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THE BULLY OF THE REMOVE!

A "stricking" incident from the powerful long school yarn featuring the Chums of St. Frank's inside,

New Series No. 113.

OUT ON WEDNESDAY.

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Archie Glenthorne's remonstrating words had not the desired effect upon Chambers. Indeed, they only added to his anger, for, picking up a jam tart from the table, he hurled it at the elegant junior. The shot was a bull's-eye. It caught Archie right on the nose, and the sticky contents smothered themselves all over his features.

This is the Opening Yarn of a Grand New Series, Chums!

THE BULLY OF THE REMOVE !



By EDWY SEARLES BROOKS

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

No schoolboy likes to be sent down to a lower class in disgrace, and the pompous, arrogant Fifth-former, Cuthbert Chambers, proves no exception to the rule. Thus, when he is put in the Remove, his dignity receives a nasty shock. No longer is he a lordly senior; now he is merely a junior. Naturally Chambers does not take this lying down, and soon the Remove finds itself in for troublous times.—EDITOR.

CHAPTER 1.

A Letter from Handy !

"GREAT Scott!"

Church, of the Remove, stared blankly at the letter-rack in the lobby of the Ancient House at St. Frank's. He was looking at the "C" division.

"What's the matter?" asked McClure, his study-mate.

"Nothing's the matter; but look at all these letters in the 'C' division," replied Church, in astonishment. "There are only two or three chaps in the Ancient House with their names beginning with 'C,' so somebody must have a pretty hefty correspondence."

"Never mind about that," McClure said. "Have a look through the letters, and see if there's one for you from old Handy. It's about time he wrote, the bounder!"

It was a curious fact that Handforth, their absent leader, invariably addressed his letters to Church. Of course, McClure was just as much his chum, and he was just as much entitled to a letter; but for some inexplicable reason Handforth never wrote to him.

It was a fine, sunny June morning, and the Ancient House lobby was filled with juniors who were lounging about reading their letters or chatting about cricket. Nipper, the Remove skipper, was over by the open doorway engaged in a friendly little argument with Reggie Pitt and Jack Grey, of the West House. Vivian Travers was languidly chatting with Jimmy Potts and Archie Glenthorpe.

Church took the letters out of the "C" division, and glanced at the top one.

"This is for Conroy major, of the Sixth," he said, replacing it in the division. "And this one is for Chambers, of the Fifth. The next one is for Chambers, too. And so is the next! My hat! Here's another one for Chambers! That makes four!"

"Blow Chambers!" said McClure. "What about the next one?"

"Good egg!" said Church eagerly. "Here we are—you can always tell Handy's scrawl!"

He separated his letter, and then took another glance at the two remaining envelopes in his hand. Both of them were addressed to Cuthbert Chambers.

"Must be his giddy birthday!" said Church, in astonishment. "Six letters by one post, you know!"

But, after all, they were not particularly interested in Cuthbert Chambers, of the Fifth. The expected letter from Edward Oswald Handforth had arrived, and they were keen upon opening it and reading the contents. Handforth's letters, if scrawled badly and ungrammatical, were generally entertaining.

At that moment—before Church could open his letter—there was a minor commotion on the stairs. Somebody was clumping down and making a lot of noise about it. Chambers, in fact, had arrived. He walked straight to the letter-rack, and he unceremoniously elbowed Church out of the way.

"Here, steady!" protested Church. "Keep your big arms to yourself, Chambers!"

Chambers frowned.

"Mind who you're talking to!" he said pompously.

Chambers had a great idea of his own importance. He was a big, dandified fellow, but his brain power was limited. Indeed, he was the bane of Mr. Pagett's existence, and was constantly getting into hot water in the Fifth Form class-room.

At one time Chambers had believed himself to be the captain of the Fifth; but since the coming of the energetic William Napoleon Browne he had been a mere nonentity. Browne's powerful personality had subdued him, and although he had more than once attempted to exercise his authority these efforts had always ended in failure.

Indeed, owing to Browne's masterly captaincy, Chambers had found himself without a single supporter, and two or three terms ago he had transferred to the West House in disgust. But now he was back in the Ancient House, and there was not even a disturbing ripple. The activities of Cuthbert Chambers were of no importance to the senior school. In short, the great Cuthbert was great only in his own estimation.

"Many happy returns of the day, old man," said Church, grinning.

Chambers started as he was taking his letters out of the rack.

"Eh?" he ejaculated.

"Many happy returns of the day," repeated Church.

"How the deuce did you know that it was my birthday?" demanded Chambers, in astonishment. "I haven't mentioned it to anybody."

"Perhaps not," said Church. "But when a fellow gets half a dozen letters by the same post it looks pretty significant. Let's hope those letters are full of fat tips!"

Chambers frowned.

"I don't see that it's any of your business," he said coldly.

"Oh, go and eat coke!" growled Church. "I wish you many happy returns of the day, and all you can do is to snap at me. Blow you!"

Chambers coloured slightly as Church and McClure moved away. But his sense of dignity prevented him from expressing any word of regret.

Church tore open his letter, and eagerly began to read it. It was addressed from "School House, St. Jim's," and it began "Dear old Churchy and Mac"—for although McClure was generally forgotten on the superscription, he was always included in the letter itself.

"He's coming back!" gasped Church excitedly, after he had read a line or two.

"What!" shouted McClure. "Look here, Churchy——"

"He's coming back at once!" went on Church, now thoroughly excited. "Good egg! Didn't we always say that Handy would come back to St. Frank's?"

"Well, well!" murmured Vivian Travers, as he glanced up. "What's all this commotion? What is this piece of bad news?"

"It's not bad news!" retorted Church. "Handforth is coming back!"

"Of course, opinions differ," said Travers languidly. "Personally I should regard it as a disaster."

"Idiot!" said Church breathlessly. "Listen to this, you fellows! If you like, I'll read it out!"

"Good gad!" said Archie Glenthorne, dropping his monocle in his agitation. "I mean to say, really? What have we done, dear old top, to deserve this? Why must you inflict Handforth's dashed effusion upon us? I mean, before breakfast, what? Somewhat poisonous!"

"Oh, all right then!" said Church huffily. "I won't read it!"

Nipper grinned.

"Keep your hair on!" he chuckled. "Don't take any notice of Archie and Travers. Let's hear it, Church, old man. Is it an absolute fact that Handy is coming back?"

"Yes, rather!" said Church. "Just listen to this!"

And as the Remove fellows gathered round him he prepared to read the precious letter aloud.



CHAPTER 2.

Quite Characteristic!

O it, Churchy!"

"Don't keep us in suspense, old man!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors were inclined to treat Handforth's letter as a joke—which wasn't very surprising. For Handforth himself had always been regarded as a joke.

"Silence!" said Nipper sternly. "Silence for the chair!"

"Hear, hear!"

Church cleared his throat, gave a glare round at the grinning faces, and then began:

"Dear old Churchy and Mac"—he always begins like that," said Church. "Well, it's

all arranged, my sons! By the time you get this letter everything will be fixed up. In fact, it's more than likely that I shall be with you long before this letter arrives——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Puzzle—find Handy!" said Travers, looking round.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Something must have gone wrong!" grinned Fullwood.

"Well, you know what an optimistic bounder he is!" said Church, flushing. "And why the dickens can't you let me finish? 'I'm writing this in the afternoon, and there's just a chance that my pater will arrive and take me back to St. Frank's this evening. If not, I shall be there to-morrow—very soon after you get this letter. But I'm writing to you, my lads, just in case.'"

"Perhaps his pater didn't turn up!" suggested McClure.

"This evening the fellows are giving me a big farewell feed," continued Church. "My pater is coming down this evening, and it's quite likely that he will take me back to St. Frank's straight away. But if I'm not there when you get this letter look out for me during the morning. You can look upon this as absolutely official, my sons. I've made up my mind to leave St. Jim's, and I shall be jolly glad to get back into my old quarters at St. Frank's. Not that St. Jim's is a bad place. On the whole, it's a jolly good school, and I'm not grumbling."

"That's a wonder—for Handy!" chuckled Reggie Pitt.

"Well, anyway, he's coming back," said Church happily. "Oh, I say! Listen to this! 'I've done jolly well at St. Jim's, too. During my month here I've become leader of the Fourth, and I've played for the First Eleven, scoring a century, and I've raided the Grammar School single-handed, too. Oh, by the way, you might give Nipper a tip before I arrive.'"

Nipper looked politely interested.

"A tip?" he repeated. "Let's have it, Churchy!"

Church coloured, as he continued reading the letter.

"Of course, 'Handy is an ass!'" he growled. "I don't know that I ought to read this next bit——"

"Rot!" went up a chorus. "You've started, and you've got to finish!"

"Oh, all right!" said Church. "But you mustn't take too much notice of Handy's rot!"

"You needn't worry—we won't!" said Nipper blandly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, he goes on like this," said Church. "'As I am leaving St. Jim's as leader of the Fourth, I shall naturally expect automatically to become skipper of the Remove as soon as I get back to St. Frank's.'"

"My only hat!"

"Good gad!"

"Handy was always an optimist!" said Travers, shaking his head.

"This is very interesting!" grinned Nipper. "So Handy expects to become skipper of the Remove, does he? Anything else, Church?"

"Yes," growled Church. "He goes on like this—'Of course, it's only natural that everything will have fallen into a pretty low state during my absence, and I shall make it my duty to buck the Remove up. And the only way I can do this successfully is to become skipper. So you might mention to Nipper that I shall look to him to stand down in my favour——'"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"He can look all he likes—but I'm very much afraid that I shall disappoint him!" said Nipper, grinning. "Poor old Handy! What a shock he'll get!"

"He's dotty!" growled Church. "And if he really has become leader of the Fourth at St. Jim's, then the age of miracles hasn't passed!"

"They've probably been spoofing him!" said McClure.

"That's about the size of it!" agreed Fullwood. "Why not spoof him when he gets back here? Why not pull his leg until further orders?"

"That's not a bad idea!" said Reggie Pitt, with a chuckle. "Nipper might pretend to resign in his favour, and we can make him believe that the cricket has gone to pot, and that everything is generally groggy."

There was much laughter as the suggestion was discussed.

"We'd better not make any plans at all," said Nipper cautiously. "You know what Handy is. It wouldn't surprise me in the least to learn that he's not coming back to St. Frank's at all. Handy isn't like an ordinary human being; you can't make plans in advance where he's concerned. Better wait until he actually turns up."

"But he says that it's official!" protested Church.

"That doesn't make any difference," replied Nipper. "I shan't believe that Handy is coming back until I see him here."

Church and McClure looked rather blank; for they had been quite ready to believe their leader's written statement. Nipper's words, however, made them pause; and they realised that it would be unwise, indeed, to take anything for granted. Handforth was notoriously optimistic, and he had a habit, too, of counting his chickens before they were hatched.

However, before the chums of Study D could make any further comment, a diversion occurred. The juniors began to crowd round Chambers, of the Fifth. Chambers was unaware of this attention at the moment. For he was concentrating wholly upon his letters, and they appeared to be giving him great satisfaction.

He was in the act of opening the fifth letter, and all eyes were eager as they beheld two or three crisp currency notes in Chambers' hand.

"By Jove!" murmured Chambers. "Three more! That makes seven quid, altogether! Seven quid by one post! Pretty good!"

The juniors drew closer, winking at one another, but making no comment. And Chambers, all unconscious of their interest, proceeded with the good work.

"From Uncle George!" he murmured, as he glanced at the letter. "Good old Uncle George!" He opened the final letter. "Well, I'm hanged! I'm blessed if there isn't another tip in this letter, too! That makes nine quid! I never thought that Aunt Martha would come up to the scratch like this!"

He stuffed all the letters into his pocket, and held only the money. His hand was positively bulging with cash.

"Many happy returns of the day, Chambers!" said Nipper genially.

Chambers started, and looked up.

"Why, what the——" he began.

"Many happy returns of the day, Chambers!" chorused the whole crowd of juniors, in one firm, hearty voice.



CHAPTER 3.

A Tip From Travers!

UTHBERT CHAMBERS frowned.

"What do you young fatheads think you're having a game

at?" he demanded loftily. "Clear off!"

"Good luck to Uncle George and Aunt Martha!" said Fullwood stoutly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Many happy returns of the day, Chambers!"

"Oh, so that's it!" said Chambers coldly.

"You think that I'm going to treat you, eh? Well, you've made a bloomer, my infants! If I treat anybody, it'll be the Fifth! I should hope I'm above mixing with a noisy crowd of silly juniors!"

And Chambers, with his nose in the air, started pushing through the throng.

"Oh, Chambers!" said Nipper reproachfully.

"Eh?" said Chambers, with a start.

"Won't you even treat us to a toffee-apple each?" asked Nipper pleadingly. "Or what about a prize packet all round?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You won't deny us a lollipop each, will you, Chambers?" asked Pitt, in a pained voice.

"You can all go and eat coke!" said Chambers stiffly.

"And that's all the thanks we get—after wishing him many happy returns of the day!" said Nipper, with regret.

"Thanks for your wishes—but I'm suspicious of 'em," said Chambers, frowning. "And kindly keep your places, my lads! I'm

a senior—and you're only juniors! I don't want any sauce!"

"Make way for His Royal Highness!" said Pitt, jumping aside. "Stand back there, Travers! Move aside, Church, you cheeky ass! The great Chambers is about to walk outside!"

Chambers, flushing deeply as the yells of laughter rang out, strode through the doorway and out into the morning sunlight. He was very touchy about being chipped by the juniors. Being in the Fifth, he had great ideas of his own importance. He was half-afraid that the juniors would follow him out, and make further fun of him. But he need not have worried. The juniors had something better to do.

Only one fellow took the trouble to go out into the Triangle, and this was Vivian Travers.

"Just a minute, Chambers!" said Travers casually.

Chambers paused, looking at the elegant junior with suspicion.

"If you want to borrow any money from me——" he began.

"Not at all!" said Travers. "I know you've got nine quid, Chambers, but the money doesn't interest me. As it happens, I could show you ten quid at this very moment. So, you see, I'm not on the cadge."

"What do you want, then?"

"Nothing much," said Travers. "You'll possibly think that it's a nerve on my part, but I was just going to give you a tip."

"Oh, were you?" said Chambers.

"It's your birthday, and you'll probably be feeling in a festive mood," continued Travers coolly. "And without wishing to press the point too plainly, I don't think you're in the habit of wandering about with your pockets bulging with cash to the extent of nine quid. It's rather a big amount for you, Chambers."

"Why, you cheeky young idiot——"

"No offence!" said Travers smoothly. "But you've been broadcasting your wealth rather unwisely, old man. In five minutes, the whole school will know that you have got nine quid on you. And don't forget there are plenty of sharpers about!"

"Sharpers?"

"It is sad, but true," nodded Travers. "There are plenty of fellows who will be only too ready to worm round you, dear old fellow. So be on your guard. Don't take any notice of flatterers. In fact, if you'll take my advice, you'll put that money into the bank straight away——"

"I don't want your advice, thanks all the same!" said Chambers coldly. "It's like your infernal impudence to speak to me at all!"

Travers shrugged his shoulders.

"I thought you'd take it like this," he said sadly. "But I can't help it. I feel that I've done my duty."

"Blow your duty!"

"Exactly," said Travers. "Blow it! But when I saw you swanking about with all that

money, I began to have fears for your safety—"

"Swanking about!" roared Chambers.

"Forgive me for being so blunt, dear old fellow—"

"You'd better clear off, before I give you a clout!" said Chambers hotly. "Of all the confounded cheek!"

He turned on his heel, and strode away. And Vivian Travers sighed.

"I expect I'm an ass for butting in, but I couldn't bear to see the chap asking for trouble like that," he murmured. "Ah, well, it will be interesting to watch developments."

And Vivian Travers thrust his hands into his pockets, and strolled away.

He was an unusual sort of junior; one could never tell exactly how to take him. But in giving that tip to Chambers he had been quite sincere.

He knew that Chambers was several kinds of an ass; he knew that Chambers was not accustomed to having so much money about him, and in the goodness of his heart he had given Chambers the straight tip. But he had known right from the start, that Chambers would resent it. However, Vivian Travers at least had the satisfaction of knowing that he had given the conceited Fifth-Former the straight tip.



CHAPTER 4.

Travers Means Well!

"I T'S no trouble at all, Chambers, my dear man!" Vivian Travers started slightly as he heard that voice. Breakfast was over, and Travers was in the Ancient House cloak-room.

"Oh-ho!" he murmured. "I wasn't so very far wrong, then!"

He recognised the voice of Grayson, of the Fifth, and then came the voice of Shaw. Travers was irresistibly reminded of his words of advice to Chambers.

But for these chance words, Travers would have forgotten all about Chambers, and would not have given the Fifth-Former another thought. As it was, he stood quite still, listening—gratified, in a measure, to receive this proof that his warning had been timely. The fact that Chambers had ignored the warning only added to Travers' satisfaction. He had always thought that Cuthbert Chambers was a hopeless ass.

Harold Grayson and Frederick Shaw belonged to the East House, and they were two of the worst scallywags of the Upper School. In their own opinion, they were great men, and the more feather-brained of the Fifth-Formers looked up to them. As a general rule, Grayson and Shaw would not take any notice of a fellow like Chambers.

But for the past hour Chambers had been swanking openly, boasting about his liberal birthday tips. Everybody knew that he had nine pounds in his pocket.

The sound of Grayson's voice caused Vivian Travers to compress his lips. He knew Grayson through and through. It wasn't so very long since that he had nearly caused Grayson to be sent from the school in disgrace.

"Well, well!" murmured Travers.

It seemed to him that the voices were coming closer, and, acting on impulse, he concealed himself behind a number of coats, in the corner. A moment later, the three Fifth-Formers came right into the cloak-room.

"Shan't keep you a minute, Grayson," Chambers was saying. "Somebody seems to have borrowed my hat—"

"It's all right—no hurry!" said Grayson genially. "As a matter of fact, it's just as well that we should be in here for a minute. Chambers. We can talk privately here."

"What do we want to talk privately about?" asked Chambers, in a tone of surprise.

"Oh, nothing much!" replied Grayson lightly. "But we don't want all the other fellows to hear our business, do we? It's your birthday to-day, Chambers, and you'll probably be keen on a little celebration."

"Well, I was thinking of something of the sort," said Chambers. "A fellow likes to do something special on his birthday. I was going to invite a few friends to an extra posh tea in my study—"

"Jolly good idea!" said Shaw enthusiastically.

"Good, as far as it goes," said Grayson. "But it's a half-holiday this afternoon, Chambers, and I thought perhaps you'd like to come over into the East House."

"What for?"

"Well, how about a little game of Bridge?" suggested Grayson casually.

"Bridge?" repeated Chambers, in a dubious voice. "I was rather thinking about something out-of-doors, you know. And I'm not keen on gambling, anyhow."

Grayson laughed.

"Gambling?" he repeated. "What put that silly idea into your head? Bridge is a game of skill—a game of pure joy."

"I know what Bridge is!" said Chambers loftily.

"Of course you do!" agreed Grayson. "Well, that's fixed up, eh? You'll come over into the East House for a little friendly game this afternoon? I dare say Kenmore or Sinclair will join us to make a fourth."

Chambers hesitated.

"Well, as long as it's only a friendly game—" he began.

"That's all!" said Grayson heartily. "We want to celebrate your birthday as it deserves, Chambers. Found your hat? Good man! Let's get outside, then. Some of those infernal juniors are crowding in here!"

The seniors went out, and a moment later Travers emerged from behind the coats. His eyes were grim. He strolled out into the sunlit Triangle, and pondered over the situation.

"Of course, it's not my business, and if Chambers likes to throw his money away, he deserves to lose it," he decided. "But can I see this lamb go to the slaughter without offering him some friendly help? What an ass the man is! The wolves are all round him, and he thinks they're sheep!"

If the leading "wolf" had been any other fellow but Grayson, it is probable that Travers would have left Cuthbert Chambers to his fate. But Travers took a special delight in defeating any of Grayson's schemes; and he wondered, now, how he could rescue Chambers. It was rather a ticklish problem.

When he went in for morning lessons, he was very thoughtful, and he was still looking thoughtful when the Remove trooped out into the sunlight, after second lesson, for morning "break." A hand was suddenly clapped on his shoulder.

"Penny for them, Travers, old man!" said a cheery voice.

"They're not worth it, dear old fellow," replied Travers promptly. "You shouldn't be so rash with your money!"

Jimmy Potts grinned. He and Travers shared Study H, and they were quite good friends. Sir James Potts did not altogether approve of Travers' habits and customs; but the two juniors generally got along very well together.

"You were looking as solemn as an owl," said Jimmy. "What's on your mind, Travers?"

