

HOW NELSON LEE AND NIPPER CAME BACK TO ST. FRANK'S!

THE NELSON LEE 2

Library And St Frank's Magazine



THE RETURN OF NELSON LEE AND NIPPER!

There is much rejoicing and jubilation at ST. FRANK'S when these two popular heroes return to the fold.

SEE THIS WEEK'S EXTRA LONG STORY!



But they paused outside. On the floor, piled against the wall, were a few heaps of books, crockery, cooking utensils, and all sorts of odds and ends.



After an absence of several months on special detective work, NELSON LEE and NIPPER officially return to ST. FRANK'S in this week's grand long story. There is much jubilation and excitement at the old school, especially in Study C, where Sir Montie and Tommy Watson give a special welcome to their old study chum.

THE EDITOR.

By EDWY SEARLES BROOKS

CHAPTER I.

IRENE & CO'S LITTLE PLOT.

ST. FRANK'S was sublimely peaceful. In the bright April sunshine, the fine old school looked sedate and full of calm repose. Sparrows bathed luxuriously in the fountain pool, and the only other sign of life was a tabby cat industriously cleaning herself on the steps of the Ancient House.

This unwonted peace had a very simple explanation. It was the first day of the new term, but as the hour was only just 11 a.m., not a soul had yet turned up—except, of course, one or two masters.

The boys generally began to arrive at lunch-time, and even then only in small contingents. The great army of fellows always arrived by the afternoon trains, for it was reckoned to be the correct thing to get settled down comfortably in time for tea.

But in the forenoon St. Frank's was at peace.

Just as the school clock was chiming the hour, four dainty figures walked briskly in through the big gateway and paused just inside the Triangle. They stood looking at the fine old school buildings.

"I say, it's a gorgeous place, you know, Irene!" said one of the new arrivals.

"Rather!" agreed Irene Manners. "You lucky beggar! I wish I had a brother

here, the same as you have! I envy you, Vi!"

Violet Watson laughed.

"This is all new to me," she replied. "I know what St. Frank's is like, of course, because I've been here on sports days time after time. But somehow it seems different now—now that I am really at Moor View."

"What about Winnie?" put in Doris Berkeley. "Her brother's here, too. But what does she care? Sometimes they don't see one another for days and days. You'll soon get used to it, Vi. Within a fortnight you'll completely forget that Tommy's at St. Frank's."

"Shall I?" retorted Violet. "It's jolly handy to have a brother practically within a stone's throw. Come on, we'd better go and find Mrs. Stokes. We told her we'd be here at eleven."

"We're punctual to the tick, too," said Doris. "I say, go easy with those flowers, Marjorie! We want them to look fairly respectable. Don't swish 'em about like that!"

The four Moor View School girls walked across to the Ancient House, and entered. Their own term had started two days earlier, and on the previous evening they had visited Mrs. Stokes, and one or two arrangements had been made.

On the strict understanding that they did extra work after tea, they had been

allowed the morning off, and they meant to employ it usefully. Violet Watson was a new girl at the Moor View School. This was her first term.

"Oh, here you are!" said a cheerful voice, as they entered the lobby.

Mrs. Beverley Stokes hurried to meet them, and there was no pretence about the cordiality of the greeting. The girls all considered that Mrs. Stokes was a sport, in just the same way as the St. Frank's fellows regarded her husband.

"You've bought some more flowers, I see," said Mrs. Stokes. "I've got two bunches ready for you, and all that cretonne, too. I'm not really sure that your brother will like it, Violet—"

"It's mainly for Dick," put in Irene promptly.

"You mean Nipper?" smiled Mrs. Stokes.

"Oh, I say! I don't like calling him Nipper at all," exclaimed Doris. "It's a lot better to call him by his right name—Dick Hamilton. We girls have made a compact, anyhow, to always call him Dick. If he doesn't like it, he'll have to lump it!"

The Housemaster's wife laughed.

"Anybody coming in at this minute would think we were a girls' school," she said, with twinkling eyes. "But there's not much fear of interruption—you're safe for an hour, at least."

"Good!" said Irene. "Then we'll get busy."

"I'll leave you to do it yourselves, of course," said Mrs. Stokes. "But take my advice, and don't overdo it. You've no idea how fanciful boys are. It's a good idea to welcome Dick Hamilton back by decorating his study—particularly as it's your brother's study, too, Violet."

"To say nothing of good old Montie," said Marjorie. "Thank goodness everything'll be the same as usual this term. But what about Mr. Nelson Lee? He'll be here, won't he, Mrs. Stokes?"

"Yes; but in quite a new capacity," replied Mrs. Stokes. "You see, he needs a lot of freedom; he doesn't like to be tied down. And it's very trying to be in complete charge of a House. I think Mr. Lee will take on some of the Head's duties, and relieve him occasionally. He's in charge of a new chemical laboratory, too."

"Well, we can't stop here talking," remarked Irene. "Thanks awfully, Mrs. Stokes, for letting us come in like this. You'll have to come and look at the study when we've finished it."

"I will indeed!" said Mrs. Stokes promptly.

The girls hurried down the passage, feeling that they were treading on forbidden ground, in spite of their official permission. Arriving in the Fourth Form passage, they opened the door of Study C, and entered.

"Well, my only hat!" said Doris grimly.

She pursed up her lips and gazed at the interior of the little room with supreme contempt. The other three girls chuckled. The study was certainly plain to the point of shabbiness.

It was clean, of course—scrupulously so. The fellows always found their studies thoroughly washed and scrubbed when they came back from the holidays. But from a feminine point of view, the principal junior study in the Ancient House was without any comfort at all.

"Look at it!" said Doris, with a sniff. "No curtains—a mantelpiece as bare as a deal plank; not even a tablecloth, and only a couple of maps on the wall! Why, there isn't even a flower-vase!"

Irene chuckled more than ever.

"You silly, isn't that why we've come?" she asked. "We're going to make a transformation, and show the boys how cosy and comfortable a study can be, if it's only arranged right."

And without delay the girls piled into the work. And the shades of all former occupants gazed at this scene with alarm and acute apprehension.

CHAPTER II.

A SHOCK FOR TWO.



"**B**EGAD! Here we are, dear old boy!" said Sir Montie Tregellis-West.

"Everything is lookin' frightfully good—it is, really! I don't mind admittin' I'm glad to be back!"

"Same here!" said Tommy Watson promptly.

They leapt out of the compartment, and landed on the gravel platform of Bellton Station. A glance up and down the train confirmed their first impression that they were the only St. Frank's fellows on it. It was a quarter to twelve, and nobody could turn up now until the twelve-thirty train arrived.

"I knew we'd be first," said Watson cheerfully. "My hat! We'll give old Nipper a surprise, eh? It's like his nerve to come down by car with his guv'nor! Still, we can't blame him—"

Watson paused, as he was about to hurry to the guard's van to see about his box. A tall, slim young man was just emerging from a first-class compartment near the guard's van.

"Well, I'm blessed!" ejaculated Watson. "Old Browne!"

"Begad! So it is!"

They hastened forward, and William Napoleon Browne beamed upon them with great benevolence.

"I fancy I am not mistaken in regarding this as the gladdest day of all the bright

New Year!" he observed genially. "How are you, Brother Tregellis-West? I trust your pince-nez are in good health? And you, Brother Watson? Let us all rejoice in this happy meeting!"

"I didn't know you were on the train," said Tommy Watson bluntly.

"Ah, Brother Watson, you may know a great deal, but not everything," replied Browne, prodding Tommy in the ribs. "But I have an idea that unless we gird our loins and dash for the luggage van, our personal belongings will be wafted into the Great Unknown. This is distinctly one of those occasions when cheery chit-chat must be abandoned."

He strode off to the guard's van, and the two juniors followed. They needn't have worried. Their boxes were already on the platform. Browne's trunk was a kind of super-affair, and of huge dimensions.

"We can leave 'em here," said Watson. "The school lorry comes down, you know, and collects all the boxes. You're a new chap this term, aren't you?"

"Hardly new," denied Browne. "In fact, somewhat second-hand, having already seen and enjoyed some seventeen summers."

"Seventeen? Then you're going into the Sixth?"

"I have been told that the excessive joy of my arrival is to be bestowed upon the Fifth," replied Browne. "We are all liable to err, but I imagine the news to be quite official, and copyright by Reuter, the Press Association, the Central News, and Exchange Telegraph."

"My hat! You're big for the Fifth," said Watson.

"Alas, Brother Watson, we cannot all bulge with highly developed brain cells," replied Browne sadly. "Mine, although developed to an unusual degree, suffer from occasional lapses. Consequently, I am booked for the Fifth Form, whereas my true position is undoubtedly in the Headmaster's chair. But let us not pursue these painful subjects."

"Yes, we're going off," said Tommy. "We came down early on purpose to prepare— Well, we came down early," he added cautiously.

"I fear that I cannot give you full marks for lucidity, Brother Watson," said the old Uxtonian, shaking his head. "I am early on the scene for reasons of my own—and I do not doubt that they are equally as sinister as yours. And speed is the great cry. Hustle is the watchword. Even as I stand I can observe the grass creeping round your soles."

Tommy Watson and Tregellis-West grinned and hastened off. If they stopped talking to William Napoleon Browne, he would keep them for ages. They had sampled his loquacity during the holidays, when Archie Glenthorne had taken a big

picnic party out on Easter Monday. They hadn't seen Browne since, in fact, although they had known that he was booked for the Fifth.

Arriving at St. Frank's, they felt just a little taller as they entered the Triangle. Somehow, they couldn't restrain a sense of possession creeping over them. There was something distinctly good in belonging to this fine old school. And Tommy Watson's feeling was more acute than Tregellis-West's. For he had been an unwilling absentee for the whole of the previous term. It was a pure joy for him to be really back again.

"Come on!" he muttered huskily. "Let's go and look at Study C!"

"Begad, rather!"

"There's nothing to beat it," went on Watson, his eyes shining. "A grubby old place, really—no curtains, plain old table, and all the rest of it. But I wouldn't exchange it for a giddy palace!"

"Rather not, dear old boy!" agreed Montie. "We get plenty of those frightful luxuries at home—it's a relief to come back to our old study. An' we're in good time. We can get everythin' tidied up, an' those new books unpacked before Nipper arrives."

"That's the wheeze!" agreed Watson. "When he comes into Study C he'll find everything exactly as it was the day he left St. Frank's, months ago—even to the giddy ruler! All his books, and all his papers, and even his old footer boots!"

They hurried into the Ancient House, unaware of the fact that they had been watched closely from the window of Study C. Irene & Co., in fact, having just finished, had been startled to see the two juniors here so early. Making one or two hasty final touches, they sped away. The girls sought refuge with Mrs. Stokes, and decided that they would "casually" meet Sir Montie and Tommy a little later on, in the Triangle.

The two juniors, unsuspecting of the bomb-shell which awaited them, marched down the Fourth-Form passage, flung open the door of Study C, and strode in.

"Dear old place!" yelled Watson joyously. "Just the sa— Why, what the—" His eyes goggled. "Great jumping stars!" he gasped blankly.

"Begad!" breathed Sir Montie, feebly beating the air.

CHAPTER III.

QUICK WORK.



STUDY C was transformed.

Its old rugged simplicity had gone. Irene & Co. were congratulating themselves on the fact that they had done wonders. From their feminine point of view, the study was now a place of beauty.

But the expressions on the faces of Tommy Watson and Sir Montie Tregellis-West were rather mixed. And in all the mixture there wasn't the faintest trace of admiration. The two emotions which fought to come to the surface were indignation and horror.

"What—what's happened?" ejaculated Tommy, with a gulp.

"Dear old boy, don't ask me!" moaned Sir Montie. "Of all the frightful scenes, commend me to this one! Some awfully funny idiots have been doin' this out of sheer spite!"

It was merciful that Irene & Co. were not within hearing, or they might have taken slight offence at this observation. With careful steps, the two juniors advanced into the study. They felt hemmed in, and for some moments adequate criticisms were quite impossible.

Their chief reason in coming down early had been to get busy in Study C. They thought it rather a fine idea to make the old room home-like. For junior studies are always too clean at the beginning of term. Nipper was coming back, and it was a great occasion. For Nipper had been away for a good many months, and Study C had altered its character during his absence.

When he entered the room his chums wanted it to be exactly the same as it had been in days of yore. Nipper's own books would be there, his little belongings, his favourite chair would be in position, and a few other similar details would be attended to.

It was, after all, a nice idea—just a little sentimental, perhaps, but, nevertheless, welcome. His staunch chums wanted him to feel at home the very instant he put his foot across the threshold.

And what did Tommy and Sir Montie see?

They saw, first of all, a profusion of flowers. And flowers, it must be remembered, had always been a pet abomination in Study C. There were flowers on the

mantelpiece, there were flowers on the table, and there was even a plant in the fireplace!

The mantelpiece was tastefully decorated with flowered cretonne, bunched up into artistic folds by the aid of silken cords. The fireplace itself was hidden behind a small fire-screen.

On the table stood a glass vase, and the table itself was covered with further cretonne. Its usual clean bareness had vanished. There was even a wastepaper basket, with fancy ribbons tied in the wickerwork.

And, to cap everything, dainty lace curtains were arranged at the window.

The two juniors looked at this spectacle with growing fear.

And yet Irene & Co. had congratulated themselves on their huge success! They had simply made Study C identical with their own studies at the Moor View School—sadly labouring under the misapprehension that boys were just as keen on decorations as girls.

"It's a jape!" said Tommy Watson, at last. "That's what it is!"

"A jape?" repeated Montie. "It's more like a nightmare!"

"I'll bet those Modern House bounders did this," said Watson darkly. "Boots and Christine and the rest! They didn't expect us down so early, and they thought they'd give Nipper a shock. Thank goodness we've got here in time!"

"Fate must have

sent us, old boy—he must, really!"

"Come on—we'd better get busy!" panted Watson. "Nipper said he was starting out with Nelson Lee during the morning, and they might be here at any time. We'll tear all this rubbish down, and shove it in the cupboard!"

"A 'brainy' idea, begad!" agreed Sir Montie.

And the work which Irene & Co. had so daintily accomplished was utterly destroyed in about four minutes. The curtains came down in two tugs, the mantelpiece was de-

PORTRAIT GALLERY AND WHO'S WHO.

Second Series.—Third Form.

NOTE.—The ages of Third Form boys vary between 12 and 14.



No. 21.—Stanley Kerrigan.

One of the most likeable of the fags. A cheerful, capable youngster, and by no means unhandsome. He is quite good at sports, and staunch to Willy Handforth and the Third.

prived of its cretonne in another two, and the tablecloth was whisked off in one.

As for the flowers and the vases, they were shoved unceremoniously into the cupboard as they were. Watson thought it a good idea to keep the evidence, so that he could show it to Nipper later on. And after that the culprits would have to be discovered.

"Phew! That's better!" panted Tommy, at last. "Now she's looking more like herself! Of all the nerve! Making a hideous sight of our old study. I couldn't breathe properly when we first came in."

"Everything's all right now, though," said Montie urbanely. "Upon the whole, dear old boy, the idea wasn't so bad. Hadn't we better find old Cuttle, and ask about that box? We want to unpack the books, you know——"

"Good idea!" agreed Tommy promptly. "Come on!"

They marched out, breathing freely again, and sallied out into the Triangle in search of Josh Cuttle, the school porter. But just outside the Ancient House steps they came face to face with Irene & Co.

"Hallo, Tom!" greeted Violet cheerily.

"Oh, I say! This is a surprise!" said Tommy Watson. "Hallo, Sis! Hallo, you other girls! What the dickens are you doing here at this time of the morning?"

"Haven't you seen?" asked Irene, in surprise.

"Seen?"

"Begad! We—we——"

"Why, the study, of course, you sillies!" laughed Violet.

"The study?" repeated Watson, his throat filling with something.

"Doesn't it look simply gorgeous?" asked Doris enthusiastically. "We took an awful lot of trouble over it—especially for Dick, too! It's our idea of welcoming him back to St. Frank's!"

Watson leaned against Montie, and Montie fought for breath.

CHAPTER IV. QUICKER WORK.



THE shock was a stunning one.

In fact, Tommy Watson and Sir Montie could not have been more startled if an earthquake had happened. It was

a devastating discovery this time! Irene & Co. were responsible for that study! And they had placed the fell work at the door of the Modern House fellows!

Indeed, now that the juniors could begin to think, they realised that it wasn't fell

work at all. There had been no intention of a jape. The girls had decorated that study in all good faith—with the one and only intention of delighting the eyes of its coming occupants!

And every strip of decoration had been torn down!

This was the dreadful situation which had to be faced.

"We took an awful lot of trouble," said Doris gaily. "All that cretonne, you know, and the flowers—— But it was worth it," she added. "Dick's a sport, and we want to make him feel happy and cosy."

"Cosy!" repeated Watson, like a hollow echo.

"Is something the matter?" asked Irene, looking at the two juniors keenly out of her blue eyes.

"Begad! The—the matter?" repeated Montie. "Not at all—not at all! In fact, we're so frightfully overwhelmed by the good work that we haven't got any words to say—we haven't, really!"

"It—it was jolly nice of you!" blurted out Watson.

"Well, you don't seem to be very delighted!" remarked Doris shrewdly. "You both look a bit dazed. Let's go into the study, and——"

"No!" gasped Watson frantically.

"But we want to show you——"

"You—you can't go in there now!" panted Tommy, his alarm growing. "I say, be sports! We—we've got one or two preparations of our own to make," he added desperately. "You can come in later."

"Oh, all right," smiled Irene. "By the way, when do you expect Dick?"

"Nipper? He might be here at any minute!"

"Ripping!" said Violet, clapping her hands.

Somehow, the two juniors managed to tear themselves away. They did so in a kind of dream, and returned to Study C with their brains whirling. And out of all the chaos came one clear thought. Those decorations had to be put back again!

If Irene & Co. saw what had happened they would never forgive Montie and Tommy as long as they lived. Quite naturally, they would look upon it as a deadly affront, and would, in addition, be grieved.

"They—they did it for old Nipper!" moaned Watson. "Oh, my goodness! They thought we'd like it!"

"Don't!" pleaded Sir Montie.

It wasn't a rag, after all, but a genuine effort to gladden our hearts!" went on Tommy. "Look here, old son, we've got to shove these things back. When the girls bring Nipper in, everything's got to be the same as we found it."

"But how?" asked Montie helplessly. "Dear old boy—"

"It won't take us long," went on Watson, who was unusually optimistic. "I remember how everything was fixed, and all the stuff's in the cupboard. We mustn't let the girls guess what happened! Later on, when they're gone, we can tell Nipper all about it, and then chuck the stuff in the dust-bin!"

"Tommy, boy, you're gettin' brainier and brainier every day," said Montie, with approval. "As long as the girls don't know anythin', there's no harm done. But it would be a frightful trick to disappoint them, begad! The curtains first, eh?"

They started on the job lightly and with high hopes. After about three minutes an intense gloom pervaded the apartment. Somehow, the blessed things wouldn't stick in the right places!

"These curtains don't look right to me," said Watson, with a worried frown. "The left one isn't so bad, but the other seems all squiffy."

They stood back and surveyed the curtains.

There was something in what Tommy Watson said. The left-hand curtain was upside down, but a detail like that didn't matter. It was slightly on the skew, too. The right-hand curtain was a perfect sight. It hung in rucks and creases, and the more the juniors wrestled with it, the worse it looked.

"Begad! We can't waste any more time, old boy," said Montie, in desperation. "They're not so bad now."

"Anyway, they're up," growled Tommy. "Now for that giddy chintz, or tapestry, or whatever it is."

The cretonne was draped round the mantel-piece in a hideous fashion. But Watson, who performed this dastardly work, was highly satisfied with the result of his efforts.

"Why, it's even better than the girls did it!" he declared hopefully. "It only shows that these girls aren't the only ones who can fiddle about with curtains and things. What about the flowers?"

The flowers were fished out of the cupboard, and the two juniors were just putting the finishing touches to the study when a faint purr sounded out in the Triangle. Tommy glanced out of the window.

"Great Scott!" he breathed. "They're here!"

CHAPTER V.

BACK AT LAST!



NIPPER looked at the school buildings with a sort of affectionate regard.

