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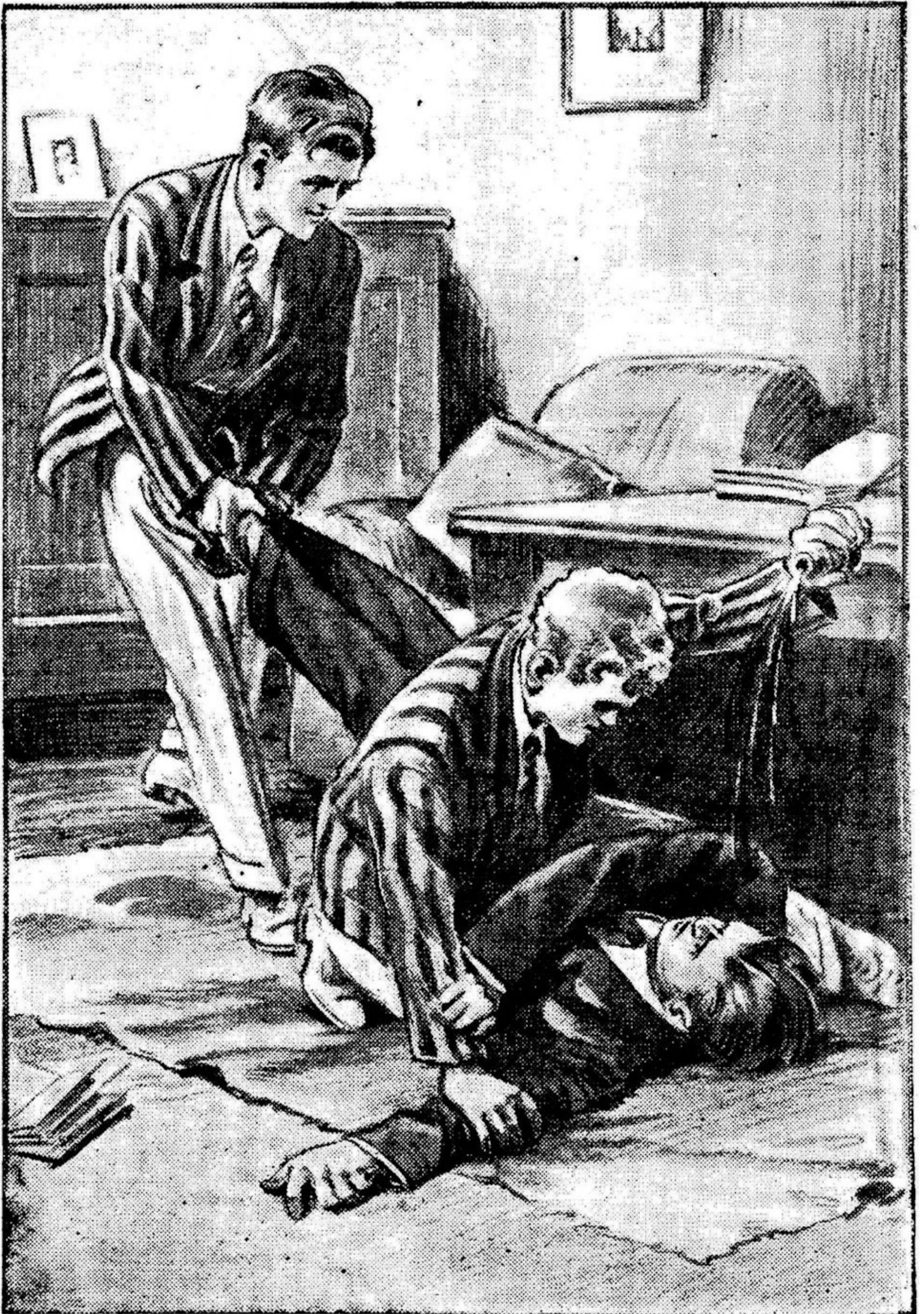
**HANDFORTH'S
RETURN!**

A rousing long complete story of school-life and fun, featuring the
Chums of St. Frank's.

New Series No. 114.

OUT ON WEDNESDAY.

July 7th, 1928.



With Church sitting on his chest, and McClure holding his legs, Chambers found himself helpless. Swish ! Church had seized an ink-pot, and the contents descended over Chambers' face in a blueblack flood. "Gug-gug-gug !" he gurgled,

Fighting For the Remove Captaincy!Nipper v. Chambers!

HANDFORTH'S RETURN !



By EDWY SEARLES BROOKS

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

Although Edward Oswald Handforth is very much a blunderer and too ready with his fists, there can be no denying that he is one of the most popular juniors at St. Frank's. So his return to the famous old school is received with enthusiasm. As it happens, Handy arrives just when the Remove is experiencing exciting times ; and now, with him back again, it is certain to experience more exciting—and amusing—times than ever.—ED.

CHAPTER 1.

The Boss of Study D !

CRASH !
Church and McClure, of Study D in the Remove passage, sprang guiltily apart as the door suddenly opened, and the big, burly figure of Cuthbert Chambers strode in.

"None of that!" said Chambers, frowning.

"I—I don't know what you mean, Chambers!" faltered Church.

"Yes, you do!" retorted the newcomer. "You and McClure were whispering together—plotting against me, eh? Well, it won't pay you, my sons!"

"No, Chambers!" they murmured humbly.

"I'm boss of this study!" continued Chambers, in an aggressive voice. "You were inclined to be a bit rebellious yesterday, but to-day you've had more sense. I don't want any more of that rot!"