"Chambers," replied Travers coolly.

"Eh?"

"Chambers of the Fifth."

"Why on earth are you worrying about Chambers of the Fifth?" demanded Potts, in astonishment. "Everybody knows that Chambers is an ass!"

"Exactly!" said Travers. "He's such an ass that I hardly like leaving him to his fate. It's his birthday to-day, and he has received quite a number of liberal tips from doting relatives——"

"We all know that!" grunted Jimmy Potts. "Chambers has been swanking about all over the place. He's got about nine quid."

"And a fool and his money are soon parted!" murmured Travers. "Forgive me for voicing that old chestnut, but it is rather apt. And as Chambers is such a thumping great idiot, I rather thought that I would save him from the sharks."

"Sharks!" ejaculated Jimmy.

"There are two of them with him now!" nodded Travers.

Jimmy Potts stared across the Triangle, and he observed Cuthbert Chambers, in the company of Grayson and Shaw.



CHAPTER 5.

The Telegram!

SIR JAMES POTTS. Bart., slowly shook his head.

"If I were you, Travers, I shouldn't interfere!" he said warningly.

"If you were me, dear old fellow, you would do exactly the same as I intend doing," replied Travers coolly. "You needn't tell me that it's none of my business. I know it. But it is one of my fatal weaknesses to butt in, and to rescue the perishing."

"You hopeless ass!"

"I may be an ass, but I am not hopeless," replied Travers. "In fact, I have the most rosy hopes of being successful."

"But what on earth are you going to do?"

"Chambers has nine quid in his pocket—or what is left of the nine quid," replied Travers. "Grayson and Shaw have got the most evil designs on that money. The scheme, as far as I can make out, is to get Chambers into their study this afternoon, and to force him into a game of Bridge."

"How do you know all this?" asked Jimmy, staring.

"Little boys shouldn't ask questions," said Travers, wagging a finger at his indignant study-mate. "Can you imagine what will happen to Chambers if he joins in this game of Bridge?"

"If Chambers is fool enough——"

"He is!" said Travers. "These sharks will fleece him. Bridge, of course, is an excellent game—a splendid recreation—but in the way that Grayson and Shaw play it I haven't the slightest doubt that Chambers will catch a very severe cold. It seems to me that there is only one way of saving him."

"And what's that?" asked Potts gruffly.

"All his money must be taken from him before he goes over to the East House this afternoon," said Travers thoughtfully. "As soon as the wolves find out that the lamb has already been shorn they'll have no further interest in that game of Bridge. Well, well! Let us put our thinking-cap on!"

"If you'll take my advice, you'll mind your own business!" said Jimmy Potts candidly.

"Thanks!"

"Seriously, Travers, you oughtn't to butt in!" said Jimmy, in an earnest voice. "Chambers is nothing to you. If he chooses to act the fool, why should you try to save him?"

"It always affords me the keenest pleasure to do Grayson in the eye," replied Travers contentedly. "Just a whim of mine, dear old fellow. In addition to that, I feel rather sorry for Chambers. He's conceited, and he's a boastful, bragging ass. But, at least, he is innocent of most vices, and I don't like to see

him getting thick with such cads as Grayson and Shaw."

Jimmy Potts shrugged his shoulders.

"Oh, I give it up!" he said. "You can do as you like, Travers."

"Thanks very much!" said Travers. "Your generosity overwhelms me."

At this moment a boy on a red bicycle rode into the Triangle, and as the telegram proved



The Fifth Form-master's entrance into the study was as unfortunate as it was unexpected, for Chambers and Travers had no time to hide the cards or the money which lay on the table. And Mr. Pagett, as he saw those tell tale signs, grew stern. "Chambers!" he thundered.

to be for Church there was a good deal of interest. Jimmy Potts and Travers joined the crowd that pressed round the chums of Study D.

"I'll bet it's from Handy!" said Church excitedly.

"Of course it is!" said Nipper. "You don't usually get wires, Church, old man. And after Handforth's letter——"

"Yes, it is!" ejaculated Church, as he gazed at the pinkish form.

"Is it bad news?" asked Travers. "Is Handy really coming back?"

"He's not coming after all!" said Church blankly.

"Then it's good news!" murmured Travers.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Cheese it!" said Jimmy Potts, pressing Travers' arm. "Don't be such a spoofer, Travers! I know jolly well that you'd like old Handy to come back. Besides, just look at Church and McClure! The poor chaps are nearly dazed."

"Then it's their own fault," declared Travers. "Haven't they learned by this time to take no notice of Handforth's blatherings?"

"What does the wire say?" demanded six or seven voices.

"I'll read it out!" said Church miserably.

"Oh, my hat! And he told us in that letter that he was coming back to-day! We might have known!"

"This is the finish!" said McClure, with a grunt. "We've lost him for good now! Rats and blow! Why did he ever go away? The silly, obstinate ass!"

"Well, let's hear the wire," said Nipper soothingly.

"Here it is!" said Church. "Listen to this:

"Not coming. Pater kyboshed it. Insists that I stay at St. Jim's. But don't worry. I'm not going to be dished like this. Expect me when you see me—but I'm coming.

"HANDY."

"Well, it's just like him, anyhow!" grinned Reggie Pitt. "Good old optimist!"

"Of course, he'll never wangle it," said Nipper, shaking his head. "If his pater is against it, there's no hope. I expect Sir Edward has laid down the law, and Handy is helpless. Well, our loss is St. Jim's gain."

"I feel sorry for the poor old scout, but he's only got himself to blame," remarked Fullwood. "There was no earthly reason for him to leave St. Frank's, and it's only natural that

his pater should cut up rusty. A fellow can't mess about like that. He chose to go to St. Jim's, and at St. Jim's he'll have to stay."

Church took a deep breath.

"Don't you believe it!" he said. "I know Handy better than you fellows. I'll eat my hat if he doesn't turn up at St. Frank's during the week."

"But his pater——"

"Bother his pater!" interrupted Church. "Handy has made up his mind to come back, and when he makes up his mind he moves heaven and earth to get what he wants!"

Nipper shook his head.

"There's one thing you've forgotten, Church, old man," he said quietly.

"Eh? What's that?"

"You've forgotten that Handy is alone," replied Nipper. "Your experience of him has been at St. Frank's—when you and McClure have been with him; and, in nine cases out of ten, his successes have been brought about by your co-operation. Alone, he'll be like a freshly-landed fish."

Church wouldn't have it.

"Rats!" he said. "Mac and I could never influence Handy once he had made up that obstinate mind of his. He always went his own road. You mark my words—we shall see him back sooner or later."

"I'm afraid it'll be rather later than sooner," said Nipper dubiously.



CHAPTER 6.

Travers Has His Way!

AP!

"Come in!" said Chambers, of the Fifth.

The door of his study opened, and Vivian Travers strolled leisurely into the apartment. It was early afternoon, and Chambers was standing in front of the mirror adjusting his tie. He frowned as he beheld the Removite.

"Well, what do you want?" he demanded shortly.

"Busy?" asked Travers.

"Yes, I am!"

"You don't look it."

"I'm too busy to be bothered with you, anyhow," said Chambers.

"That's too bad," murmured Travers, as he sat down in the easy-chair. "I was rather hoping, Chambers, that you had no appointment just yet. It's only two o'clock."

"Well, I've got an appointment at three!" said Chambers coldly. "And I don't want you here, Travers. Clear out, you cheeky junior!"

But Vivian Travers had learned what he wanted to know. Chambers was not due to go over to the East House until three o'clock; this was very satisfactory.

The situation was not without interest.

Travers knew perfectly well that Cuthbert Chambers would lose every penny of his money if he went over to join Grayson and Shaw. A game of Bridge had been mentioned, but Travers had his doubts with regard to this. Perhaps Bridge would figure in the early proceedings, but it was quite palpable to Travers that the whole thing was a "plant" to relieve Chambers of his birthday cash.

Chambers, in his conceit and self-importance, never dreamed that it was possible for him to be hoodwinked. In his own estimation he was a very smart fellow—and people would need to get up very early in order to catch him napping! In reality, as Travers was well aware, Chambers was several kinds of a mug. He was all bluff and bluster—a figure of straw.

And Travers, for no reason whatever—unless it was to afford himself some amusement on this hot afternoon—decided to protect Chambers from the "wolves." As far as he could see, the only way to achieve his object was to "win" Chambers' money before Grayson and Shaw could get a chance at it. Later, of course, he would tell Chambers that he had worked it, and then he would hand the money back.

Travers had queer ideas of amusement; yet his motive in this instance was certainly sound. It would give him great pleasure to spoil the plans of those rascals, Grayson and Shaw.

So, although Travers had come here for the express purpose of gambling, it was only a means to an end. He didn't want Cuthbert Chambers' money, for he had plenty of his own. But he did want to prevent that money from getting into the pockets of the plotters of the East House.

He glanced up and found that Chambers was looking at him with a hostile glare.

"Well, why don't you go?" said the Fifth-Former sourly.

"There's no hurry, is there?" said Travers. "I've nothing to do for half an hour, and you don't seem to be particularly busy, Chambers. What about a little game?"

"I don't play with juniors!" replied Chambers shortly.

"Dear old fellow, why not forget your status—and my status, if it comes to that?" suggested Travers mildly. "Does it really matter that you are in the Fifth and that I am in the Remove? We are here together, there is an idle hour before us, and very little possibility of being disturbed."

Chambers hesitated. The thought occurred to him that it might be a good idea to get in a bit of practice before going over to join Grayson's set.

"What do you propose to play?" he asked gruffly.

"Oh, any old thing you like," replied Travers. "Banker—poker—nap——"

"I don't play those sort of games!" cut in Chambers coldly.

"Then let me teach you, dear old fellow."

"You silly young ass!" said Chambers, turning red. "I don't mean that I don't know the games! I don't need any teaching!"

This was not exactly the truth. Chambers' knowledge of gambling games was limited. He had never gone in for such hectic pleasures. He was several kinds of an ass, but there was nothing really vicious about him. His inclination now was to turn Travers out of his study—never realising that Travers was proposing nothing worse than Grayson had proposed. For a gamble is a gamble, whatever the game that is used as a medium.

"Let's make it banker then," said Travers genially.

Chambers had a moment of strength.

"No!" he said. "I'm hanged if I'll gamble with you!"

"But my dear old fellow——"

"Get out of this study!" snapped Chambers.

"Just as you like!" said Travers, rising to his feet. "But I rather thought that you were a sportsman, Chambers. Still, if you're afraid to risk your money——"

"Afraid!" roared Chambers.

"Well, doesn't it look like it?"

"No, it doesn't!" shouted Chambers hotly. "Great Scott! Do you think I'm afraid of losing my money to you? If you want to know the truth, I'm not keen on taking advantage of you. I don't want to win any of your cash."

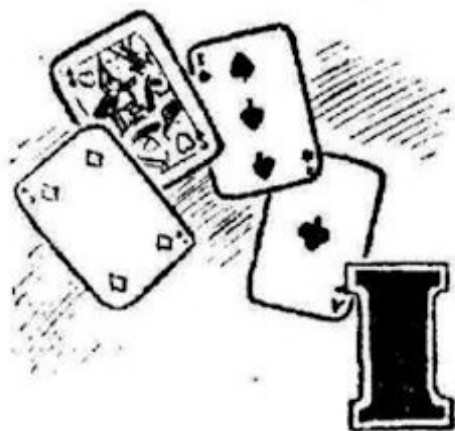
"That's quite all right," said Travers coolly. "I've got plenty of cash, and if I lose any I shall lose it with a good heart. Let's just have five minutes—for fun, eh?"

"No!" said Chambers curtly.

"Well, well!" murmured Vivian Travers. "I hardly thought it of you, Chambers! It is a bit of a shock to realise that you are nervous——"

"I'm not nervous!" snapped Chambers. "All right, then—five minutes, you young rotter! Five minutes, but no longer!"

And Travers, smiling inwardly to himself, sat down at the table.



CHAPTER 7.

Easy Money!

IF Travers had been really out for rooking Chambers of his cash, he might have felt just a little ashamed of himself. For it had been so absurdly easy to goad this weak-willed Fifth-Former into playing a game that he had no desire to play.

But as Travers' motive was a good one, his conscience was clear.

And Travers felt rather sorry for this feather-brained Fifth-Former. He was so full of his own importance; so childish in his conceit. It never occurred to him for a single instant that it might be risky for him to participate in a gamble with this junior.

Chambers, in fact, thought such a great deal of himself that the prospect of losing never occurred to him.

He wasn't a gambler by nature; and he was angry with himself for even agreeing to the game. But he lacked the courage of his convictions. He wanted to feel that he was a sportsman; and he had no intention of letting this junior go away to spread a story that he was afraid to risk his money.

Travers, for his part, wanted to teach Chambers a sharp lesson, and for this very purpose he had brought his own playing-cards.

It was a specially prepared pack, and it would enable Travers to win or lose just as he pleased. Let it be said at once that Travers would never have used this pack had he intended playing in real earnest. He was a reckless junior, but he was not crooked.

No. His intention was to swindle Chambers deliberately, and then later return his money—showing Chambers exactly how he had done the trick.

It was quite possible that Chambers would be very wild about it, but at least he would have learned his lesson. A little of the conceit would be taken out of him. For he would know then how ridiculously easily he had been fooled.

Travers was preparing to fleece him openly and palpably, yet he was prepared to swear that Chambers would never see through the dodge. The shock would come later when Travers returned the money with his cool explanation.

He was going to enjoy this game of taking Chambers down a peg or two. And it possessed the added charm of spoiling Grayson's little scheme. Chambers was an innocent, and he had to be protected. But to offer him any advice would be worse than useless. The only way was to give him a thorough eye-opener.

"Cut!" said Travers languidly.

Chambers cut, and Travers did likewise.

"Your bank!" said the Removite, handing over the cards.

"Eh?" said Chambers. "My bank?"

"You understand the game, don't you?"

"Of course I do!" said Chambers hastily.

"You've only got to put three piles of cards on the table, and then I can choose which one I like," said Travers smoothly. "I'll back two cards, and leave you one. If yours is lower than mine, then you pay out."

"Hadn't we better have only two piles?" suggested Chambers. "We don't want to get confused."

"Very well then—two piles."

Chambers cut them and laid the two piles on the table.

"I'll have a quid on this card," said Travers, laying a pound-note against one of the piles. "That's right—the top card. Yours is the other one."

This was not the correct game, but as Chambers didn't know it, there was no trouble. Besides, Travers had his own reasons for choosing the top cards instead of the bottom ones.

"Turn them up," he said, with a smile. "Let's know my fate!"

Chambers turned up the card that Travers had backed. It was a seven of clubs. Then he turned up the top card of the other pile. It was a queen of hearts.

"You win!" said Travers, with a sigh. "Good-bye, quid!"

Chambers flushed as he took the money. This seemed altogether too easy!

"Hang it!" he said impulsively. "I haven't won this quid, Travers!"

"Yes, you have," said the Removite. "Your card's higher than mine."

"Yes, but it seems so—so quick!"

"That's the beauty of banker," agreed Travers, with a nod. "You can either win quickly or lose quickly. Shove out another two piles, Chambers, and let's get on with it. We've only got five minutes, remember."

"Oh, yes!" said Chambers hastily.

He shuffled the cards and made two further piles. Travers could have laughed aloud. He had deliberately lost that first pound—just to give Chambers some encouragement.

But those cards were special ones. The pack was a trick pack. The design on the backs of the cards looked quite normal, but it was not so. There was a little ornamentation at each corner of the design, and one of these ornamentations could be read in just the same way as one reads the time. Without very special scrutiny this fact could not be detected.

Chambers suspected nothing. But Travers knew exactly what the cards were after a single swift glance. Thus he now knew that the two cards in front of him on the tops of the piles were the queen of clubs and the three of diamonds. He placed a pound-note against the queen.

"Turn up!" he said briefly.

Chambers turned up the two cards.

"You lose!" grinned Travers. "Let's have that quid back, please!"

And so it went on, with Vivian Travers chuckling inwardly to himself. It wasn't a gamble at all—but a sheer piece of trickery. It could not have been worked with Grayson or Shaw, for they, with all their experience, would have smelt a rat in no time. But with Chambers it was perfectly safe.

However, there was no thought of dishonesty in Travers' mind. He was just amusing himself and teaching Chambers a lesson at the same time. Perhaps some of the Fifth-Former's conceit would be knocked out of him when he learned the ridiculous truth.

CHAPTER 8.

The Bombshell!



UTHERT
CHAMBERS was hot and perspiring.

Ten minutes had elapsed, and his last pound-note had just vanished. All his money,

in fact, stood on Travers' side of the table in a disorderly pile.

"Well, go ahead!" said Travers, yawning. Chambers nearly choked. He had lost all his money, and he was filled with consternation and fury.

"You young rotter!" he panted. "I haven't got any more money! You've won the lot!"

"That's all right," said Travers. "We can still go ahead. Perhaps you'll win it back, Chambers—or, if you don't, I don't mind accepting your I O U's."

Chambers hesitated. The thought that he might win his money back gripped him. Such was his ignorance of gambling that he had held the "bank" all the time, for it suited Travers' purpose that he should do so. For the Removite had been enabled to back a winning card whenever he had liked, just by glancing at that secret design. To Chambers, who had never before gambled, and would not have done so now had he not been goaded, the whole thing was disastrous.

"I'll have one more try—that's all!" he panted. "Confound you, Travers! I'm fed-up with this rotten game!"

"Dear old fellow, is that the way to talk after you have lost your money?" asked Travers reproachfully. "You're a good loser, aren't you?"

"Hang you, yes!" muttered Chambers.

He cut the cards again, and Travers deliberately put two pounds on a card that he knew to be the two of hearts. Chambers turned up the seven of spades.

"There you are!" smiled Travers. "It's soon going back. It always fluctuates like this."

Chambers took the two pounds eagerly, and cut the cards again. Then at that moment a light step sounded out in the passage.

Before Chambers could even look up the door suddenly opened and Mr. Pagett walked in.

The shock was totally unexpected. Mr. Pagett was the master of the Fifth Form, and Chambers sat there, his jaw dropping, his hands limp. Every trace of colour fled from his startled face.

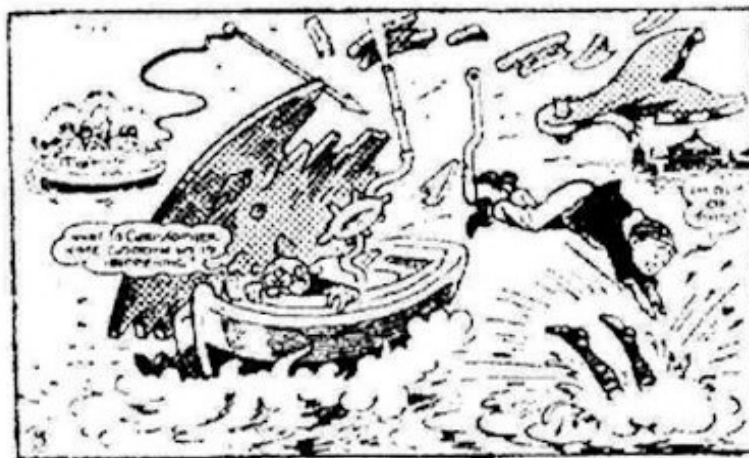
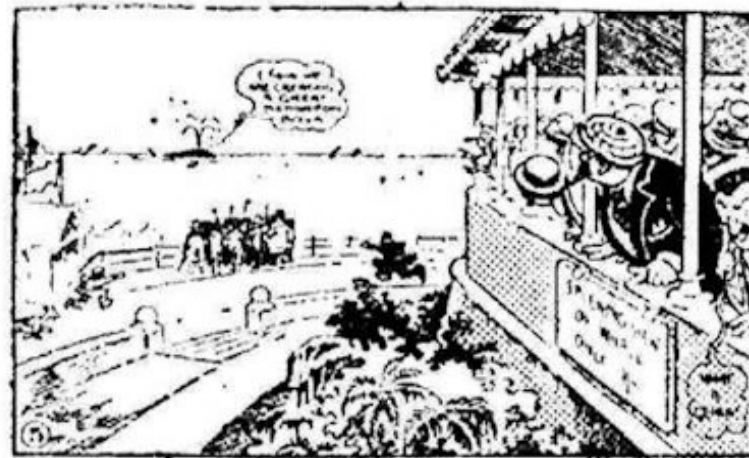
"Oh, Chambers, I am glad that you are here!" said Mr. Pagett coldly. "I just want to show you these papers— Good gracious! What on earth— Chambers!" thundered Mr. Pagett. "What are you doing?"

Chambers tried to speak, but words failed him. Vivian Travers sat there perfectly cool, the smile still on his face.