"I'm not a sentimental chap, guv'nor, but it's good to see the old place again,"

he remarked, with a sigh. "And it's good to know that we're here as fixtures, too. Everything looks fine, eh?"

Nelson Lee switched off the engine.

"The weather is in our favour, Nipper," he replied smilingly. "Somehow I don't think you would be quite so enthusiastic if the skies were grey, and if rain was pouring down. This sunshine is exhilarating. All the same, it is certainly good to be back."

The famous detective was looking a little thinner than usual—a trifle paler. It had taken very little persuasion to bring him back to St. Frank's as a permanent resident. But he had firmly declined the offer of a fixed appointment.

As chief of the new laboratory, he would not be tied in any way. He would give his lectures in his own time, and would generally be on the spot to act as Dr. Stafford's adviser. At the same time, there was nothing to prevent him being away from St. Frank's for two or three weeks on end if an important case called him away.

Nipper, too, desired a little more freedom than he had formerly enjoyed, and he had his own ideas on this subject. If Nelson Lee wanted him on important work, he would hold himself ready to go. And he couldn't very well be in this position if he tied himself.

"We seem to be the first arrivals, guv'nor," he remarked as he climbed out of the car. "Not a soul about, and everything quiet. Not even a brass band playing to welcome us back!"

"And a good thing, too!" said Lee fervently. "Indeed, I am thankful that we started early, Nipper. I hate display of any kind, and if we had arrived this afternoon I fear that a few of your misguided young friends would have made a considerable noise."

Nipper grinned.

"You needn't think you're going to escape, guv'nor," he chuckled. "It isn't me they care about—it's you. And if they don't get up something special in the way of an ovation, I shall be jolly surprised."

Nelson Lee shook his head.

"Do your best to subdue any such folly, Nipper," he urged. "Nothing will please me better than to be left alone."

Mr. and Mrs. Beverley Stokes appeared at this moment, and their greeting was warm and hearty. They carried Nelson Lee off indoors just as Tommy Watson and Sir Montie Tregellis-west came out and grabbed Nipper.

"Begad! It's like old times, Nipper, boy!" beamed Sir Montie.

"No more separations, eh?" asked Watson heartily.

"Not if we can help it," replied Nipper. "But who said the age of miracles has passed? I thought you chaps were still in bed! How on earth did you manage to get down here so early?"

"We came down on purpose to——" Tommy Watson paused, and seized Nipper's arm. "I say, we've got something to tell you," he went on tensely. "We just want to give you the tip——"

"Hallo! Here are the girls now!" interrupted Nipper. "Wonders will never cease!"

Watson groaned inwardly and gave it up. He had hoped to have a private word with Nipper before Irene & Co. appeared on the scene. But it couldn't be done. The girls came up in a noisy crowd.

"At last, you bounder!" cried Doris, grabbing Nipper's hand.

"Welcome back, Dick!" exclaimed Irene. "St. Frank's hasn't been the same place without you. All last term the Fourth Form was looking as blue as the dickens. It's about time you came along to buck things up!"

"Rather!" agreed Marjorie Temple. "Here! Get out of it, Irene! Can't I shake hands, too?"

"What about me?" said Violet Watson indignantly.

They surrounded Nipper, pumped his hand, slapped his back, and ended up by making him completely breathless. Tommy Watson and Tregellis-West stood by, grinning in a rather sickly fashion. They knew what was coming, and were filled with deep inward apprehension.

"I say, steady on!" grinned Nipper. "You'll give me a swelled head if you go on like this! I'm glad to be back, of course, but you can't kid me that the Fourth was absolutely rudderless during my absence. What about Reggie Pitt? Isn't he a huge success as Form captain?"

"Rather!" agreed Doris heartily. "Reggie's done wonders. All the same, it'll be different now that you're back. You'll be able to keep that chump Handforth in order."

"Chump yourself!" said Irene warmly. "Ted may be a bit of an ass, but he's as good as gold at heart. He knocks old Church and McClure about a bit too much, but that's only his way. I've got an idea they rather like it, on the quiet. They've got so used to these stray biffs that they'd miss 'em now."

Nipper chuckled.

"Handy gets a stray biff himself now and again," he remarked. "But I want to know what you girls are doing here at this hour of the morning? Haven't you got any lessons to do? Oughtn't you to be learning cookery, or sewing, or something?"

"A fat lot you know about our school!" sniffed Irene. "You boys are so hopelessly ignorant that I've given you up as a bad job. But let's get indoors. We've got a surprise for you."

"Rather!" chuckled Doris. "What do you say, Tommy?"



"I have been told that the excessive joy of my arrival is to be bestowed upon the Fifth," replied Browne.

"Eh?" gasped Watson. "A surprise? My hat, yes!"

They went indoors in a group, and Nipper was slightly puzzled. He gathered that the girls had prepared something special for him, but he couldn't quite understand the glassy expression in the eyes of his two chums.

CHAPTER VI.

BROWNE TO THE RESCUE.



IRENE MANNERS paused outside the door of Study C.

"Now, Dick, close your eyes!" she commanded. "Tightly, remember! Don't dare to open them until I tell you!"

"Yours to command," murmured Nipper—"mine to obey!"

"If you take a sly squint, we'll slaughter you!" warned Doris.

"All right—go ahead!" grinned Nipper. "I don't know what the dickens you've been up to, but I can stand anything. I'm a hardened case."

Irene threw open the door of Study C, and the girls pushed Nipper inside.

"Now!" cried Irene. "You can open—My goodness!" she gasped, staring blankly into the study. "What—what's happened?"

"My only Sunday strawyard!" breathed Doris.

Nipper opened his eyes, wondering what all the consternation was about. He didn't wonder for long. One glance at the study was enough to make him shudder. He clung to the table for support.

"Ye gods and little fishes!" he said faintly.

For a tense half-minute there was a deadly, ominous silence. The girls crowded in the doorway, startled beyond measure. Tommy Watson and Tegellis-West stood just out in the passage, shivering in their shoes. They longed to flee, but daren't.

The study was an awful sight. It had been bad enough—from a boy's point of view—as Irene & Co. had left it. But it was a perfect nightmare now. The curtains were hanging lop-sided and entangled. The breeze had blown one of them half-down, and it hung there in mournful disorder.

The mantelpiece was a tragedy. Not only was the cretonne bunched up in the most amazing muddle, but it had been fixed on inside out. Two flower vases stood on the top, but they were odd. The flowers themselves were simply pushed in, many with stalks uppermost.

"Lovely!" said Nipper, with heroic politeness.

"But—but something's happened!" gasped Irene. "Why, the place looks awful! It's positively hideous!"

Nipper breathed a sigh of relief.

"Thank goodness!" he said. "I thought you were expecting me to admire it! Hideous, eh? I've never seen anything so diabolical in all my life! Who did this foul deed?"

"We did," said Violet. "But—but it's been altered!"

"Altered!" shouted Irene. "It's been ruined! All our lovely work messed up! Who's been here? Oh, Dick, it's too bad! We did everything so beautifully, too."

"Never mind!" grinned Nipper. "I'll take your word for it. But I can't quite understand—"

"Tommy Watson, come here!"

Irene spoke in her most imperious manner, and she was pointing a stern finger at Watson. That unfortunate junior turned pale, and clung to Sir Montie. Their very expression gave them away.

"What do you mean by it?" demanded Irene indignantly. "Oh, you wretches! Whatever made you do it?"

"I'll never forgive you, Tom!" said Violet tearfully.

"We—we— You see— The fact is—"

"Begad! It—it was like this—"

They both paused, confused.

"Well?" asked Irene darkly.

Watson and Tregellis-West longed for an earthquake. All they wanted at that moment was to be swallowed up. Four pairs of angry feminine eyes were focused upon them like searchlights, and the strain was rather too great. All connected speech deserted them.

And at this interesting point a footstep sounded in the passage, and the next moment William Napoleon Browne glanced in at the open doorway. He paused, and beamed benevolently upon the company.

"Pardon my intrusion, but am I right in assuming that this murky passage will lead me to the lair of one, Mr. Paget?" he asked. "I have been told on good authority that Mr. Pagett— But what do I perceive? Correct me if I am wrong, but do I not see signs of girlish anger?"

"Who's this?" asked Doris bluntly.

"Browne!" said Nipper with a grin.

"Come, come, Brother Nipper!" protested Browne. "Am I deserving of no better introduction than this? While the whole school is literally agog with excitement over my arrival, you can do nothing better than refer to me as a mere cipher. We are deeply grieved, Brother Nipper."

"You mustn't take too much notice of him, girls," said Nipper. "He's William Napoleon Browne—the 'Napoleon,' I fancy, is an addition of his own—and he's a new fellow in the Fifth. Browne, let me introduce Irene, Doris, Marjorie, and Violet, of the Moor View School."

Browne executed a stately bow.

"The honour is entirely mine," he said gracefully. "I speak in no carping fashion, but I assume the young ladies have other names as well? However, we will let that pass." His gaze wandered over the study. "Ah, I see you are holding your little con-fab in the lumber-room!" he added kindly. "Personally, I have no great admiration for lumber-rooms, but there is no accounting for taste."

"This is our study, you ass!" snorted Watson.

"I fear I detect a certain animosity in your tone, Brother Watson," said Browne regretfully. "What have I done to deserve this unkindness?"

"We're pleased to meet you, but don't butt in," said Irene pointedly. "We prepared this study all ready for Dick, and these two duffers have turned everything upside down! We're waiting for an explanation."

"Splendid!" said Browne. "In these circumstances, we will linger also, for we must confess that our curiosity has been piqued. If there is any difficulty, Brother Watson, do not hesitate to call upon me. I am ever ready to come to the rescue in life's little troubles."

CHAPTER VII.

MAINLY ABOUT STUDIES.



TOMMY WATSON looked round him like a caged rabbit.

"You—you see, we thought—Montie and I thought—Well, we thought something was wrong!" he blurted out. "When we saw the study, we nearly had a fit!" he added bluntly.

"A fit?" echoed the girls, in one voice.

"The news is not at all surprising," observed Browne. "Do you not detect the pallor in Brother Watson's robust cheeks? No longer can he truthfully be described as a ray of sunshine. Indeed, Brother Watson, you have the manner of one who has no single friend in all the world. Passing on to the subject of fits—"

"Oh, do be quiet!" interrupted Doris impatiently.

Browne looked at her with mild reproach.

"Pray enlighten me if I am disturbing the harmony of the occasion," he said. "Nothing distresses me more than to feel that I am a piece of grit in the smooth running cogs of the machinery. Speak boldly. Do not mince your words. I need but the intimation, and I will pass upon my way with all my celebrated fortitude."

"Good!" said Irene. "Then pass! How can we find out about this study while you stand there talking like a gramophone?"

"Proceed!" said Browne, with a wave of his hand. "Your invitation is not as pressing as I would wish, but I will waive the point and stay. Brother Watson, I fancy it is your turn to exercise the chin!"

"There's nothing to say!" growled Watson. "I'm awfully sorry, Irene! Montie and I came into the study, and found it all decorated, and we thought somebody had been having a lark!"

"A perfectly natural assumption," murmured Browne. "Of course, there are different delineations of the word 'lark'—"

Irene stamped her foot.

"Yes, but why did you ruin all our work?" she demanded warmly.

"Ruin it!" snorted Watson. "We tore everything down, and then found that you girls had done it all. So we put everything back exactly as we had found it."

Irene fainted gracefully into Doris' arms.

"Water!" she breathed.

"I have heard on good repute that a burnt feather is an excellent restorative," said Browne concernedly. "Brother Nipper, be good enough to dash out to the chicken run—"

"Well, it's no good getting wild," said Doris. "I suppose you acted in good faith, Tommy. But I must say you're about the

brightest pair of fatheads I ever came across!"

"Strong words, but, under the circumstances, we must forgive and forget," said Browne. "If there is anything I can do—"

"Tom, I'm ashamed of you!" interrupted Violet warmly. "After all the trouble we took over this study, too! I always knew you were verging on sheer idiocy, but this is the first real proof!"

"Look here, Sis—" began Watson indignantly.

"Hush!" interrupted Browne. "Are we to have family quarrels within these grey old walls? You must bear these trials bravely, Brother Watson. It is a sister's privilege to regard her brother as a born idiot. I urge you not to broadcast your opinion on sisters."

"It's all right, girls—don't worry!" smiled Nipper. "I'll bet you made the study look lovely, and it was just like these inartistic asses to mess everything up. Suppose we take the will for the deed?"

"It's about all we can do," said Irene, slightly appeased.

"That," said Browne, "is the spirit. 'I like this atmosphere of good comradeship between neighbours. I assume the Moor View School is at no great distance? Splendid! Perchance we shall meet by the wayside, fair maidens. In all your little troubles, do not hesitate to call upon me. My permanent address is Study No. 10, Ancient House—Telephone, Bannington 71. Telegraphic Address—Lightning.'"

"Study No. 10?" repeated Nipper.

"Your auricular orifices are evidently wide open."

"But Study No. 10 belongs to Chambers," said Tommy Watson.

"A little misapprehension which others will probably suffer from ere the day is over," agreed Browne. "It is not entirely unlikely that Chambers himself will make this sad error. But fear not. When he arrives, blithe and happy, I shall make it my duty to explain all. In the meantime, I should esteem it a favour if one of you stalwarts put me on the right road to the fortress of Mr. Pagett. I desire to besiege the gentleman."

Nipper gave the necessary directions, and Browne bowed his way out—content in the knowledge that his soothing presence had calmed the troubled waters. He found Mr. Pagett's study, and entered.

The master of the Fifth was seated at his desk, leaning back comfortably in his chair. Pipe in mouth, he was dreamily contemplating several open boxes of gaily-coloured sealing-wax.

"Good-morning, sir," said Browne benevolently.

Mr. Pagett spun round, confused. He made an attempt to hide the boxes of seal-

ing-wax, but it was useless. Realising this, he rose to his feet with dignity, removed his pipe, and gazed at William Napoleon Browne with all the acidity for which he was famed.

CHAPTER VIII.

BROWNE'S CELEBRATED SYSTEM.



"WELL, sir, and who are you?" demanded Mr. Pagett in a kind of bark. "How dare you enter my study without knocking! Who are you, eh? Your face seems familiar to me—"

"Alas! I fear your memory is in a somewhat C3 condition," interrupted Browne sadly. "I am Browne, sir—William Napoleon Browne. It is but a few weeks since I startled the school—"

"Ah, yes, to be sure!" interrupted Mr. Pagett. "You are the impudent young rascal who hoodwinked the whole school on April 1st, eh? A thoroughly impertinent piece of work, young man."

"Others," sighed Browne, "have referred to that celebrated exploit in more kindly terms. However, we will let it pass. I understand, sir, that in future I am to nestle under your protective wing."

"Don't use such absurd language, Browne!" snapped Mr. Pagett. "The head-master has already informed me that you are placed in my Form. What is your age, Browne?"

"I have already witnessed seventeen alleged summers, sir."

"Seventeen?" echoed Mr. Pagett. "You are quite old enough and big enough to be in the Sixth."

"Possibly so, sir—possibly so," admitted Browne. "But who would be in the Sixth in preference to the Fifth, knowing that you preside over the latter Form? Only by insistent pleading was I allowed to join your troupe of bravoos. You cannot imagine the delight, sir, that thrilled through my very marrows when I learned that you were to instruct me in the way I should go. A good Form-master is better than a year's course of Kruschen."

Mr. Pagett looked at Browne suspiciously.

"Well, what do you want?" he asked. "You are down here uncommonly early, Browne—not that I condemn you for that. It is a good sign—a very good sign. What is the reason for this visit?"

"Touching on the subject of studies, sir," said Browne. "We realise, of course, that we cannot all have our little whims and fancies granted, but are there any particular

rules and regulations regarding this knotty problem?"

"What do you mean—rules and regulations?"

"During my lightning survey of the Fifth Form quarters, I have not failed to observe that certain studies are rather more palatial than others," replied Browne. "The point, sir, is this. Are these miniature palaces reserved in advance for any special hot favourites?"

Mr. Pagett glared.

"There is no favouritism in my Form, Browne," he replied curtly.

"As I suspected, sir—indeed, as I was well aware, after my first shrewd glance at your powerful visage," said Browne. "I take it, then, that the famous old axiom is in full force—first come first served?"

"Well, I don't know about that—"

"It has been wisely stated that the early bird catches the worm, sir," went on Browne. "I am neither a bird, nor is Study 10 a worm. At the same time, you doubtless catch my point?"

"But Study No. 10 is occupied by Chambers, Phillips and Bryant."

"Without wishing to contradict you, sir, you must permit me to indicate a slight error," said Browne. "When I left Study No. 10, the only occupant was an exceedingly well-fed tabby cat, which insisted upon following me. Now, while objecting to being followed by dogs, I issue no criticism against being followed by cats. My magnetic nature draws in the most powerful manner, and cats have a particularly acute fondness—"

"We are not talking about cats, Browne," interrupted Mr. Pagett tartly. "Don't waste my time like this! As for Study 10, you cannot have it. Certainly not! Chambers and Phillips and Bryant have occupied this study for some time, and I cannot have them disturbed. Indeed, it would be tantamount to a shabby trick if you occupied this study during their absence."

Browne shrugged his shoulders.

"Alack, I have done my best—and what more can any man do?" he sighed. "I am grieved—indeed, shaken. Undoubtedly, Study No. 10 is slightly less like a rabbit hutch than other studies. Only slightly, I will admit, but we must stick to facts. Of all the drab, sinister habitations, these Fifth Form studies are surely the worst on record. Not that I blame you, sir," added Browne earnestly. "You, I am sure, will agree with me—"

"You had better go, Browne," interrupted Mr. Pagett stiffly.

"One moment, sir. As Captain of the Fifth, I deem it my duty to inform you—"

"Captain of the Fifth?" repeated Mr.

Pagett, staring. "What do you mean? Chambers is the captain of my Form!"

"You are still in volume one, sir," said Browne. "Kindly be good enough to dip into volume two. Chambers is no longer the Captain of the Fifth. He was, but all is over."

"When did Chambers resign?" demanded the Form master.

"He hasn't—"

"Eh?"

"But he will," smiled Browne. "My dear sir, when the Fifth Form arrives, and finds me in full command,

the enthusiasm will reach such a pitch, that I am seriously thinking of asking for protection. As Form Captain, I consider I have a certain amount of justification—"

"Browne, you are too ridiculous for words!" interrupted Mr. Pagett tersely. "Let me tell you that this kind of nonsense is not encouraged by me. You will have Study No. 17—"

Browne started. He had inspected Study No. 17. It was small, dark, and gruesome. Without doubt, it was the worst proposition in studies that he had ever gazed upon. The interview with Mr. Pagett was panning out badly.

"Study No. 17?" repeated Browne. "As you say—as you say. Is it for me to criticise? Is it for me— But what is this? Sealing wax? Joy! Jubilation! Is it possible, sir, that our hobbies are identical?"

Browne leapt to the table with a glad cry, and stared down at the boxes of sealing wax with a mixture of awe and veneration.

CHAPTER IX.

THICK AS THIEVES.



MR. PAGETT lost his angry expression. At the same time, he was by no means amiable. He watched Browne with open suspicion. He didn't quite know how to take this talkative youth.

"Are you informing me, Browne, that you are acquainted with sealing wax art?" he demanded.

"Acquainted?" repeated Browne, astonished. "Without wishing to sound over-emphatic, I think I can claim to know each piece of sealing wax by its pet name. A wonderful art, sir—an amazingly skilful occupation. Only the finest brains can cope with its intricacies. Thus you will understand my own love of the art."

Mr. Pagett thawed even more. As a matter of fact, this sealing wax outfit was a new acquisition.

PORTRAIT GALLERY AND WHO'S WHO.

Second Series.—Third Form.

NOTE.—The ages of Third Form boys vary between 12 and 14.



No. 22.—Tommy Tripp.

For a Third-Former, Tommy is a bit older than he should be, owing to his slackness in class. A bit of a dandy, too, with a lean face, which the other fags generally make fun of.

During the holidays he had spent a week with an old friend—and this old friend was an enthusiastic worker in sealing wax. Mr. Pagett had been astonished at the wonderfully decorated ornaments, vases, bowls, etc., which had been executed by his friend.