"No, Chambers!" murmured Church, hanging his head.

"We'll do our best to please you, I'm sure!" said McClure meekly.

Cuthbert Chambers swelled visibly. He looked at the two cowering juniors with a sort of triumphant contempt; as a tiger might look at a trembling fawn. He was their master—and they were ready to submit to his dictation! All day long they had flown to obey his every command, and Chambers felt that this was as it should be.

It was a bright summer's afternoon, and lessons were over. But it was a good hour from tea-time yet, and the Remove in general was hurrying to get out of doors.

There was a House match this afternoon—Ancient House versus West House. It was to be a Remove game, with Nipper's side opposed to Reggie Pitt's. Not that there was much doubt as to the result. Everybody prophesied a certain win for the Ancient House.

Cuthbert Chambers was elegantly attired in a well-cut suit, and he looked quite important. But in this case looks were deceptive—for Chambers was really of no importance whatsoever.

He shifted his gaze from his two study-mates, and he looked sharply round the study.

"Where are my shoes?" he demanded.

"In the cupboard, please, Chambers," said Church.

"Get them out!"

"Yes, Chambers," murmured Church.

He obeyed the command with alacrity, and soon had Chambers' shoes ready. He placed them reverently on the floor at Chambers' feet, and stood waiting, as though for further orders.

"That'll do!" said Chambers curtly. "Don't stand there like an idiot! Get out of my way!"

"Yes, Chambers!" panted Church.

He backed away, and blundered into McClure. They both stood back, breathing in a frightened sort of way. And Chambers, after shooting them a contemptuous glance, proceeded to change his shoes.

"I'm going to show you kids something this afternoon!" he remarked complacently. "By glory! You think you can play cricket in the Remove, don't you?"

"We're not so bad, Chambers," said McClure, with great daring.

"Not so bad, eh?" scoffed Chambers. "That may be your opinion, kid! But I think you're rotten! And I'm going to make it my business to show the Remove exactly how cricket should be played!"

"It's awfully kind of you, Chambers!" ventured Church.

For a moment Chambers looked suspicious, but the expression of humility on Church's face satisfied him. He laughed shortly.

"I'm in the Remove now, and perhaps it's just as well that I was sent down from the Fifth," he said. "It'll give me an opportunity to teach you youngsters how to run things! I'm the biggest fellow in the Remove—and the oldest. So it's only right that I should be Form captain!"

Church and McClure were silent. They thought it just as well to reserve their own opinions. It would do no good to speak their minds—to tell Chambers that they considered him to be a swelled-headed idiot, a conceited ass, and a hopeless dunce.

"Of course, I've hardly started yet," proceeded Chambers, as he finished lacing his shoes. "I've only been in the Remove for about twenty-four hours, but I can see that I shall have to assert my authority. I've got you youngsters well under control, but some of the other Remove fellows are inclined to be obstinate."

"I expect they'll soon come round," remarked Church hopefully. "You're so big, Chambers—so strong and firm—that they can't possibly resist you for long."

"They're bound to knuckle under before the end of term," agreed McClure.

Chambers laughed.

"Before the end of term?" he repeated scornfully. "You hopeless young fatheads! I'll have them all running to obey my orders before the end of the week! And I shall start the ball rolling this afternoon by taking charge of this game!"

"Has Nipper resigned in your favour?" asked Church mildly.

"No, he hasn't!" snapped Chambers. "If you're trying to be sarcastic——"

"Oh, Chambers!" protested Church, in horror.

"Well, don't try it on—that's all!" said Chambers darkly. "At the first hint of sarcasm from either of you, I'll give you a darned good hiding!"

"Yes, Chambers!" they murmured, hanging their heads again.

"As a matter of fact, I haven't spoken to Nipper about the game yet—but that's only a detail," said Chambers. "As soon as he knows that I mean to play in the match, he'll hand it over into my care. He can't do anything else, considering who I am!" he added pompously.

"Is there anything else we can do, please, Chambers?" asked Church.

"No; there's nothing else," replied Chambers, moving towards the door. "As far as I am concerned, you can both go and eat coke!"

"Yes, Chambers," said Church.

"Thank you, Chambers," murmured McClure.

And Cuthbert Chambers, with the air of an Indian potentate, strode out of the study. His power here, at all events, was supreme. Before long he intended to have the whole Remove trembling at his lightest word!



CHAPTER 2.

The Secret !

As the door closed behind Chambers, broad grins appeared on the faces of Church and McClure. Silently they shook hands.

"The great hulking lunatic!" remarked Church candidly.

"The conceited jackass!" said McClure.

Again they shook hands, and their grins became wider.

"And he thinks that we're his slaves," said Church incredulously. "My only hat! Is he fool enough to really believe it, Mac?"

"Chambers is fool enough for anything!" replied McClure promptly.

"I believe he is!" said Church. "He even thinks that he'll get a place in to-day's game against the West House! Let's get outside, and see what happens when he starts giving his orders to Nipper!"

The change in Church and McClure was remarkable.

Instead of cowering, instead of looking meek and humble, they were both serenely

happy. The fact that Cuthbert Chambers was now the self-appointed leader of Study D did not seem to worry them in the least. Yet the previous day, when Chambers had first arrived, they had been aghast. Incidentally, they had been very rebellious.

But, much to Chambers' astonishment and gratification, they had suddenly knuckled under to him. During the previous evening, and throughout the whole of to-day, they had quailed before him.

If Chambers had not been such a conceited chump, he would have been suspicious. But then, Cuthbert Chambers had always been known at St. Frank's as a bragging idiot.