He was just as startled as Chambers, but he did not show it. Neither of them had expected any such interruption as this. It was a half-holiday, and the senior studies were quiet and mostly deserted. It was an extraordinary thing for a master to come to a study at such an hour. Mr. William Pagett's arrival was akin to the explosion of a bombshell.

(Continued on page 14.)

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THE BULLY OF THE REMOVE!

(Continued from page 12.)

The Fifth Form-master was not particularly popular at St. Frank's. He possessed a sharp tongue, and he was generally getting on the track of somebody or other, and making their lives a burden to them.

"What are you doing, Chambers?" he repeated, in a terrible voice.

The question was rather unnecessary, since it was perfectly obvious what Chambers had been doing. To the meanest intellect—and Mr. Pagett's intellect was quite keen—it was clear that a gambling game was in progress. There lay the cards, and there, too, were the disorderly piles of currency notes. Neither of the players had had the slightest chance of whisking the evidence out of sight. Mr. Pagett had dropped in upon them with dreadful suddenness.

"Well, well!" murmured Travers, with a little sigh.

He resented Mr. Pagett's intrusion, but it was his way to take things easily. His whole plan was spoilt now, but he could not possibly have foreseen this development. And he felt, too, that it was up to him to put things straight. Chambers was not to blame, and it would be most unfair if he was made to suffer.

"I am waiting, Chambers!" said Mr. Pagett ominously.

"Ye-e-e-es sir!" faltered Chambers, with a gulp. "I—I—I—I mean, we—we——"

"Well?" thundered Mr. Pagett.

He only added to Chambers' confusion, and Travers thought it advisable to chip in.

"It's all right, sir," he said coolly. "There's nothing to worry about."

"You wretched boy!" said Mr. Pagett, twirling round on him.

"Sorry to contradict you, sir, but I'm not a bit wretched," said Travers smoothly.

"And, as for this game, it's not what you think it is. It's only a friendly little demonstration."

"What?" barked the master of the Fifth.

"That's all, sir," said Travers. "You mustn't take any notice of this money on the table. We're not playing for money at all. This is only part of the demonstration."

Quite coolly, Travers separated his own money from Chambers', and put it in his pocket. Then he pushed the other notes across the table.

"That's your lot, Chambers," he said languidly. "I hope you can see, now, how easy it is to be spoofed by these cards."

Chambers automatically put the money in his pocket, and Travers rose to his feet, slipping the cards deftly into his jacket.

"I dare say it looked a bit wonky to you, sir, when you came in," he said, smiling at Mr. Pagett. "But there's nothing in it, really. Chambers doesn't gamble, anyhow."

But for once Vivian Travers' cool effrontery failed to save him.



CHAPTER 9

Trouble!

MR. PAGETT could hardly be blamed for rejecting the Removite's glib explanation of the situation.

"Stand where you are, Travers!" said the Form-master harshly. "I am not to be deceived by this theatrical by-play! I came into this study and caught the pair of you red-handed. You were gambling, and I am amazed that you should have the audacity to deny it!"

"But, honestly, sir, it was only spoof," said Travers, with perfect truth.

"Is this true, Chambers?" snapped Mr. Pagett, turning to the startled Fifth-Former.

The unhappy Chambers was too flabbergasted to give a quick answer.

"I—I— We—we——" He paused, floundering.

"That is enough," said Mr. Pagett grimly.

"I am quite satisfied that you were actually gambling. I am shocked, Chambers. I am well nigh stupefied. You foolish boy!"

"If you'll only think for a minute, sir, you'll see that you are doing us an injustice," said Travers sadly. "If we had really been gambling, do you think we should have played here, in this study, with the door unlocked?"

But Mr. Pagett was ready for that.

"You felt quite satisfied that you would not be interrupted!" he retorted. "It is most unusual for me to come to any senior study on a half-holiday, and you know that, Travers. I only came now because I wanted to have a very serious talk with Chambers, in private. And I find—this!"

Chambers, who felt really guilty, had nothing to say; he was stunned by the enormity of the affair.

"Since you will not believe me, sir, perhaps you'll take my word for it that Chambers is not to blame?" said Travers steadily.

"I brought the cards to this study, and I suggested the little—or—demonstration. Chambers knew nothing about it until I came to him."

"We will see what the headmaster has to say on the point!" replied Mr. Pagett curtly.

"Come with me—both of you!"

"You're not going to take us to the Head, sir?" gasped Chambers.

"I certainly am!"

"Oh, but please, sir!" panted the Fifth-Former. "The Head might give us the sack! And it wasn't my fault——"

He paused, nearly choking. It startled him to think that he was prepared to seek shelter behind a junior. Chambers was a weakling, but he was not a cad.

"This matter is altogether too serious for me to deal with personally," said Mr. Pagett coldly. "And as Mr. Lee, your Housemaster, is away this afternoon, I have no alternative

but to take you before the headmaster. Come!"

"It's hardly worth it, sir," urged Travers. "If you think we deserve the punishment, we'll take it all right. But can't you manage to deal with the matter yourself, sir? It isn't quite fair to Chambers. The whole thing was only a spoof. But the Head won't be ready to believe that——"

"No doubt you are right!" broke in Mr. Pagett, with set lips. "Now, both of you! I am tired of waiting! Come with me!"

There was no denying him, and they were compelled to accompany him to the headmaster's house. Chambers was trembling in almost every limb, and he was as pale as a sheet. But Travers remained quite cool and calm. His brain was working rapidly, too. He was thoroughly annoyed at this unexpected development; and it was most unjust that Chambers should suffer. For Travers knew that he, alone, was to blame. It was he who had goaded Chambers into joining in that ridiculous "game."

Dr. Stafford listened gravely as Mr. Pagett described the scene. It did not take the Form-master long.

"I am ashamed of you, Chambers!" said the Head, at length. "You are quite old enough to know that gambling is wicked and foolish. Moreover, it is against all the school regulations. I shall have to flog you."

"Yes, sir!" muttered Chambers huskily.

His chief emotion, at the moment, was one of relief. He had been afraid that he would be expelled—and now that he learned that he was only to receive a flogging a great weight had been taken off his mind.

"May I speak, sir?" asked Travers. "Mr. Pagett has failed to tell you that I am really to blame."

"Indeed!" said the Head icily.

"Yes, sir," continued Travers. "I came to Chambers' study at about two o'clock, and I suggested that we should fool about for a bit with my pack of cards."

"Give me—that pack of cards, Travers!"

"Certainly, sir," said the junior, handing it over.

The Head tossed it into the waste-paper basket, and then eyed Travers again.

"I do not want to hear anything further from you, Travers," he said. "The cards maybe yours—but that is a matter of no importance. Mr. Pagett found you and Chambers gambling, and whether you take the blame on yourself or not makes no difference. Chambers is a senior. He is the elder boy, and thus the blame is mainly his."

"I don't see that, sir!" said Travers quickly. "Chambers is quite a good chap, really, and he's as innocent as a baby when it comes to gambling. I led him into this——"

"Be silent!" exclaimed Dr. Stafford. "Chambers is the elder, and he should have known better than to have agreed to your wicked proposal. I shall flog the pair of you."

And, without further ado, he started on the good work.



CHAPTER 10.

More Trouble For Chambers!

HERE!" said the Head breathlessly.

He had just completed his unsavoury task. Cuthbert Cham-

bers and Vivian Travers stood before him, both of them racked with pain. But while Chambers showed every sign that he had just been flogged, Travers bore himself as coolly and languidly as ever.

It was a terrible blow to Chambers' dignity. He, a senior, had been flogged! His only consolation was that the Head had inflicted this punishment in private. Chambers would have died of heart-failure if he had been compelled to suffer the ordeal of a public swishing. The humiliation would have been too much for him.

"You can both go!" said the Head sternly. "And, remember, I have purposely dealt leniently with you on this occasion. If ever I hear of a similar offence, I shall act much more drastically."

"Thank you, sir," said Travers composedly.

Chambers was unable to speak, and he turned towards the door automatically. But Mr. Pagett checked him.

"Just one moment, Chambers!" he said. "While the boy is here, sir," he added, turning to the Head, "perhaps I had better show you these papers. When I made this—this—er—unhappy discovery, I was seeking Chambers in order to tax him on the subject of his lamentable slackness."

Chambers shivered afresh as he heard these dread words. The Head took the papers from Mr. Pagett, and glanced at them.

"These are, I take it, examples of Chambers' work?" he asked.

"Yes, sir," said Mr. Pagett. "It was not my intention to place them before you, but in the circumstances I feel that I am justified in doing so. The boy is here now, and he can, therefore, answer for himself."

The Head turned the papers over, his expression becoming more grim.

"Is Chambers—er—low in your class, Mr. Pagett?" he asked.

"He is the bottom boy of the class," replied Mr. Pagett ominously. "I feel that it is my duty to tell you, sir, that I have exhausted my patience. Chambers is lazy—utterably lazy. I have talked to him until I am tired. He takes absolutely no care over his work, and the more I point out his faults, the less notice he takes of me. Those papers in front of you are fair examples of the work that he has been handing in during this term."

Cuthbert Chambers listened with a dull kind of horror. More than once Mr. Pagett had threatened to show his papers to the Head. Now the calamity had happened! But it wouldn't have happened if this other affair

had not cropped up. It was just sheer, bad luck. Mr. Pagett had taken advantage of the opportunity.

"I must have time to examine these papers," said the Head, after a short pause. "Chambers, you may go. You, too, Travers."

"Thank you, sir."

"One moment, Chambers!" added the Head. "Do not leave the school premises. If I need you again, I will send for you."

"Yes, sir!" muttered Chambers fearfully.

They went out, and the door closed. Mr. Pagett moved nearer to the desk.

"I am sorry to bother you with this additional trouble, sir," he said, "but Chambers' slackness has become so pronounced of late that I feel that drastic measures are necessary."

"There is no need for you to apologise, Mr. Pagett," said the Head. "If you cannot make any headway with this boy, it is plainly your duty to place the matter in my hands. Dear, dear! Surely this cannot be an example of Chambers' handwriting?"

"I am afraid it is, sir."

"What are his average marks?"

"They are really so low that I hesitate to tell you," replied the Form-master dubiously. "As you will see, sir, Chambers is weak in every subject. His geography is appalling, his arithmetic atrocious. In the classics, he is so extremely bad that I despair of him."

The Head continued looking through the papers, and at last he glanced up, his expression grave and troubled.

"For a Fifth Form boy, this work is positively disgraceful," he said. "Indeed, there are many pupils in the Remove who can show a very much better——"

"Indeed, yes, sir!" broke in Mr. Pagett quickly. "Practically any Remove boy could do far, far better than Chambers."

The Head pursed his lips.

"Is it because the boy is naturally stupid?" he asked.

"I hardly think so, sir," replied Mr. Pagett. "Chambers was very much better last term. Indeed, he was half way up the class. But this term he has been deliberately slacking, until, at length, he is at the bottom of the class, and there he sticks. It is not because he is naturally dull-witted. I will admit that he is not brilliant, but, at the same time, he could do very much better if he chose."

"Can you suggest any reason why he should be so far behind the others?"

"There is, I think, only one reason," replied Mr. Pagett. "The boy is vain—hopelessly conceited. He looks upon himself as a very splendid fellow, and he resents my repeated warnings. He is so self-satisfied, indeed, that he refuses to make any effort."

The Head nodded.

"I have had to deal with such boys before," he said grimly. "I rather think, Mr. Pagett, that we shall have to give Chambers' self-satisfaction a little shock. If he were incapable of better work than this, I should rather pity him. But you assure me that he could have done much better?"

"Most certainly he could!" said Mr. Pagett. "I have lost all patience with the boy. His conceit and complacency are so marked that he is blinded to the truth. For some weeks I have threatened to tell you about him, and at last I have done so."

"Then he has had every chance!" said Dr. Stafford sternly. "He cannot say that he has not been warned. It is apparent, Mr. Pagett, that he has frittered away his opportunities—with this lamentable result."

"There would, perhaps, be some little excuse for him if he were spending his time in the sports field," said Mr. Pagett. "But he is not. He has been consistently slacking, in defiance of all my warnings."

"Then there is only one thing to be done," said the Head coldly. "Chambers shall be sent down into the Remove—and there he will remain, until he proves that he is fit to resume his place in the Fifth Form!"

Mr. Pagett was startled.

"Really, sir, I hardly expected that you would act so drastically—" he began.

"My mind is made up, Mr. Pagett!" said the Head firmly. "This boy needs a sharp lesson—and he shall have one!"



CHAPTER 11.

Travers Does His Best!

OUTSIDE, in the shade of Big Arch, Chambers turned furiously upon his companion.

"You young rot-

ter!" he said fiercely.

But Vivian Travers was quite unmoved. They had crossed Inner Court without a word, and Travers had been expecting some such outburst as this. It had come at last, when they were in the comparative privacy of Big Arch. There were very few fellows about this afternoon, for most of them were on the playing fields, or on the river, or out for rambles.

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

"No need!" shouted Chambers. "It's bad enough to get a flogging—me, a senior!—but goodness only knows what'll happen now! That beast of a Pagett has shown my papers to the Head!"

"I'm perfectly ready to take the blame for some things," said Travers, "but you can't push this on to my shoulders, dear old fellow. If you have been slacking in your work——"

"You confounded young idiot!" panted Chambers. "If Pagett hadn't found us gambling in my study, he wouldn't have shown my work to the Head! It's all your fault! And as for your rotten money, you can take it!"

He pulled the notes out of his pocket, and held them towards Travers.



" . . . I have therefore decided that you shall be sent back into the Remove—for the remainder of this term, at least!" said the Head. Chambers of the Fifth, as he heard the words, gave a horrified gasp.

"My money?" said the Removite mildly. "But I've got my money."

"You won this from me, didn't you?"

"For the love of Samson!" laughed Travers. "Didn't I tell you, while Pagett was in the room, that it was all a spoof?"

"Yes, but that was only to pull his leg!" said Chambers. "You know well enough that we were really gambling——"

"I know nothing of the sort!" said Travers. "My dear old fellow, I was only trying to teach you a lesson. My scheme was to win the money off you by means of those trick cards——"

"Trick cards!" panted Chambers. "Do you mean to tell me that you were swindling?"

"My poor, deluded innocent!" said Travers. "Of course it was a swindle—but, at least, I never had any dishonest intentions."

"That's what you say now!" sneered Chambers.

Vivian Travers changed colour.

"Is that quite fair?" he asked quietly. "I may not be too particular, Chambers, but I don't think I'm capable of playing such a filthy trick as that on anybody. I am telling you quite frankly that they were trick cards, and my idea in winning your money was to save you from Grayson and Shaw."

"You interfering young——"

"Because, if I did not win the money from you, they would," proceeded Travers. "Their

object was to fleece you of every note you possessed. Do you think I don't know them?"

Chambers was excited and furious.

"I don't believe you!" he said harshly.

"It's only an excuse—now that you've been forced into the open. You meant to keep my money—and you would have kept it, if old Pagett hadn't butted in."

"I'm sorry you think that," said Travers sadly. "Perhaps you're justified in thinking it—but, fortunately, I can prove to you that you're wrong."

"Oh! And how can you prove it?"

For answer, Travers waved a hand, and Jimmy Potts, who was just entering the Ancient House, paused, and altered his direction. A moment later, he joined the pair in the shadow of Big Arch.

"Sorry to trouble you, Jimmy, dear old fellow, but you're needed for purposes of corroboration," said Travers coolly. "Will you kindly tell Chambers why I went to his study?"

Jimmy Potts stared.

"To have a gamble with him, I understood," he replied.

"There you are!" shouted Chambers fiercely.

"Just a minute," said Travers. "What was the object of this gamble, Jimmy?"

"I told you not to interfere," said Potts, as he glanced curiously from Travers to

Chambers. "There's been some trouble about it, eh?"

"Never mind that," said Travers. "What was my idea in gambling with Chambers?"

"Why, you wanted to save him from those rotters of the East House," replied Jimmy Potts promptly. "You told me that you were going to win Chambers' money, and then give it back to him later on, after he had had his lesson."

Travers nodded.

"There you are!" he said coolly. "What about it now, Chambers?"

But the Fifth-Former was not inclined to be reasonable.

"I don't believe it!" he said hotly. "Potts is your study mate, and you faked this story up between you."

"But, dear old fellow, I haven't seen Potts since——"

"That makes no difference!" snapped Chambers. "You may have told him that you meant to give me the money back. But do you think I believe it? Not likely!"

"But I gave it to you back!"

"Only because Pagett butted in!" said Chambers. "I've a good mind to knock you down, you tricky young demon!"

Jimmy Potts whistled.

"My hat!" he ejaculated. "Do you mean to say that old Pagett surprised you? I told you not to act the fool, Travers——"

"Well, it can't be helped," interrupted Travers. "We've had our flogging——"

"Can't you keep quiet, confound you?" snapped Chambers, turning red. "Do you think I want the whole school to know that I've been flogged? Look here, Potts!" he added, whirling upon Jimmy. "You keep this to yourself! I don't want to be the laughing-stock of everybody!"

And Chambers strode off, still sore, and fuming more than ever. It was certainly not one of his lucky afternoons. But the worst blow was yet to fall!



CHAPTER 12.

The Blow!

ENTERING the Ancient House, Chambers slackened his pace. He hardly knew what to do. It was just upon three o'clock, and he hesitated before going over to join Grayson and Shaw, in the East House.

In a word, he had learned his lesson.

With a tremendous shock, he realised that he had been a complete mug; he had "fallen" for Travers' crooked play. In his heart of hearts, Chambers knew that Travers had always meant to give him his money back—whatever he might have said to

Travers himself. No fellow, unless he were utterly and absolutely evil, would have kept money that had been so fraudulently won.

It was the knowledge that Travers had fooled him so easily that made Chambers stop and think. If Travers could do it, then Grayson could do it! And Chambers knew well enough that Grayson was an out-and-out trickster.

But for the fact that he was blinded by his own self-complacency, Chambers would never have agreed to playing that game of Bridge in the East House. It was his birthday, and he had plenty of money in his pockets. He was temporarily knocked off his balance by this unexpected wealth, and, in his desire to do something special on his birthday, he had agreed to the folly of joining in the East House game.

But now, thanks to Travers, he was in a different mood.

"Hang them!" he muttered to himself. "Travers was honest enough to give me my money back—but once Grayson and Shaw get hold of it, I'll never see it again! No gambling for me! I've had enough of it!"

A little of the conceit was knocked out of him—a very, very little. All the same, he had received a jolt. He began to realise that he was not quite so clever as he had thought himself to be.

He paused in the lobby, and then decided that he would go upstairs and change, and get a book. If he met Grayson and Shaw, he would tell them, quite coldly, that he had changed his mind.

"Hallo! Just the fellow I was looking for!"

Chambers turned, as he heard the sound of Biggleswade's voice. Biggleswade was one of the Ancient House prefects, and he was an amiable individual.

"Well, what do you want me for?" asked Chambers, looking inquiringly at the Sixth-Former.

"My dear chap, I don't want you!" said Biggleswade genially. "But the Head just rang through, and asked somebody to rout you out and send you across. He's waiting for you, I believe!"

"The Head?" muttered Chambers, changing colour. "He—he wants me?"

"Rather badly, I'm afraid," said Biggleswade, in a sympathetic voice. "Hard Cheddar, old man! What have you been up to?"

"Confound the Head!" burst out Chambers, with mingled anger and consternation. "It's old Pagett's fault! The mean, contemptible old rotter! This is his doing!"

"I shouldn't be at all surprised!" nodded Biggleswade. "Well, you've heard the bad news, so my duty is performed. Best of luck, Chambers. Hope you get out of it all right."

And the prefect, humming to himself, went off.

Chambers knew better than to ignore the headmaster's order. The sooner he could get to the Head's study, the better. He instinctively knew that Dr. Stafford wanted to see

him about his slackness this term. Chambers was well aware of his own delinquency. He had been playing "Old Harry" with Mr. Pagett of late. In his conceit, he had felt that he could do very much as he liked. But now he was learning that there was such a thing as a day of reckoning.

He went to the Head's house, steeling himself for the lecture that was almost certain to come. Entering the headmaster's study, he found Dr. Stafford looking very grim. Mr. Pagett had gone, but Mr. Crowell, of the Remove, was there.

"Chambers, it is not my intention to beat about the bush," said the Head evenly. "I have been looking at the papers which Mr. Pagett placed before me, and I have come to the conclusion that you have been guilty of deliberate slackness. In all subjects you are lamentably weak. Your average of marks is little short of disastrous."

Chambers said nothing.