And sealing wax was the sole secret! Not the common or garden sort, of course, but a special art wax which could be purchased in endless colours, and in complete sets. The Fifth Form master had been so fascinated by the hobby that he had purchased a complete outfit. He was eager to try his hand at this new form of art. With very little practice, he understood, the most surprising results could be obtained.

And Browne, it seemed, was an ardent enthusiast. Happily, Mr. Pagett was unaware of the actual truth. Browne, to be exact, knew about as much as he did him-

self, and probably less. But it was the old Uxtonian's system to acquaint himself with a man's hobby, and then enlarge upon it with enthusiasm. So far, the system had never failed him. The fact that he knew nothing of each particular hobby was only a detail.

"I am itching, positively itching to get to work, sir," said Browne eagerly. "Not that I would dream of touching your own particular sticks of wax. May I crave an honour, sir? May I see some of your complete work? Do not delay, Brother Pagett, for I am literally agog."

Mr. Pagett coughed.

"Well, as a matter of fact, I haven't really started, Browne," he said awkwardly. "I only bought the set yesterday. I—I thought the hobby might interest me at odd moments. You know something about it, it seems."

"My good sir, it will take hold of you like a drug!" declared Browne. "Cross-word puzzles are a mere jest compared with this King of Hobbies. You will regard all cross-word puzzles with a pitying smile, and at the end of your day's work, you will dash sealing-waxwards like a gazelle leaping to the brook for its evening drink. I assure you, sir, that the fascination of this pastime is beyond all belief. Ere long you will startle the school by becoming the sealing-wax champion of the world!"

Mr. Pagett beamed, all his irritation gone.

"I am afraid you are a flatterer, Browne," he said. "I'm delighted to find, however, that I have a fellow-enthusiast in the school. These sticks, you see, are multi-coloured, and are designed for what is called crazy-work."

"Ah, crazy-work!" said Browne. "I cannot imagine anything more likely to suit your own particular gift, sir."

"Quite so—quite so," said Mr. Pagett, unaware of the hidden meaning in Browne's remark. "These compartments here contain a spirit lamp, fuel, and other necessary apparatus. It looks rather complicated, but I am told that one soon becomes proficient."

"That, indeed, is the cry!" declared Browne heartily. "Proficiency! Let it be your watchword, Mr. Pagett. Before you realise it, you will be able to invent countless new designs in your sleep. Reverting back to other matters, I would mention the matter of Study No. 17—"

"Ah, yes, Browne—exactly," said Mr. Pagett. "I must confess that No. 17 is somewhat pokey. On second thoughts, I am afraid it would hardly be suitable—"

"I was convinced, sir, that your great nobleness of mind would not permit such an injustice," said Browne. "A round peg in a square hole would be a perfectly fitting joint compared to William Napoleon Browne in Study No. 17. We take it, then, that No. 10 is now available?"

"Well, I don't quite know about that—"

"We beg to thank you for your esteemed graciousness," said Browne solemnly, "and have the honour to remain your obedient servant."

"I'm afraid Chambers will make a fuss," said Mr. Pagett, frowning. "In fact, he is certain to make a fuss—"

"Leave him to me, sir," interrupted Browne. "Leave him entirely to me, and devote yourself with wholehearted enthusiasm to the complicated juggling of this uplifting hobby."

"Of course, if you can settle things amic-

ably with Chambers, that is a different matter," went on Mr. Pagett. "But if Chambers resents the alteration, I'm afraid I must support him—"

"Thank you, sir," interrupted Browne. "You need not let this trivial matter worry the contents of your cranium. With my celebrated tact and grace, I shall have no difficulty in making Brother Chambers toe the line. In that particular branch of diplomacy I have no living equal."

And Browne gracefully bowed himself out, leaving Mr. Pagett more or less bewildered. The Form master was not exactly afraid of this new fellow, but his departure left Mr. Pagett with a distinct sense of relief.

CHAPTER X.

IN POSSESSION.



STUDY No. 10, in the Fifth Form passage, was undoubtedly the pick of the bunch.

There were several other studies almost as good, but not quite. And William

Napoleon Browne had selected it after the first brief round of inspection.

Strictly speaking, he had right on his side.

No boy had any power to demand a certain study for his own use. According to the letter of the school regulations, it was left entirely to the Form master to appoint boys to their various studies. But, generally, the Form master knew better than to interfere in these matters.

The fellows simply went back to their old studies naturally, and drastic changes were seldom. Now and again a daring spirit would take unlawful possession of a rival study, and there would be an unholy row when the rival turned up. In most cases the invader was ejected forthwith, and there the matter closed. On one or two celebrated occasions the invader had maintained his rights—the rights of being first on the scene—and after a good deal of petty quarrelling, harmony had been ultimately restored.

Browne was prepared for trouble. But his supreme confidence in his own ability made him regard the coming interview with Chambers with complete sangfroid.

"By no means murky," decided Browne, as he looked round.

The study was the best one in the passage from the point of view of light. One could look right out on to the Triangle, and there were no angles to cut off the sunshine. Furthermore, whilst nearly all the other studies were distempered, No. 10 boasted of wallpaper. A bit stained, and a trifle torn, but undoubtedly wallpaper. The cupboards were better, too, and there was a general air of cheeriness.

The furniture was of a simple kind, consisting of a bookcase, a table, two small

chairs, an easy-chair and a couch. This furniture belonged to the school, so there would be no difficulty on that score. The personal belongings of Chambers and Phillips and Bryant consisted of books, ornaments, cooking utensils, and such like trifles.

Browne glanced at his watch and frowned. "It is high time that Brother Stevens appeared on the scene," he murmured. "Alas, I'm afraid that Brother Stevens is developing late habits. It must be my duty to correct him—to urge him to abandon these vicious habits. I rather fancy there is some removal work to be done, and without Brother Stevens I am lost."

It never seemed to occur to Browne that he had hands of his own. It was his general policy to talk, and to get others to work. Unless severely pressed, Browne would never do anything himself.

However, on this occasion he felt that it would be unwise to delay. Gathering an armful of books, he went out into the passage, and calmly deposited them on the floor.

"Brother Chambers will doubtless receive a shock, but he must learn to regard these matters as life's little troubles," observed Browne, as he piled the books neatly against the wall. "It will be a lesson——"

"Hallo! What on earth are you doing, Browne?"

Browne glanced round and rose to his feet. Stevens, of all fellows, was coming down the passage.

"Let the joy bells ring out!" exclaimed Browne, beaming upon the newcomer with kindly benevolence. "Brother Stevens, you have arrived in time to assist in the good work."

"What good work?" asked Stevens, as they shook hands.

"Ask no questions, but roll up your sleeves, hoist up your slacks, and follow me into our future abode," said Browne. "You may count yourself as one of Fortune's favourites, Brother Horace. For, in the goodness of my heart, I have decided to suffer your presence as a study-mate. I trust you will accept this honour with due reverence."

Stevens stared.

"My dear ass, you're off the rails!" he said politely. "This is Study No. 10. It belongs to Chambers—the skipper, you know. You can't plant yourself in here——"

"In mistaking me for a shrub, you are in grave error," interrupted Browne. "I am no plant, Brother Stevens, and let me add that we are wasting time. You are still wearing your spring cheviot—I trust, by the way, that it is paid for—and you do not display that anxiety for work which is so desirable. Spring to it, Brother, for time flies."

Stevens grasped the truth at last.

"But good heavens," he ejaculated, "you don't mean to say that you're going to pinch Chambers' study? You're not going to

chuck his belongings out, and take possession while his back's turned?"

Browne shook his head sadly.

"Crudely put, Brother Stevens—crudely put!" he protested. "At the same time, I must confess that you have the rudiments of the truth. And as Chambers and his stalwarts may appear at any moment, it behoves us to show a hot turn of speed."

CHAPTER XI.

THE CONVERSION OF STEVENS.



HORACE STEVENS walked into Study No. 10 like a fellow in a dream. He stood looking round, and Browne was obliged to prod him.

"This habit of sleeping in an upright position is to be greatly deplored," observed the new senior gravely. "Remember, Brother Stevens, that time goes on—ever on. Never can we reclaim the lost minute—that minute which sometimes means the turning-point of a career."

"You're mad!" said Stevens bluntly. "You're dotty! If we pinch this study, Chambers will kick up a fearful shindy when he arrives. There's old Pagett to be considered, too——"

"Brother Pagett may be ruled out," interrupted Browne. "I have already interviewed that moth-eaten gentleman, and we are now as brothers. You may set your mind entirely at rest."

"Pagett's given you permission to take this study?" gasped Stevens.

"It would be paltering with the truth to say that he has given me permission," replied Browne. "And as a lie has never passed my lips, I cannot force one through the aperture now. No, Brother Stevens, speaking officially, Brother Pagett has not exactly given me the all-clear signal. At the same time, he has intimated that the study is mine on condition that an amicable arrangement is made with Chambers."

"Pagett knows you're here, then?"

"I am in his thoughts always," replied Browne.

"Well, I'm sorry to give you a shock, old man, but it can't be done," said Stevens bluntly. "It's like old Pagett to worm out of responsibility. You've got to come to an amicable arrangement with Chambers. I can see it coming off! In about a hundred years!"

"This pessimism is regrettable, Brother Stevens," protested Browne. "As far as my future arrangements go, I rather fancy I shall have no use for the study in a hundred years' time. I am more optimistic. Optimism, Brother Stevens—that is the watchword! I venture to suggest that Brother Chambers and myself will be appending our signatures to an armistice in less than a hundred minutes."

"Don't you believe it."

"But first of all we must make certain strategic movements," continued Browne. "There are more books to eject, to say nothing of sundry decrepit cooking utensils, and a number of odds and ends. Be a man, Brother Stevens, and dash into this labour of love."

Stevens sat on the corner of the table, and looked round again.

"My hat, you've got a nerve, Browne!" he said admiringly. "I've always envied Chambers for having this study—it's the best one in the passage."

"Our views, happily, coincide."

"I'll give you a hand, of course," went on Stevens. "At the same time I warn you. As soon as Chambers & Co. turn up, there'll be the deuce to pay. Old Cuthbert's a bit of an ass, but you can't mess him about! And Phillips and Bryant are two of the best boxers in the Fifth!"

Browne shook his head.

"It is sad to realise that your thoughts always turn to violence, Brother Horace," he said regretfully. "There will be no violence. I am a man of peace, and I shall settle the entire trouble with a few well-chosen words. I shall be quite gentle with Brother Chambers. It is no exaggeration to state that before I have done I shall have him ready to jump through hoops at my command."

"But, my dear man, he's the Form skipper—"

"Again you are speaking in ignorance," interrupted Browne. "That, of course, cannot be wondered at, since ignorance is your natural condition. I do not blame you, Brother Stevens—it is doubtless a hereditary complaint. Your father, I have heard on good authority, is known throughout clubland as a Priceless Old Buffer. In years to come you will carry on the famous tradition of the Stevens family."

"Look here, you silly idiot—"

"Harking back to your former remark," interrupted Browne. "Brother Chambers is not, as you imagine, the captain of the Fifth. He holds that honoured position no longer. He doesn't know it yet, but it is nevertheless a fact."

"Doesn't know it?" repeated Stevens blankly.

"The present and future skipper of the Fifth is now posing before you with all the grace for which he is celebrated," said Browne benevolently. "Come, Brother Stevens, you are slow in uttering your cheer."

"You!" gasped Stevens. "Form skipper?"

"Such is the joyful truth."

"Oh, I give you up!" said Stevens help-

lessly. "You haven't been in the school ten minutes, and yet you make yourself skipper of the Form! Just wait until the fellows turn up! You'll be absolutely squashed!"

Browne merely smiled, and lounged gracefully in the easy-chair. And Stevens, who felt like a naughty lag, set about the task of clearing the study.

CHAPTER XII.

THE ARRIVAL OF THE RAJAH.



"HERE we are again!" said Handforth cheerfully. "Buck up, Church, don't jog my bag about like that! And be careful with those pastries, McClure, you ass!"

The chums of Study D had just arrived in the Triangle, and they looked about them with interest. St. Frank's was certainly looking its best. It was early afternoon now, and the blue sky was flecked with picturesque little white clouds—true April weather.

"Nipper & Co. are here, I see," said Church. "There's old Tommy Watson waving from the window of Study C. There's Nipper, too. Hallo, you chaps!" he added, in a yell, answering the wave.

Handforth frowned.

"I've got nothing against Nipper, but I'm afraid there's going to be trouble!" he exclaimed. "He'll naturally want to become captain again, and I expect he'll cut up rusty when he finds himself dished."

"Dished?" asked McClure. "How?"

"Considering that I'm going to be captain—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Eh?" said Handforth, glaring.

His chums composed themselves hastily.

"Oh, rather!" said McClure, with a gulp. "You'll make a wonderful skipper, old man! The trouble is, some of the other fellows might vote against you. There's an awful lot of jealousy in the Form, remember," he added diplomatically. "I shouldn't be surprised if the votes went against you."

"It's bound to happen," said Church. "Nobody realises your true worth, Handy. Take my advice, and be prepared for another disappointment. Nipper's certain to be elected."

Handforth grunted.

"Oh, is he?" he replied. "We'll see about that! Certain to be elected, eh? I'll have something to say—Hallo, who the dickens is this dusky merchant? What's he doing here?"

Handforth & Co. were not the only new arrivals.

Seniors and juniors had been pouring in in floods during the last hour, quite a number arriving by car. At the moment a superb Rolls-Royce saloon was standing on the gravel of the Triangle. And a tall, distinguished young man was standing beside

ANSWERS
EVERY MONDAY...PRICE 2:

it, deep in conversation with Mr. Beverley Stokes and Fenton of the Sixth.

The young man was obviously of Eastern blood. It was hardly fair to describe him as dusky. His complexion was dark, certainly, but Church and McClure had seen many white men who were darker. This distinguished-looking young Oriental was evidently of very high caste.

He was laughing as he talked, and his voice came across to the three juniors. He spoke with an Oxford accent, and without the slightest trace of foreign peculiarity.

"One of Hussi Kahn's friends, I expect," said Church. "There's Hussi, talking with Pitt and Grey. Suppose we go over and ask? I expect this other Indian chap brought him down in his car."

"That's about it," agreed Handforth.

They went over and joined the little group, and Hussi Ranjit Lal Kahn, the Indian Fourth-Former, greeted the chums of Study D with one of his flashing smiles.

"I am honourably pleased to greet you again within the precincts of this delightful and inhospitable pile," he said gently. "The weather is deliciously ludicrous for the occasion."

"Oh, rather!" grinned Church.

"You've been here long enough to learn good English!" said Handforth severely. "How can the weather be ludicrous, you inky fathead? Who's that chap over there?"

Hussi Kahn was quite used to this form of address.

"You mean my esteemed brother?" he asked.

"Your brother, eh?" said Handforth. "Didn't know you had one."

"Which only shows that even you don't know everything, old man," chuckled Reggie Pitt. "Hussi's brother is a considerable pot, too—Rajah Goolah Kahn, sole heir to the great Indian province of Kurpana."

"My hat!" said Handforth & Co.



"At last, you boulder!" cried Doris, grabbing Nipper's hand.

They looked at the visitor with renewed interest. His father, the renowned Maharajah of Kurpana, was one of the wealthiest princes of India. The Maharajah was Hussi's father, too, but somehow the juniors hadn't regarded him with any particular awe. Hussi was such a cheerful, good-natured junior that there had never seemed anything distinguished about him.

But his elder brother was a real rajah, and his very wealth lent him a certain glamour. He had been in England for some years, with only an occasional trip home—generally during the long vacation. First at St. Frank's, then at Oxford, the rajah was now thoroughly English in all his ideas, his speech, and his outlook.

"Just brought you down in his car, I suppose?" asked Church casually.

"My honourable brother will stay under this absurd roof for some weeks," replied Hussi Kahn. "He has already concluded

his disgusted career at Oxford, and is at what we call a loose finish."

The juniors grinned.

"I suppose you mean he's finished his distinguished career, and is at a loose end?" grinned Jack Grey. "Do you mean he'll be the Head's guest—or what?"

"My honoured and august father is making a State visit to England within a few weeks," replied Hussi. "So my noble brother is waiting, so that he may return to India with our mutual pater. In the time that is mean, he will assist the glorious St. Frank's cricket team to victorious ends."

Reggie Pitt looked serious.

"Any help is welcome," he declared. "The junior cricket isn't in need of assistance, but the seniors are awfully weak, I hear. Senior cricket has had a bad time for the last three seasons—so something drastic must be done. Otherwise St. Frank's will be a laughing-stock before long."

Handforth & Co. took another look at the rajah, and then moved off to the Ancient House. It was interesting to know that the rajah had come to stay for a while, but the chums of Study D were not absolutely thrilled.

CHAPTER XIII.

PREPARING A WELCOME.



WILLY HANDFORTH scratched his head thoughtfully.

"Those Fourth-Form asses are doing nothing, so it's up to us to get busy," he declared.

"Why, it would be a sin and a shame to let an opportunity like this slip through our fingers!"

"An opportunity like what?" asked Chubby Heath.

The fags were collected in a lurking group behind the gymnasium. There was no earthly reason why they should lurk, but Willy's call to arms had suggested some sinister purpose. Whenever the skipper of the Third wanted his braves round him, he uttered a peculiarly shrill whistle, and fags came tearing up from all quarters. They knew better than to disregard that signal. In the Third, Willy was a kind of overlord.

The most prominent members of the "gang" were present. Chubby Heath and Owen minor, Tommy Hobbs, Juicy Lemon, and Stan Kerrigan. Conroy minimum and Dicky Jones arrived breathless, and with suspicious smears of cream round the corners of their mouths.

"An opportunity like what?" repeated Willy witheringly. "Haven't you fatheads got any brains? Sorry! What a question to ask. Of course you haven't!"

"Look here, Willy—"

"I suppose you've forgotten that Mr. Lee's come back?" demanded Willy.

"No fear!"

"We've seen him twice!"

"Then what do you mean by pretending to be ignorant?" asked Willy. "Mr. Lee's come back, and it's the duty of the Fourth to supply him with a brass band welcome. But the Fourth isn't doing anything," he added bitterly. "What do those fatheads care? It's all left to us!"

"I don't see what we can do," objected Chubby. "We can go and give him a few cheers perhaps, but that's about all."

"Rats!" said Handforth minor. "Cheers are all very well, but we've got to have something better than that. I suggest some biscuit tins and cricket stumps—we can make a lot of noise, anyhow. And we can get some combs, and play some music—"

"We shall get dropped on if we make a noise like that," said Owen minor.

"Don't you believe it!" said Willy. "It's the first day of term, and we can do pretty well as we like. Besides, it's a pity if we can't give Mr. Nelson Lee a musical welcome back!"

Willy Handforth's idea of music seemed to be a trifle distorted, but this was only a detail. He got to work with all his usual energy. Several fags were sent off at full speed.

They returned five minutes later with biscuit tins, cricket stumps, and combs. These latter were improvised with paper in the approved style, and the weird sounds which Willy & Co. caused were startling.

The rehearsal was brief, for after all, it didn't matter so much about any particular tune. The main idea was to gather beneath Nelson Lee's window and make as much hullabaloo as possible.

Chubby Heath had been scowling, but he returned with his freckled face flushed and excited.

"Come on, you chaps—Mr. Lee's in his room now!" he panted. "I just spotted him at his desk writing. We'd better go while we're certain of him!"

"Good!"

"Come on—let's buzz off!"

"Hurrah!"

"Hold on, you fatheads!" roared Willy, glaring. "We don't want to go in a mob, I suppose? Form up! Now then, Lemon, toe the line! Attention! Are you deaf, young Kerrigan?"

The fags hastily formed up into a ragged looking square. Willy gazed at his hand with disgust. Half of them were out of step, and the other half didn't know a straight line from a corkscrew.

"Oh, it's no good!" growled Willy. "You're hopeless, anyway! Now, when I give the order to march—march! And don't start playing until I raise my hand!"

Willy had located Nelson Lee's new study as a preliminary, for Mr. Stokes, of course, was in possession of the room which Lee had originally occupied. There was no fear of the "band" making the fatal mistake of playing outside the wrong window.