He was really a Fifth-Former, and at one period, indeed, he had even had the effrontery to pose as Form captain. The redoubtable William Napoleon Browne was skipper now, and the Fifth, as a whole, felt no inclination to weep because Chambers had left them.

Chambers had been slacking during the whole of this term, and at last Mr. Pagett's patience had become exhausted. He had placed a good deal of Chambers' work in front of the Head, and Dr. Stafford, in consequence, had sent Chambers down into the Remove.

And the Remove did not feel at all honoured.

It had been a stunning blow to the swelled-headed Chambers. At first he had been so bewildered that he had hardly realised the enormity of the catastrophe. He, a senior—the most dandified and conceited of seniors—reduced to the status of a mere junior! The indignity of the whole thing had dazed him.

However, Vivian Travers of the Remove—the indolent, languid, whimsical Travers—had pointed out to Chambers that this was his chance. Here was his opportunity to gain Power. In the Fifth Form he had been a nonentity; in the Remove he could become Somebody with a capital S!

Hence Chambers was now the self-appointed leader of Study D. Edward Oswald Handforth had gone, and apparently would never return. So Chambers had taken his place.

But there was one thing which Cuthbert Chambers did not know; one thing which nobody in the Remove knew, except Church and McClure. And these hopeful youths were discussing that one thing now.

"What do we care?" chuckled Church gleefully. "We shan't have to fool Chambers for much longer. Only an hour or two, at the most!"

"My son, it'll be worth quids and quids!" said McClure dreamily. "Oh, my only sainted aunt! Just think of the ructions when Handy turns up!"

"And the joke of it is, nobody thinks he's coming!" said Church. "Nobody knows anything about it!"

They laughed long and loudly at the very idea of it. Edward Oswald Handforth was coming back! He was due that evening! And when he arrived—

"Chambers thinks that we're afraid of him!" said Church, grinning. "We've been obeying his orders all day—running to do his rotten errands! He's fool enough to think that we're scared of him!"

"But it's worth it!" said McClure contentedly. "By Jingo! It's worth it, Churchy, old man! I rather wonder how we kept ourselves in. But just wait until this evening—until old Handy shows up! Chambers will get the shock of his life!"

"Shock?" said Church. "It'll be more like an earthquake! You know what a chap Handy is! When he gets back and finds that there's a usurper in his study, he'll go off like an explosion of dynamite!"

There was every reason for the satisfaction felt by Church and McClure.

Only a day or two ago, Handforth had written to say that he was coming back; and then a telegram had arrived, bearing the startling news that his father had prohibited him from leaving St. Jim's. Sir Edward Handforth had cut up rusty, and had stated plainly that he would not allow his son to return to St. Frank's.

However, unknown to the rank and file of the Remove, Sir Edward himself had arrived at St. Frank's the previous day—in order, as he said, to settle things up with Dr. Stafford. But Church and McClure had met him, had pleaded with him, and had won him round.

They had triumphed. Their arguments had succeeded with the stubborn Sir Edward, and, finally, he had completely capitulated—promising that Handy should come back to St. Frank's on the morrow. And this was to-day! During the evening Handforth would arrive! There wasn't any doubt about it whatever. Sir Edward had given his word, and therefore it was official.



CHAPTER 3.

Nothing Doing!

CUTHBERT CHAMBERS, unaware of the cloud that was already beginning to creep over his horizon, walked airily across to Little Side, and there he found most of the junior cricketers preparing for the game. He had now changed into flannels.

It was by no means an important match; merely a House game; Nipper's eleven against Reggie Pitt's eleven. But the juniors were taking a big interest in it, nevertheless, and the West House chances of success were considered to be slight.

"Just a minute, Nipper!" said Chambers. He butted right into a chat that Nipper was having with Fullwood and Gresham, but he evidently considered that he was such a big man that he could do this sort of thing

with impunity. The juniors looked at him with unfriendly eyes.

"Just a minute, Chambers," retorted Nipper, mimicking Chambers' own words. "If you want to speak to me, I'll attend to you in a moment. Gresham was asking me—"

"I don't care a hang what Gresham was asking you!" broke in Chambers aggressively. "When I speak, I expect attention!"

Nipper laughed outright.

"Sorry, Chambers, but we don't look at it in quite the same way," he said good-humouredly. "You've got to remember that you're just a junior now—an ordinary member of the Remove."

"That's where you're wrong!" said Chambers, drawing himself up to his full height. "I'm not an ordinary member of the Remove!"

"Well, perhaps not," agreed Nipper. "Seeing that you were sent down from the Fifth for slacking—"

"Never mind why I was sent down!" roared Chambers, turning red. "I'm in the Remove now, and I'm older than anybody else in the Form. It's my place to give instructions, and to expect obedience!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Removites laughed uproariously.

"Hallo! What's all this?" said Reggie Pitt, strolling up with Jack Grey and Castleton. "Well, I'm bothered if it isn't the mighty Chambers! Bow, slaves! Salaam, O dirt, before this magnificent being!"

With great solemnity the West House juniors salaamed low. But somehow Cuthbert Chambers did not seem to appreciate it. Perhaps he realised that he was only being ragged.

"That's about enough of that!" he said sharply. "I'm a big fellow, and the most important chap in the Remove; but I don't want you to kow-tow to me. As long as you obey my orders I shall be satisfied!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Chambers, old man, you're a scream!" said Nipper calmly. "It's just about time that somebody told you the cold, painful truth. You were nobody in the Fifth—and you're still nobody in the Remove."