"Your work this term—if it can be called work—is just one long record of dilatoriness and indolence," continued the Head. "It is necessary, Chambers, that you should be made to realise that you are here for the purpose of studying. Your parents sent you to St. Frank's to be educated, but during this term you have been going gradually backwards—in spite of repeated warnings from your Form-master. You are at the bottom of your class, and your work is much inferior to that of many Remove boys!"

"Oh, sir!" said Chambers.

"I have therefore decided that you shall be sent back into the Remove—for the remainder of this term, at least!" said the Head quietly.

"The—the Remove, sir!" gasped Chambers, horrified by the sentence. "You're—you're sending me down?"

"I am, Chambers!"

"You can't do it, sir!" shouted Chambers. "I'm a senior! I'll write to my pater—"

"Silence!" thundered Dr. Stafford. "How dare you, Chambers? You had better realise, at once, that you are no longer a senior!"

But Cuthbert Chambers couldn't realise it; it was too devastating!



CHAPTER 13.

The New Remove!

W^{ERE} Chambers anywhere?"

Vivian Travers and Jimmy Potts glanced round as they heard Grayson's voice. They were standing on the Ancient House steps, chatting, and Grayson had just come over from the other side of the Triangle. He was looking irritable and impatient.

"Yes!" said Travers. "We've seen him."

"Where is he?"

"Ah, there you have me!" said Travers. "At an earlier hour this afternoon we saw Chambers—just as plainly as we can see you. But when you ask us where he is——"

"I don't want any of your infernal cheek!" said Grayson harshly.

"Perhaps you'll get it, whether you want it or not!" replied Travers, with a sweet smile. "And you shouldn't get so excited, Grayson. It makes your face look so much more mottled."

Grayson gritted his teeth.

"If it wasn't so public here, I'd knock you down, Travers!" he snarled, and involuntarily his fists clenched.

The Removeite continued to smile.

"The publicity of the place makes no difference, dear old fellow," drawled Travers. "What really prevents you from knocking me down is the thought that you might get knocked down afterwards."

Grayson snapped something under his breath, and turned aside. As he did so, he beheld a figure coming through Big Arch. He started, and then hurried forward. The figure was that of Cuthbert Chambers.

"I say, Chambers, what's the idea of this?" demanded Grayson complainingly, as he walked up. "It's twenty past three, and you definitely promised——"

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He broke off, noticing, for the first time, the pallor of Chambers' cheeks. He noticed, too, the way in which Chambers' shoulders drooped.

"What's up?" he asked bluntly.

"Nothing!" growled Chambers. "But I'm not coming across to play that game with you, Grayson."

"Oh, but why not?" asked the Fifth-Former quickly. "Everything's ready. We've got Kenmore in, and we're all waiting—"

"I can't help that—I'm not coming!" said Chambers sullenly.

"You can't fool us about like that!" snapped Grayson. "An arrangement is an arrangement. I suppose you've been hauled over the coals by the Head?" he went on, giving Chambers another close look. "You've just come from the Head's house, anyhow. What's the trouble?"

"It's Travers' fault!" muttered Chambers feverishly. "It's all his doing! Just wait until I get hold of him! I'll smash him to pieces!"

"Don't be silly!" said Grayson. "You're a senior. You can't fight with a junior!" Chambers gave a hollow laugh.

"I can fight with Travers!" he said bitterly. "I'm a junior, too!"

"What on earth—"

"The Head has sent me down!" said Chambers, almost hysterically. "He's shoved me back into the Remove!"

"What!" said Grayson, in amazement.

"That beast of a Pagett has been talking to the Head about me!" continued Chambers, almost as though he were speaking to himself. "He's shown him my papers, and told him all sorts of yarns about me. And now the Head has bunged me into the Remove again!"

Grayson gave a long whistle.

"Well, you know, you've been asking for it, Chambers!" he said candidly. "You've been playing Old Harry with Pagett for weeks past. I'm not particularly high in the Form, but I'm miles above you! Lots of fellows have been expecting something like this! It's rather a wonder that the Head didn't shove you back into the Third!"

"You silly fool!" said Chambers angrily.

"Well, there's lots of fags know more than you do!" taunted Grayson, only too glad to avail himself of this opportunity to be unpleasant. "Ye gods and little fishes! What a disgrace for the Fifth! Shoved back into the Remove! Well, it serves you right!"

And that was all the sympathy that Chambers got from Harold Grayson. The cad of the Fifth could see, quite plainly, that the little flutter was off. Chambers, in his present mood, would never agree to participate in that game of Bridge. So Grayson vented his irritation upon the unfortunate new Removite.

Incidentally, somebody else had heard.

Merrell and Marriott, of the Fourth, had been lounging near the junior entrance of the School House, and they had heard the

startling news. Within two minutes, Boots and Christine, also of the Fourth, had been informed—and the story was flying about the school like lightning.

"Chambers sent down into the Remove!" said Christine incredulously. "Great Scott! This is going to be a sensation!"

He hurried across the Triangle, and joined a group of Removites standing round the Ancient House steps. Travers was there, also Jimmy Potts, and Fullwood, and Nipper.

"Have you heard?" panted Bob Christine.

"Heard what?"

"About Chambers?"

"What about him?"

"He's been sent down into the Remove!" said Christine breathlessly.

"Rats!"

"Come off it, Bob!"

"Tell us another!"

"But it's a fact!" shouted Bob Christine. "Everybody's talking about it! Chambers just came from the Head's study, and he told Grayson—"

"Phew!" whistled Nipper. "Is this absolutely official?"

"Absolutely!"

"Well, well!" murmured Travers, as he remembered the papers that Mr. Pagett had put in front of the Head. "So we have got a new Removite, have we? The one and only Chambers is with us as a Form-fellow? Well, life's full of these little snags!"

The fellows were beginning to trickle in from the river and from the playing-fields, and when they heard the surprising news they expressed doubt and incredulity. Lots of Removites flatly refused to believe the rumour.

Mr. Crowell, however, soon put an end to the doubts. As he appeared in the Triangle, he was immediately surrounded by a crowd of excited juniors.

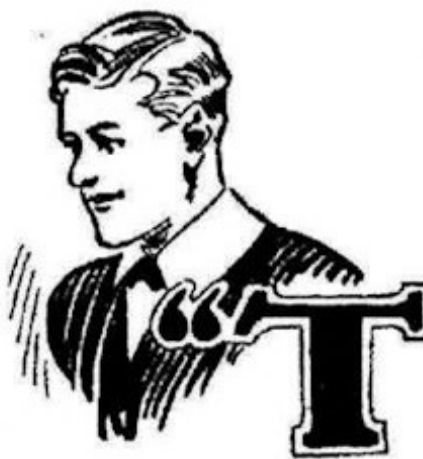
"Is it true, sir, that Chambers is now in the Remove?" asked Fullwood.

"It's just a yarn, isn't it, sir?" sang out Gresham.

Mr. Crowell paused.

"There is no need for all this excitement," he said mildly. "Chambers, I regret to say, has paid the penalty for slackness, and has been sent down into the Remove by the headmaster. I hope this will be a lesson to some other boys—lest they should suffer a similar fate!" he added pointedly.

And that settled it. Cuthbert Chambers, late of the Fifth, was now a mere junior!



CHAPTER 14.

The Schemer!

THERE'S going to be trouble!" said Nipper thoughtfully.

"With Chambers?"

"Yes."

"But why should there be trouble?" asked

Tommy Watson. "Chambers is nobody now. He's only the same as any other Remove fellow. Of course, he's bigger and——"

"He's not the same as any ordinary fellow," interrupted Nipper. "That's just the point. Chambers has been a senior—and, at one time, he was skipper of the Fifth. He thinks a tremendous lot of himself, he's big and brawny, and he'll still regard himself as a senior, whether he's in the Remove or not. We're going to have some trouble with him."

"All the better!" grinned Fullwood. "Anything to liven things up this term!"

"It's frightfully hard lines on the man," said Nipper. "On his birthday, too!"

"By Jove, I'd forgotten that!" said Fullwood. "What a rotten kind of birthday present! The Head might have waited until to-morrow!"

"I don't suppose the Head knows anything about Chambers' birthday," replied Nipper. "If you fellows will take my advice, you'll leave him severely alone for this evening. There's no need to rub it in. It'll be bad enough for him to-morrow, when he has to take his place in the Remove class-room."

"Well, he's only got himself to blame," remarked De Valerie. "He's always been a beastly slacker, and everybody knows that he's got a tremendously swelled head. We shall be able to take some of the swank out of him now. If he starts any of his rot, we'll simply jump on him, and bump him!"

"Hear, hear!"

"We can do it as much as we like now, because he's only a junior," chuckled Hubbard.

"Dear old fellows, I shouldn't be too sure!" remarked Vivian Travers languidly. "I may be wrong, but I have an inkling that Chambers will be something of a surprise-package."

And after that astonishing remark Travers strolled off.

"What did he mean?" asked De Valerie.

"Oh, nothing!" said Nipper, smiling. "At least, nothing except what I've already told you. Chambers won't settle down in the Remove without a tussle. We shall have to look out for squalls."

Vivian Travers was strolling indoors, and he made his way to the Fifth Form passage, in the Ancient House. As he turned one of the corners, he ran into Phillips and Bryant, of the Fifth. At one period, Phillips and Bryant had been Chambers' close chums; but of late, although friendly, they had not been on quite such intimate terms. Phillips and Bryant, to be exact, had got rather fed-up with Chambers' conceit.

"Seen Chambers anywhere about?" asked Travers casually.

"He's in his study," said Phillips, staring. "And if you'll take my advice, kid, you won't go there!"

"No?" said Travers. "Why not? Is there any danger?"

"It would be safer to drop a match into a barrel of gunpowder!" retorted Phillips.

"Bryant and I just went there, and Chambers nearly threw the table at us. And we went there to sympathise, too!"

"I'm fed-up with the idiot!" said Bryant indignantly. "He deserves all he's got! For weeks the man has been asking for trouble! Lots of fellows warned him of what would happen, and he took no notice. He hasn't done a stroke of work this term."

"Hence the chopper!" nodded Travers. "Well, well! We must see what can be done."

He walked on until he came to Chambers' study, and, after tapping on the door, he walked boldly in. Phillips and Bryant shrugged their shoulders, and departed.

"Well, dear old fellow, I'm here to offer my congratters!" said Travers amiably, as he closed the study door.

Cuthbert Chambers, who had been standing on the hearthrug, staring dully before him, gave a violent start, and glared at his visitor. His face became flushed, his eyes wild. He uttered no word, but with a sudden bellow of fury he rushed across the room.

"Steady!" warned Travers hastily. "Kindly remember——"

Crash!

Travers had no time to dodge. He received the blow full in the face, and he went over backwards with a fearful thud. He lay on the floor, dazed and bewildered, a little trickle of blood appearing from his nose. He blinked up at Chambers.

"Great Samson!" he murmured dreamily. "That's a wonderful right you've got, Chambers!"

"Get up, you young hound—and I'll knock you down again!"

"If it's all the same to you, dear old fellow, I'll remain here until you have cooled off," replied Travers, making no attempt to rise.

"You funk!"

"No, I'm not a funk!" said Travers. "But there are some cases where discretion is the better part of valour. I don't quite like your looks. If I get up, will you promise not to attack me again?"

"No, I won't!" roared Chambers ferociously. "You young rotter! What do you mean by coming here and sneering at me?"

"Did I sneer?"

"Yes, you did!" yelled Chambers. "You offered me your congratulations——"

"So I did!" murmured Travers. "And I do so again."

"What!"

"Heartily!" said Travers, as he produced a handkerchief, and gingerly dabbed his nose. "Dear old fellow, you don't realise the true position. You don't know how lucky you are."

Cuthbert Chambers stared down at the schemer of the Remove in rage and wonder. Travers spoke as though he meant it. There was something in his coolness, too, that robbed Chambers of his own ferocity. It was rather difficult to punch a fellow who insisted upon keeping calm.



To everybody's amazement, Vivian Travers stepped forward
"Let's have a rival party," he suggested. "Hands up every-
body in favour of forcing Nipper to resign and electing Chambers
instead." Only a few hands went up, and there was a fresh
shout of derision.

CHAPTER 15.

The Brain Behind
the Brawn!

G

ET up!" said Chambers curtly.

"Do you promise—"

"Yes, you worm—I promise!" said Chambers harshly.

Vivian Travers got to his feet, and dusted himself down. His coolness was positively irritating.

"Of course," he said, "I'm not really afraid of you, Chambers. If it came to a scrap, I daresay I could put up a good show. But I don't want to fight—don't feel like fighting. Why, indeed, *should* we fight? I only came here to offer you my congrat—"

"If you say that again, I shall forget my promise!" panted Chambers thickly.

"But what's the matter with you?" asked Travers. "Why are you so ratty? It seems to me that you don't recognise a good thing when you see it."

"A good thing!" choked Chambers.

"Exactly."

"Do you call it a good thing for me to be chucked out of the Fifth, and bunged back into the Remove?"

"It's not only good, but full of the most interesting possibilities," said Travers coolly. "If you'll only think for a minute—"

"I won't think!" roared Chambers, stamping up and down. "It's all your fault, Travers! You're to blame!"

"I know it—I admit it."

"Everybody's talking about me!" said Chambers, staring fixedly before him. "The Fifth despises me now—and the Remove will laugh and jeer. I'm afraid to go out of this study!" he added bitterly. "As soon as I show my face, I shall get the bird!"

"This excitement isn't doing you any good—"

"I shall get as excited as I like!" shouted Chambers wildly. "It's your fault, Travers!"

"You said that just now, dear old fellow."

"And I'll say it again!" raved Chambers. "If Pagett hadn't lugged us off to the Head—"

"Why go over old history?" asked Travers mildly. "And is this quite the thing, dear old fellow? My aim was a generous one. I wanted to save you from those sharks, Grayson and Shaw. Pagett's interference was totally unlooked for—"

"But he interfered, didn't he?" said Chambers. "And it was because of that that the Head got to know all the rest."

"As far as I can see, the crash would have

come, in any case, sooner or later," remarked Travers. "You mustn't blame me for your degradation. You have merely received the reward of consistent slackness."

"If you're going to start gloating—"

"I'm not!" said Travers. "Quite the reverse. I'll accept responsibility for precipitating this affair, but that's as far as I'll go. Pagett would have gone to the Head tomorrow, or next week, in any case."

Chambers was silent. Perhaps he realised that the Removite had spoken the truth. This afternoon's events had only hastened the inevitable crash.

"I don't bear you any ill-will for knocking me down," proceeded Travers, as he seated himself on a corner of the table. "But you're all wrong, Chambers. There's not the slightest need for you to be upset. Instead



of wearing that black frown, you ought to be smiling with serene contentment."

"You young fool—"

"Let me explain what I mean," said Travers soothingly.

"I won't!" snapped Chambers. "Get out of this study, you cheeky junior!"

"We're both juniors now, dear old fellow." Chambers started.

"Another taunt, eh?" he said fiercely.

"For the love of Samson!" sighed Travers. "Why am I so misunderstood? I'm not taunting you—I'm merely trying to show you that your prospects are rose-tinted."

"My prospects are as black as ink!" retorted Chambers.

"You only say that because you haven't thought the thing out!" murmured Travers.

"Confound your impudence——"

"Now, now!" said Travers. "Show your courage, dear old fellow, and admit that I am right."

"I won't admit anything of the sort!"

"But you have been a nonentity, all the same," said Travers coolly. "Browne is the skipper of the Fifth, and Browne rules everything in the Fifth. You haven't had a say, Chambers. Even if you have made a suggestion, it has been laughed at. All the Fifth-Formers have treated you with a half-veiled contempt."

Chambers was silent.

"Well, you're out of the Fifth now," continued the schemer. "And, as I helped to get you out, I feel a certain amount of responsibility. But don't you see, dear old fellow, that your chance has come?"

"My chance?"

"Absolutely!" nodded Travers. "While you were nobody in the Fifth, you have an excellent opportunity of being somebody in the Remove!"

Cuthbert Chambers stared.

"What do you mean?" he asked, with a catch in his voice.

"Ah! Something is stirring at last, eh?" murmured Travers complacently. "There is no reason, Chambers, why you shouldn't become the greatest Power that the Junior School has ever known! And, if you want any help, you can count on me. I'll stand behind you right through!"



everybody's amazement, Vivian Travers stepped forward. "Let's have a rival party," he suggested. "Hands up every- in favour of forcing Nipper to resign and electing Chambers ad." Only a few hands went up, and there was a fresh shout of derision.

"You don't care a tuppenny button about your work, Chambers."

"Look here——"

"And what, after all, was your position in the Fifth?" asked Travers pointedly. "Where were you? At the bottom of the class! Always in trouble with Pagett—always being ragged by the other seniors. To be painfully frank, you were a nonentity."

"In the Remove, it will be easy!" said Travers calmly. "You're a big fellow, Chambers, and you can fight. In fact, you're the biggest fellow in the whole Remove."

Chambers winced.

"Don't keep reminding me that I'm in the Remove!" he said sourly.

"But, my dear fellow, that's what you must always remember," said Travers. "Why should



CHAPTER 16.

The Silver Lining!

CUTHBERT CHAMBERS sat down suddenly,

stupefied by the mental picture that he had just conjured up.

"Power!" he murmured.

"Great Scott! I've never had any in the Fifth—not any real power! But in the Remove——"

you worry about the Fifth? The Fifth has never done anything for you. But think of your position in the Remove! You're the biggest fellow in the Form, and, by very reason of your size and age, you should automatically become the leader. In fact, I propose that you should start straight away—this very hour."

Chambers stared.

"Look here, Travers, what's your idea behind all this?" he asked suspiciously. "If you're so keen on leadership, why don't you have a shot at it yourself?"

"It doesn't appeal to me," replied Travers frankly. "I am perfectly content to remain one of the rank and file. Leadership to me is a bore and a nuisance. I prefer to leave it to others."

"That young upstart Nipper is the skipper of the Remove!"

"Need he remain skipper for long?" murmured Travers. "Where do you come in? A Fifth-Former—a big, brainy, hefty chap like you!"

Chambers rose to his feet.

"So that's why you congratulated me?" he asked, his tone more friendly now.

"Exactly!" smiled Travers. "Perhaps I was a little too previous. I should have explained in advance."

"I'm sorry I knocked you down."

"Don't mention it!" said Travers politely. "These little misunderstandings are always liable to occur. Now what I advise you to do is to get into Study D."

"Study D?"

"With Church and McClure," nodded Travers.

"What on earth for?"

"According to all the best rumours, Handforth has left St. Frank's for good," replied Travers. "Church and McClure are without a leader. Why should you not become their leader? And thus, by easy stages, you can get a grip on the whole Remove."

Chambers made no comment. He stood on the hearthrug, his face flushed, his eyes glittering. Vivian Travers watched him with an earnest expression on his face, but with a smile behind it.

As he had suspected, Chambers had "fallen" for the bait. Travers felt that he was partially responsible for Chambers' downfall, and in order to make his conscience quite clear he was suggesting this scheme. Already it was putting Chambers into a good humour, and he was seeing the silver lining to the cloud that had descended upon him.

Quite independently of this, however, Vivian Travers thought that it would be an excellent idea to create a diversion during this hot, lazy summer term. With Cuthbert Chambers aiming to become leader of the Remove, there was liable to be a good deal of trouble in the Remove. And as long as Travers himself was not involved in it he would be satisfied. It suited him to stand by as an interested spectator.

At the back of his mind, too, Travers had a shrewd idea that Handforth would soon be coming back to St. Frank's. Then, indeed, would the ructions start—if Chambers had meanwhile appointed himself leader of Study D! The situation, from all points of view, was promising.

But Travers did not think it necessary to point out to Chambers that Handforth might turn up one of these days.

"Yes, by Jove!" muttered Chambers. "Why not? Why shouldn't I go all out?"

Travers sat there listening but making no remark. He was gratified to see that his efforts were having the desired effect.

"They've chucked me out of the Fifth, and now I'll get my own back!" went on Chambers breathlessly. "I'll smash anybody who tries to stand in my way! They've shoved me down into the Remove, so I'll become supreme leader! There's nobody who can beat me—nobody who can stand up to me! I'm better than any of them! And why shouldn't I be? Strictly speaking, I'm a Fifth-Former—a senior. By glory! I'll make these juniors sit up now! I'll make them take notice of me!"

Chambers was working himself up into a fine burst of enthusiasm. And Travers continued to smile inwardly. Already Chambers had forgotten him. Such was the conceit of this swelled-headed Fifth-Former that he gave himself all the credit for the great idea.

His hour had dawned. In the Fifth he had been a nobody. But in the Remove he would constitute himself supreme dictator!