"March!" ordered Willy sharply.

He took care to keep his baton down; it was really a cricket-stump, but that didn't matter. And with Willy at their head the fags marched from behind the gym., and started off across the Triangle.

Half-way across Willy started. Emerging from the Ancient House were a number of Fourth-Formers, with Reggie Pitt at their head. Various instruments flashed in the sunlight. And what was more to the point, the strains of loud and discordant music rent the unoffending atmosphere.

CHAPTER XIV.

"FOR HE'S A JOLLY GOOD FELLOW!"



"WELL I'm jiggered!" Willy uttered that remark with deep, intense feeling. After all his trouble to get up his own "band," it was disheartening to find the Fourth had forestalled him at the crucial moment.

Reggie Pitt & Co. were not quite so slow as Willy had declared. And Pitt's band was undoubtedly a vast improvement on Willy's mixture of combs and empty biscuit-tins.

"Halt!" grunted Willy curtly. "What's the use? How the dickens can we hope to make ourselves heard against a row like that? My stars! Did you ever hear such a ghastly din?"

The Fourth Form's impromptu band was certainly making its presence known in no uncertain manner. All the Fourth Form musicians had been pressed into service, with the exception of Hubert Jarrow. It was hardly reasonable to expect Jarrow to come out with a piano strapped round his neck. And the piano was Jarrow's only instrument.

But the other musicians were on the job, and one or two others who weren't musicians at all. Handforth, for example, had insisted upon playing the trombone. He only produced some ghastly tearing noises, but he seemed to consider that he was doing wonders.

Griffith was doing well with his flute; Webb was hammering away at his trap drum; Conroy minor was doing his utmost to drown Handforth with his cornet; Jack Grey was strumming at his banjo, and Solomon Levi was testing a violin. He wasn't an expert as yet, but, as he pointed

out, it didn't matter a bit, for his efforts would be drowned in any case.

Heads appeared from windows on both the inhabited sides of the Triangle. The very air vibrated with the fearsome strains. Stevens, looking out of Study No. 10, declared that he could vaguely recognise the strains of "For He's A Jolly Good Fellow," but William Napoleon Browne shook his head.

"Forgive me for contradicting you, Brother Stevens, but you are undoubtedly mistaken. If this exaggerated form of wireless atmosphere has any tune at all, I should set it down as 'We Won't Get Home Till Morning.'"

Stevens shook his head.

"No, it's 'For He's A Jolly Good Fellow,'" he declared.

"Well, well—life is too short for these intense arguments!" sighed Browne. "Have your own way, Brother Stevens. Not that it matters," he added musingly. "To the best of my belief, the same tune does duty for both songs."

"Why, of course!" grinned Stevens. "I hadn't thought of that! I say, what on earth are they kicking up that din for?"

"Youth will have its fling," said Browne, lying back on the lounge. "We must expect these volcanic outbursts, Brother Stevens. I will confess that much of this sort of thing will reduce me to a mere shadow; but we must hope for the best. Hope is our only watchword. Let us fervently trust that some painstaking master will hurl a brick into the machinery. Otherwise, I fear we are in the Oxo!"

The band, in the meantime, was making for Nelson Lee's window. For a brief moment Browne had suspected that the music was in his own honour, but he shuddered at the very thought. Nothing less than a full military band would have pleased his refined taste.

Pitt was conducting the band, and it required no little skill to perform this work. Handforth persisted in tearing off a few yards of blare at exactly the point where it wasn't wanted, and all trace of melody was consequently drowned. Only when he paused to take a breath could the tune be faintly recognised.

And in the middle of it all a still worse din suddenly broke out. It came from behind the band, and the band rocked. Handforth, glancing round in alarm—fearing that the Modern House was collapsing—beheld his minor performing violent gymnastics with a cricket-stump. In reality, Willy was merely conducting his band, and it might as well be admitted that the band was in considerable danger from the swinging stump.

Nelson Lee came to the window and threw up the lower sash. It sounded to him as though pandemonium had been let loose.

and after standing it for a full minute, he thought it time to investigate.

At the first glance he chuckled. The Fourth and the Third were vieing against one another in earnest. While Pitt & Co. were trying their best to create music Willy's gang of rogues were hammering at the biscuit-tins until the commotion was appalling.

"Hurrah!"

Handforth started to cheer, and others took it up.

"Hip, hip, hurrah!"

"Welcome back to St. Frank's!"

"Three more cheers for Mr. Lee!"

"Hip, hip, hurrah!"

The alleged music ceased, and the cheers rang out with tremendous force. They could have been heard for miles. The whole Triangle echoed and re-echoed with the full-throated greeting.

Dr. Stafford, glancing in a startled manner out of his own window—he had, as a matter of fact, been awakened from a short siesta—was relieved to find Nelson Lee master of the situation. The great detective merely raised his hand, and the cheers died completely away.

"Speech, sir—speech!" urged the excited juniors.

CHAPTER XV.

THE FORM MEETING.



NELSON LEE cleared his throat.

"I cannot doubt the warmth of your welcome," he said earnestly.

"There's nothing I can say, boys, except that I value your greeting very highly. My own pleasure at being back with you is great indeed, and although I'm no longer your House-master—"

"That doesn't matter, sir—you're here!"

"It's all the same, sir!"

"The main thing is to have you with us!"

"Hurrah!"

"Although I shall no longer control you, I shall have every opportunity of joining in your pleasures and recreations," said Nelson Lee. "And I am hoping that the new arrangement will enable me to get into closer touch with you. I don't like to consider myself a master—we just want to be the best of friends, eh?"

"Rather, sir!"

"Good old Mr. Lee!"

"You've got to stay here for good now, sir!"

"Hear, hear!"

Nelson Lee was unable to say anything else, for some more cheers rang out, and then the fags started pounding away at their tins once more. In self-defence, the Fourth started up their own music.

Unfortunately, the affair nearly ended up

in a free fight, for Handforth tried to grab his minor's cricket-stump, and only succeeded in getting a fearful rap across the knuckles. So he charged in among the fags, scattering them like chaff before a gale.

The rest of the Fourth followed his example, for it was generally agreed that these cheeky fags needed a lesson. But Willy & Co. discreetly vanished, leaving the Triangle strewn with their discarded "instruments."

"Let 'em go!" grinned Reggie Pitt. "After all, they had as much right to kick up a shindy as we had. Let's get indoors. It's nearly half-past three, and we mustn't be late for the Form meeting."

"What Form meeting?" asked Handforth. "As soon as I catch my minor I'll turn him upside down and—"

"Never mind your minor now," interrupted Pitt. "Everybody's got to turn up for this meeting. On second thoughts, we'd better hold it in the gym. Boots and his crowd will be there, and the common-room won't be large enough."

Pitt had ascertained that the entire Fourth had arrived. There were two sections of it at St. Frank's, and, all told, the Fourth numbered no less than seventy-six. The gymnasium, therefore, was none too large. It would just about hold the twin Forms comfortably.

John Busterfield Boots was captain of the Modern Fourth, and his position was secondary to Reggie Pitt's—for Pitt was sole skipper of junior football and cricket, having complete authority over both Houses.

A call from him, therefore, was tantamount to a command. If within the school premises, nobody dared to stay away. Even Fullwood & Co. and Snipe and Teddy Long, much as they disliked Form meetings, were obliged to attend.

Nipper turned up with Tregellis-West and Watson, and soon after three-thirty the gymnasium was packed.

There were endless grumbles, for a Form meeting on the first day of term was regarded as a piece of nerve. The fellows liked to be free and easy on the first afternoon—especially with tea-time looming so near.

"All right, you chaps—all right!" yelled Pitt, jumping on to a raised ledge. "Don't get excited—I shan't keep you more than five minutes. But what I've got to say must be said at once."

"Go it, old son!"

"Make it short and sweet!"

"You all know that Nipper has once more returned to the fold," shouted Reggie.

"He's back again—"

"Hurrah!"

"Good old Nipper!"

The Fourth gave him a thunderous cheer, and Nipper modestly acknowledged the greeting with a cheerful grin.

"We wanted to start the term right, and that's why I've taken the first opportunity to get you all together," went on Pitt.

"When Nipper left St. Frank's he naturally resigned the captaincy of the Fourth and I was elected as a kind of substitute——"

"Good old Reggie!"

"You've been a first-class skipper!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Thanks!" said Reggie, flushing slightly.

"At the same time, there's only one chap for the job now. Nipper's back, and I want him to automatically step into his old position. I've been proud to captain the Fourth, but I shall be just as proud to serve under Nipper's banner. I've had a good run, and I wish to tender my resignation here and now."

CHAPTER XVI.

A SURPRISE FOR THE FOURTH.



THERE was a confused commotion for some moments.

Everybody had been expecting Pitt to resign, but, somehow, now that the moment had come, there was a lot of discussion. Even the confirmed grumblers of the Fourth were compelled to admit that Reggie had skippered the Form with tact, judgment, and perfect skill.

"Pitt's done the right thing!" roared Handforth. "I always said he was a sport, didn't I? The only thing now is to have an election, and Church is anxious to nominate a candidate."

"Eh?" gasped Church. "I—I didn't know——"

"Go on!" hissed Handforth. "You know what to say."

"Oh, rather!" said Church, confused. "I vote for Nipper——"

"What!" thundered Handforth. "I told you to nominate me!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I—I mean Handy!" stammered Church, as red as a beetroot. "I vote that we elect Handy as Form captain——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Sorry, Handy, old man, but it's no good you standing!" grinned Buster Boots. "You'd only get two votes! Why, I'd stand a fairly good chance myself—but I'm not putting my name up. What's the use against Nipper? His election is a foregone conclusion. I'll be content with skippering the Modern side."

"Good old Boots!"

"What about me?" demanded Armstrong, pushing forward. "Isn't it about time I had a look in. I've been kept back for terms, and there are plenty of chaps who'll vote for me——"

"Dry up, Armstrong—you don't stand an earthly," interrupted de Valrie. "You might get ten or fifteen votes, but no more. There's no need to make a fuss over this election—it can all be settled within two minutes."

"Absolutely!" said Archie Glenthorne, nodding. "I mean to say, the whole dashed thing is a frightful fag, what? Two energetic coves absolutely lugged me off the old lounge in the middle of forty of the choicest. What about it? I vote for Nipper, so that's that!"

"That's the way, Archie—go to it direct!" grinned Reggie. "But to satisfy these candidates, we'll hold a swift election. Hands up, everybody, for Handforth—right hands only, remember!"

There was a yell of laughter, but no hands appeared. After a moment, however, Church and McClure gave two simultaneous yelps—the result of a couple of prods—and raised their right hands.

"Two for Handy!" chuckled Pitt. "Handforth, old son, you're out of it!"

"Gee whizz!" grinned Adams. "He's sure sunk!"

Handforth looked round with blank amazement. Although everybody else had known exactly what the result would be, Handforth had firmly believed that he would capture most of the votes. His optimism was something to marvel at.

"Ain't you going to vote for me?" he roared aggressively.

"Time's up!" sang out Pitt. "Now then—votes for Armstrong!"

"Make it snappy!" advised Ulysses.

It was snappy. Only eight hands appeared—those of Armstrong's immediate cronies. The leader of Study J glowered round, and flushed. His vanity had led him to suppose that he would have more supporters.

"That's two of 'em sunk!" grinned Pitt. "Look here, this is a farce. It's no good asking you to vote for Boots or me. We shall only be wasting time—and I can already smell tea. Hands up for Nipper!"

"Hurrah!"

Practically every right hand in the gymnasium went upwards. Church and McClure shot theirs up with alacrity. And Handforth, with one glare, followed their example. He had the decency to realise that his own cause was hopeless, and that he might as well vote for Nipper with the rest.

Reggie Pitt chuckled again.

"No mistake this time, eh?" he shouted. "Thanks, you Modern House chaps, for your support. When it comes to electing a Form skipper, there mustn't be any House favouritism—and Nipper's the only chap for the job!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Now then, Nipper, up you come!" went on Pitt. "Come on this ledge, and acknowledge the plaudits of the multitude. And jolly good luck to our old skipper!"

"Hurrah!"

Nipper was pushed through the excited crowd, and forced on to the ledge. He was quite calm, and took the honour with all his usual level-headedness. He was, indeed, smiling.

"Thanks, you chaps, for electing me like this," he said, as a hush fell. "It's more

than I deserve—and I'd like to point out a little discrepancy. I appreciate your votes to the full, and I think you're a fine lot of sports. But I'm afraid I shall have to spoil the harmony of the meeting."

"How do you mean?" asked Buster Boots.

"Well, I wasn't even consulted in the matter, and I've been elected in a kind of rush," said Nipper calmly. "But it so happens that I've made up my mind to refuse nomination."

"What!"

"I'm not standing for the captaincy at all," went on Nipper. "Therefore, if you'll excuse me, I'll gracefully back out of the election. I feel that it is my duty to firmly refuse the captaincy."

CHAPTER XVII.

NO CHANGE.

SOMETHING like consternation reigned for a few exciting minutes. Nipper waited for the storm to die down, and found questions being hurled at him by dozens of juniors. Reggie Pitt was looking quite concerned.

"What's the idea?" he asked blankly. "You can't refuse, old man! You've been elected, and

"Of course you have, Nipper!" roared Watson.

"Begad, rather!" said Tregellis-West.

"Have you gone dotty, Nipper?" yelled somebody else.

"Calm down, and listen to your uncle!" said Nipper smoothly.

"Don't get so excited. I'm refusing the captaincy because there never ought to have been any election at all. Don't think I'm ungrateful for your votes—I value them tremendously. But I've always understood that a new Form skipper is wanted when the retiring skipper leaves the Form, or proves himself unfitted for the job."

"Yes, but——"

"Neither of these situations has arisen here," continued Nipper earnestly. "Pitt is still with us, and he has only resigned because of a silly fancy that I ought to

step back into my old place. But why? Pitt has proved himself to be the best skipper the Fourth ever had."

"No, no!"

"Hear, hear!" yelled Jack Grey. "Nipper's right."

"All last term Pitt handled the footer in a masterly fashion," continued Nipper. "In every other way, too, he acquitted himself in the most topping manner. Why, hang it all, I shouldn't feel comfortable in the captaincy now. I want you to vote for Pitt—

to retain him as skipper, and to let me serve under his banner. Nothing would please me better."

There was a hush while the Form considered this unexpected proposal.

Reggie Pitt was startled. He had never anticipated anything of this sort, and with flushed face and gleaming eyes he waited. And the look he cast at Nipper was full of warmth.

Everybody realised the nature of Nipper's act. It was an act of self-sacrifice—and, if anything, it served to make him more popular than ever. For the captaincy was the highest of all possible honours, and to refuse it after being elected by an overwhelming majority was an unusual exhibition of strength.

"I don't want to pose as a martyr, or anything like that," said Nipper, rather uncomfortably. "That's all rot. The position's as clear as daylight. Reggie Pitt is skipper,

and there's no need to have any change."

"But it's your job, old son," said Pitt. "I was only acting as your understudy——"

"Rats!" interrupted Nipper gruffly. "Be a sport, Reggie, and stick to the reins. You've been a huge success as captain, and we all want to see you carry on the good work. You can rely on me to back you up whenever you need a hand——"

"Yes, but it doesn't seem right," growled Pitt.

"I'm not so sure that Nipper isn't acting in the best way," remarked Buster Boots thoughtfully. "He's a sportsman, anyhow,

PORTRAIT GALLERY AND WHO'S WHO.

Second Series.—Third Form.

NOTE.—The ages of Third Form boys vary between 12 and 14.



No. 23.—Jimmy Hook.

Rather an aggressive boy, but not really formidable. Fancies himself a leader, but his ability as such is practically nil. He wears glasses, but hardly ever uses them—as he looks over the top.

and nobody can deny it. I don't think I should have had the pluck to stand down after being elected."

"Good old Nipper!"

"Come on, you fellows—show your loyalty to Reggie!" shouted Nipper. "Don't forget his ripping leadership. What about the scandal some time ago? Nobody could have done finer work than that."

"Oh, rot!" said Pitt, frowning.

"Give him your votes, and retain him as captain," urged Nipper. "He's the one man for the job. He hasn't made a single slip since he took the reins, and until he does make a slip, it's your duty to support him all along the line."

remains captain, but I'll be ready to step into his shoes as soon as he gets off the rails."

"Oh, I say, what rot—" began Pitt.

"Now then—let's have your votes," said Nipper. "No hanging back—no shirking! Come on—make it solid! Here's my hand to start with!"

He raised his hand, and he had aroused such enthusiasm that a perfect forest of other hands rose upwards. Out of the whole seventy-five juniors in the twin forms, less than a dozen withheld their votes.

"That's good enough!" roared Buster Boots. "Three cheers for our skipper!"

"Hurrah!"



Nelson Lee came to the window and threw up the lower sash. It sounded to him as though pandemonium had been let loose, and after standing it a few minutes he thought it time to investigate.

"Hear, hear!" said Bob Christine. "I'm blessed if Nipper's view isn't the most sensible one. But I'll tell you what. Why not try it for a month? If Pitt keeps the flag flying all right he can still carry on. But if he makes a hash of things, we'll demand Nipper instead. How's that?"

"Good idea!"

"Yes, that's sensible enough," said Trotwood major.

"Rather!"

"I'm game!" grinned Nipper. "I'm not likely to be skipper for a long time, though! I trust Reggie to steer the ship as skilfully as anybody. All right, it's settled. Pitt

"And three cheers for Nipper, too!" yelled Pitt. "He deserves 'em a lot more than I do."

"Hurrah!"

Nipper received his cheers, although he felt rather uncomfortable about them. He hated any kind of display, and to be set down as a kind of hero was torture to him. He was heartily glad when the meeting broke up.

"Well, that's settled, thank goodness," he said, with a breath of relief, as he walked indoors with Tregellis-West and Watson. "Phew! I feel like a restorative—and there's nothing to beat a cup of tea!"

"Archie's unfailing remedy!" grinned Tommy Watson. "But I say, old man, you were a hopeless duffer, refusing the captaincy like that!"

"Duffer?" repeated Sir Montie thoughtfully. "Begad! I can think of a better word than that, Tommy boy—I can, really!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

CHAMBERS & CO. ARRIVE.



CUTHBERT CHAMBERS, the Captain of the Fifth Form, was looking tired and irritable. He had just walked into the Triangle, accompanied by his faithful chums, Phillips and Bryant. This trio represented the "big noise" of the Fifth.

Phillips and Bryant were fed up, too. There wasn't a smile between the three of them as they walked towards the Ancient House. It was tea-time, and the sun was still shining brilliantly. St. Frank's indeed, was looking its best, and the acknowledged leaders of the Fifth ought to have responded to the cheery conditions.

But they were tired and weary, and only thought of getting into their study, and having some tea. Everything had gone wrong to-day. It had been Chambers' fault in the first place, and although he knew this, he wouldn't admit it. This was one reason why he was irritable.

He had positively arranged to meet his chums at Victoria in time to catch the early afternoon train. Phillips and Bryant had been there in good time, and had even bagged a corner seat especially for Chambers.

And Chambers had turned up five minutes after the train had gone—having made a mistake of ten minutes in the time of departure. He had found Phillips and Bryant on the platform, fed up to the neck.

There had been an argument, high words, and a kind of chilly restraint had followed. Instead of coming down by a good train, Chambers & Co. had been compelled to travel in a species of snail which stopped at every station, and sometimes at no station at all.

Chambers hated slow trains, and he didn't improve matters when he roundly accused his chums of causing the disaster. For the sake of peace, Phillips and Bryant had said as little as possible—and they were now thankful that St. Frank's had been reached at last.

On the Ancient House steps they met Simms, of Study 14. Simms was a morose kind of chap in many ways, but at present he was looking quite pleasant. His good humour was due to the fact that he had got rid of Horace Stevens—who had previously shared Study No. 14 with him. Stevens, be-

it known, was just as jubilant to have got rid of Simms.

"Hallo!" said Simms, grinning. "You're late!"

Under the circumstances this was a tactless remark. Chambers & Co. concentrated three baleful glares upon Simms.

"Go to the deuce!" said Chambers sourly.