"Why, you—you cheeky junior—"

"Junior yourself!"

"I'll make you bend to my will before I've done!" shouted Chambers, dancing with exasperation. "Don't I keep telling you that I'm the biggest fellow in the Remove?"

"The biggest ass, yes!" nodded Nipper, whilst everybody else chuckled.

Chambers swallowed hard, and he managed to control himself.

"Just for this once, I'll overlook your insolence!" he said, with incredible self-importance. "These things must come gradually, and I mustn't be too impatient. You happen to be the Remove captain, and so I must recognise you as such."

"Thanks awfully, old man," said Nipper, with mock gratitude.

"Well, anyhow, when's the game going to start?" demanded Chambers, looking round. "I think I'll open the batting with you, Nipper."

"Oh!" said Nipper, with interest. "You think that, do you?"

"Yes; I'll do you the honour of—"

"Just a minute!" interrupted Nipper. "Who told you that you were going to play in this match?"

"Who told me?" repeated Chambers, staring. "I told myself, of course!"

"Then it wouldn't be a bad idea for you to tell yourself something else!" smiled Nipper. "Sad to relate, Chambers, you're not playing in this match at all!"

"Not playing!" thundered Chambers.

"Sorry, and all that, but it's going to be a real game," explained Nipper. "If you are keen on having some amusement, I dare say the fags will let you join them in their marbles!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Chambers had been red before, but now he went as scarlet as a beetroot.

"You silly young idiot!" he hooted. "What the deuce do you mean? I'm going to play in this match—"

"Oh, I say!" protested Fullwood. "Are we going to waste any more time on this insufferable fathead?"

"Not another minute!" replied Nipper briskly. "Come on, you fellows!"

"Hold on!" gasped Chambers. "As a chap who had just come down from the Fifth, I claim a right to play in this game!"

"I don't see how that gives you any right, Chambers," said Nipper. "You weren't in the senior eleven, and as far as I know, you don't know the difference between a bat and a leg-pad. I've never seen you playing cricket for the Fifth!"

This was true enough, and Chambers gritted his teeth. He had thought, in his conceit, that his very seniority would allow him to barge into the Remove team without let or hindrance. Now he was discovering the truth—and, as usual, the truth hurt.

"Then you mean that I can't play in this game?" he asked thickly.

"Sorry; but that's exactly what I mean!"

"All right!" fumed Chambers. "All right, my lad! But just you wait until I'm captain of the Remove!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Just you wait!" repeated Chambers hoarsely.

"I'm quite agreeable!" smiled Nipper. "I rather fancy that I shall have to wait for a long time, Chambers. I wouldn't give a brass farthing for your chances!"

"You cheeky young sweep!" panted Chambers, turning on his heel. "One of these days, I'll teach you a lesson!"

He stalked off, boiling with rage. In Study D, he could strut about just as he pleased,

giving orders to Church and McClure. But with the rest of the Remove he was just Chambers of the Fifth—Chambers, the chump!



CHAPTER 4.

Leave It To Travers!

VIVIAN TRAVERS, of Study H in the Remove, was looking very elegant in his spotless white flannels as he came towards Little Side, with his bat tucked under his arm.

"Well, well!" he murmured mildly.

He had just caught sight of Chambers, as the latter was storming off the field. At the same instant, Chambers caught sight of the languid Removite, and changed his direction. He approached Travers, his eyes gleaming with anger.

Travers was one of the most important men in the Ancient House Junior side. In some ways, he was a doubtful quantity, and not many of the Removites knew exactly how to take him. But when it came to cricket, Travers was undoubtedly "the goods."

Indeed, the Ancient House was relying upon him for this particular match. Harry Gresham, one of the star men of the Remove, was unfit. He was sound as a bell physically, but he had hurt his wrist at practice, a couple of days earlier, and Nipper had decided that he must have at least a week's rest. So Gresham, much to his disappointment, was now only a spectator.

Then, too, the redoubtable Handforth was not available. Handforth had left St. Frank's—for good, as the Remove believed. And Handforth, whatever his faults, was an extraordinary slogger, and he could generally be counted upon to get between twenty and thirty runs. With both Gresham and Handforth out of the team there were not many stars left.

So Vivian Travers was very much needed.

"I want to talk to you, Travers!" said Chambers harshly, as he came to a halt.

"Dear old fellow, go ahead!" invited Travers languidly. "But I would remind you that I have not many minutes to spare. Nipper is an excellent fellow in many ways, but I am afraid that he is inclined to be somewhat impatient—especially when you recollect that I am already late."

"I don't care a hang about Nipper, or the game either!" snapped Chambers. "Two minutes ago, I told Nipper that I was going to play in this game. And what do you think he said?"

"For the love of Samson!" murmured Travers. "Do you expect me to answer riddles on a hot day like this?"

"What do you think he told me?" roared Chambers.

"At a random guess, I should suggest that he told you to go and eat coke."

"You silly young fool!" breathed Chambers. "He told me that he wouldn't have me in the eleven!"

"Well, well!" said Travers smoothly. "You mustn't be so indignant, dear old fellow. Remember that Nipper is the skipper, and remember, also, that your reputation as a cricketer is not precisely brilliant."

Chambers nearly choked.

"Are you agreeing with that rotten young upstart?" he demanded fiercely.

"Wait!" murmured Travers, as a thoughtful expression came into his eyes. "Wait, dear old fellow! Unless I am much mistaken, an idea is beginning to take shape in my masterly mind."