CHAPTER 17. ||

Getting Down to It!

R. NELSON LEE, the Housemaster of the Ancient House, glanced up from his desk as a tap sounded

on his door.

"Come in!" he invited.

The door opened, and Cuthbert Chambers entered. Just for a moment Nelson Lee looked at the visitor with an expression of mild interest. Chambers was not bearing himself as one might have expected. He had no crestfallen look. On the contrary, he was brisk and eager; his eye was purposeful.

"Sorry to trouble you, sir," he said crisply.

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"but I've come to see you on rather an important matter."

"Yes, Chambers?" asked Nelson Lee.

"Yes, sir!" said Chambers, nodding. "It's about my study."

Nelson Lee was not surprised. It was quite characteristic of Chambers to regard his study as a matter of importance.

"I have heard some bad news about you, Chambers," remarked Nelson Lee.

"Oh, I don't know, sir," said Chambers. "You mean, the Head sending me down into the Remove?"

"Yes."

"It was a bit of a shock at first, sir, but I'm getting used to it now," said Chambers lightly. "I think I shall get on all right."

"Are you not aware of any sense of humiliation, Chambers?" asked the Housemaster sternly. "Do you think it is creditable to be sent down into a lower Form? Have you not resolved to mend your ways and to apply yourself to work so that you will be sent up again?"

Chambers coloured.

"You're not going to lecture me, are you, sir?" he asked indignantly.

"It was not my intention to lecture you, Chambers," replied the Housemaster. "But I do not quite approve of your attitude. You appear to be quite cheerful in the face of this indignity."

"Well, it's no good crying over it, sir," replied Chambers. "I'm making the best of things."

"Well, I am pleased to hear that," said Lee. "I only hope, Chambers, that you will show such industry that your sojourn in the Remove will be brief."

"Oh, rather, sir!" said Chambers. "Now, about this study. Of course, as I'm in the Remove now, I shall have to change my quarters. Will it be all right if I go into Study D with Church and McClure?"

Nelson Lee considered for a moment.

"Are Church and McClure agreeable?" he inquired.

"As far as I know, sir," replied Chambers. "But what difference does it make? Any of the Remove fellows will be jolly glad to get me into their study."

"You really think so?" asked Nelson Lee amusedly.

"Why not, sir?" said Chambers. "I'm a Fifth-Former and they ought to be jolly proud to have me with them."

His conceit was colossal.

"Well, as Handforth has apparently left St. Frank's for good, I see no reason why you should not enter Study D," said Nelson Lee thoughtfully. "Very well, Chambers, you have my permission."

"Thanks awfully, sir!" said Chambers eagerly.

He left the study in a hurry in case Nelson Lee should change his mind. Outside at the end of the passage he met Vivian Travers, who was lounging languidly against the wall.

"It's all right!" said Chambers briskly. "I'm in Study D now!"

"Good man!" murmured Travers. "So it's official and sealed? Well, well! If Handforth turns up again he'll have to find himself another study."

"But he won't turn up!" said Chambers, staring.

"One never knows!" said Travers. "I only hope, dear old fellow, that you will be strong. Handforth is an arrogant sort of merchant, and if he finds you in his study he will probably create ructions."

"Let him!" retorted Chambers. "It's not his study now! Confound it, the man left the school, and if he comes back he'll have to go where he's placed!"

"Exactly!" agreed Travers. "Well said! You are now the leader of Study D, and, being a strong man, you will rule the roost. Get to it, dear old fellow—and make these juniors sit up!"

"I'll give them the surprise of their lives!" said Chambers gloatingly.

His mood was now one of complete exhilaration. The juniors had always chipped him, and he, being a senior, had not liked to lower his dignity by retaliating. Now it was different! He was a junior, too, and he had no dignity to lose.

Chambers felt like a prisoner who had just been freed.

"Well, so long!" said Travers casually. "I think you'll find Church and McClure in Study D having tea. At any rate, they went there some little time ago."

"Aren't you coming?"

"For the love of Samson, no!" said Travers. "Why should I come? Aren't you capable of dealing with those asses single-handed?"

Chambers started.

"By Jove, yes!" he replied. "If they start any of their rot I'll soon shove them in their places!"

And he strode off with grim strides. His jaw was set, his eyes were gleaming. The fight was about to commence!

Vivian Travers, as he watched Chambers walking off, chuckled to himself. His handiwork was soon bearing fruit; and the evening promised to be very entertaining!



CHAPTER 18.

The New Leader of Study D!

CHURCH and McClure were not looking too happy as they partook of their tea. The window was wide open, and the afternoon sunshine came streaming across the West Square, and into Study D. A gentle, cooling breeze lightly stirred the curtains.

But Church and McClure were not influenced by the excellent weather conditions.

"Poor old Handy!" remarked Church, as he helped himself to a couple of sardines. "I wonder what he's doing now? It must be pretty rotten for him at St. Jim's—after thinking that he was coming back here."

McClure grunted.

"He was always too jolly confident," he said. "Always counting his chickens before they were hatched! Imagine the idiocy of the chap, writing us that letter! Merely on the strength of his own calculations, he tells us that he's coming back! He didn't even suspect that his pater might kybosh the whole thing."

"Oh, I give it up!" said Church tartly. "Handy's got himself into a fine mess, and now he finds that he can't get himself out. He left St. Frank's of his own accord, and you can't blame his pater for putting his foot down. Handy has asked for it."

"And what's going to happen to us?" growled Mac.

He did not know that an answer would be forthcoming within the next second or two. He certainly heard a heavy footstep in the passage, but he took no notice of it. Then the door opened with a bang.

"Oh, here you are!" said Cuthbert Chambers.

He strode in as though he owned the place, slammed the door, and stood looking at Church and McClure with an aggressive eye. Chambers expected trouble, and he was prepared for it.

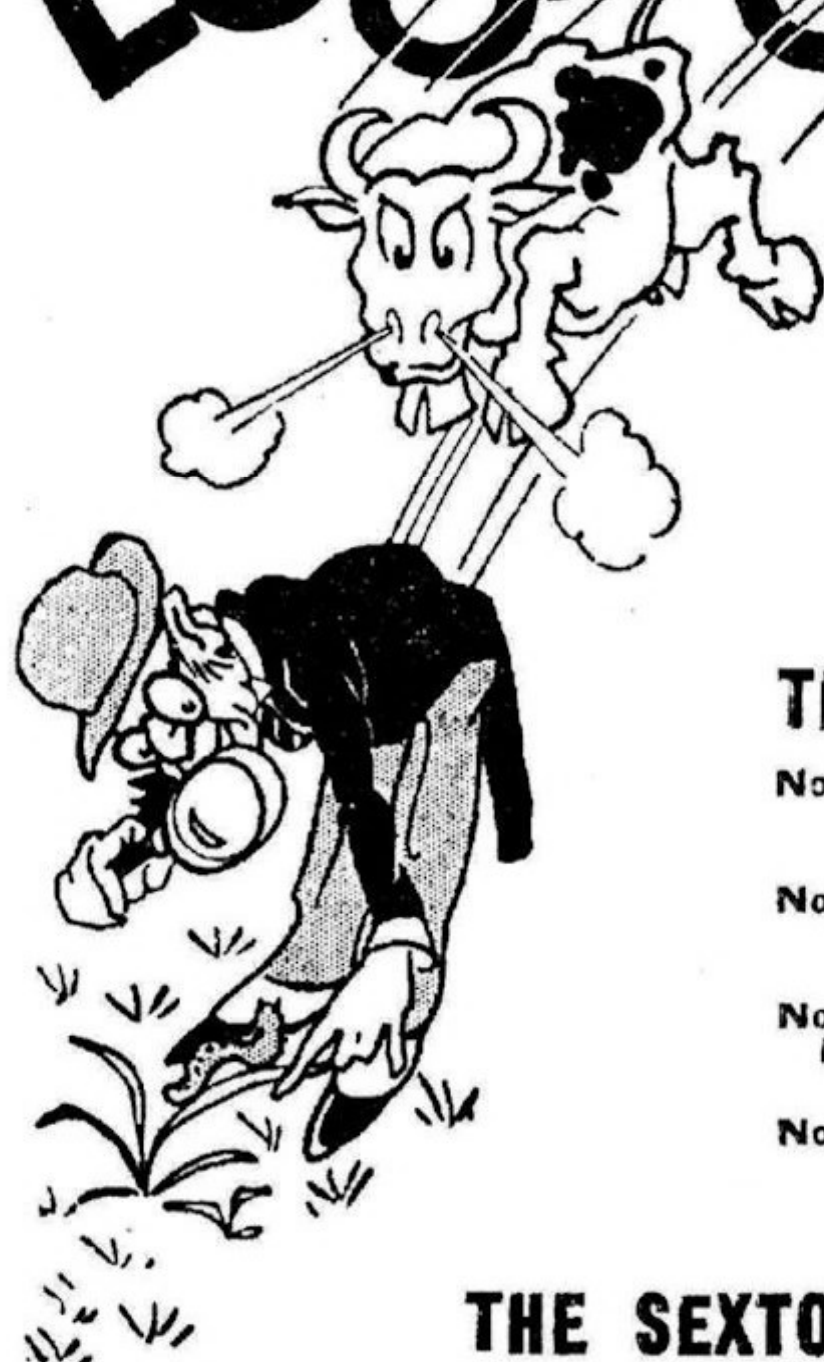
"Well, I'm jiggered!" said Church, setting his cup down.

"You're looking a bit bucked, aren't you, Chambers?" asked McClure, in astonishment. "Everybody's been saying that you're afraid to show your face."

"Well, I'm not!" retorted Chambers grimly.

"So it seems," nodded Mac. "Although,

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goodness knows, a face like yours is better kept secret."

"You leave my face alone!"

"My dear chap, I wouldn't touch it with a barge-pole!" replied McClure politely. "Your face doesn't interest me in the least. Neither does any other part of you. And, if it comes to that, what the dickens are you doing here? I don't remember asking you to come in."

Chambers breathed hard; he could tell that he would meet with a good deal of resistance here. But, inspired by Travers' influence, his determination to assert his authority was strong.

"I don't need asking!" he said curtly. "I'm in the Remove now, as you fellows probably know——"

"Yes, you've been degraded, haven't you?" murmured Church.

Chambers turned red.

"I'm in the Remove now!" he repeated, his voice rising. "And, as you don't seem to realise it, I'd better tell you that this is my new study!"

McClure dropped his cup, and it crashed to pieces in the saucer. Fortunately, he had already consumed the tea that the cup had contained.

"Your new study!" he echoed blankly.

"That's what I said."

"You're rotting, of course!" ejaculated Church. "Don't be an ass, Chambers. How the thunder can this be your study?"

"I don't care how it can, but I'm here!" said the burly ex-Fifth-Former. "I've spoken to Mr. Lee about it, and it's official. So I don't want any of your nonsense. I'm the leader of this study, and if you chaps don't obey me in all things I'll tan your hides!"

Church and McClure were dumbfounded.

It was some little time before they could adjust their thoughts to this startling revelation. They had known that Chambers had been sent down into the Remove, but it had never occurred to them that he might be placed in their study. Yet it had always been a possibility.

"Look here, Chambers, it's all rot!" said Church, trying to speak steadily. "Don't be such a hopeless ass! You know jolly well that you can't come into this study."

"I'm in!" said Chambers triumphantly.

"I mean, you can't remain here permanently!" said Church. "We're keeping this place warm for Handy."

"Bother Handy!"

"He's coming back——"

"I don't care what he does!" said Chambers aggressively. "But I thought that Handforth had sent a wire, saying that he's being kept at St. Jim's?"

"So he has!" said Church hotly. "But Mac and I don't take any notice of that! Sooner or later Handy will come back, and this is his study. We've got to keep it warm for him——"

"I'll make it warm for him, if he does turn up again!" remarked Chambers, with a grin. "It's like your beastly nerve, you cheeky kids!"

"Kids!" roared McClure. "Kid yourself!" Chambers gave a gulp.

"I'm a senior—— At least, I was!" he said hastily.

"I'm glad you said that last bit!" snapped Mac. "If you call us kids, Chambers, you'd better remember that you're in the same Form. None of your high-and-mighty ways now, my lad!"

"Why, you young——"

"Are we going to stand this, Church?" went on McClure excitedly. "Are we going to let this great big hulking ass lord it over us?"

"No, we're not!" said Church promptly.

Chambers stepped back a pace as the two angry Removites left the table and advanced towards him. Just for a second his arrogance was in danger of deserting him. Then he remembered Travers' advice, and he squared his shoulders. After all, he was a lot bigger than the average Removite, and he was older, too. By very right of strength, it was his province to rule.

"Now then!" he said sternly. "Stand back!"

"Wha-a-at!" gasped Church.

"Keep away from me!" thundered Chambers.

"My only hat?"

"I've gone easy with you so far, but you'd better not try my patience too far!" continued Chambers, gratified by the effect of his roar. "Understand, once and for all, that I'm the leader of this study!"

"Why, you—you——"

"Understand, once and for all, that I won't put up with any insubordination!" said Chambers sternly. "And understand, once and for all, that when I give an order it's got to be obeyed."

"My only sainted aunt!" breathed McClure, gazing dazedly at Church. "He's using the same tactics as old Handy! Ordering us about like his slaves!"

Church gave a gulp, and then found his voice.

"Yes, but he's not Handy!" he replied.

"And that makes all the difference. We didn't mind putting up with Handy's rot, but I'm jiggered if we'll stand any from this——this usurper! Let's chuck him out!"

"Just what I was going to say!" exclaimed McClure.

And Cuthbert Chambers felt his heart give a wild leap as the two outraged Removites advanced upon him.



CHAPTER 19.

The Usurper!

TOP!"

At the last moment Chambers recovered himself. With extraordinary swiftness—for him—he realised the crucial nature of this

situation. Chambers was several kinds of an ass, and, as a rule, he wasn't given to quick thinking.

But his senses were probably sharpened by the critical issues at stake. If he allowed Church and McClure to prevail, his dream of power would end in a ludicrous fiasco.

Never again would he be able to assert his authority. He would be the laughing-stock of the Remove, as well as the Fifth. His whole future career depended upon his strength now.

"Stop!" he repeated harshly.

Church and McClure stopped, from very surprise. They had never heard Chambers using that tone before. Like most of the other Remove fellows, they had always held this conceited Fifth-Former in contempt. He was a boasting, bragging chump, with the brains of an ant.

But, then, they didn't allow for the change that had taken place in Chambers' position. As a senior he had his dignity to uphold; as a junior, he had no dignity. And in his new-born strength he was like another being.

But all would depend upon this first tussle. Failure would mean double disaster, but success would make the Remove respect him. And Chambers had set his heart on becoming supreme dictator in the Remove. It would more than compensate him for his degradation.

"Stand where you are!" commanded Chambers magisterially. "You insubordinate young sweeps! If you think you're going to lay your hands on me, you'd better think again!"

"Well, I'm blessed!" gasped Church.

Again he was irresistibly reminded of Edward Oswald Handforth. But this sort of thing was not to be stood! It was one thing for Handforth to give his orders, and quite another thing for Chambers to try the same high-handed line.

"What are you waiting for?" asked McClure fiercely. "We're going to chuck this blithering idiot out, aren't we?"

"Yes, we are!" roared Church.

With one accord they flung themselves at Chambers. Unfortunately, they were both very excited. Chambers, on the other hand, was deadly cool. The vital importance of this second had steadied him.

"So that's your game, is it?" he said sternly. "All right, my lads! I'll soon show you who's master!"

As the pair rushed at him, he seized Church with his left hand, and McClure with his right. He grabbed them by the coat collars and the backs of their necks. He gripped with all his burly strength, exhilarated by the inward excitement which did not show itself in his calm exterior.

"Now!" he panted.

Crash!

With considerable force he yanked Church and McClure together, and their heads met with a sound that echoed throughout the study.

"You'll try to chuck me out, will you?" thundered Chambers. "Haven't I told you that I'm boss? Take that, Church!"

He released Church, and with lightning speed he delivered a powerful drive which sent Church staggering backwards over the tea-table. The unfortunate junior nearly turned a back-somersault, and there was an ominous crashing of crockery.

"And this is for you!" roared Chambers to McClure, whom he had been shaking.

He gave McClure a shove which sent him hurtling after Church. The tea-table went completely over, with Church and McClure floundering amid the debris. Cuthbert Chambers stood back, amazed at his own aggressiveness. He was coming out in a new light, and he could hardly believe it.

Yet it was perfectly natural.

Ever since he had been in the Fifth, he had been tethered by that hide-bound convention of "senior dignity." Now he was a junior again—with a big advantage over every other junior. He was like a giant refreshed.

"Get up!" he shouted, in a terrible voice.

Church and McClure, dazed by the whole incident, and rather scared by Chambers' unexpected strength, staggered to their feet. But they weren't beaten yet.

"You—you bullying rotter!" panted Church furiously. "You're a foot taller than either of us, and over a year older!"

"But you're two to one!" retorted Chambers, with a sneer.

This was a truth that the Removites could not deny. It stung them. Surely they could wipe up this conceited idiot?

They made another blind rush—which was a fatal mistake. Down they went, one after the other, Chambers beating them with powerful drives as they rushed at him. And this time he followed up his success by grabbing the unhappy pair by their coat collars again and yanking them to their feet.

"Had enough?" he panted.

"You—you——"

"Go to my study—my old study!" ordered Chambers, as a new thought occurred to him. "Go and get my books, and bring them here! And don't forget my slippers and my blazer and——"

"You rotter, we're not your servants!" panted Church.

"That's just where you're wrong!" ejaculated the usurper. "You *are* my servants! And, if you don't obey my orders, you'll get this sort of punishment every hour of the day."

He dropped them, strode to the door, and flung it open.

"Now, then—outside!" he said commandingly. "Go to the Fifth Form passage, and get my things!"

"We won't!" hooted Church.

"Never!" said McClure defiantly.

Quick as a flash, Chambers took a running kick at the nearest of the two juniors. Church tried to dodge, but he just failed. He was fairly and squarely booted, and he



Chambers' entrance into Study D was surprising enough, but his words were more surprising still—so surprising, indeed, that McClure allowed his cup to drop into the saucer, where it crashed into pieces. For Chambers had calmly announced that, as he was now in the Remove, he intended to make this his new study!

went flying through the doorway, yelling at the top of his voice.

"Now you!" bellowed Chambers.

He took another running kick at McClure, and McClure fled. More amazed than hurt, the chums of Study D scooted down the passage, while Cuthbert Chambers slammed the door, stuck his thumbs into his armholes, and strutted up and down the disordered apartment.

"By glory!" he gloated. "I'll show 'em! I'm boss now—I'm dictator! And if these juniors cause any trouble I'll give 'em some more of the same medicine!"



CHAPTER 20.

Archie Helps!

GOOD gad!" Archibald Winston Derek Glenthorne came to a horrified halt in the Remove passage, and his eyeglass dropped limply from his eye. He gazed in dumb stupefaction at the two figures which confronted him.

"Well, you can see us, can't you?" asked Church thickly. "Clear out of the way, Archie!"

"Absolutely!" ejaculated Archie, finding his voice. "But what's happened, laddies? I

mean to say, what's all this frightful mess?"

He indicated Church's blazer and flannel trousers, which were daubed with jam, sardine oil and butter. McClure was in a similar condition, and altogether the two juniors were looking very much the worse for wear.

"The rotter!" panted McClure huskily.

"Good gad and odds life!" said Archie, with a start. "You don't absolutely say so! I mean, he's come back, what?"

"Eh? Who's come back?"

"Oh, rather!" said Archie brightly. "You needn't explain, old teapot. I can easily see that Handy has arrived! Old times, as it were!"

"You hopeless chump!" snapped Church. "Chambers did this!"

"Eh? I must confess that I don't quite follow——"

And Archie paused, floundering.

"Chambers!" roared Church. "Chambers did it!"

"Oh, absolutely!" said Archie, backing away. "Kindly adjust the rheostat, dear old loud speaker! Sundry blastings and oscillations! But I gather the trend! Chambers, as it were, is the chappie who committed this poisonous outrage? Good gad! The blighter ought to be sent to penal servitude!"

"He chucked us out of our own study!" said McClure tensely. "Where's Nipper?"

He's captain of the Remove, and unless he does something we'll call him a weakling. We're not going to stand Chambers' rot!"

Archie was thoroughly startled.

"You don't absolutely mean to say that Chambers is doing this sort of thing?" he asked. "Of course, I've heard that the blighter has been shoved into the Remove, and I've been wondering what the Remove has done to deserve it. But, I mean—this!" he added, staring once more at the wreckage. "Good gad!"

"He's in Study D now!" breathed Church. "He's wrecked the table, bumped our heads together, and threw us out!"