"We lost our confounded train," growled Phillips. "Well, there's nothing to grin about, is there? I never did like your face, Simms, but I'm blessed if I thought it was as hateful as this!"

Simms frowned.

"No need to be personal!" he grunted. "I was going to give you a word of warning, but I'm dashed if I will now! You can have the shock first hand, without being prepared!"

"What shock?" asked Chambers, who was naturally inquisitive.

"Wait till you get into Study No. 10!" said Simms, his grin returning.

He went off without saying any more, and Chambers & Co. had a vague sense of uneasiness. They stared after Simms, and then glanced at one another.

"What did the ass mean?" growled Chambers.

"Goodness knows," said Bryant. "I hope they haven't been messing our study about during the vac.! There's no telling what can happen as soon as our backs are turned. Let's buck up and see."

They hurried into the House, strode into the Fifth Form passage, and made for the old familiar door of No. 10. But they paused outside. On the floor, piled against the wall, were a few heaps of books, football boots, crockery, cooking utensils, and all sorts of odds and ends.

"My hat!" gasped Phillips. "These are ours!"

"But what are they doing out here?" roared Chambers. "Who's been carting our stuff out of the study? By Jove! I'll soon see what's the matter!"

He was just feeling in the mood for trouble with somebody. His irritation had been increasing for hours, and what he wanted at the moment was a good outlet. Phillips and Bryant were quite ready to back him up.

One or two doors opened along the passage, and inquiring heads were thrust out. Everybody knew about William Napoleon Browne's seizure of Study No. 10, and the subject had been practically the sole topic of conversation during the afternoon. The Fifth Form had been anxiously awaiting the arrival of Chambers—and here he was at last.

Chambers flung open the door of Study No. 10 and marched in. He took one stride, and then came to an abrupt halt. Stevens was sitting at the table, eating doughnuts, and Browne, lounging easily in the best chair, was lazily pouring out a cup of tea. He looked up and smiled.

"Visitors!" he exclaimed benevolently. "Splendid! Walk in, brothers, and make yourselves at home. Always remember that hospitality is the motto of this noble apartment. Brother Stevens, be good enough to round up a few more cups and saucers."

Chambers & Co. stared at the scene with glassy eyes.

CHAPTER XIX.

TROUBLE IN STUDY NO. 10.



STEVENS swallowed half a doughnut in nearly one gulp, and came within measurable distance of choking himself. He started to his feet, and looked at the new arrivals with acute uneasiness.

"I say, you know, we—we— That is—"

"Be good enough to leave this matter entirely in my charge, Brother Stevens," interrupted Browne gently. "Have no fear. There will be no strife. In my own masterly fashion I will deal with this delicate situation. And in future do not labour under the misapprehension that doughnuts are pills, and must be swallowed whole."

Chambers, who had been swelling like a kind of human balloon, suddenly burst.

"What are you doing in this study?" he hooted violently.

Browne looked shocked.

"Alas! I fear that high words are unavoidable," he said regretfully. "Always bear in mind, Brother Chambers, that life's little troubles are lurking round unexpected corners, waiting to spring at our throats. This is one of those occasions when you must take hold of yourself firmly, and reveal that fortitude which—"

"This is my study!" roared Chambers, red in the face with indignation and fury.

"Great Scott! You've not only cleared our stuff out, but you've brought your own books and things in."

"You—you needn't look at me like that!" put in Stevens, as he received the full candle-power of Chambers' glare. "I told Browne what to expect—not that I'm backing out, mind you. This is our study now."

"Your study?" bellowed Chambers & Co. in one voice.

"Much as I enjoy the full-throated roar of the rhinoceros on its native heath, I must confess a treble dose of it is somewhat startling," said Browne gently. "Calm yourselves, brothers. Let us have peace. Alas! I fear a tragedy is about to happen."

Chambers tried to speak, but he only gurgled.

"As I feared," sighed Browne. "Unless I am mistaken, Brother Chambers is now about to perish miserably from apoplexy. It is distressing to have these interruptions

in the middle of a meal. Under the circumstances, Brother Chambers, perhaps you will be considerate enough to expire out in the passage?"

"Get out of this study!" bellowed Chambers hoarsely. "I've never heard of such nerve in my life! You rotten outsider! You blessed fraud! You cheeky new bounder! You—you—"

"I beseech you, Brother Stevens, to open the window," urged Browne. "As you may be aware, I intensely dislike this indigo tint in the atmosphere. I am convinced, moreover, that Brother Chambers is in need of air. He is already revealing every sign of internal combustion. I fear his carburettor is rapidly becoming choked. I suggest an immediate closing of the throttle."

Stevens stood by quite helplessly. He had been expecting some scene of this sort for hours, and now that it had come he was practically bereft of speech.

William Napoleon Browne seemed perfectly at his ease. He not only retained his beaming smile, but sank back into his easy-chair and eyed Chambers & Co. in much the same way as an elderly gentleman will watch the antics of children.

Chambers & Co., having got over their initial shock, dimly began to realise that shouting was useless. They calmed down, and Chambers deliberately closed the door—much to the disgust of an interested audience which had collected outside.

"Look here!" said Chambers thickly. "We don't want any arguments—we don't want any scrapping—"

"Ah, so our views coincide at last?" asked Browne gently. "Splendid, Brother Chambers—splendid! I have always held the view that concentrated calmness is the cry. You may consider that the present situation is acute, but let me remove this impression. In the space of a nutshell I can tell you all."

"This is our study—"

"Wait!" interrupted Browne. "It pains me to observe this lack of manners. Without wishing to wound you, Brother Chambers, let me say at once that Study No. 10 is now the abode of the Fifth Form's most distinguished member. In other words, I have decided to reside here."

"You—you—"

"Acting upon the principle of first come first served, I naturally took possession with no little alacrity," proceeded Browne. "Brother Stevens has been honoured by my decision to include him in the scheme. All your personal belongings are neatly arranged outside. No doubt you will express your gratitude at a later hour, for Brother Stevens and myself took the greatest possible care of your nicknacks and what-nots, to say nothing of various thingummy-jigs."

"And do you think," demanded Chambers, with concentrated fury—"do you think that you and Stevens are going to stay here? Have you got the nerve to expect such a thing?"

"My nerve," replied Browne placidly, "is simply colossal."

CHAPTER XX.

CHAMBERS ON THE WARPATH.



THE rightful owners of Study No. 10 were beset with a feeling of acute helplessness. Never had they encountered such an extraordinarily cool fellow as William Napoleon

Browne. Time-honoured methods were useless against his armour of concentrated calm.

"Colossal!" repeated Browne, closing his eyes and placing the tips of his fingers together. "Indeed, on one occasion our family physician remarked that I am no mere human being—but, on the contrary, a solid chunk of condensed nerve. We Brownes, as you may know, are celebrated throughout the world for our wit, our tact—"

"My only hat!" gasped Chambers. "Come on, you chaps! Talking's no good against a gas-bag like this! Make one rush at him and chuck him out! It's the only way!"

Browne lazily opened his eyes.

"At Uxton my reputation as a middle-weight boxer is spoken of with bated breath," he observed reminiscently. "The entire school, of course, is now in mourning—but let us not speak of these sad things. What is Uxton's loss is St. Frank's gain. For I am here. William Napoleon Browne is finally and permanently amongst you."

Chambers hesitated.

"No, we won't fight!" he panted, apparently struck by Browne's casual reference to boxing. "We'll deal with this thing in another way. Come on, you fellows."

"I am delighted to find, Brother Chambers, that you have definitely decided to abandon all idea of vulgar brawling," said Browne gently. "Without exaggeration, I can say that you have leapt up in my estimation. And that, no doubt, is a great consolation to you. To be held high in my esteem is the ultimate ambition of everyone."

Chambers turned to the door and flung it open. About nine Fifth-Formers poured through the doorway like a flood, but checked themselves in time. They scattered, and Chambers & Co. strode out.

"Going?" asked Browne, mildly interested. "Come, come! This will never do, Brother Chambers! You must accept our

hospitality, and partake of this noxious brew which Brother Stevens alleges to be tea. It may possibly suit his plebeian taste, but to a connoisseur like myself—"

Crash!

Chambers slammed the door so violently that the very walls shook. Browne looked across at Stevens and shook his head.

"These violent outbursts are to be greatly deplored," he said sadly. "I fear that Brother Chambers is careless. I may be wrong, of course, but I have a distinct impression that he is slightly irritated."

"Irritated?" said Stevens, breathing hard. "He's raving mad with fury!"

"He seems to have taken the blow rather badly," said Browne. "But be of good cheer, Brother Stevens—let your natural buoyancy come to your aid in this crisis. Brother Chambers may be annoyed at the moment, but in due course he will realise that it is fitting that he should henceforth be known in the Fifth as number two."

"And you're number one, I suppose?" grinned Stevens.

"How could it be otherwise?" inquired Browne in surprise. "You must surely realise that the Fifth Form cannot have two captains. And since I am here, Brother Chambers must naturally be content with a pit seat instead of an orchestra-stall."

Stevens looked dubious, and felt even more dubious than he looked. He knew that this storm had only just commenced. He had the advantage over Browne, inasmuch as he knew Chambers through and through. And Cuthbert Chambers was not the kind of fellow to make light of an affair of this kind. The Fifth Form would literally be turned upside down within five minutes.

Chambers' first move was to rush to Mr. Pagett.

There was no element of sneaking in this action. Mr. Pagett would naturally know about the new occupation of Study 10 in the ordinary course of events, and if Chambers could get Mr. Pagett to come along and order the intruders out, the matter would be settled. Chambers didn't want to take drastic action until he was compelled. For he fancied he had a dignity, and he was horrified at the idea of "brawling."

But Chambers made a grave technical blunder. Instead of cooling off and visiting Mr. Pagett with that dignity on which he prided himself, he burst into the Form-master's study like a whirlwind.

And it so happened that Mr. Pagett was making his first test of the sealing-wax art—with gruesome consequences. The result of his handiwork, indeed, was little short of ghastly. Furthermore, Mr. Pagett had got a blob of hot sealing-wax on his best trousers, and he had burnt his finger. He was hardly in the mood to entertain visitors who broke in like young bombs.

"Look here, sir—" began Chambers breathlessly.

"Chambers!" thundered Mr. Pagett furiously. "What do you mean by hurling yourself into this room—"

"Browne and Stevens have pinched my study, sir!" hooted Chambers.

"I don't care what Browne and Stevens have done!" roared Mr. Pagett, like one thunderclap after another. "Go away at once!"

"But—but Browne and Stevens—"

"If Browne and Stevens are in your study, I have no doubt they have a perfect right to be there!" rapped out Mr. Pagett, like a machine-gun. "I won't have you bringing me every scrap of tittle-tattle in this way!"

CHAPTER XXI.

ANOTHER FORM MEETING.



HANDFORTH stared. "These Fifth Form chaps are making a dickens of a commotion this evening!" he remarked. "They're dodging about like lunatics! I was nearly knocked down by Parry and Drake just now, and Simms has just gone tearing down the passage—"

"I think it's old Browne," grinned Church.

The chums of Study D were in the

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"Tittle-tattle, sir?" asked Chambers dazedly.

"Yes, sir—tittle-tattle!" stormed Mr. Pagett. "If you can't look after your own study, Chambers, it is a pity! Get out of this room before I thoroughly lose my temper. Do you hear me?" he boomed violently.

Chambers staggered out, and gasped for breath in the passage. He had hardly expected such a reception. And the fact was gradually dawning upon him that the Fifth itself would have to take the matter in hand.

Ancient House lobby, and there was certainly a fair amount of cause for Handforth's remarks. For the last ten minutes Fifth-Formers had been rushing to and fro, highly excited, and completely lacking in dignity.

"Browne?" repeated Handforth, frowning.

"Yes, that chap who came with us on Archie's picnic on Easter Monday," said McClure. "He's in the Fifth now, you know. Somebody told me he's collared Chambers' study."

"Like his giddy nerve!" said Handforth severely. "A new chap, too! Coming here

and appropriating a study that doesn't belong to him! I hope he gets ragged to smithereens!"

"Yes, he deserves it!" agreed Church.

"Of course, Chambers is a first-class ass, and deserves pretty nearly anything," went on Handforth. "So Browne's pinched his study! Good luck to him! It'll give Chambers something to think about!"

"But you just said he ought to be ragged——"

"I can change my mind, I suppose?" roared Handforth. "Not so much of your giddy criticism, my lad! And don't stand there grinning! Where's my bat? We've got to do a bit of practice this evening at the nets. Where's my bat, blow you?"

"I thought it was in your hand, but I must be mistaken," said Church sarcastically. "Perhaps it's only one of the bails!"

Handforth, who had been leaning on his cricket-bat, grunted and strode out into the Triangle. His chums followed, although they were rather curious to find out what exactly was happening in the Fifth.

As a matter of fact, Chambers had called a Form meeting. Perhaps he was jealous of the Fourth, and felt that the Fifth ought to start the term well by holding a Form meeting, too. But the reason for the Fifth Form gathering was of a very different nature to the junior affair.

Only about two-thirds of the Fifth had turned up. For Chambers did not hold the sway that Reggie Pitt did. Chambers was regarded as more or less of an ass, and unless he expressly stated that he wanted to speak on sports, his meetings were practically ignored.

On this occasion, however, the fellows turned up because they were curious. And they felt, also, that Chambers deserved their support. It was like this new fellow's nerve to barge in, and settle himself in the captain's study on the very first day.

"I'm not going to speak much," shouted Chambers, as he faced the crowd in the Fifth Form Common-room. "You all know about Browne, don't you? The awful, fearful rotter——"

"Go easy!" grinned Swinton. "Browne's a bit of a comedian; but I'll admit he's got a frightful sauce."

"There's only one thing to be done!" roared Chambers. "We've got to go along in force, order the beast out, and see that he goes! If he won't move, we'll chuck him out on his neck!"

"Hear, hear!"

"He can't defy the whole Form," went on Chambers. "And if we let the thing go on, he'll be worse than ever. We've got to pitch him out without any delay—neck and crop!"

"Much as it pains me to disagree with

you, Brother Chambers, I have no alternative but to do so," said Browne gently.

The meeting stared. William Napoleon had just walked in, and he was arm in arm with Stevens. While Stevens was undoubtedly white about the gills, Browne was an unruffled as ever.

"There he is!" roared Chambers, with sudden fury.

"I thought it only neighbourly to come along and join the festive throng," said Browne. "There is nothing I like better than a cheery, good-natured gathering of this type. It does my old heart good to see your smiles of friendly greeting."

The Fifth Form grinned. It couldn't help it. There was something so engagingly quaint about this new fellow that Chambers' supporters completely forgot themselves.

"I may be wrong, but did I hear some suggestion of chucking me out neck and crop?" asked Browne politely. "It is as well to point out, in passing, that I really possess no crop, although more than once I have been referred to as a cheery old bird. But to deal with more important matters. I am here, Browne, on a mission."

Browne walked across the room, climbed upon a chair, and surveyed the Fifth with a kindly, patronising eye.

"A somewhat blistered tribe, but no matter," he observed. "I have seen far worse during my various travels. Once, indeed, whilst being shown over a reformatory—— But let us not digress. Brothers, it is now your bounden duty to raise your sylvan voices and cheer."

"Cheer?" grinned Swinton. "What for?"

"Behold, your new captain!" said Browne simply. "Brother Chambers feels that the duties of leadership are too heavy for his limited brain supply, and I have generously consented to take on the noble task. A cheer, brothers, for your skipper!"

CHAPTER XXII.

BROWNE DOES THE TRICK.



THE Fifth didn't cheer, but they gasped in the most generous fashion.

"You hear him?" breathed Chambers, his voice hoarse and hollow. "He's not only pinched my study, but he's trying to pinch the captaincy now! Let's pitch him out——"

"Wait, I beseech you!" urged Browne, holding up his hand. "What is this? Am I to be a witness of low, rude violence? Come, brothers! This won't do! Cease this unseemly conduct; and if Brother Chambers cannot control himself, let him be forthwith ejected!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Dry up, Chambers!"

The great Chambers gave a choking gulp. He had called this meeting to deal with Browne, and here were the Fifth-Formers actually agreeing with Browne, and telling him—Chambers—to dry up! If the world wasn't actually coming to an end, it was on the verge of it.

"Do not imagine that I shall detain you long," went on Browne kindly. "I fully realise that you have your little duties to perform—little simple pleasures to attend to. You will always find me a lenient leader and a capable captain—"

"Chuck it, Browne!" grinned one of the seniors.

at a standstill, and the senior school Elevens had to rely, almost entirely, upon the Sixth. Browne had made it his business to learn these facts.

"In response to my unknown brother's invitation to 'chuck it,' I fear I must decline," said Browne gently. "Indeed, it is my full intention to ram home a few well-chosen home truths. The medicine may be nauseous, but it is what the doctor orders. I urge you to be patient, and take it in one gulp."

"Make him clear out!" muttered Chambers feebly.

"In scanning over the records of the



"Get out of this study!" bellowed Chambers hoarsely. "I've never heard of such nerve in my life! You rotten outsider! You blessed fraud! You cheeky new bounder! You—you—"

But Browne had no intention of chucking it. Whether he had really hoped to be accepted as Form captain when he first started this programme, it was impossible to say. But now that he had the Fifth in front of him, his mind was made up.

They were an easy-going lot, he could see. Furthermore—and this was to the point—it needed only half an eye to see that Cuthbert Chambers was little more than a figurehead. His leadership of the Fifth was a formal kind of business, which really amounted to no leadership at all.

The Fifth, in fact, was in the doldrums. It had neither advanced nor gone backwards for several terms. Sport was practically

Fifth, I have noted, with fear and alarm, that the Fifth is splashing about in the ox-tail," proceeded Browne. "I can only attribute this in-the-soup condition to Brother Chambers' weakness of leadership. I have nothing against him personally, indeed, he has but to extend his hand, and I shall grasp it with all the famous Browne warmth. Peace is my only watchword."

The Fifth listened attentively—many of the grins vanishing. When Chambers made a speech he bored everybody. Indeed, there wasn't a fellow in the Fifth who could hold a meeting's attention for more than a minute. But Browne possessed such a rare eloquence, and such an attrac-

tive style, that the seniors were captivated in spite of their original feelings.

"These records," went on Browne, "are not only murky, but black to the point of stygian. I must confess that I shuddered no less than three times whilst drinking in all the drab details."

"Look here, you new ass—"

"Failure!" said Browne sternly. "That has been the Fifth Form's disgraceful record! Weakness at football, weakness at cricket, weakness at sculling, weakness at swimming, weakness at snakes and ladders,

weakness at marbles—in fact, weakness at everything! I must acknowledge that I felt ashamed and humiliated to realise that I am now associated with this great collection of human antiquities."

The Fifth had been pricking up its ears for some moments, and now it felt those same ears burning. For there was truth in every word that Browne uttered.

"I do not blame Brother Chambers for all this misfortune," went on Browne generously. "I am convinced that he is merely one of Nature's blitherers, and therefore harmless. There is material here with which to fashion the best sportsmen in the school. I confess the material is moss-grown and more or less creaky, but it undoubtedly exists. It shall be my mission in life to mould this inanimate mass into proper shape."

"Aren't you going to chuck him out?" asked Chambers fiercely.

"Shut up!"

"Go it, Browne!"

"There is little else to say," continued Browne. "Vote me your captain, and I will steer our craft to victory and triumph. Place yourselves unreservedly in my delicate hands, and before long the whole country will be ringing with the exploits of the Fifth."

"Come on, you chaps!" yelled Stevens, who was really enthusiastic. "Browne's the chap for the job! He was cricket skipper at Uxton, and the best boxer in the senior

school! I know—he's been a pal of mine for years! You can't do better than make him skipper! Here's my hand, anyhow!"

Stevens raised his hand, and practically every Fifth-Former followed his example. Amazing as it seemed, William Napoleon Browne was elected Form captain during his first day at St. Frank's! It was sheer personality which had worked this seeming miracle.

And Chambers & Co. crawled away, feeling very much as though they had been knocked on the head with brickbats. As for Study No. 10, Browne was left in undisputed possession.

Undoubtedly, he had scored an early triumph!