He looked at Chambers in an abstracted way. He recalled that he was partly responsible for the Fifth-Former's downfall.

It had been Chamber's birthday yesterday, and Travers had discovered that Grayson and Shaw, of the East House, were planning to entrap Chambers into a gambling game, so that they could fleecy him of the substantial tips that he had received from doting relatives. Travers, in the goodness of his heart, had tempted Chambers into a game of banker—his object being to "win" Chambers' money, so that the designing East House fellows could not get hold of it. Later, of course, Travers would have returned his winnings.

Unfortunately, Mr. Pagett, the Fifth Form-master, had interrupted this interesting game. Both Travers and Chambers had been hauled before the Head, and had been flogged; and it was owing to this incident that Mr. Pagett had placed Chambers' work in front of Dr. Stafford.

The net result was that Chambers was sent down into the Remove—as a punishment for slacking all the term.

And now Travers felt that he owed it to Cuthbert Chambers to help him. Quite apart from this, Travers was amused at the whole affair. It would be interesting to see how far Chambers went, wearing the mantle of the departed Handforth. But then, Vivian Travers did not know that Edward Oswald Handforth was even now on his way back to St. Frank's!

"Well, I'm still waiting!" said Chambers tartly, after a pause.

"Exactly!" murmured Travers. "The fact is, dear old fellow, there might be a chance here for you to grab the reins of the Remove. One cannot tell. Much will depend upon the events of the next ten minutes."

"What on earth are you talking about?"

"I'd prefer not to explain," said Travers calmly. "But just leave this to me, Chambers. It's your ambition to become captain of the Remove, and to see Nipper cast down from his high estate. Well, we'll see what we can do."

"That's all very well!" said Chambers. "But I want to know what you're driving at, Travers! How the dickens can you wangle the thing?"

"I don't know—yet," replied Travers.

"But the first essential is to get the bulk of the Remove incensed against Nipper. It's rather hard lines on the poor chap, because I like him. He's one of the best!"

"You young idiot!"

"Opinions differ, of course," went on Travers smoothly. "And it's rather a good thing, in a way, that we don't all think alike. There's nothing like variety, dear old fellow."

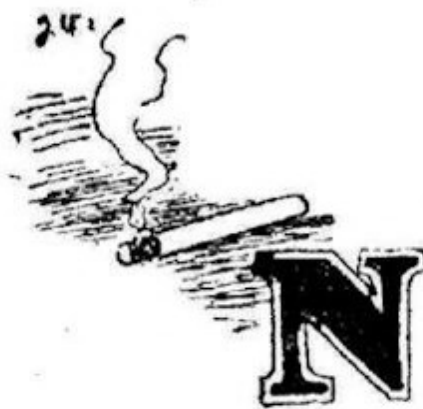
He prepared to move off, but Chambers caught him by the arm.

"You haven't explained what you're going to do!" he said gruffly.

"No," agreed Travers. "I'm not going to explain, either. All in good time, Chambers. Just leave this to me."

He shook himself free, and walked off. Chambers, breathing hard, thrust his hands deeply into his trousers pockets, and went his own way.

Yet he was beginning to have hope. There was something very rock-like and substantial about Vivian Travers.



CHAPTER 5.

Asking For Trouble!

NIPPER looked at Travers approvingly as the latter joined the cricketers.

"Feeling fit?" he

asked, smiling.

"Fit as a fiddle," replied Travers. "Everything ready?"

"Yes, pretty well," said Nipper. "We're relying upon you for some good work in this match, Travers. Everybody is saying that it's a certain win for the Ancient House, but I'm not so sure. Unless we work hard, we shall find ourselves whacked."

"Yes, without old Handy and Gresham, we're a bit handicapped," agreed Travers, nodding. "I understand that Chambers wanted to play?"

"Yes, the hopeless idiot!"

"Dear old fellow, what's the objection?" inquired Travers languidly. "Why didn't you give him a chance?"

Nipper stared.

"Look here, Travers, none of your kidding!" he said gruffly. "You know jolly well that Chambers is a hopeless duffer. He can't play hop-scotch, let alone cricket!"

"Well, if it comes to that, I can't play hop-scotch, either," murmured Travers dryly. "But it's not an important match, and it would have been—well, friendly, if you had given Chambers a place."

"You're mad!" said Nipper shortly.

"Thanks awfully."

"Off your rocker!" went on Nipper. "I can't understand why the dickens you're taking such an interest in Chambers! You can't honestly mean to tell me, Travers, that you would accept him as a leader!"

"I don't accept anybody as a leader," replied Travers promptly. "No offence to you, dear old fellow, but I always go my own way. Always have done—always shall do."

Nipper laughed.

"Well, we won't argue," he said. "Where's Reggie? We're ready to start now, aren't we?"

Travers shrugged his shoulders, and strolled off towards the pavilion. He found it empty, for it was very hot in there, and the fellows preferred the open air. Travers smiled to himself, then very deliberately he produced his cigarette case, and lit a cigarette. He puffed away contentedly.

"Now we'll wait for the fireworks!" he murmured.

In ordinary circumstances, Travers would never have smoked just before a cricket match. He loved cricket, and he heaved a little sigh as he realised that his present action would probably cost him his place in the eleven. At all events, that was what he was aiming for. In his determination to help Chambers, he was sacrificing the game. But, after all, it was only a minor match, and so it didn't much matter.

Besides, Travers was intrigued by all the possibilities.

He strolled to the window, and looked out. Castleton, of the West House, was near by; Travers concealed his cigarette, and hailed the other junior.