"Rather like the old days, what?" murmured Archie.

"Rats!" snapped Mac. "Handy never did anything like this! He was pretty violent at times, but he wasn't a bully! I think Chambers must have gone dotty!"

Archie considered.

"It seems to me, dear old things, that a word in season might be—er—seasonable, so to speak," he remarked. "Supposing I trickle along to the dashed apartment, and parley with the blighter!"

"If you go there, Archie, you'll be sorry!" warned Church.

"A little peacemaking stuff," mused Archie. "What this dashed Chambers wants is a good stout lad to point out the error of his ways. I mean to say, it's a bit thick when he barges into the Remove with this sort of material. Kindly allow me to tick the blister off."

And Archie strode firmly to Study D, knocked on the door, and walked in. Chambers turned in the middle of one of his gloating strides, and he eyed Archie aggressively.

"What ho!" said the visitor brightly. "That is to say, what absolutely ho! In other words, old volcano, kindly cease the eruption. Good gad! The place looks like Pompeii after the disaster."

"Get out of here!" said Chambers sourly.

"Eh? I mean, what?"

"Get out of here!" roared Chambers again, and pointed towards the door.

"Oh, rather! That is to say, absolutely not!" retorted Archie. "Laddie, it pains me to see you like this. It may be the practice to do this sort of dashed thing in the Fifth, but not in the Remove!"

"You babbling dummy——"

"Not," said Archie, "in the Remove! Decidedly not!" he added stoutly. "Let me remind you, therefore, that you're only asking for trouble. And remember that this is a friendly word of warning, given by one chappie to another in a spirit of good fellowship. You don't absolutely deserve it, but——"

"Are you trying to lecture me?" snorted Chambers.

"That was the general idea, although——"

"I'll give you ten seconds to get out!" hooted Chambers. "If you're not through

that doorway in ten seconds, I'll spoil your looks!"

Archie felt helpless in face of this unexpected violence.

"I came here as a peacemaker," he said with dignity. "You appear to have been having a frightful sort of dust-up with Church and McClure; and that sort of thing is foul in the extreme. We all know that you can't help being in the Remove, but now that you're here, laddie, you've got to behave yourself."

"By glory!" breathed Chambers.

He was feeling triumphant after his great victory over Church and McClure; and he

NEXT WEDNESDAY!



was in no mood to stand any interference from Archie Glenthorne. In fact, Archie was the one Removite he felt he could treat with impunity.

"Are you going?" he asked ominously.

"Absolutely not!" said Archie. "At least, not until——"

"Then take that!" said Chambers.

Splosh!

During the last second, he had picked up a stray jam-tart, and he hurled it at Archie's face with all his strength. It was a bull's-eye. The jam-tart disintegrated over Archie's visage, and made havoc with his manly beauty.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Chambers.

He hadn't indulged in this form of horse-play for so long that he was hugely amused.

It was glorious to feel that the fetters of senior loftiness were cast off, and that he could henceforth fling as many jam-tarts at the fellows as he pleased. Two hours ago, he couldn't possibly have done a thing like this; but now he could enjoy himself to the full.

"Odds stickiness and horrors!" gabbled Archie. "Good gad! You—you dashed blighter! I mean to say——"

"You might as well have this one, too!" grinned Chambers.

Whizz! Smack!

"Also this one!" yelled the ex-senior. Splash!

'HANDFORTH'S RETURN!'

Only Church and McClure know of Edward Oswald Handforth's impending return to St. Frank's, and so there is great excitement and surprise when he suddenly strolls into the Ancient House common-room.

And as it happens, old Handy couldn't have chosen a more exciting time to arrive. For he walks in just when a fight between Nipper and Chambers is taking place—a fight for the captaincy of the Remove!

Chambers, let it be said, has been going great guns. Ably supported by Vivian Travers, he is gaining supporters. Lively times are in store for the Remove; and with Handforth returned to the fold they are likely to be more lively—and amusing—than ever.

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About five slices of bread and butter plastered themselves over Archie's noble waistcoat, and the contents of the tea-pot followed. Archie shrieked with dismay. In a second, his supreme smartness had gone. He was tea-stained from head to foot, and tea-leaves were clinging to every portion of him.

In utter disorder, he fled from the study.

He had made the mistake of regarding Cuthbert Chambers as a senior, and it had never occurred to him that Chambers would descend to this sort of low-down hooliganism. At least, Archie regarded it as hooliganism.

And Chambers proudly gazed at himself in the mirror of Study D, and mentally registered another victory.



CHAPTER 21.

The Gathering Storm!

ELL, well!" said Vivian Travers mildly.

He was lounging in the lobby, idly chatting with Nipper and

Tommy Watson and Fullwood and one or two other Removites. The evening was still very early, and they were wondering if there was time for a scratch game of cricket.

"Look who's here!" went on Travers, in an amused voice. "At a random guess, I should suggest that Church and McClure have been looking for trouble."

The other juniors turned, and surveyed the approaching figures.

"At another random guess, I should suggest that Church and McClure have found it!" remarked Nipper dryly. "Great Scott! What on earth have you chaps been doing to yourselves?" he added, in astonishment.

Church and McClure, breathing hard, stood before the little throng.

"Look at us!" panted Church.

"I'm looking!" said Nipper. "And I can't say that I'm particularly impressed. You silly asses! You'd better dodge upstairs, and get cleaned before a prefect spots you."

"Bother the prefects!" shouted McClure. "We want to know what you're going to do about this, Nipper?"

"I?"

"Yes, you!"

"But why drag me into it?" asked Nipper. "If you fellows like to smother yourselves in eatables——"

"Chambers did it!" panted Church furiously.

"Chambers!" echoed the juniors, in amazement.

"Yes, Chambers!"

"Well, well!" murmured Travers. "Would you believe it?"

"He came into our study, and started ordering us about!" yelled Church. "Said that it was his study! Told us to fetch his books from the Fifth Form passage! And when we refused he started wrecking the study, and chucked us out!"

Nipper's face became grim.

"Oh, so that's it, is it?" he said. "I rather wondered where Chambers had got to! My sons, it seems to me that we shall have to take some pretty drastic steps."

"I should think so!" said Fullwood indignantly. "If Chambers has come into the Remove thinking that he can boss everybody, he's made a mistake! Of all the beastly nerve! He's not really planted himself in Study D, has he?"

"Yes, he has!" said Church fiercely. "I don't know what we're going to do about it! Supposing Handy comes back? This—this usurper——"

"We won't bother about Handy now, if you don't mind," interrupted Nipper. "Ac-

according to all the latest reports, he's a fixture at St. Jim's, so we can wash him out. But I'm jiggered if we'll stand this bunkum from Chambers!"

"Dear old fellows, why excite yourselves?" asked Travers languidly. "After all, Chambers is older than any of us—and bigger. Isn't it rather fitting that he should be the leader?"

About seven pairs of eyes were glaringly turned on Travers.

"Are you approving of Chambers' high-handedness?" demanded Nipper.

"Why not?" said Travers. "No offence, old man, but I'm with Chambers all along the line! Chambers is a big man—a brawny, hefty sort of merchant. If I don't support his campaign, he might want to fight me. And why should I fight? Anything for a quiet life!"

"You hopeless idiot!" said Nipper amusedly. "What the dickens do you mean by campaign? Who told you that Chambers is starting a campaign?"

"A little bird whispered——"

"Oh, go and eat coke!" retorted Nipper. "I never know when you're serious and when you're rotting, Travers."

"No?" smiled Travers. "How awkward!"

At this moment Archie Glenthorne arrived, and there was further consternation in the camp. Half the Remove had been attracted by this time, too, and the lobby was not only crowded, but the fellows overflowed into the Triangle.

"S.O.S.!" bleated Archie feebly. "Laddies, kindly gaze upon me!"

"You look horrible!" said Travers, shaking his head. "And has Chambers done this? Well, well! It seems to me that Chambers has been pretty busy since he dropped into the Remove!"

Travers was gratified. He recognised that this was his work. For Travers was shrewd, and he knew well enough that Chambers would never have had the initiative to do these things but for his—Travers'—urging. Travers was the brain behind the brawn.

"How did it happen, Archie?" asked Nipper grimly.

Archie explained with an unnecessary abundance of detail.

"That'll do!" interrupted Nipper, at length. "You went into Study D, remonstrated with Chambers, and he chucked things at you?"

"Good gad!" said Archie. "Isn't that putting it rather bleakly, old fright? I mean, there was this blighter——"

"I know!" said Nipper hastily. "Now, run along and get changed, Archie. You do the same," he added, to Church and McClure. "And the rest of us will get hold of Chambers, and bump him. There's only one thing to do with a fellow of his sort. Shove him in his place at the beginning!"

"Hear, hear!" chorused the Remove.

The excitement spread with great speed. Reggie Pitt and his merry men from the West House turned up—for they belonged to the Remove, too, and they were equally

interested. Cuthbert Chambers' startling beginning in the Remove had caused a first-class sensation.

Within five minutes, a full meeting of the Form was called, and everybody hurried into the Ancient House Common-room. This crisis had to be dealt with at once. Chambers, the interloper, had to be put in his place!



CHAPTER 22.

The Fateful Hour!

CUTHBERT CHAMBERS glared defiantly as he beheld the six sturdy forms in the doorway of Study D. They had just arrived. Nipper was in the forefront, and other prominent Removites were behind him.

In his conceit and arrogance, Chambers had fondly believed that he could continue his high-handed activity without any hindrance. So the arrival of this grim-looking gang took him by surprise. Inwardly, he began to quake; but outwardly he managed to maintain a bold front.

"What's this?" he demanded curtly. "Who told you kids to come here?"

"This is your study, Chambers, isn't it?" asked Nipper.

"Yes, it is!"

"Did Mr. Lee approve of your entering it?"

"Yes, he did!" said Chambers triumphantly.

"Well, I only wanted to know," said Nipper. "If it's official, I'll say no more. But Mr. Lee never gave you sanction to wreck the place, and to throw out the existing occupants. You may think it very clever to come into the Remove like a lion, Chambers, but that game won't work."

"Oh, won't it?" snorted Chambers. "Who's going to stop me?"

"I am!"

"You!" jeered Chambers. "And who the dickens do you think you are?"

"It doesn't matter who I think I am—but I happen to be skipper of the Remove," retorted Nipper. "And I've got the Remove solidly behind me, too. You're wanted in the common-room, Chambers!"

"Then I shall be wanted!" said Chambers curtly.

"Will you come to the common-room of your own free will, or would you prefer to be carried?"

"You silly young ass——"

"Because you're coming, one way or the other," continued Nipper. "I can give you my word for it, Chambers, that we shan't carry you any too gently. So you can take your choice."

Chambers began to get angry; for the moment he forgot that he was a Removite, and that Nipper was his Form captain.

"You can go and fry yourselves!" he said scathingly. "I don't recognise any of you! It's like your confounded cheek to order me about!"

"You're not in the Fifth now, Chambers!" Nipper reminded him.

Chambers started.

"Eh?" he said. "By Jove! I'd forgotten —"

"Then you'd better not forget again," said Nipper. "I don't know where you've got your nerve from," he added frankly. "In the Fifth you were practically a nobody, and now that the Head has sent you down into the Remove for slacking I should hardly think that you're feeling pleased with yourself. Yet you seem quite bucked."

"The whole thing was an outrage!" shouted Chambers. "Pagett vented his spite on me—that's all. But I'm not a chap to whine. And now that I'm in the Remove I mean to be the big boss!"

"Oh!" said Nipper. "You mean to be the big boss?"

"Yes! And I'm not taking orders from you or anybody else," said Chambers defiantly. "You want me in the common-room, do you? All right! I'll come to the common-room when I please—and not before!"

It was quite evident that Cuthbert Chambers was out for trouble. Most of the Removites were astonished; they had never believed that Chambers could possess such determination. But Nipper understood the nature of the situation. Chambers was humiliated at his downfall, and he was brazening the whole thing out by adopting this dictatorial guise. It was better than allowing himself to be jeered at. He had taken the offensive, which was very clever of him. What Nipper did not realise was that Travers was at the bottom of it all.

"Well, you fellows, it's got to be done, I suppose," said Nipper resignedly. "Three of us will take his head, and the other three his feet."

"Good egg!" said the others.

"Hi, look here!" ejaculated Chambers, in alarm. "If—if you insist——"

"We do!" said Nipper. "Here's your last chance, Chambers. It's a Form meeting, and everybody must be present."

"Oh, all right!" said Chambers, trying to look dignified. "I didn't know it was a Form meeting. That's different."

Travers, who was one of the juniors in the doorway, gave Chambers a reproachful look. It was his first sign of weakness. In Travers' opinion he ought to have maintained his defiant attitude even to the length of being dragged to the common-room. Travers musingly concluded that he would have to buck things up a bit.

When the common-room was reached Chambers was beginning to feel genuinely alarmed. The place was packed, and he received nothing but hostile glares on every hand. A few fellows—such as Gore-Pearce & Co., of Study A, and Hubbard and Teddy

Long—smiled upon him. They did so because it was their general policy to take sides against anything that Nipper instigated. But the rest were frankly unfriendly. They had many old scores to wipe off against Chambers. He had always been too fond of riding the high horse, and now that he was a Removite like themselves they felt that their hour had come.

"What's all this confounded fuss?" demanded Chambers irritably.

"There's no fuss," replied Nipper.

"Sorry! My mistake!" sneered Chambers. "But I rather thought there was. Anyhow, my arrival in the Remove seems to have caused a bit of a stir. I can't be such an unimportant fellow as you make out."

"You're so unimportant that we're not going to stand any of your tomfoolery," replied Nipper grimly. "The first thing you do after being sent down into this Form is to kick Church and McClure out of their study."

"They defied me!" retorted Chambers. "They refused to obey my orders!"

"And why not? Who are you to give orders?"

"I'm—I'm——"

Chambers paused, all his arrogance evaporating. Now that he was put to the test he was failing. So much hostility flustered him. Moreover, he couldn't think of any satisfactory answer to Nipper's question.

Realising this, Vivian Travers decided that this was the moment for him to barge in. Clearly Chambers was such a figure of straw that he would never go far unless he was propped up and made to look genuine.

"Just a minute, dear old fellows!" said Travers languidly. "At the risk of earning your severe displeasure, I'd like to say that I'm all for Chambers. His action in kicking Church and McClure out of Study D was absolutely justified, and I admire him for it."

"Justified!" echoed Jimmy Potts, staring.

"Positively justified!" insisted Travers. "They were foolish enough to disobey him after he had plainly proclaimed himself as their leader."

"Hang it, why should he do that?" demanded Fullwood.

"Well, that's his business, isn't it?" said Travers. "Didn't Handforth proclaim himself their leader? And didn't they always obey him?"

"Handforth was different," objected Gresham.

"How different?" inquired Travers. "Why should there be one law for Handforth and another for anybody else? If Church and McClure didn't do as he ordered he smashed them, and nobody else in the Remove interfered. Then why should you interfere with Chambers for doing exactly the same thing?"

Even Nipper could not argue this point.

"That's not the question, Travers," he said quietly. "Chambers has come into the Remove from the senior school, and because he's bigger and stronger and older he thinks he can rule the roost."

"Quite right, too," said Travers. "Dear old fellows, why don't you look at the thing in a reasonable light? By his very seniority Chambers has a perfect right to lead."

"Oh, you're crazy!" said Potts.

"He's off his rocker!" shouted a number of others.

"Hear, hear!"

"Clean dotty!"

"Of course, you can have your own opinions—but right is right!" continued Vivian Travers. "Personally, I'm entirely disinterested. But Chambers has come down from the Fifth, and he's a year older than any of us, and pretty nearly a foot taller. I'm ready to follow his leadership, and I consider that Nipper ought to resign the captaincy in his favour."

Not many of the juniors took any notice of Travers. He was too fond of kidding them, and they naturally concluded that he was now talking with his tongue in his cheek.

But the effect upon Chambers—as Travers had anticipated—was remarkable. He recovered his spirits; he drew himself up to his full height, and he looked round the crowded room with fire in his eyes.

"Yes!" he thundered. "I'm older than any of you, and I'm going to be skipper of this Form!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

A roar of derisive laughter rang out.

"You can cackle all you like, but there's going to be trouble before I've done!" roared Chambers. "You kids have had your own way too long, and it's about time that a strong man took charge of you!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Let's have a rival party," suggested Travers amusedly. "Hands up everybody in favour of forcing Nipper to resign and electing Chambers instead."

About seven hands went up, and there was a fresh shout of derision.

"Not many, Chambers, dear old fellow, but it's a beginning!" said Travers coolly. "You've only been in the Remove a couple of hours, and you've already got a party. It's small, but select."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The rest of the Remove yelled with merriment—never realising that this hour was to mark the beginning of a new era.



CHAPTER 23.

An Unexpected Arrival!

DEAR old fellow, everything is going swimmingly."

Travers clapped Chambers on the

back ten minutes later, after the chuckling crowds had dispersed from the common-room. The meeting had been very much of a fiasco, since Chambers had turned the Removites'

wrath into laughter. His supreme conceit had robbed them of their enmity.

"I'm not so sure about it!" growled Chambers. "It's all very well for you to talk about me being leader of the Remove, but where am I? They're all cackling at me—except about half a dozen. And that half-dozen is not worth owning!"

"Still, it's a beginning," said Travers complacently. "Patience, dear old fellow! Stick to your guns and you'll win through. And whatever you do, keep a firm grip on Study D. Don't let Church and McClure defy you!"

Travers strolled off then, secretly sympathising with Church and McClure. In his heart he was on their side, for he thought nothing of this futile ex-Fifth-Former. But it would be interesting to see how far the lay figure could be bolstered up.

Chambers himself went to Study D, and he frowned darkly when he discovered Church and McClure within the apartment, standing over the damaged crockery and eyeing the mess on the floor. They returned his black looks.

"Well, what do you think you're doing?" demanded Chambers. "Why don't you clear up this mess?"

"We're waiting for you to do it," said Church. "You caused it, you big rotter, and you've got to put it straight!"

Chambers laughed.

"Do you want me to smash you again?" he said contemptuously. "I'm going to my old study now, to get my things together. If this room isn't cleared up when I get back I'll pulverise the pair of you."

"Rats!" said Church and McClure, in one voice.

They pushed past their new "leader," and strode out of the study. They had both made up their minds that they would not take the slightest notice of him. He was a usurper and a bully, and if he started any more of his tricks the Remove would deal with him.

"The nerve of the chap!" said Church wonderingly, as they walked down the passage. "Did you ever see anything like it!"

"Never!" replied Mac. "We've got to take up a stand, old man. He thinks he's strong—but we'll be stronger. We mustn't touch that mess in the study—we mustn't move a thing."

"Rather not!" agreed Church. "Chambers caused the damage, and he'll have to do all the clearing up. I'll eat my hat before I obey any of his rotten orders!"

They passed out into the Triangle, trying to make themselves believe that they were content. But it was only a mask. In their hearts, they were very miserable.

For it seemed to them that the advent of Chambers into Study D marked the definite end of the old order of things. Handforth would never return—and Chambers had taken his place. And Church and McClure knew, too, that they would ultimately fall under Chambers' sway. He was bigger and

stronger, and it was inevitable that he should become leader.

But what a leader, compared to the one and only Handy!

"It's no good fooling ourselves, old man," said Church, as he leaned against one of the big gateposts, and gazed disconsolately down the lane. "We keep saying that we won't put up with the big brute, but how can we avoid it?"

"Just what I was thinking!" muttered McClure. "Life won't be worth living if we're constantly fighting."

"And yet, in a way, we were always scrapping with old Handy," mused Church.

"But that was different," said Mac. "Handy was always too free with his fists, but he was a good old scout! Always sorry for what he had done, and always plucky enough to admit it. My only hat! If only we could get him back again!"

Church groaned.

"There's no hope now!" he said miserably. "But think of it, Mac! Wouldn't it be too glorious for words if old Handy turned up again—with Chambers in Study D! Wouldn't it be just perfect?"

McClure closed his eyes dreamily.

"Don't talk about it!" he breathed. "Oh, my only hat! Can't you just picture Handy's face when he heard that his place had been usurped? Can't you see him going to Chambers, and knocking him into mince-meat?"

"I can!" murmured Church. "But it's only a vision!"

Just then another vision—rather more solid—came into view. In short, it was a well-appointed limousine. And seated in the well-appointed limousine was no less a person than Sir Edward Handforth!



CHAPTER 24.

Too Good to be True!

"LOOK!" gasped Church. He had suddenly become aware of the approaching car and its occupant, and he

could hardly believe his eyes.

"Handy's pater!" yelled McClure frenziedly.