PORTRAIT GALLERY AND WHO'S WHO.

Second Series.—Third Form.

NOTE.—The ages of Third Form boys vary between 12 and 14.



No. 24.—Charlie Thompson.

A rather soft youngster, whom everybody in the Third rags mercilessly. He is so good-natured that he takes it all with a smile, and has never been known to become offended.

CHAPTER XXIII.

INTRODUCING THE

RAJAH.

THAT evening Browne was the most discussed fellow in the Senior School.

Most of the Sixth-Formers were frankly incredulous when they heard the news. It seemed impossible that a new fellow could have usurped Chambers' coveted position in so few hours.

The Fifth itself was startled. Mature consideration led the fellows to believe that they had been hasty. Discussing the matter in the privacy of their studies, the Fifth-Formers wondered if they had done right.

No definite decision was taken, but it was tacitly agreed that if Browne did nothing of note during the first week, he would be pitched off of his

perch and Chambers reinstated. But after having elected him, the Fifth felt that he ought to have a short run.

So, although Chambers and Phillips and Bryant went about like firebrands, nobody took any notice of them. Chambers' only consolation was the conviction that Browne would simply play the fool for a week. And Chambers derived a little satisfaction from the thought that his turn would soon come.

Later in the evening Browne strolled elegantly into the Senior Day Room, and found it occupied by a number of Sixth-

Formers. They all regarded him with open curiosity.

"Forgive me if I am wrong," said Browne gently, "but is my tie crooked, or does a smudge mar the well-chiselled line of my features? Your close attention merely makes me curious."

"Is it true that they've made you captain of the Fifth?" asked Morrow.

"I fear you have been misinformed---"

"I thought it was only a yarn!" said Wilson.

"My aim is to be always truthful," went on Browne. "It was I who engineered the entire masterpiece. Whilst hating to boast, I must flatter myself that my election was entirely due to my own tactics. If you ask me if I am captain of the Fifth, I can do nothing but answer in the affirmative."

"Well, of all the long-winded chumps!" grinned Morrow. "I hear you were pretty hot stuff at Uxton, Browne."

"Alas, sports were my ruin!" sighed Browne. "I was so excessively hot that visiting schools feared me as though I were the plague. In the lesser branch of school life—that is to say, lessons—I was considered to be more or less off the wicket, and consequently—"

At this point the door opened, and Fenton entered. And conversation in the Day Room ceased, for Fenton was accompanied by no less a person than the Rajah of Kurpana. The latter, smiling and cheerful, made a clean, well-cut figure.

"Here are a few of the fellows, your Highness," said Fenton. "Let me introduce them—"

"I say, old thing, cut out the 'Highness,' for goodness' sake," smiled Hussi Kahn's brother. "I had a scrap with more than one fellow at Oxford for addressing me like that. I want to be one of yourselves—so let's have a clear understanding, what?"

"Just as you like," smiled Fenton.

"Good!" said the rajah. "I shall always answer to the name of 'Googly,' if you want to call me. They always called me that up at Oxford. It's a bit like my name—and I happen to be a googly bowler."

He made himself at home at once, and the conversation, much to Browne's satisfaction, centred almost entirely upon cricket. Cricket was Browne's obsession, and he was secretly longing to get at the nets. He didn't know whether he would be allowed a chance in the Senior Eleven—he doubted it, being a new fellow—but he was hoping for the best. And if he couldn't wangle his way into the team, nobody on earth could.

The rajah, it seemed, had decided to spend a few weeks at St. Frank's as a kind of holiday—just to fill in the time before his distinguished father arrived on his State visit.

CHAPTER XXIV.

WHAT FULLWOOD KNEW.



THE rajah had had several reports about the parlous state of senior cricket at St. Frank's. And, being an Old Boy, he had the good of the old school at heart.

His visit, in strict truth, was a labour of love. He had come to St. Frank's to polish up the First Eleven—for he was a wonderful player. At Oxford, indeed, he was considered a certainty for the next Test team, and his appearance in the England Eleven was almost a foregone conclusion.

As coach to the St. Frank's seniors, he would not only do immense service to the old school, but he would thoroughly enjoy himself at the same time. Officially, he would be the headmaster's guest, but it was clearly understood that he would spend practically all his time with the cricketers.

Browne heard all this with great satisfaction. It pained him exceedingly to think that St. Frank's was backward in the great summer game. At Uxton, Browne had revelled in the school's proficiency. He wanted to see St. Frank's cricket soar upwards towards fame.

And while the rajah was being introduced to the seniors, he little knew that he was the sole topic of conversation in Study A, in the Fourth Form passage.

Fullwood & Co., the Nuts of the Fourth, were enjoying a free-and-easy smoke. On the first evening of term there was no danger of a master popping his head in the doorway.

"Seen the rajah?" asked Fullwood languidly, as he knocked the ash off his cigarette.

"Yes," yawned Gulliver. "He seems pretty all right."

"Not much to look at, though," said Bell. "Just an ordinary sort of chap, as far as I can see. I say, what rot! Lessons to-morrow, an' then the same old bally grind for the whole term! I'm feelin' pretty sick."

"Shouldn't smoke so much," grunted Fullwood.

"I don't mean sick like that, you ass!" said Bell indignantly. "I'll bet I could smoke more cigarettes than you could—"

"Oh, dry up!" interrupted Fullwood languidly. "About the rajah. What did he come to St. Frank's for? Have you chaps thought of it at all?"

"He's the Head's guest, isn't he?" asked Gulliver.

"Yes, but why is he here?" went on Fullwood. "Why has he come down from Oxford an' fixed up to stay at a sleepy hole like this—instead of havin' a good old fling in London? He's a native prince, don't forget, with millions of quids."

"He's come down here to help with the cricket," said Bell, staring.

"Poor little innocent!" sneered Ralph Leslie Fullwood.

"Look here——"

"Do you think I'm fooled by a yarn like that?" went on Fullwood cunningly. "Not me! There's somethin' behind this visit, my sons—or I'm a Dutchman! He hasn't come here just to help with the cricket."

Gulliver and Bell stared.

"What the dickens do you mean?" asked Bell.

"Oh, nothin'."

"I believe you've heard somethin' in private," said Gulliver bluntly. "Look here, Fully, what's the game? If the rajah isn't here for the cricket, why is he here?"

"You'd like to know, wouldn't you?"

"I say, be a sport!" urged Bell. "Tell us!"

"I'm not sayin' anythin'," murmured Fullwood, lying back and closing his eyes. "But I've got my suspicions—an' not without cause, either. Anyhow, you can take it from me that there's somethin' fishy about our fine Mr. Nigger!"

"Fishy?" repeated Gulliver. "An' look here, he's not a nigger! Indians ain't niggers—an' the rajah is practically as white as we are. What do you know about him, you sly rotter?"

"It's no good—I won't satisfy your curiosity," replied Fullwood. "But I mean to keep my eyes open, an' if I don't make some big cash this term— Well, that'll do for now."

Gulliver and Bell were intensely curious, but Fullwood froze up, and wouldn't utter another word. It was clear enough, however, that he knew one or two things which the school in general remained in ignorance of.

Upon the face of it, it certainly did seem a little strange that a man of the rajah's position and influence should elect to stay at St. Frank's. What was it Fullwood knew? And how was his knowledge likely to affect this native Indian prince?

Little more can be said here—except that Nelson's Lee's presence at the old school was likely to be useful in the near future.

THE END.

By Your Editor:



My dear Readers,

With the return of Nelson Lee and Nipper to St. Frank's we may now look forward to some exciting mysteries in the near future. Already we find that Fullwood has discovered something which he calls "fishy," connected with the visit of the Rajah of Kurpana to the school, and the intention of this Indian prince to take up his residence at St. Frank's for the alleged purpose of coaching the school cricket eleven. Apparently, Fullwood has got hold of information about the rajah out of which he means to make capital, and that whatever it is, he alone out of the whole school possesses the knowledge. Later on in the new series we shall, of course, hear more about this mystery.

A SPLENDID NEW CRICKETING SERIES!

As already hinted in the story above, there is no doubt that the St. Frank's senior cricket eleven is in a very bad way.

The rajah, who is a first-class cricketer, will certainly stimulate a new enthusiasm among the boys this coming season. William Napoleon Browne will prove to be a very useful addition to the school eleven, for he is as expert with the bat as he is glib with the tongue. We can look forward to big happenings in cricket at St. Frank's very shortly when the new series starts next week. The first story of this series is called "FENTON'S CRICKET SENSATION!" As we are constantly being asked by readers to introduce more sport into our stories, I trust my numerous followers of the great summer game will be more than pleased with our coming great cricketing series. Having read these stories in advance, I am confident they will be as popular as any stories of the kind we have yet published.

Your sincere friend,

THE EDITOR.



(NOTE.—If any readers care to write to me, I shall be pleased to comment upon any remarks that are likely to interest the majority. If you have any grumbles—make them to me. If you have any suggestions—send them along! Remember, my aim is to please as many of you as I possibly can. All letters should be addressed to me personally, c/o The Editor, THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.—E. S. B.)

Letters received: Joe Bustard (Whitehead), George Craven (Pontypridd), P. J. Behan (Athy), Frans V. D. (Mechelen, Belgium), H. F. Carrington (Camberwell), Smith Thompson (Bradford), Cyril A. Barton (Nottingham), Ernest W. Sands (Halifax), X (Hornsey), Kenneth James (Solihull), Two Girl Readers (Blackburn), The Six Well-Wishers (Wigan), T. Hooper (Weymouth), A. Neiman (E.5), Trevor Roulston (Portsmouth), F. Dukes (E.C.2), G. W. Linford (Worstead), John Price (Islington), I. D. (Loughboro), W. F. C. (Brighton), A Soldier Reader (Tamworth), A Bobbed-haired Tomboy (Luton), W. M. Kuhlmann (Gawler East, S. Australia), Allen Neilson (Parramatta, N.S.W.), Joseph Watt (Woodview, N.S.W.), Eric Hassall (Moss Vale, N.S.W.), Stanley Bournes (Sydney, N.S.W.), Stan Seymour (Adelaide, S. Australia), V.C. (Sydney, N.S.W.), Jack Armstrong (Brisbane), Alexander McLean (Beac, Victoria), P. Benjamin (Melbourne), C. J. Wise (Potchefstroom, S. Africa), D. E. Mackenzie (Durban, S. Africa), Prairie Maid (Toronto), E. Barker (Freemantle, W. Australia), Harold Phillips (Detroit, U.S.A.), Bryan Slater (Lenham), Wm. Nicholson (Seaham Harbour).

You'll notice that I'm no longer putting asterisks against the names of readers who have offered themselves as organising officers for the St. Frank's League. This is because the League scheme is now in abeyance (although by no means abandoned). I want all such readers to know that their names are filed away, and I take this opportunity of thanking them for their loyalty and interest. If there is any prospect of the

League materialising in the near future, I shall certainly hasten to announce the fact.

Thanks for that plot of yours, George Craven. It is quite ingenious, but unhappily, not entirely novel. The idea of an old parchment being found, and adventures at the North Pole following, is not exactly original. I'm not accusing you of stealing the plot from somebody else. As a matter of fact, there is nothing new under the sun. All story plots are necessarily old. At the best, we hapless authors can only put our old ideas into new forms, and give them twists and turns which make them appear new.

H. F. Carrington has also been kind enough to send me an idea. Curiously enough, it runs on the same lines as George Craven's—ending up among the ice and snow. You are wrong, H. F. Carrington, in thinking that I shall sling your letter into the wastepaper basket without any further thought. I never do that sort of thing. The theme is only the subject or topic—and there is never much difficulty in getting hold of a theme. Which reminds me that quite a number of my readers send me themes—free, gratis, and for nothing—under the mistaken impression that they are plots. Let me tell you that a plot is very difficult to get hold of. It is the hardest part of story-writing. Once an author has his plot cut and dried—that is, thoroughly constructed—the actual writing of the story is simple to an experienced scribe. Many authors spend hours and days of agony while constructing their plots, and weeks of pleasure while writing the story itself. And it is really the construction which matters more than anything else, for upon the success of this rests the interest and grip of the yarn.

So you're learning to play the violin, Smith Thompson? There's no end to your activities! All right, I shan't be expecting any more letters from you for a long time. Go ahead, Smithy, and learn to play! But, from what I know of the violin, you'll have

plenty of hard work. I admire your determination to conquer all difficulties.

* * *

Yours was a particularly nice letter, Ernest W. Sands. By this time you'll probably have seen in one of my previous chats that Arthur Kemp shares Study J with Armstrong and Griffith. As for calling Nipper by his correct name—Richard Hamilton—I quite agree with you that it sounds more dignified. But I'm afraid he wouldn't be quite the same if I made such a sudden and drastic change. It will be quite enough if the masters always address him by his real name. Thanks for your corrections about the order of the football teams.

* * *

You'll have to be a little more patient, Bonzo. (You signed yourself "Bonzo," and then ask me to acknowledge your letter and print your signature, F. Dukes. I'm not sure which you wanted, so you've got both.) That 4d. book you mentioned will be published one of these fine days, but I can't exactly say when. My photograph has already appeared in the Old Paper, and fortunately the old paper still survives. You mustn't ask the Editor to tempt Providence by suggesting that it should be published a second time.

* * *

I'm awfully sorry if I didn't answer your previous question, Bobbed-haired Tomboy. Will portraits of Nelson Lee and other masters appear in the Portrait Gallery? I have already stated that they will. Lots of readers ask questions of this sort, and as they have been answered indirectly—that is, in reply to some other readers' questions—naturally, I don't repeat them. With regard to making Nipper captain of the Fourth again, you will have seen by this week's story that the problem has been solved. But I hope that you and all your friends won't carry out your threat of coming up to the office and seizing me, and smothering me with tar and feathers.

* * *

I've just been glancing through all the Australian letters again, and although they are interesting, there are no particular matters of interest upon which I need to comment. Some of them are so jolly good that I'd like to write paragraph after paragraph about them. But as these paragraphs would only be interesting to the senders of the letters, I mustn't do it. I want these pages to be interesting to everybody.

* * *

You mustn't be offended, C. J. Wiese, when a character in my stories is made to say "That's the fellow," or "I'm a Dutch-

man," or "He's talking double Dutch." There's nothing in it—just a commonplace expression. I'm quite sure that all South African readers are broad-minded enough to see this.

* * *

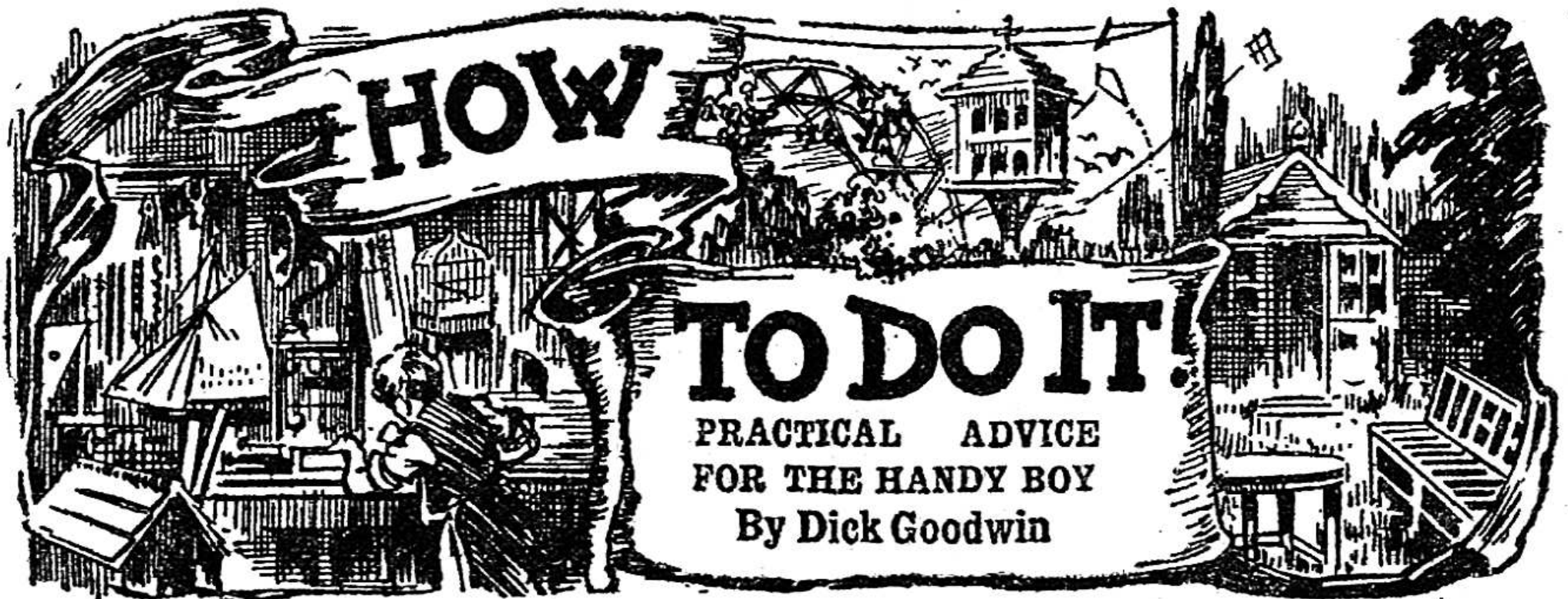
Your letter was another "special," as I call them, Prairie Maid. I should like to quote one of your paragraphs, although I hope that other readers will not be cruel enough to assume that I am seeking a little cheap self-advertisement. My object in quoting your letter is quite simple. Quite a lot of parents still disapprove of their sons and daughters reading my stories, and if they can be shown an old reader's well-thought-out opinion, there's just a chance that they might change their views. It's not much good my saying anything, for they wouldn't take any notice. By quoting your words I might possibly gain a hearing.

* * *

This is what Prairie Maid says in her letter: "I can commend your stories for boys, girls, men and women, as very fine reading. They are written especially well for giving boys a clean, straightforward view on life. I sincerely believe that if more boys were supplied with such reading matter as the Nelson Lee Library there would be fewer cigarette-smoking vagabonds between the ages of twelve and twenty. I consider your boys fine examples of clean, wholesome manliness, and such that any boy should be proud to set up as an ideal to copy from. They are not "sissies," but are just real out and out live boys." I am tempted to quote still further from Prairie Maid's letter, and I hope she won't mind: "I have travelled about a very great deal, and I have seen some wonderful sights, and I can say with all truth that your yarns always hit the mark, and are highly educational for old and young. On the whole these stories are touching and real to a surprising degree. I am glad I have discovered these books, for I look forward each week to the next number as impatiently as any boy. Before I close, let me say again that all I have stated in my letter is the truth, and really my opinions on your school yarns."

* * *

I needn't tell you, Prairie Maid, that I appreciate your letter very highly, and if it will serve to help other readers who are forbidden to read my stories by their parents, then you will have performed a fine service. So I hope you will forgive me for the liberty I have taken in repeating your words. Yes, I think it will be quite a good idea for Mr. Beverley Stokes to be included in the summer holiday stories—and for Mrs. Stokes to be present, looking after the Moor View girls.



Readers who wish to ask questions or make suggestions regarding these articles are invited to write to Dick Goodwin, c/o The Editor, The Nelson Lee Library, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

HOW TO MAKE MODEL AEROPLANES

No. 2. Biplane to Rise off the Ground.

THE bi-plane model shown in plan at Fig. 1 and side view at Fig. 2 is a particularly strong aeroplane, and although it will not fly very much further than the monoplane described recently, it will give steady flights and will generally keep in the air for a longer time. Like the previously mentioned model, the construction is not difficult, but the workmanship must be neatly done, especially the joints.

MAKING THE FRAMEWORK.

The best material for the framework is bamboo. This should be split in long lengths from a length of bamboo of as large a diameter as possible, and planed to a little more than $\frac{1}{8}$ in. square. The struts can be the same size or a little smaller. The general shape can be seen in the plan and side view, with the sectional front view at Fig. 3, but the complete frame is shown without the planes at Fig. 4. The joints are made by splitting the long members and inserting the cross and diagonal pieces as at Fig. 5. The ends of the latter pieces are trimmed off with a sharp knife

so as not to open the split too much. When complete, each joint is bound with narrow silk tape touched with seccotine; this is shown in the lower portion of the diagram. An alternative method is shown at Fig. 6; here the material is square butted, and the corners strengthened with an angle-piece of thin tin, the whole being bound with tape, as before. This looks a little neater, but it is not so strong as the previous method.