"I say, Castleton!" he called. "You might tell Nipper that I want a word with him, will you?"

"What's the idea?" asked Castleton. "Can't you come out and speak to Nipper yourself?"

"I can—but I prefer to have a word with him here, in private," replied Travers. "Tell him that it's rather important."

Alan Castleton did not understand it, but he nodded, and gave the message to Nipper. A minute later Nipper came towards the pavilion and marched into the little dressing-room, where Travers was lolling against the wall.

"Thanks awfully, dear old fellow," he said, as Nipper entered. "Now, about Chambers—"

"Hold on!" said Nipper grimly. "What are you doing, Travers?"

Exactly as Travers had anticipated, Nipper was looking angrily at the cigarette which dropped from Travers' lips. This was asking for trouble with a vengeance!

"Doing?" repeated Travers mildly. "Nothing, at the moment."

"Yes, you are! You're smoking!"

"Oh, this?" said Travers, removing the cigarette. "Any objection, dear old fellow?"

"You know quite well that I dislike you smoking, Travers!" retorted Nipper. "You can do what you like in your own time, but please remember that you're now a member of my eleven—and I'm the skipper. I don't allow my cricketers to smoke!"



"Get my shoes!" ordered Chambers, as if he were addressing a slave. Church obeyed the command with alacrity, and he placed the shoes reverently on the floor at Chambers' feet.

"No?" murmured Travers. "What a pity!"

"You'd better put that thing out."

"Sorry, dear old fellow, but I don't feel inclined to," replied Travers, as he took another puff. "There's nothing better than a cigarette for steadying one's nerves. This is going to put me in fine fettle for the game."

"Don't be a fool!" retorted Nipper hotly. "Smoking doesn't put you in fine fettle for anything!"

"Opinions differ, of course!"

"Well, my opinion doesn't differ—it remains the same about smoking!" said Nipper. "I can't understand you, Travers. If you weren't a member of my eleven, you could smoke yourself sick, for all I cared. It's not my business."

"Then why get so excited about it?"

"But you *are* a member of my eleven!" said Nipper. "And it is my business. Either you put that cigarette out now, or you don't play!"

Vivian Travers deliberately smoked on.

"Did you hear me?"

"Yes, I heard," said Travers. "But it pleases me not to heed."

"Are you defying me?"

"Put it like that, if you want to," said Travers. "But I'm a bit obstinate, too. You tell me not to smoke, and I say I shall smoke. As soon as I've finished this cigarette, I'll come outside——"

"While I'm skipper of this eleven I'll have my own way!" interrupted Nipper grimly. "I've given you one warning, Travers, and

I'll only give you just one more. Will you put that cigarette out now, or will you be dropped out of to-day's match?"

"I'm not putting the cigarette out at your orders, anyhow."

Nipper's eyes gleamed.

"All right!" he snapped. "You won't be wanted this evening, Travers. I'll play Church, instead."

"Well, well," said Travers, with a sigh. "Isn't that rather foolish, dear old fellow?"

"It's my decision!"

"Cæsar hath spoken!" grinned Travers, as he smoked on. "Without wishing to lay too much stress on my own prowess, do you really think that Church will be an efficient substitute? Don't you think that you'll be letting the side down?"

Without a word Nipper turned on his heel and walked out of the pavilion, and Travers knew perfectly well that the junior skipper had acted in the only possible way. He had been defied by one of the team, and he had acted with his usual firmness.

But, after all, this was exactly what Travers had been aiming at!



CHAPTER 6.

The Telegram!

NIPPER was looking thoroughly upset when he joined the other cricketers outside. They were waiting for him, and they looked at him

curiously as he came up with a worried brow.

"Travers isn't playing!" he said shortly.

"Great Scott!" ejaculated Pitt. "Why not?"

"I've thrown him out of the eleven, that's why not!" replied Nipper. "No need to go into any explanations. Travers isn't playing in this game, and I'd like somebody to find Church."

This, too, had been anticipated by Travers. He had fully counted on it. Nipper would not tell anybody else that he had found Travers smoking, that Travers had defied him, and so everybody would jump to the conclusion that he—Travers—had been thrown out of the team because he had championed the cause of Chambers.

As a matter of fact, all the cricketers did actually come to this conclusion. And nobody thought of asking any questions, because Nipper looked very grim and angry.

As it happened, Church and McClure were within sight. They were hovering near the gateway which led through the Triangle, and when some of the fellows beckoned to them, and shouted, they hurried forward.

"You're wanted, Church!" said Tommy Watson eagerly, as Church and McClure came up. "Where's your bat?"

"My bat?" repeated Church. "But—but —"

"I've decided to play you in this match," said Nipper briefly.

"I say, thanks awfully!" exclaimed Church, looking dismayed. "But—but, you see, I—I—"

"Well?"

"I'm not very keen on playing!"

"What!" echoed half a dozen voices.

"If it's all the same to you, Nipper, I'd rather watch!" said Church lamely.

Everybody stared at him in amazement. Ninety-nine juniors out of a hundred would have leapt at the chance of playing in a House match. Church's reluctance was inexplicable.

"What's the matter with you?" demanded Nipper, with a touch of irritation. "You're fit, aren't you?"

"Yes, but—"

"Then what's your objection?"

"There's no objection!" put in McClure quickly. "Don't be such an idiot, Churchy! I'll buzz indoors and get your bat for you. He'll play, Nipper!"

"Yes, all right," muttered Church. "Thanks awfully, Nipper!"