Somehow, it seemed to him that the arrival of Handforth senior was a good omen, and, with one accord, the two juniors rushed recklessly at the limousine as it was slowing down in order to turn into the gateway. They jumped upon the running-board, clinging to the door-handles.

"Here, steady, young gents!" ejaculated the chauffeur, in alarm.

"You'd better stop!" said Sir Edward Handforth. "Upon my word! What do you mean by this, boys? You might have injured yourselves!"

Church tore the rear door open, and gazed feverishly at Sir Edward.

"Why have you come, sir?" he asked, in such a frantic tone that Sir Edward listened in wonder. "What about Handy, sir? I—I mean, your son? Is he coming back to St. Frank's?"

"Is he, sir?" chimed in McClure tensely.

Sir Edward regarded them not unkindly. He was, indeed, immensely struck by their feverish eagerness. Never for a moment had he suspected that his hopeful son's chums could have been so affected by the sight of him.

"You mustn't be so excited, young men!" said Sir Edward gruffly. "Perhaps I had better tell you at once that I have only come here in order to have a final settling up with your headmaster. Edward is remaining at St. Jim's."

"Oh, sir!" said Church bleakly.

There was such a world of misery in his tone that Handy's pater felt a pang of guilt. McClure, too, was looking unutterably sad.

"I am sorry, my boys, but I had to be firm," said Sir Edward gently.

"Oh, but why, sir?" panted Church. "We—we thought that—Why can't Handy come back? He was only rotting when he went away to St. Jim's, sir. You know that, don't you?"

"I certainly do know it," admitted Sir Edward. "Don't stand on the step in that way. Come inside—both of you. Watts, draw to the side of the road, and wait."

Sir Edward felt that he would like a little further chat with these two distracted school-boys. As a matter of fact, he had just come from St. Jim's, after telling his eldest son that he must remain there, and on the comparatively short journey Sir Edward had

(Continued on next page.)

"THE BOY THEY COULDN'T SACK!"

At all costs Handforth is determined to shake the dust of St. Jim's from his feet, and to return to St. Frank's.

But it's not an easy matter. Not even by behaving in such a manner as would normally merit expulsion does Handy achieve his object, for fate seems to be working against him.

Luck does not desert him altogether, however, as you will see for yourselves when you read the final yarn featuring Handforth at St. Jim's which appears in this week's bumper issue of

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somewhat cynically concluded that he would find everything normal at St. Frank's, and that his son would have been forgotten.

So it came as a bit of a shock to him to find Church and McClure so unhappy. He knew them well—since they had frequently been at his London home.

"Yes, young men, I know perfectly well that Edward was only—er—rotting when he elected to go to St. Jim's," he said. "But I am sick and tired of Edward's nonsense. He went to St. Jim's of his own accord—in response to his own desires—and there he must stay. I have no intention of pandering to his whims and fancies!"

"And—and is this really final, sir?" muttered McClure.

"I'm afraid it is."

"Can't you change your mind, sir?" asked Church eagerly. "Oh, why not be generous? Handy wants to come back—and you can't believe how much we want him! And it's more important than ever now that he should come back."

"Indeed! How is that?"

"Why, there's some bullying rotter of a Fifth-Former in our study, sir!" said McClure indignantly. "He's been shoved into the Remove, and he's trying to take Handy's place! What a lark it would be if Handy came back now! My hat! There'd be some fireworks, sir!"

"Ahem! Very possibly there would," said Sir Edward. "Well, I'm sure I don't know. I had definitely made up my mind to keep Edward at St. Jim's, and I really see no reason why I should change—"

"He's wanted here, sir!" broke in Church. "He's never been wanted so much as he is now! And don't forget that he's a St. Frank's chap, sir. It doesn't matter how long you keep him at St. Jim's, he'll always be a St. Frank's chap! Oh, why don't you be a sport, sir?"

Handy's pater grunted.

"I hope I am a sportsman," he said gruffly. "I have always tried to be—and it would upset me greatly if I ever did anything unsporting. Good gracious! You are almost making me believe that I *have* been unsporting."

"Oh, no, sir!" said Church, with rare cunning. "You've been firm, sir. Handy deserves everything you've given him. But now that you've been firm, sir, can't you be generous?"

"Eh? Look here, young man——"

"You don't know how happy you'd make us, sir!" continued Church, pressing his advantage.

For a moment Sir Edward looked thoughtful. Then he chuckled.

"Well, upon my word!" he said amusedly. "It seems to me that I shall have to be weak and easy-going, after all. Just when I had made up my mind to be strong! H'm! You young rascals!"

They gripped him by the arms.

"Are you going to let him come back, sir?" panted Church.

"Well, in the circumstances——"

"Are you, sir?"

"Yes," growled Sir Edward. "As you seem to be so unhappy without him, I have no alternative but to show this lamentable weakness. I'll go back to St. Jim's to-morrow, and bring him along."

"Oh, you're a brick, sir!" gasped Church joyfully.

"Nonsense!" snorted Sir Edward.

"And—and will he be back here to-morrow, sir?"

"I'll have a little talk with Dr. Stafford this evening, and fix it up," chuckled Sir Edward. "As a matter of fact, I was half thinking—— H'm! Well, never mind! I'll bring Edward back to-morrow."

"It's the best news I've heard this term, sir," said Church happily. "Oh, and please don't tell any of the other chaps, sir!" he added, as a sudden thought struck him. "Mac and I will keep it quiet—and then Handy will come as a surprise."

"Crumbs!" said Mac dreamily. "What a lark! They all think that Handy's gone for good—and so he'll turn up again out of a blue sky. My only topper! What a shock for Chambers!"

"Perhaps I'd better not make any inquiries about this mysterious Chambers," said Sir Edward, with a twinkle in his eyes. "Well, youngster, you've scored your victory. Perhaps you'll now let me drive on?"

They thanked him again and climbed out. And Sir Edward, as he drove sedately towards the Head's house, had no reason to feel unhappy. Indeed, his last view of Church's and McClure's joyful faces had left a very deep impression on his mind.

As for Church and McClure, they solemnly shook hands.

"We've done it!" murmured Church.

"And Handy's coming back to-morrow!" said McClure gleefully. "We won't say a word to anybody, and when Handy comes back—oh, corks! What will happen to Chambers?"

"It makes me go dizzy to think of it," said Church. "I say, let's spooof the rotter!"

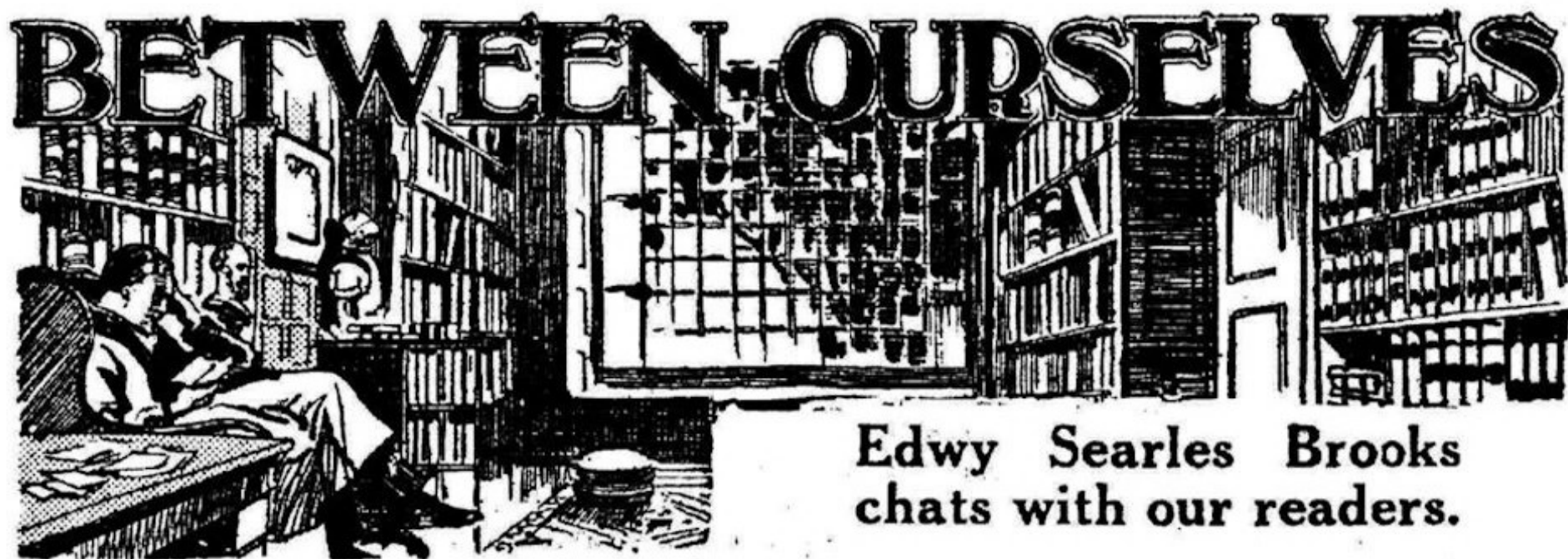
And they proceeded to spooof Cuthbert Chambers "up to the eyes." They went to Study D, and they cleared up the mess. They meekly offered to fetch Chambers his books from his old study. And Chambers, seeing this, gloated over his victory.

He had subdued these defiant juniors! They had thought things over, and they were ready to be his slaves! Throughout that evening Chambers was glorying in his new power.

But he was living in a fool's paradise!

THE END.

(Handforth returning to St. Frank's! That's good news, isn't it, chums? And he's arriving back when the Remove is absolutely seething with excitement. You can bet he'll be in his glory when he discovers how the land lies, and Chambers—well, he can look out for squalls! Don't miss reading next Wednesday's yarn, which is entitled: "HANDFORTH'S RETURN!")



Edwy Searles Brooks
chats with our readers.

NOTE.—If any reader writes to me, I shall be pleased to comment upon such remarks as are likely to interest the majority. All letters should be addressed: EDWY SEARLES BROOKS, c/o The Editor, THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY, The Fleetway House, Farringdon St., LONDON, E.C.4.

HERE we are again! And, what's more, here we are to stay.

Now, listen to me, all you boys and girls of every age, size, and description. Lend me your shell-like ears. Of course, some of you may have ears like oyster-shells, or even tortoise-shells, but we'll let that pass. The main thing is to lend me your ears for the next minute or two.

We are going to make a fresh start. No half and half measures about it, but a really honest new beginning! And I would like to whisper my apologies into all these thousands of ears round me for the somewhat erratic behaviour of this page in the past.

But I'm not going to take all the blame. Some months ago, before the irregularities commenced, the Editor and I had a long talk. In fact, lots of long talks. And the more we talked, the greater became the problem. So many of you wanted a longer story, and so many of you wanted a bigger instalment of the serial. Well, this Old Paper is only a certain size, and it's not made of elastic. We can't stretch it. So, in the end, it was settled that this page should be dropped out for a time. As you know, it was dropped. Perhaps some of you were pleased; but I know jolly well that a good many others were just the opposite.

Now, I have only got this one page every week, so we must make the most of it. If I attempted to include the names and addresses of all readers who have written to me during the past few months, this page would look like a post office directory for the next year. So I hope you'll let me start with a clean sheet. I have received your letters—every one of them—and I thank you for them. And from now onwards I propose to start in quite a different way.

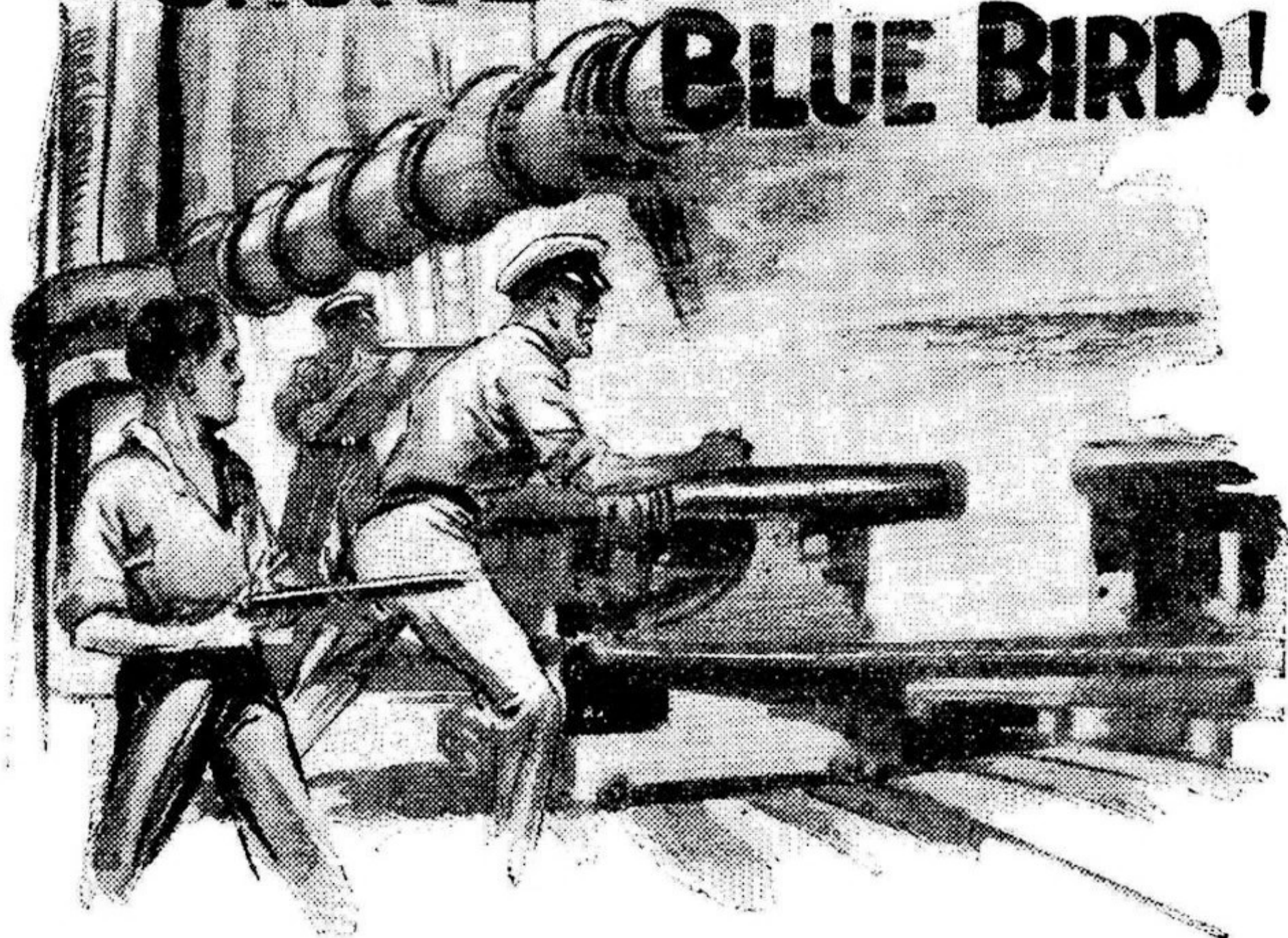
I want you to write to me, but I cannot promise you *all* that your names will be

acknowledged on this page. The fact is, there isn't room. But I certainly *will* write a personal letter to every reader who sends me a letter which I consider entitles the writer to a reply by post. There are heaps of letters which are very interesting, and very entertaining, which really require no answer—and I like to get these just as much as the others. And then there's the letter which simply *must* be replied to. Well, all those of the latter sort will, from now onwards, be promptly dealt with through the post by me. If you don't get a reply first time, have another shot. If you keep on practising, you're sure to hit the bull's-eye!

You are by no means the first one, Jack Hardy, (Bury, Lancs.), to place the "School-boy Magician" series at the top of the list. If I've had one request for more stories about Ezra Quirke, I've literally had hundreds and hundreds. I wonder what it is that appeals to you so much? I suppose the majority of you like something mysterious and creepy. But stories of this type are hardly suitable for the summer months, you know. Wait until later on, Jack, old man. Somewhere about Christmas-time, perhaps. I might bring Ezra Quirke in again—if I can find out where he's got to after all this time.

Yes, I've heard a similar rumour, Dora, of the Happy Seven (Norwich). But I'm not worried a bit. It really doesn't interest me whether the British Isles are gradually drifting into the Arctic regions or not. They're probably only drifting at the rate of about one foot in ten thousand years, or something like that. So who cares?

THE CRUISE OF THE BLUE BIRD!



By COUTTS BRISBANE

Rua-Rua, the native chief who has been the cause of all the trouble at Graden Island, may be a prisoner, but he is still dangerous, as Jack Manby finds out to his cost. Rua-Rua also has a secret—a stupendous secret which is to result in many breathless adventures for Captain Manby and his companions!

Bad News!

THE cinematograph, hidden among the packing-cases, had whirled into action. A huge battleship, stripped for action, surged into view, flashes and smoke leaping from her turret guns. From the edge of the grove came low moans of terror as the native saw it. Next a battery of horse artillery took up a position at the gallop, wheeled into line, and then the guns went into action. Came another and even longer moan as the target was shown flying to pieces as the shells burst upon it.

"Thus our people deal with their enemies!" shouted Hutton. "And now you shall see the soldiers of our Big Chief."

Click-ick-ck! The machine whirled softly—and there was a battalion of Guards on parade, marching and wheeling like one, their bayonets gleaming as they swung into a long line, and steadily, inexorably, came swiftly forward; on and on till they seemed as though they would leave the wall and charge straight over the spectators.

The sight was too much for the simple savages. Not with a moan, but with frenzied howls of terror, they rose and bolted for dear life without waiting for the terrible men in the tall, furry hats to reach them. The grove resounded with their yells and the thud of their retreating feet. Swiftly the noise died to a murmur and silence fell.

"The trick's worked!" said Captain Manby, with a laugh. "I don't think you'll have any trouble now, Hutton."

"No. The chances are that we'll never be able to get one of them near the house again. We'll be looked upon as the most powerful of magicians henceforth."

"In that case you can safely leave the place for a while. Come aboard for dinner, all of you," invited Manby. "Ah Moy, besides being an excellent tracker, is the best of cooks, and I fancy he'll outdo himself this evening. Come along!"

The surmise proved correct. Ah Moy, stimulated by his profitable afternoon's bit of work, had done his best, and the dinner proved to be a veritable feast. Not till the meal was concluded did Captain Manby speak of the business which had brought the Blue Bird to Graden Island.

"Now that you have your labour in hand again, I suppose there will be no difficulty about getting the copra that I bought aboard?" he asked. "We can start loading first thing to-morrow morning, I presume?"

Hutton started guiltily and looked at Mitchie. The pair flushed, as though they had been caught doing something disgraceful.

"I—I should have told you before, captain," replied Hutton slowly, "but what with all the fighting and racing and chasing, it went clean out of my mind. We're mighty sorry about it, but—you noticed a lot of thick smoke when you came in this morning? Well, the fact is that those villains set fire to the store sheds, and that smoke came from your burning copra. The whole crop was destroyed! I'm terribly sorry. Mr. Fox will have to refund your money—"

His voice trailed to silence. Captain Manby's tanned face had paled a little, but he smiled grimly at the concluding words. Fox, the lessee of the island and the original owner of the copra, was the last man to repay money. Besides, he—Manby—was the last man to ask for repayment. Though nearly all his small capital had gone into the deal, and years of petty trading might pass before he could accumulate enough for another venture, he wouldn't try to back out of a bargain. And he was essentially a sportsman, able to endure a blow without wincing. With no effort, he laughed.

"Oh, refund be hanged!" he cried gaily. "If I had shipped the stuff I should have made a whacking fine profit. That it has been destroyed is no fault of old man Fox, or of you two. I'll have better luck next time. Fortune will give me something good in the next deal, so why worry? I'll probably pick up a good paying cargo when I've handed Rua-Rua over to the commissioner. He's the Jonah. Carry on, boys!"

Rua-Rua's Bargain!

IN spite of his brave words, however, Captain Manby lay awake for a long time after the guests had gone ashore, trying to form plans for the future. So far as he could judge, any freight he might pick up would do no more than cover the expenses of the voyage, at the best.

But not a trace of his disappointment appeared on his face next morning when he and the boys were rowed ashore to say good-bye to Trotter and Coombes, who had spent the night in the bungalow. In fact, Hutton and Mitchie were the gloomy ones of the party, but they speedily grew cheerful when they found that Manby refused to be down-cast.

The labour gang were now at work again, clearing away weeds and brush on the farther side of the island. Siri, the messenger of the previous day, had been made gang boss.

"So if you'll just fly round that way, they'll have a final object lesson, and I don't think we'll have any trouble with them," said Hutton, as the airmen prepared to depart. "And if you can call in when you come back this way, we'll be delighted to see you."