THE MAIN PLANES.

The main planes, measuring 30 in. by 4 in. can be made as in the monoplane, but the better method is to make the main spars in front from $\frac{1}{8}$ in. by $\frac{1}{8}$ in., the rear spars $\frac{1}{8}$ in. by $\frac{1}{8}$ in., and the ribs $\frac{1}{8}$ in. by $\frac{1}{8}$ in. bare.

The ribs can be let into spars by sharpening the ends and driving them in split openings as at Fig. 7. The joints are then covered with silk as at

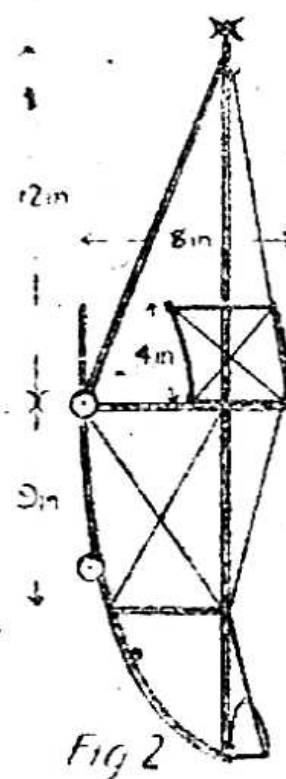
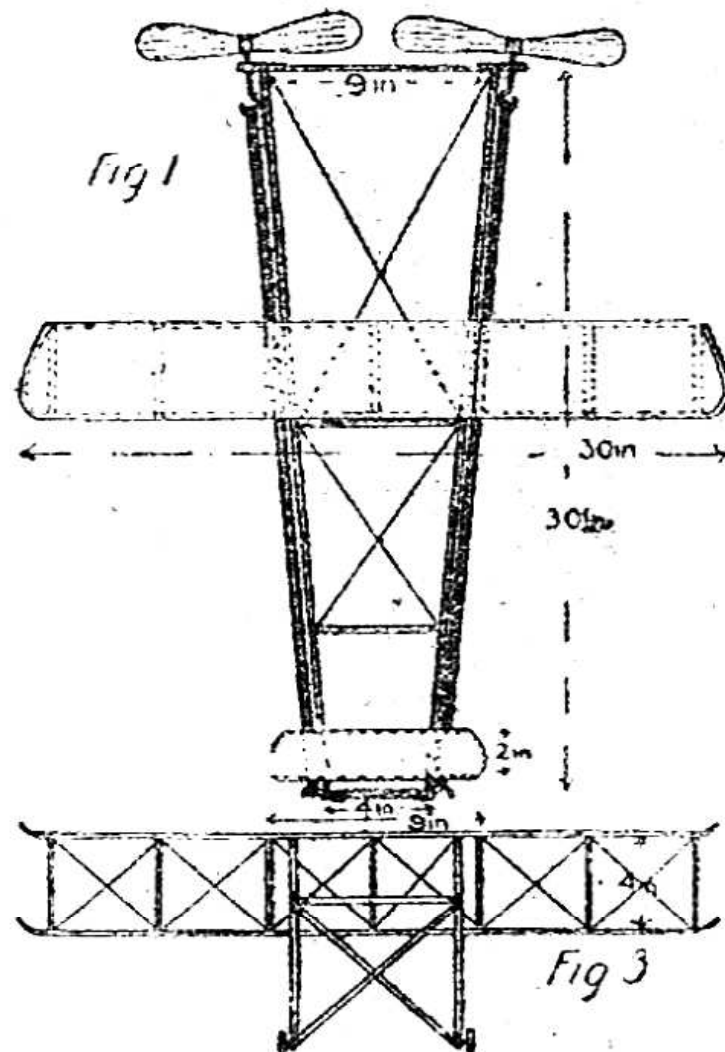


Fig 3

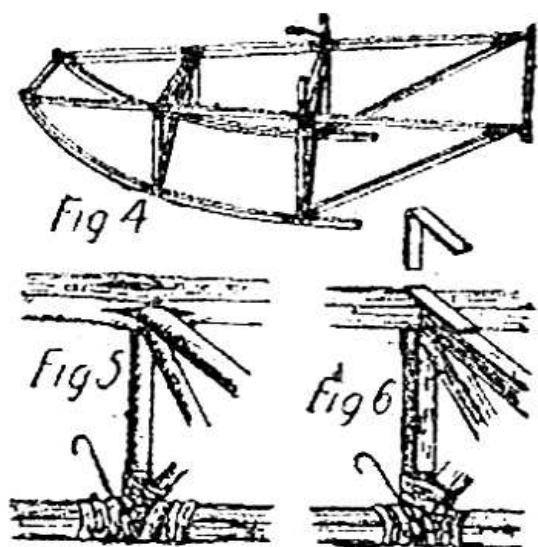
Fig 2

Fig. 8. The camber of the planes should be about $\frac{3}{8}$ in., and the tips about the same amount. The two planes are joined together with 4 in. spars, each set of spars being braced diagonally, as shown. The silk covering to the

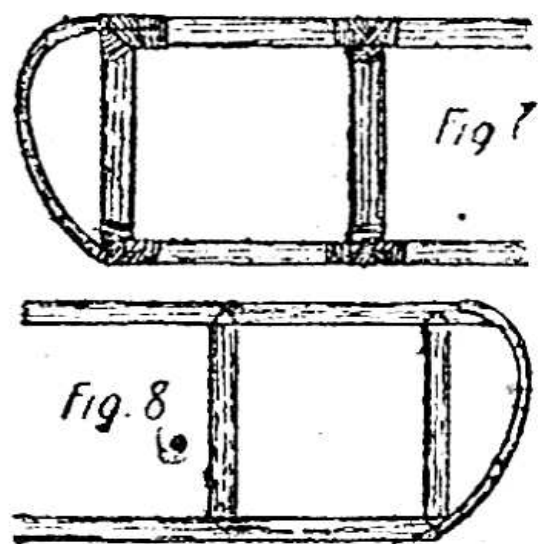
planes should be proofed with celluloid dissolved in amyl-acetate. The planes are attached to the front of the framework, flower wire being used to tie the parts together.

THE ELEVATING PLANE.

This part can be made with bamboo as in the main planes, or of piano wire, as at Fig. 9.



It is attached to the front of the frame, but a rudder, as at Fig. 10, is fitted underneath; this can be made of bamboo and the end fastened to the first cross-bar of the frame. It is a simple matter to fit an upright so that the elevating plane can be placed at different angles, when desired. Diagonal straining wires are placed wherever possible, in order to obtain the greatest amount of strength. In the tape-covered angles, small hooks of steel wire can be fastened as shown at Figs. 5 and 6; fine flower wire serves as straining wire, and when passed over the hooks and fastened (a good method being shown at Fig. 11), the straining can be done by giving the hook a twist with a small pair of round-nose pliers. The front rubber hooks should be of stout wire, as they have to carry a considerable strain.



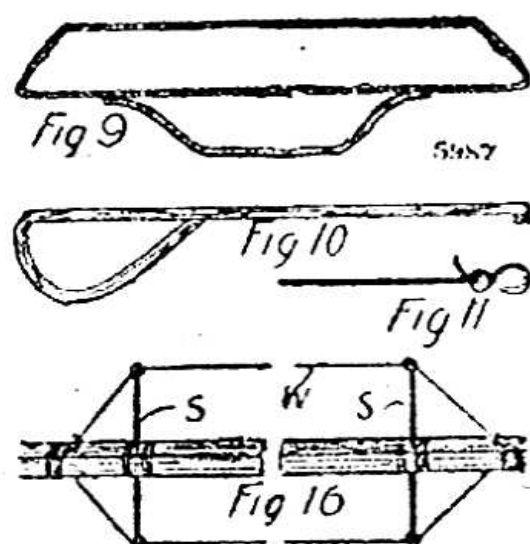
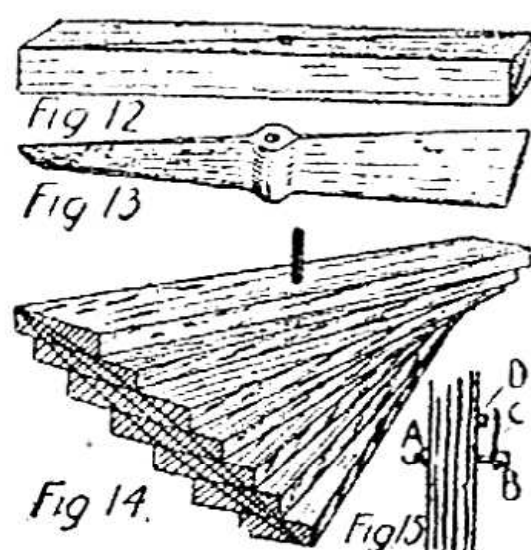
carving the propeller out of the solid is shown at Fig. 12. The wood is planed up square in the first place, $1\frac{1}{2}$ in. square will do. Lines are drawn across the diagonals to oppose each other on opposite sides, and then the waste is cut away with chisel and knife, file and glass-

paper. The centre hole should be bored first, and sufficient material left in the centre to give strength, as at Fig. 13.

Another method is to build up the propeller with strips of wood about $\frac{1}{8}$ in. thick, as at Fig. 14; this is an easy method, as the

whole of the shaping can be done with a rasp, followed by a file and glasspaper, but the strips must be carefully threaded, and each piece must be accurately planed or the glue will not adhere properly. In mounting the propellers on their shafts, allow $\frac{1}{8}$ in. play, as shown as Fig. 15 between the two stops A and B.

These stops should be soldered on firmly. Fit on the shaft a strip of sheet metal as at C, and at D drive in a little catch on the propeller. The projection is rounded on one side, so that in driving the propeller in one direction, the flat edge catches in the stop, but in the opposite direction it passes over it.



THE PROPELLERS.

Two $9\frac{1}{2}$ in. carved or built-up propellers should be used for this model, the pitch being $1\frac{1}{2}$ times the diameter. A simple method of

THE MOTOR.

Fourteen strands of $\frac{1}{8}$ in. square rubber is used for each propeller, and the rubber should be smeared with soft soap before use. A winder is a necessity with a model of this size; it would take too long to wind up by hand. The model is placed on the ground after the rubber has been twisted, and allowed to rise immediately the propellers have been released. The only adjustment likely to be required is in the elevating plane.

Extra strength can be given to the frame or to any straight spar frame by fitting straining wires on struts, as at Fig. 16. In large models this method of strengthening is essential, and it is mentioned here in case the model is made to a larger scale.

The Next Article of this Series on Model Aircraft will be:—

“How to Make a Hydro-plane.”



or, THE SECRET OF THE GHAUTS.

A Wonderful Romance of the Adventures of Two British Boys in India.

By WILLIAM MURRAY

FOR NEW READERS.

Pink Triscott, a private of the Bedfordshire Regiment, stationed at Mysore, is kidnapped by the rajah for the purpose of recovering the lost opal from its secret hiding place. Pink refuses, for the return of the opal by an Englishman means a rising in the Province. Pink is sentenced to death, but is rescued during a fire at the palace by Myles Chesney and his chum, Jack Wynyard, two brave British lads who figure prominently in the story. With Pink and Paltu, a native stable lad, the four set off to find the opal. They are pursued by the rajah's mounted troops and find plenty of exciting adventure on their hazardous journey, including a brush with fierce man-eating tigers. Then they hear the distant clatter of hoofs, a warning that their pursuers are not far behind.

(Now read on.)

CHAPTER V.

THE VILLAGE IN THE FOREST.

THERE was no mistaking the identity of the approaching horsemen. Beyond doubt, a troop of the rajah's fierce soldiery were in hot chase of the fugitives.

And to be overtaken meant sure death by tulwar or bullet. Little marvel that Myles and Jack turned pale, or that Paltu whimpered with fear.

Even Pink Triscott hesitated a moment while he peered right and left into the dense, inviting shelter of the jungle. Then a light broke suddenly on his perplexed mind.

"We must part, lads," he exclaimed hastily. "I'll go it alone. I did wrong to drag you into such a mess. Walk your horses back into the road we just left, and then——"

"No, you don't," interrupted Jack. "I go the way you go."

"So do I," cried Myles, and Paltu stoutly expressed a similar intention.

Pink made a vehement, but futile protest.

"Well, you are a bull-headed lot," he muttered, half in anger, half in admiration.

"Ere goes for a race, then. The rajah's cut-throats are just past the village, and that's a mile behind. Don't spare your 'orses. We must gain, and I believe we can do it."

He jerked the grey mare around, and spurred madly into the left-hand fork of the road. The boys galloped after him, and the chance of safety they had refused was gone beyond recall.

They rode on and on through the silvery night, while mile after mile of jungle and grain field fell behind them. The clatter of their steeds drowned every other sound, but once, on a bit of turf-covered road, they caught the distant pounding of hoofs.

"Do you 'ear that!" cried Pink. "We're

'olding our own, lads. But they 'ang on like bloodhounds!"

And every whit as keen on the scent the rajah's human hounds proved themselves through the remaining hours of that momentous night.

As often as the ominous ring of hoofs was heard in the rear, the fugitives urged their horses to greater speed. Toward morning the country grew more rugged and lonely, and the road was frequently cut by brawling streams.

The first glimmer of dawn in the eastern skies found Pink and his party more than thirty miles from Mysore, and galloping furiously through a forest of gigantic trees.

Steeds and riders were sorely in want of rest and food, yet there was but a scant prospect of obtaining either.

In spite of all that pluck and courage could do the grim hand of death was almost upon them. The relentless chase was nearing its end. Only half a mile behind rode a dozen savage troopers, armed to the teeth, and mounted on the pick of the rajah's stables.

Occasionally, when the nature of the road permitted, the fugitives could see the dusky horsemen spurring madly onward in the grey light of early dawn. Every minute the distance lessened.

"We'll soon have to stop and fight," cried Jack, whose pale face was stamped with terror.

"No use," replied Pink. "They're four to one, and we'd be shot down double quick."

"Sahibs, let horses go, and hide in forest," suggested Paltu.

"Yes, that's our last chance," assented Pink. "I 'ate to try it, because it means good-bye to the opal. Come, lads, one more spurt. Something may turn up."

Five minutes longer the race continued. Pursuers and pursued urged their horses to the very limit of speed, and neither party made any visible gain.

Then the narrow road suddenly curved, and a few yards ahead it ended on the bank of a swirling torrent—a rapid and apparently deep stream, nearly four hundred yards broad.

The fugitives checked their panting steeds at the verge of the shore.

"This is a branch of the Cauvery River," cried Miles. "It is fordable in the dry season."

"But not now," muttered Pink. "It is still high from the rainstorms in the Ghauts. We've got to cross, though. It's sure death to stay here. And once we reach the shelter of the other bank, I've got a little scheme to try on. 'Ere goes, lads."

The grey mare gallantly led the way, and the others followed. Rapidly the horses splashed deeper and deeper into the flood. Soon it reached their bellies, and when it

rose still higher they quaffed the water in gulps as they struggled on.

Near mid-channel the bottom shelved downward, and instantly the horses were out of their depth. They swam desperately across the current, all the while drifting down stream.

It was a perilous and critical moment. As yet the enemy were not in sight, but the clattering of hoofs could be distinctly heard.

"We'll do it," cheerfully shouted Pink. "Keep your weapons and ammunition dry."

A few seconds later the grey mare and the two black chargers struck bottom, and waded higher and higher through the fast-shallowing waters. But the little Afghan pony, being still out of its depth, lost strength, and went drifting away on the tide.

Paltu tried vainly to urge him to further efforts. Then he slipped off the animal's back and swam lustily for shore, holding his rifle overhead with one hand.

He arrived safely, at the same time as his companions, and ran nimbly up the sandy beach at the heels of the horses.

Just as they entered the continuation of the road the Hindoo troopers appeared on the opposite bank. They unslung their rifles and opened fire.

But their aim was poor, and the fugitives got quickly out of range by penetrating a grove of date palms for some yards.

Here Pink made his companions dismount.

"We've gained one advantage," he said, "and now I'm going to show you how to gain another."

He led them back to a dense fringe of rocks and bushes near the water's edge, from which they could command a good view of the river without being seen themselves.

The unfortunate Afghan pony had disappeared. In full view was the bunch of bloodthirsty troopers, now riding eagerly out from the opposite bank.

The first rays of the sun shone on their grim faces and foam-flecked steeds, on their bristling array of rifles, tulwars, and spears, on their flashing helmets and breastplates of chain armour.

When the horsemen had splashed some thirty or forty feet across the river, Pink poked his rifle through the bushes, took careful aim, and fired.

Crack! The foremost horse rolled over and drifted helplessly away on the current. Its rider disentangled himself from the saddle, and waded shoreward with rapid strides.

Pink could have shot the fellow, but he hesitated to shed blood needlessly. Had he known the identity of the ruffian, he would probably have pulled trigger.

This first taste of real warfare inflamed the boys, and they were eager to fire. But Pink checked their ardour by a few judicious words.

"I'm not shooting to kill," he added. "It

may come to that, though. Watch now, lads!"

He fired twice in quick succession, and the first shot brought a horse to its knees. The second ball went a little too high, and hit one of the men. The fellow was plainly seen to reel in his saddle, but he did not fall.

"That was a mistake," muttered Pink; "but I won't go in mourning for it. Ah, look there, lads!"

As he spoke, the troopers pulled up with a burst of savage yells. Then they wheeled their steeds about and made for the shore they had just left. The loss of two horses and a man at the start warned them of what they might expect if they persisted in crossing the river.

As soon as they reached the bank they opened a hot fire on the copse of bushes. But by this time the fugitives had retreated unseen to the grove of date-palms.

"That river did us a good turn," said Pink. "We're pretty safe now. You see, the troopers won't dare to cross while they think we're 'ere. They'll likely ride up stream to look for another ford."

"But we're not going to stay here?" asked Myles.

"Hardly, lad. We'll walk the 'orses for a bit, so the enemy don't know we're on the move. Then we'll cut away like a streak."

Pink's wise plan was carried out. The horses were led slowly along the road for nearly a quarter of a mile. Then, all being quiet in the rear, the little party mounted, and rode on, Paltu climbing up behind Myles.

The prospect now looked bright and hopeful, and when a straggling village was reached, some half-dozen miles beyond the river, Pink ventured to order a halt.

While the horses were being rubbed down and fed, Myles induced a rascally-looking Hindoo to part with some food for the consideration of a rupee.

The rice, eggs, and chupatties—coarse cakes—looked far from palatable; but hunger made a keen relish, and they were eagerly devoured.

The natives gathered curiously about the travellers, and watched them depart in sullen silence.

"Those fellows looked mighty anxious to cut our throats," said Pink, as the village faded from sight. "No doubt they're expecting the revolt against British rule."

"They'll expect in vain if we get hold of the opal," replied Myles.

Pink laughed, and then looked grave.

"We mustn't be over-confident," he said. "Those 'eathen troopers will be on our track before the day ends."

"And what of it?" exclaimed Jack. "We ought to show them clean heels. Our horses have been rested and fed, and we've got full stomachs ourselves."

"If we only had an hour or two of sleep," added Myles wistfully.

"You may get a few winks before sun-down," replied Pink, "though it's too soon yet to promise. For my part, I don't need it, but you lads are not accustomed to rough campaigning."

"I am," indignantly cried Jack. "If rowing isn't campaigning, I'd like to know what is."

Pink did not answer. He had relapsed into sober thought, and would not be roused. He was probably pondering over that mysterious barrier of Tippoo Sahib's, the nature of which was yet unknown to the boys.

So the morning wore on while the three sturdy horses put many a mile behind them. With every hour that failed to bring the clatter of pursuing hoofs the fugitives grew more confident.

About noon they were compelled to leave the trunk road, which here turned westward toward Mercara, the chief town of the mountainous little State of Coorg.

Instead, they followed a rude jungle-path, where their jaded horses had to move with much less speed.