He and McClure exchanged quick glances, and the other juniors, noticing the action, couldn't understand it. Yet the truth was very simple.

Church and McClure were expecting Handforth at any minute. Even now the great Edward Oswald might be driving into the Triangle, at the wheel of his trusty little Austin Seven, and Church was dismayed at the thought of being tied to the cricket field at the moment of Handforth's arrival. But for this, he would have been as keen as mustard on playing.

McClure hurried off, and, as luck would have it, he caught sight of a red bicycle as he entered the Triangle. The cyclist was in uniform, and he had just ridden in through the gateway.

A telegraph messenger!

McClure swerved aside, and ran up to the telegraph boy as he was dismounting.

"Who's the wire for?" he asked breathlessly.

"It's addressed to Master Church, of the Ancient House," said the messenger, feeling in his little satchel.

"Good egg!" gasped McClure. "Give it to me!"

"But you're not Master Church, are you?"

"Never mind about that—that wire is for me, just as much as for Church!" replied Mac. "Come on—hand it over!"

He fairly grabbed it, and tore it open. Then his eyes danced with joy and satisfaction.

For this is what he read:

"Will arrive at about seven o'clock. Have special feed in Study D. Invite as many as you like. "HANDY."

"Hurrah!" yelled McClure excitedly.

"Crumbs!" said the messenger, staring.

McClure scooted off indoors, grabbed Church's bat out of Study D, and then raced back to Little Side. He was feeling thankful that nobody had seen him taking that telegram from the messenger. He could still keep it a secret! Nobody would know about Handforth's arrival until the Austin Seven drove right into the Triangle!

"Here you are, Churchy!" panted Mac, as he dragged Church aside. "Go in, and play for all you're worth, old man!"

"But—but what about Handy?" murmured Church. "Supposing he comes while—"

"Not a chance of it!" grinned Mac. "I can't show it to you now, but a wire just came for you!"

"What!"

"I opened it!" said McClure. "It's from Handy. He says he's getting here at about seven o'clock. Keep it mum, for goodness' sake!"

Church's eyes danced, too.

"Seven o'clock," he breathed. "Good egg! The match will be all over by then, and the fellows will be crowding in the Triangle! Oh, I say! What a lark! He's really coming back, Mac! This settles it—absolutely!"

"Absolutely!" nodded McClure happily.

All their doubts were set at rest. Yesterday, they had seen Sir Edward, and he had assured them that he would send his son back to St. Frank's. But now the matter was clinched. Handforth was on his way—and he would arrive at seven o'clock!

Church and McClure were very happy—but, in the meantime, some rather dramatic events were destined to occur!



CHAPTER 7.

All Nipper's Fault!

THAT'S done it!" said Tommy Watson gloomily.

The House match was nearing its end.

Reggie Pitt and his men had been in first, and they had knocked up a respectable total of 107. The Ancient House was now in, and Church's wicket had just fallen. Incidentally, Church had scored the magnificent total of 2 runs.

There was some excuse for him; he was excited. He did his best to conceal it, but throughout the game he had been more or less abstracted. And now, instead of "stonewalling," and keeping his end up—as Nipper had expected—he had slogged away recklessly, and his middle stump had been sent flying out of the ground.

Things had gone badly for the Ancient House Remove.

Nipper and Tregellis-West, opening the innings, had knocked up a handy 43 before Sir Montie gave an easy catch to third slip.

Watson, who followed him, managed to add 10 more runs to the total, Nipper, meanwhile, raising his own individual score to 28. He and De Valerie made a bit of a stand, and the Ancient House began to hope when the score-board showed 78. Then Nipper succumbed to one of Hussi Kahn's googlies, and Jimmy Potts had taken his place.

Jimmy played well, but Reggie Pitt and his men were now beginning to see that the game was practically in their own hands. Church was last man but one, and the total score was only 92.

The end came within five minutes, for Duncan, who was last man in, gave a comparatively easy catch to Goodwin from Reggie Pitt's bowling.

The Ancient House juniors were all out for 97, and there was a feeling of resentment amongst a good deal of the Ancient House juniors. It was resentment against Nipper.

"It's all Nipper's fault, of course!" said Hubbard, as he and a number of other fellows stood discussing the game in the Triangle. "I think something ought to be done to show him that we don't approve of his rotten high-handed ways!"

"Oh, come off it!" said Fullwood. "Nipper's the best skipper the Remove ever had—"

"Rot!" put in De Valerie. "I'm inclined to agree with Hubbard. It's not often I go against Nipper—he's a good scout, on the whole—but to-day he made a pretty bad bloomer."

"How did he?" asked Gresham hotly.

"By dropping Travers, of course," said De Valerie. "Everybody knows that Travers could have saved us. If he had played, instead of Church, we should have whacked the West House hollow!"

"That's true enough!" admitted Fullwood reluctantly.

"Of course it's true!" said Hubbard. "Travers is a jolly fine player—and he can bowl almost as well as he can bat. Pitt's crowd wouldn't have reached a century, if Travers had been bowling, and it's pretty certain that Travers would have made a big score in the Ancient House innings. That fathead, Church, only got two!"

"There seems to be something wrong with Church this evening," muttered Fullwood, frowning. "He didn't play his usual game at all! And McClure is very much the same; they're both excited."

"I expect they're worried, because Chambers is leading them such a dance," said Jimmy Potts. "They're pretty hopeless, too—because Handy isn't coming back."

"Well, never mind about Church!" said De Valerie. "Nipper ruined the game this afternoon by dropping Travers. And why did he drop him? That's the point! Just because Travers was ass enough to support Chambers."