"I'm afraid that won't be for some time," replied Trotter. "We're going on to the Solomons, and after that I can't say where we'll be sent. But we'll drop in if we're passing."

With that Trotter climbed to his place, while Coombe started the motor. A few moments later the seaplane glided away down the lagoon, gathered speed, then rose from the water and circled away around the island at a low altitude. It was lost to sight behind the palms for a minute or two, then reappeared slanting up and up, got its bearings, and boomed away to the north-east.

WHAT HAPPENED IN THE OPENING INSTALMENTS:

CAPTAIN MANBY is skipper of the schooner Blue Bird, which is approaching Graden Island, in the Southern Pacific. He is accompanied by his son

JACK MANBY, and Jack's cousin

NED SUTTON, two adventure-loving boys, although the former lacks the cautious nature of Ned. From the deck of the Blue Bird they see that the bungalow wherein resides Hutton, manager for the man who owns the copra crops on the island, is surrounded by a seething mob of mutinous Solomon Islanders. The captain, with the two boys and a party from the schooner, go to the rescue. They become overwhelmed by the savages,

and are saved by the arrival of a seaplane, which frightens the mob away. The plane is piloted by a man named Trotter. Later they succeed in capturing Rua-Rua, the native who had been the cause of all the trouble, and he is taken on board the Blue Bird. The other Solomon Islanders then promise to return quietly to work, and in order thoroughly to convince them of the white man's power, Hutton tells them he will produce some "magic." This is to be done by means of a cinematograph, hidden among a number of packing cases. All is ready; a shaft of light springs from the projector on to the white wall opposite.

(Now read on.)

"Good lads! But for them we'd all be dead by this time," said Manby. "And now we must hustle. I'll come ashore for water and fresh vegetables presently, Hutton, and sail with the flood. You'd better write your letters, and an account of the rising for the commissioner. Meanwhile, I'll rout out a few things we have brought for you and Mitchie. Come along, boys," he added, turning to Jack and Ned.

They returned to the schooner. Manby already busy with fresh schemes for recouping his loss. As he stepped aboard the Blue Bird, Ah Moy, wearing a bland grin, came out of the galley.

"Pleasee, cap'n, thlat fella Rua-Rua wantee talkee one pieccee much alongee you. I makee tie up wound in him shouldah, he say you come talkee, makee plomisee."

Captain Manby hesitated. He didn't want to talk with the prisoner. Still, he was a man of his word, and he had promised to speak with Rua-Rua.

"Oh, I'll talk to him now," he growled, and strode forward.

Rua-Rua sat on the deck beside the windlass. His wounded shoulder was swathed in bandages, his legs were in irons, but he grinned defiantly at Manby as he rose.

"What is it you want to say?" asked the captain.

"I am not a common man: I am a chief," said Rua-Rua. "I want to go free. I want to go back to my own people. Because of this I will tell you a great secret and you will let me go. I will tell you of an island that no white man has seen, that no white man can get at."

"I am going to take you to Bauro, to the big white chief there who will punish you for your evil doings," replied Manby. "Am I a child that you should make this talk of an island? There is no such island."

"There is. It is not foolish talk. I have been there for half a year. Its name is Malea, and all round there are many rocks so that no ship can get near—except by one way. I know that way. Let me go free and I will show you that way."

"Malea!" muttered Manby. He had heard of a spreading group of barren atolls lying between the Marshalls and the Gilberts which bore the name. Navigators gave it a wide berth for it had never been properly chartered and was, indeed, a regular ships' graveyard. "There is no island, only bare rocks," he added.

"There are many, many rocks, but in the middle is an island with trees and good water. I have lived there and I know the way through the rocks," insisted Rua-Rua eagerly. "If you promise to let me go free after, I will take you there."

"I will not let you go," said Manby. "You have caused men to be killed. You must be punished according to the law of the white man. And you are a fool to think that I would let you go because of an island without people to trade with. Why should I go there?"

Rua-Rua moved a pace nearer and bent a little forward, lowering his voice.

"Because there is something there that all white men covet. There is a big lagoon—and it is full of shell better than anywhere else, and it has never been touched. It is full of pearls. It will make you very rich. Let me go free and I will show you the way to it. It is all yours if you will let me go free!"

The Keeper of The Lagoon:

CAPTAIN MANBY stood silent and rigid for a long moment. Rua-Rua had just offered him the fulfilment of a dream that haunts every trader in the Pacific—an untouched lagoon full of pearl shell!

In all probability there would be pearls also, though this wasn't certain. They might be small or of poor quality, but pearl shell—the mother of pearl—is always in demand and worth a considerable sum. He might easily recoup his losses over the copra and make a small fortune into the bargain, for he felt certain now that Rua-Rua was telling the truth.

But, on the other hand, Rua-Rua had been the cause of Jim Tincan's death; he had been the cause of the deaths of a score of his fellow labourers, and he must be punished. Captain Manby was an officer and a gentleman, and he was not to be bribed. His duty was clear. He shook his head.

"No, Rua-Rua, I cannot let you go. I shall take you to Bauro for the big white chief to judge and punish."

Rua-Rua looked aghast. His mouth fell open. He had felt sure that his big secret would save him.

"But you can't find the way through the rocks. Only I know it. Let me go and I will take you there. A big lagoon, twice as big as this, full of shell. I will give it you!" he whined.

"No. You must be punished!" snapped Manby decisively, and turned away.

"But I am a chief!" shouted Rua-Rua. "I am not a common man."

"All the more reason for punishing you!" replied Manby with finality and, walking aft, disappeared into the cabin.

With a fierce oath, Rua-Rua lowered himself to the deck again. For the fiftieth time he tugged at the lock of his legirons, but it was quite useless; the lock was strong and the irons heavy. Rua-Rua tried their weight with his hand, looked balefully aft, then, settling himself with his back to the windlass, appeared to go to sleep, though a close observer might have noted that he kept one eye a little open.

Big Timo, the bo'sun, came stiffly on deck and sat himself down on the rail not far from the prisoner. He had been a good deal knocked about in the previous day's fighting and wasn't yet fit for duty, but word had come forward that the schooner was to sail that day and he thought that he could at least pull his weight on the halliards.

Jack and Ned Sutton came out of their cabin and paced slowly forward.

"I'm awfully sorry for uncle," Ned was saying, "though he seems to take the loss of all that money lightly enough. What d'you think he'll do next?"

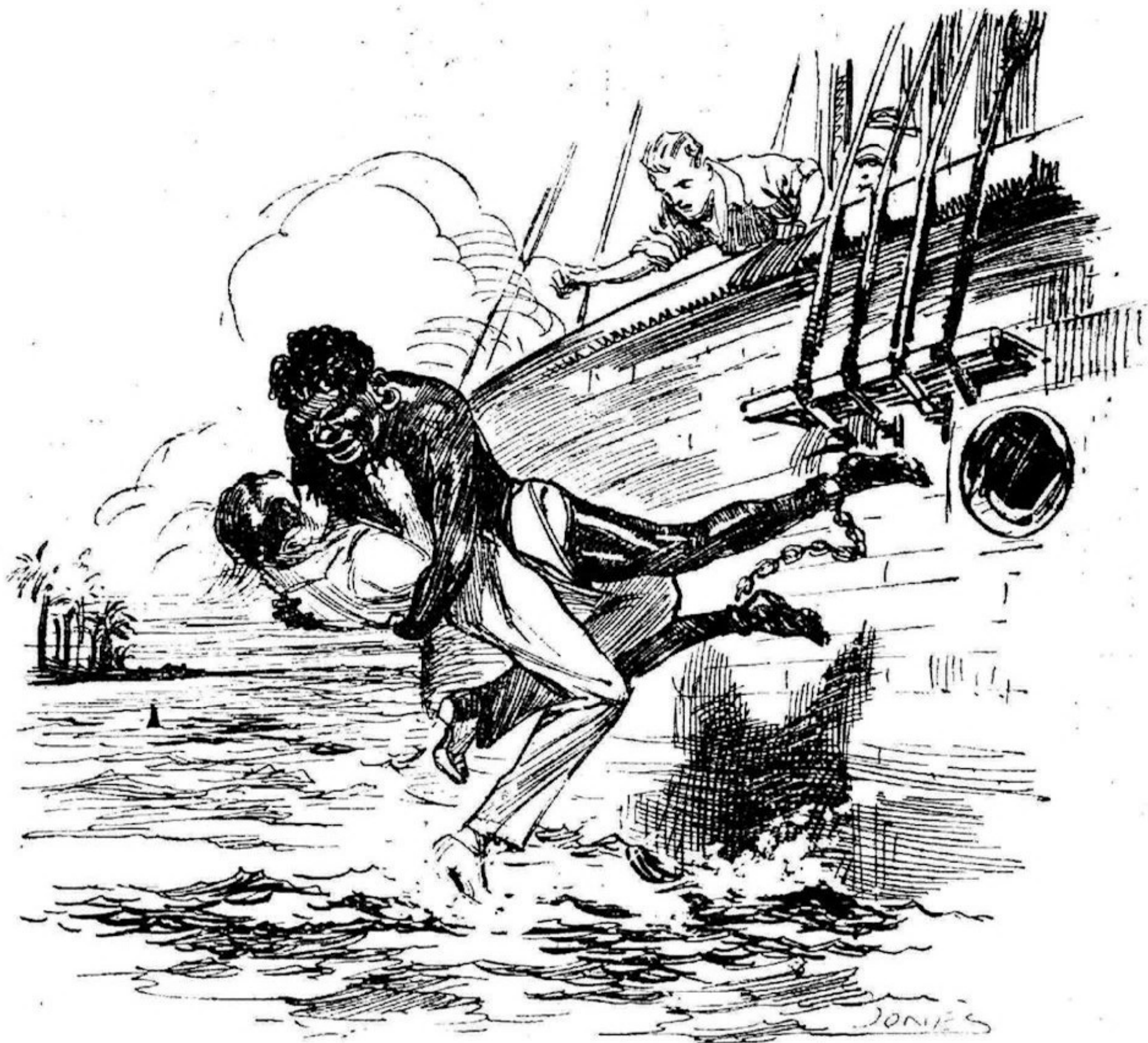
"Go and look for a freight after handing that scoundrel over to the commissioner," replied Jack, and glared at the apparently unconscious Rua-Rua. "Hallo! Look there! It's the keeper of the lagoon."

"One is more than enough for my taste," said Ned, and turned to the bo'sun. "How goes it to-day, Timo?"

"Heap sore. Them club mighty hard," replied Timo. "Allee right to-morrow. Like mighty well whackee that fella Rua-Rua on head with axe. Like feed him to shark."

"Oh, he'll be punished," remarked Ned consolingly, and wheeled to rejoin his cousin.

Jack had walked on a few paces, and paused by the windlass to glance at the



Clasping Jack in a gorilla-like grip, Rua-Rua leapt over the side of the Blue Bird. Ned sprang forward, too late to prevent the catastrophe. Next moment he gave a horrified gasp, for, not far away, a triangular fin broke through the surface of the water—a shark!

They had paused by the rail to look down into the clear water. A long, shadowy shape passed close alongside and rose at a little distance; a big triangular fin cut the smooth surface for a moment, then disappeared as the huge shark slid down towards the deep water in the middle of the lagoon.

"There's only one shark in a lagoon as a general rule, and sailors call him the keeper," explained Jack. "Usually he's a whopper. But in bad weather a lot come in, and if there was a heavy gale blowing outside you'd see them popping about all over the place."

prisoner who squatted beside it, apparently asleep. Rua-Rua's eyes flashed open. He knew that the lad before him was the captain's son; he saw his chance for revenge. With a sudden, harsh, snarling cry, Rua-Rua leapt to his feet.

His sound arm shot out, he gripped Jack, drew him close in a rib-cracking hug irresistible as a gorilla's, and dragging the heavy irons across the deck in a swift shuffle, threw himself and his captive over the rail even as Ned leapt forward, too late, to prevent the catastrophe.

One smothered, inarticulate shout from Jack, a roar of triumph from Rua-Rua, and the pair had disappeared with a mighty splash—while half a mile away a big, triangular fin broke water and came swiftly towards the schooner. The keeper of the lagoon, ravenous with the eternal hunger of the sea, was on the alert for a meal!

Jack's Peril!

FOR a moment Ned stood half paralysed by surprise and horror, then his voice rang out along the deck:

"Man overboard! Shark! Rua-Rua has taken Jack overboard!" He yelled frantically and leapt to the rail with some vague notion of going overboard to the help of his cousin.

The peril was deadly and imminent. Already the keeper of the lagoon, the huge shark which he had seen but a few minutes before, was swirling towards the schooner, full speed ahead. It had heard the mighty splash made by the fall of the pair locked in a tight embrace, and that sound was to it a dinner-gong.

Ned peered down into the clear water. There, only a few yards away from the schooner's bow, half a dozen fathoms deep, he saw two writhing bodies, black and white. Rua-Rua, his leg irons hooked over a projecting chunk of coral, was securely anchored to the bottom. His uninjured arm gripped Jack Manby to his broad chest in an iron grasp of hate and revenge.

Rua-Rua had played his last card when he offered to ransom himself by guiding Captain Manby to the secret island of pearls. His offer had been refused. He knew that Jack was the captain's son, and knew, too, that he would die by the rope if once he were in the clutches of the white man's law. Rua-Rua was resolved to die in his own way and to pay his score at the same time. If only he could hold Jack till he drowned—or till the shark arrived—he would die happy.

Ned saw and understood. He had no knife, and the rifle which he had laid down on the hatch-top amidships was utterly useless. Not the finest shot on earth could have made certain of hitting the black man even had he been on the surface. To have hit him as the pair writhed together under water would have been a miracle. Ned swung round, saw an iron belaying-pin, sprang to it—and was swept aside as Big Timo, flashing out his knife from the sheath at his belt, ran stiffly past him, paused a moment by the rail, then plunged overboard.

All this had taken but a few seconds. Ned's shout was still echoing along the shores of the lagoon. The first answering calls from the fo'c'sle were rising from below as the big bo'sun went overboard.

Ned staggered back to the rail in time to see Big Timo neatly clip into the water in a dive above the spot where the terrible struggle for life was going on at the bottom of the lagoon. Then he lifted his eyes to the

shearing fin of the hungry shark barely a hundred yards away. A few seconds more and it would locate its prey!

Captain Manby came jumping out of his cabin followed by Sinclair, the mate. Ah Moy waddled from his galley flourishing a ham knife. The crew came tumbling up on deck. In a moment everybody was crowded forward.

Captain Manby had picked up Ned's rifle. He dashed through the men and swung upon the fo'c'sle head. One glance he cast downwards at the bo'sun diving towards the black-and-white blur at the bottom.

"Timo's gone after him! Timo has gone!" yelled Ned. "The shark! The shark, uncle!"

Manby turned towards where the boy pointed. The big fin was close now. In another moment it would have disappeared. Up went the rifle. It flashed, cracked, a spurt of water flew up a little ahead of the fin. Crack! Another shot. Manby had fired at fish before, and could allow for deflection and refraction. The bullets apparently touched the ravenous monster. It slowed, half-turned, then dived.

Those on deck saw the glint of the light on its great body as it began to turn over, then all eyes fixed on the blur below.

Something that looked like a cloud of dark smoke obscured the water, there was a swirl, and Big Timo's head broke the surface. One hand held his knife, the other held Jack, whose head lolled on his shoulder.

Timo wasn't wasting time. He knew that at any moment the huge jaws might close upon him. The water foamed as he drove through it.

Ropes snaked out. Timo let his knife fall, grabbed one of the ropes, and was hauled alongside. Crack! Crack! Crack! Captain Manby blazed away at the silvery gleam below and behind the couple. The shark was hit. Confused perhaps by the impact of the bullets, it whirled round, then came to the surface. Crack!

With a rush Timo and Jack were run up the bows; a dozen hands gripped them, hauled them in. Timo rolled over on the deck, releasing Jack as his father grasped him. Then he crawled to the rail, and looked over with a happy grin, while the crew babbled about him.

Jack, struggling faintly, shook himself. His eyes opened. He recognised his father and smiled. Then memory of that awful twenty seconds' underwater struggle returned, and he shuddered.

"Don't talk. All's well. Lie still. Ah Moy, brandy! Smash the locker open!" cried Manby.

"Me smashee!" gurgled Ah Moy, and went aft at a tremendous rate, considering his figure, waving the cleaver.

Followed the sound of a couple of heavy blows, then he was back with a bottle and glass. Captain Manby poured a little of the spirit down Jack's throat. He spluttered, choked, gasping like a fish ashore.

"You'll do!" said his father, and, picking him up, carried him aft, Ned following.

A minute later Big Timo turned away from the rail. He looked pleased with the world.

"That fella Rua-Rua shark chop," he said to Mr. Sinclair, the tubby mate.

"What happened? What that fella Rua-Rua and you do along down there?" asked Sinclair.

"Him hold Jackee, coral hold him. I kill Rua-Rua. Take Jackee," replied Timo serenely. "S'pose boss cap'n gimme new knife? Lose old one."

"I guess he give you more than new knife, Timo. Yes, sir? Bring him aft? Yes, sir!" Sinclair replied to Captain Manby's call. "Come along, you chocolate swordfish!"

With Timo at his heels he went aft to the cabin. Jack, already looking better, lay in his father's berth wrapped in a blanket, with Ned standing by and Ah Moy hovering round with a bland smile on his face.

"My son wants to thank you, Timo," said the captain. "Shake hands with him."

Timo, so desperately courageous a few minutes before, became as shy as a small child. He went bashfully forward, stretched out his big brown paw. Jack gripped and shook it heartily.

"I won't forget it, Timo," he said. "I can't do anything to repay you now, but one day I will. Thank you!"

"Not want you drown, Mis'r Jackee. Not want that fella Rua-Rua be top side finish. Stickum knife, pullee you, come 'way quick! Shark chop him. He finish!" explained Timo, and grinned cheerfully.

Jack shivered, squeezed Timo's hand again and lay back on the pillow. But for Timo he, too, would have been shark chop, for he remembered the terrible, unbreakable grip of Rua-Rua's arm.

"When you want to leave the sea, Timo, you shall have a good house and a good boat and a piece of good land for taro," said Captain Manby. "And from now your pay is a pound a month more. You are a good man!"

"You mighty good boss, cap'n! Me stay along a bit yet," muttered Timo. "Go along now gettum water. So long, Mis'r Jackee!"

And, fairly wriggling with embarrassment, the big man sidled out.

The Mystery Ship!

"SIT down, Sinclair!" It was Manby who spoke. The mate had been about to follow Big Timo out of the cabin, but the captain had called him back.

"I want to talk to you," Manby continued, when Sinclair had sat down. "D'you know what that villain Rua-Rua wanted me to do? Let him off punishment in consideration of his leading me to an island which he declared lies in the middle of the Malea group of reefs. I refused, of course, but now that he's dead I've been thinking of it. He said there was a passage through the reefs, and that he knew it. Have you heard anything concerning it?"

"Malea, eh?" murmured Sinclair. "Yes. I've heard native talk. They say there is an island, but it's taboo because some big god lives there. I never thought much of it. You hear these yarns, but there's seldom much in them."

"I think there's a good deal in it," said Manby seriously. "I think Rua-Rua was telling the truth. He was bargaining for his life, and he appeared absolutely certain that he could deliver the goods. He spoke of the lagoon of the island being full of untouched shell. I think I'll sail that way and test the truth of it."

"It's a risky bit of water, sir. Only the outer fringed is charted—and the charts are none too reliable."

"Well, we've run risks before, and, to tell you the truth, Sinclair, this copra business has cleaned me out. Barring cash for expenses I'm nearly broke, and I don't fancy pottering round for perhaps two or three years on short allowance. We'll go as far as the outer fringe anyhow. Given good weather, there should be little danger. If we do find the island and the shell, you'll be on shares. It should prove a small fortune for us, if it's any good at all. All a gamble, though."

"I'm game for it, sir," said the mate quietly. "Come to think of it, I remember a beachcomber at Levuka who talked about having sighted land—high land, not an atoll—in the Malea group when he was in a whaler. I didn't pay much attention to him at the time, however. But if there is pearl we're ready for it. We've still got those two diving suits you bought from that man on Christobal, who died before we returned."

At that moment Ah Moy appeared in the cabin doorway. There was a curious gleam in his eyes.

"Stleamah come!" he said.

"Eh?" Sinclair and Captain Manby were on their feet in an instant, alert and wondering. For Graden Island was far out of any regular steamer track, and there was no trade to attract even a stray tramp.

(Another exciting instalment next week, boys!)

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