The country was now impressively wild and lovely—perhaps more so than any other part of India.

The great triangle forming the southern part of the empire—and of which the State of Mysore is a very small fraction—is known as the Deccan. Along one coast-line run the Eastern Ghauts, and along the other the Western Ghauts. The name implies terraces or steps, and just so do the mountains rise up to meet the vast tableland which the Deccan virtually is.

With two exceptions, all the rivers of the Deccan rise in the Western Ghauts, and empty into the Bay of Bengal, on the east coast.

Toward these Western Ghauts Pink Triscott was now leading his companions in their desperate race against the rajah's troopers for the magic opal.

The nearness of the mountains was clearly shown by the succession of ravines through which brawled raging but shallow torrents, and by the vast, primeval forests of teak, ebony, sandalwood, and mahogany that almost hid the sky by their matted foliage.

It was not pleasant for the travellers to reflect that on all sides lurked tigers, elephants, bison, and many other species of savage animals.

But they feared human tigers even more, and through the long, sultry hours of the afternoon they urged their jaded horses forward, themselves hardly able to sit erect.

Within an hour of sunset they paused on the crest of a ridge, which a hurricane had partly denuded of timber. In front, at a distance of ten miles, the countless peaks of the Ghauts majestically pierced the sky. To the rear a landscape of jungle and forest stretched seventy miles to Mysore.

The air was very still. There was scarcely a sound except bird notes, or the frequent

cry of some prowling beast. No distant thud of hoofs alarmed the fugitives.

"I've always wanted to see those mountains close," said Myles. "I had no idea they were so big. It looks to me as though finding the opal was going to be worse than hunting a needle in a hay-rick."

"I hope not," replied Jack. "But you haven't even got a map, Pink, have you?"

"I don't need one," said Pink. "I've got what I 'eard in the palace that night tucked away 'ere," patting his breast, "and I've got something else, too."

"What is it?" the boys asked eagerly.

For answer, Pink pointed a finger at the distant mountains.

"Do you see those two twin peaks straight ahead? They've got flat tops, and there are a lot of smaller peaks this side. Well, there's my landmark, and once we reach it the rest won't be 'ard."

The boys gazed at the indicated spot with keen interest.

"The peaks look to be pretty well back in the mountains," said Myles.

"About ten miles," Pink replied, "or twenty altogether from 'ere. But if it was only five we oughtn't to make the stretch without rest and sleep. Down in yonder ravine I 'ear water. We'll risk it, lads, and snatch a few winks."

This was welcome news. The boys were haggard from exhaustion, and even Pink felt more fatigue than he chose to confess to. So they gladly spurred their horses down the opposite slope of the ridge.

Sure enough, there was a fussy little brook in the trough of the ravine. The thirsty travellers, brute and human, drank their fill of the deliciously cool water.

Then the scanty remains of the rice and chupatties were eaten, and Pink gave the horses a plentiful measure of grain, afterwards tying them to a bunch of saplings.

It was a very lonely place. Along the roadside was a pile of stones, and in it was inserted a bamboo staff with a little triangular flag fluttering from the end. This indicated that a man had recently been slain here by a tiger.

The boys were naturally alarmed by the discovery, but Pink reassured them.

"I'm going to keep watch," he declared, "and no tiger will catch me napping. I'll take my share of sleep another time. Turn in now, lads, or you won't 'ave your peepers shut till I make you open them."

His companions were too sleepy to protest against this unequal division of guard duty. They spread their blankets in the middle of the path, and were almost instantly in deep slumber.

Pink kept a watchful eye upon them and the horses as he paced up and down, his rifle over his shoulder.

The brief tropical twilight fell, and before it was succeeded by the blackness of night Pink built a blazing fire on each side of the little camp. Between watching and listening, and gathering fuel, he now had his hands full.

"The troopers may 'ave taken another road," he soliloquised, "though that's 'ardly likely. But I'd stake a lakh of rupees that they aren't within five miles. And unless they 'ave eyes like bats they won't ride a steeplechase by night through such a bit of country. 'Ullo! How about torches?"

The reflection put him in a quandary for a moment. He half turned to awaken the boys, but changed his mind, and went on with his vigil.

An hour slipped by. The savage beasts of the forest were now out of their lairs, and prowling about in search of food. But the ruddy fires warned them off from the vicinity of the camp.

In the far distance Pink heard weird cries and dull, crashing noises. Once a tiger roared, and a herd of elephants trumpeted shrill defiance.

He rejoiced that it was no worse. What he most dreaded to hear was the ring of approaching hoofs.

And at last it actually came—a faint, muffled clatter that rose and fell on the night air. There was burning wrath in Pink's heart as he roused the soundly sleeping lads, and hastily told them of the danger.

While they untied the horses he chose a resinous brand from one of the fires, and then extinguished the flames with water.

A minute sufficed for the fugitives to mount. Guided by the light of Pink's torch, they crossed the stream and spurred up the rugged hillside. The boys felt stronger after their brief sleep, and tried to face the situation; but they doubted if their horses could hold out in a long race.

And the peril was even closer than they believed. When they reached the top of the hill and looked back, they saw lights flashing on the opposite ridge. Then the quickened clatter of hoofs told that the troopers had seen Pink's torch.

Craft and caution were needless now. There was nothing for it but a mad dash.

Down the slope galloped the fugitives, reckless of all obstructions, and at the bottom they found a level stretch of dense timber through which the road crept sinuously.

"Don't spare the spurs!" cried Pink. "Our 'orses ought to be the better. We must beat, lads."

On and on they pounded past the black coverts of the forest. Pink's torch threw light ahead, and as often as the flames faded he stirred them to fresh life by violent waving.

At intervals, when the way was muffled by turf or moss, the ominous clatter of the pursuing troopers could be heard in the rear. It was some consolation that the sound seemed to come no nearer.

But the friendly light could not be long depended upon, and it was certain that the horses would come to grief in the darkness at their present necessary rate of speed.

When the evil moment was very close, the road came suddenly to an abrupt end before an arched gate, on each side of which a line of stone wall stretched into dense jungle.

The little party checked their steeds

safe way around through the jungle, and yet he shrank from so doubtful a refuge. The noise of hoofs in the rear decided him.

"We'll risk it, lads," he cried, striking the gate with the butt end of a pistol.

There was no response, though he hammered again and again. Then he lost patience, and dealt vigorous blows with his rifle.

At length quick footsteps were heard in the seemingly dead and deserted village, and the gate swung inward, revealing to the fugitives a dim vista of a little street of houses and gardens beyond.

Yet they saw only a solitary Hindu run-



They were man-eating tigers. With gleaming eyes and oscillating tails they crept closer.

barely in time to avoid a collision. They stared in alarm at the obstruction.

"A 'ostile village," muttered Pink; "ere's a go!"

"It may not be hostile," cried Myles. "One end of the State of Coorg cuts away into Mysore, near the Ghauts, and that's where we are now. I'm sure of it, for the place is just like the village my father once visited and told me about. It can't belong to Mysore."

"This no be my people's town," broke in Paltu. "Mysore towns have no walls, sahibs."

Pink hesitated briefly. There was no

ning towards the nearest hut. As he dived into the doorway he wheeled about and yelled shrilly:

"Beware, sahibs. Beware of the man-eaters!"

CHAPTER VI.

WHICH TREATS OF TIGERS, BRUTE AND HUMAN.

THE Hindu's warning shout cleared up the seeming mystery, and accounted for all of the little community being indoors at so comparatively early an hour of the night.

Doubtless one or more man-eating tigers had been terrorizing the village of late, and were at this very time within the walls.

So the visitors surmised as they recalled the gruesome monument of stone and bamboo back in the forest, and they little liked the prospect of being shut in between two perils.

"Looks as though we'd 'ave to give protection instead of claim it," muttered Pink, throwing himself out of the saddle. "I've 'eard of tigers putting a 'ole town at their wits' end, but I never saw it before. The first thing is to shut the gate against the rajah's cut-throats. We're safer inside than out, and if it comes to siege, I've got my fighting temper on. Rifles ready there, lads, in case the man-eaters take a notion for white meat—"

Just then a low, angry snarl drew attention to a pair of huge animals crouching in the street about thirty feet away.

They were the man-eating tigers. With gleaming eyes and oscillating tails they crept closer.

The horses snorted with terror. The grey mare jerked loose from Pink and went out of the open gate like a streak. Jack's charger simply stood still, trembling like a leaf.

The other horse rose on its hind feet so suddenly that Myles and Paltu tumbled to the ground. Then it wheeled about and galloped off to the left between the huts and the village wall.

Pink's first act was to hurl the torch at the man-eaters, and so sure was his aim that the blazing brand struck within a foot of the brutes, and drove them back into the gloom, roaring savagely. He next banged the gate shut, and dropped a heavy bar into the sockets on each side.

By this time Jack was on his feet, holding fast to his frightened horse. Myles and Paltu were not hurt by the fall, and fortunately the runaway steed had not taken their weapons along.

The village was in an uproar. From the unseen occupants of every hut came shrill cries and supplications.

The torch now having faded to a mere spark, one of the tigers suddenly reappeared. It was plainly rabid with lust for human flesh; nor was it an aged animal, as man-eaters mostly are.

A light spring landed it within fifteen feet of the party, and there it crouched for a final leap, quivering from head to tail.

At this critical moment Myles had courage to lift his rifle and fire. At the sharp report the tiger rose in the air with a frightful roar, and fell, mortally wounded, within six feet of the lad.

As Myles jumped hastily out of the way,

Pink's rifle cracked twice, and the man-eater rolled over dead.

There was no time to exult at the victory, for a second tiger was yet at large. Its whereabouts were just then made known by a weird, unearthly scream of agony from the far end of the village street.

"What's that?" cried Jack, with a shudder.

"The beast 'as grabbed the 'orse," shouted Pink, running fearlessly in the direction of the sound. "Stay 'ere, lads."

It was scarcely three minutes later when he returned.

"Two 'orses gone now," he growled bitterly. "The man-eater knocked the charger over right in front of the rear gate, which 'appened to be open—and then 'e dragged the body outside. It was no use going after 'im, so I shut and barred the gate and 'urried back. But there's one danger the less, lads; and now for the troopers. 'Ow near are they?"

"I don't believe they're near at all," said Jack, and, strange to say, he seemed to be right.

Brief as was the time that had elapsed since the fugitives entered the village, it was yet long enough for their blood-thirsty pursuers to have arrived. Perhaps their torches had failed them, or they had halted on hearing the rifle-shots.

For possibly half a-minute, Pink and his companions listened in vain for the clatter of hoofs on the forest road. Then the silence was turned into a deafening hubbub by the sudden irruption from their houses of the entire community.

The death of one tiger and the flight of the other had spread like wildfire, and men, women, and children crowded about the strangers with heartfelt protestations of gratitude.

It appeared, from their incoherent stories, that the man-eaters had kept them in a state of terror for the past two months, and in that time had claimed twenty victims. On this occasion a gate carelessly left open had allowed the animals to enter the walls.

Pink struck while the iron was hot; that is, he promptly singled out the head man of the village, gave him a partly true account of the situation, and claimed protection for himself and party.

The village really belonged to the State of Coorg, and for this reason the head man was the more willing to accede to Pink's demand.

He at once spread word around that "the white sahibs, who slay man-eaters, "were in danger from mutinous troopers of the Rajah of Mysore, and it was greatly cheering to the fugitives to see how readily and gladly the fierce, half-naked Hindoos ran for their spears, and swords, and antiquated matchlocks.

"This is luck, and no mistake," said Pink. "We'll stay 'ere till morning, and then strike for the Ghauts. We'll 'ave to go on foot, though. The 'ead man says there ain't a 'orse to be 'ad—or an elephant, either. Jack's charger won't do for four, and we'll be just as well off without it."

"But can we spend the night here in safety?" asked Myles. "I don't mean that there's any danger of the village being taken by storm, but the troopers may ride around it, and get to the Ghauts before us."

"They can't, lad," Pink replied. "The only road towards the mountains is straight through this 'ere village. To right and left the jungle is so thick that a man can 'ardly slip through—let alone a 'orse. So the 'ead man says, and I take 'im to be a true talker."

"Then we ought to be safe enough," remarked Jack. "It's not likely the troopers will abandon their horses, and take to the jungle on foot. But there's sure to be some stirring times when they arrive."

"I doubt if they are coming," exclaimed Myles. "It looks mighty queer——"

"'Ello! What's that?" interrupted Pink. "'Ark, lads!"

Clear on the night air, above the scurrying feet and shrill voices of the natives, rang the dull pounding of hoofs. Over the top of the arch shone the glimmer of approaching torches.

An instant later the flashing lights vanished, the clatter of hoofs was stilled, and the hoarse notes of a cavalry trumpet pealed loudly before the gate.

"Open! Open!" cried an angry voice; and the command was emphasised by a thunderous knock on the stout teakwood planks.

There was no answer from within. Hastily the women and children ran to the shelter of the huts, while the men—threescore in number—huddled close to the loop-holes in wall and gate.

Pink secured one of these points of vantage, and reported events to his companions, who were at his elbow.

"'Ere the cut-throats are," he whispered. "I can't tell 'ow many, because they've thrown their torches away on purpose. I've 'alf a mind to drop the leader. I could do it easy now. There's a bit of moonlight shines right down on 'is face, and—by Jove, lads, if it ain't Mogul Mir!"

This discovery gave the boys an unpleasant shock, and even Pink felt something like a chill run down his spinal column as he realised the desperate character of the ruffian who commanded the troopers.

He might have been tempted to fire but for the intervention of the head man, who now mounted a platform at one end of the gate, and coolly demanded of the intruders what they wanted.

"In the name of the Rajah of Mysore, we demand the Feringhee dogs who have taken shelter within your walls," replied Mogul Mir, thus openly avowing his purpose.

"But they are sacred to us," answered the head man evasively. "This very night they have rid us of two man-eating tigers who long preyed on our people. It is the will of Brahma that we protect them in turn."

"Dog of a liar!" thundered the enraged soubadar. "Know you not that Brahma punishes with loss of caste all those who consort with heretics? Yield us the Feringhees, or not one stone of your village shall be left standing on another."

"You shall not have them!" was the defiant reply. "They are safe here. Depart whence you came, sons of burnt fathers. Think you that we men of Coorg tremble at the threats of such blustering dogs? Bah!"

With this the head man dropped nimbly to the ground, and by so doing he narrowly escaped a ball from Mogul Mir's pistol, fired with deadly intent.

So treacherous a deed stirred the villagers to fury, and as many of them as had matchlocks deliberately blazed away through the loopholes. Others hurled spears over the wall, and shouted insulting names.

It may be imagined that the antiquated firearms were of little account, since the man-eaters had defied them for two whole months. Yet either a slug or a spear certainly found a billet across the wall.

A loud cry was heard, followed by a crashing noise, and the clatter of a runaway steed. A rifle volley was instantly fired by way of reprisal, but it did no more damage than to rip splinters from the top of the gate.

Then an unexpected thing happened. The trumpet sounded the retreat, and the troopers wheeled their horses around and spurred away. Evidently they were discomfited by so stubborn a resistance.

Pink once more glued his eyes to the loophole, and watched steadily for several minutes.

"They've camped about fifty yards down the road," he finally announced. "They're building fires to scare off the wild animals."

"Can you see who was hurt?" asked Myles.

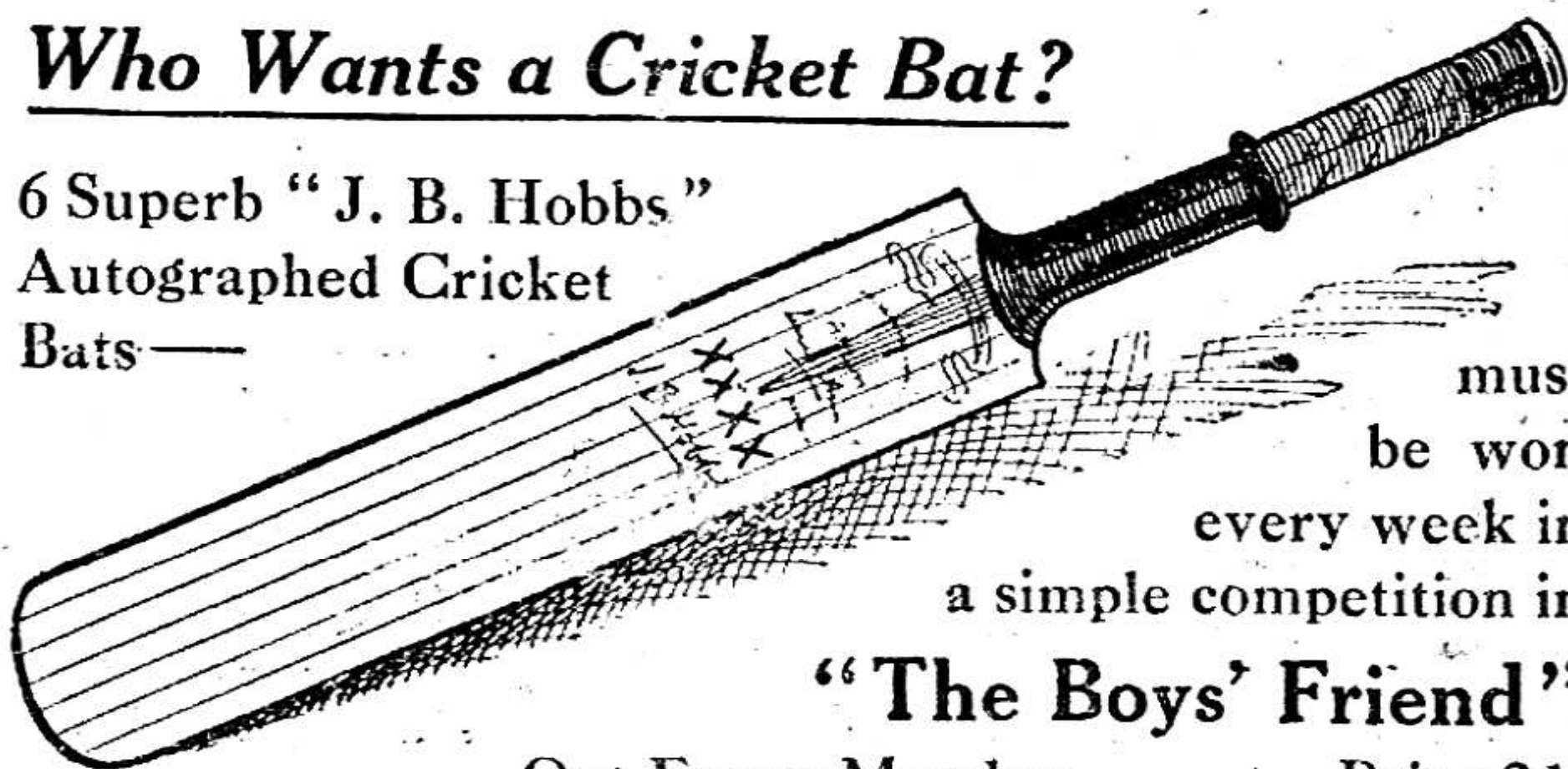
"No; it's too far away," replied Pink. "I 'ope Mogul Mir 'as kicked the bucket, though."

These tactics of the enemy were hard to understand. Had they some deep motive in waiting, or were they merely planning the next move?

(Another instalment of this exciting story next week).

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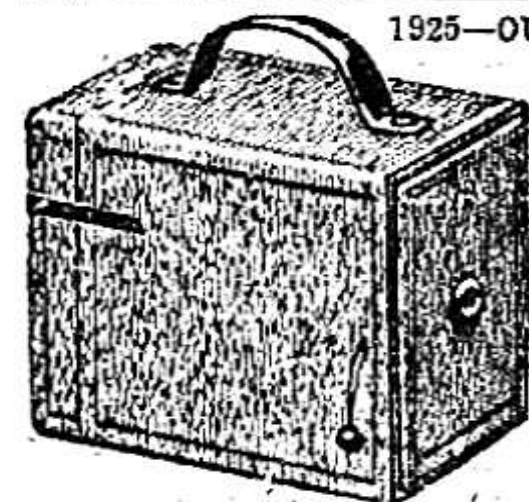
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