"I'm glad you admit that he was an ass!" said Potts. "Travers is my study mate, but he's off his rocker this week! Why the dickens he should be taking any notice of Chambers is more than I can understand."

At that very moment, Vivian Travers was lounging in Study D, talking to Chambers.

"It's your chance, dear old fellow, and if you don't seize it you'll only have yourself to blame," he was saying. "I've made the opportunity for you—"

"But I don't understand!" interrupted Chambers. "How have you made the opportunity?"

"Haven't I explained?" asked Travers, with a sigh.

"You've explained that you deliberately forced Nipper to drop you out of the team," said Chambers. "But I don't see how that affects me."

"Then I'll tell you," replied Travers. "All the fellows are saying that Nipper ought to be boiled for throwing the game away. They're saying that he allowed personal feelings to interfere with the match. Of course, that's all wrong, but I don't see any reason why I should explain matters. It's your chance, Chambers!"

"But what can I do?"

"Do!" said Travers, holding up his hands in a helpless gesture. "Why, fight!"

"Fight!"

"What else?" said Travers. "Go down into the Common-room, collect the chaps together, and incite them for all you're worth against Nipper. Agree with them that he's no good. And then, at the crucial moment, challenge Nipper to a scrap!"

"You—you mean a regular fight?"

"Yes, a regular fight!" said Travers calmly. "For the love of Samson! You're not afraid of him, are you?"

"Nun-no! Of course not!"

"I should hope not, anyhow!" said Travers, with a touch of contempt in his voice. "You're bigger and older! You ought to be able to make mincemeat of him, Chambers! But

don't you see what the result will be? If you fight Nipper, and beat him, he'll be compelled to resign. The spoils to the victor, what? In the excitement of the moment, the fellows will elect you skipper, in Nipper's place."

Cuthbert Chambers' eyes gleamed. It seemed possible that his dream would come true! Owing to the schemings of Travers—the very simple, innocent schemings—there was a possibility that he would win the captaincy!

But, as Travers had said, unless he seized this chance with both hands, it would slip away from him. It was now or never!

"I'll do it!" said Chambers breathlessly.

"Good man!" murmured Travers. "Let's go along, and start the ball rolling!"

CHAPTER 8.

The Row!



HERE was a good deal of subtle cunning in Travers' little plot.

If Chambers had challenged Nipper to

a fight at any ordinary time, he would have been laughed at in sheer derision. None of the Removeites would have allowed the fight to take place.

But with a good many of the fellows blaming Nipper for the lost match, and criticising his captaincy adversely, there was a distinct possibility that Chambers would receive a good deal of support.

If he actually won the fight, Nipper would be greatly discredited. There were a good many fellows in the rank and file who would turn only too willingly to a new leader. They would be glad enough of a change, if only for the novelty of it.

Nipper already had a few enemies in the Ancient House—notably Gore-Pearce & Co., of Study A—while such fellows as Hubbard and Long were ready enough to turn against him; and if Nipper were vanquished in a fight, even the decent chaps, like De Valerie and Somerton and Russell and Brent, might consider that a change would be advisable.

And Chambers was the man to take Nipper's place!

Chambers was a Fifth-Former—or had been until just recently. Furthermore, Chambers was a big muscular fellow; therefore he should be captain if only because he was a senior and the biggest member of the Remove.

The situation, of course, was an entirely forced one, and due to the scheming of Vivian Travers. Normally, it would not have mattered much. But, considering that Handforth was on his way back to St. Frank's, there was almost something uncanny in the way things were going.

For Edward Oswald Handforth had been eager to come back to his old school because he had a conviction within him that everything in the Remove was going to chaos.

Handforth wasn't conceited, but he had weird and wonderful ideas.

He believed, for instance, that his absence from St. Frank's had thrown everything into disorder. He fondly imagined that the Remove was going to the dogs, and that it was up to him to return to put everything in order.

And now, by pure coincidence, there seemed every likelihood that he would arrive to find the chaos that, up till this hour, had been a mere figment of Handforth's imagination!

Chambers and Travers strode into the Common-room, and found, to their satisfaction, that a good many fellows had collected there. Gore-Pearce and Gulliver and Bell were talking excitedly with Hubbard and Brent and De Valerie—and the general run of the conversation was significant. They were all of the opinion that Nipper had made a blunder, and that he ought to be called over the coals for it.

"Here's Travers!" said De Valerie, as the newcomers arrived. "Hard lines, Travers!"

"Yes, rather!" said Hubbard. "If you had been playing this evening, Travers, we shouldn't have lost the match!"

"You're probably right, dear old fellow," said Travers nodding. "But we can't be sure, can we? Church, at least, scored a couple of runs. I might have scored a duck."

"Rats! You were good for twenty, at least," said De Valerie promptly. "Why the dickens did Nipper drop you, anyhow?"

"Oh, why bother?" said Travers. "The game's over—and lost. Does it do any good to hold an inquest over it?"

Chambers walked into the middle of the room, and he looked round aggressively.

"I'll tell you why Nipper dropped Travers!" he said darkly. "It was because Travers suggested that I should be put into the team. Nipper's no good! He may have been all right in the past, but he's played out. The Remove needs a new leader!"

"Hear, hear!" said Hubbard. "What's the matter with Travers?"

"Nothing, that I know of," said Travers.

"Why don't you push Nipper out and step into his shoes?" drawled Gore-Pearce.

"Nothing doing, dear old fellow!" replied Travers, shaking his head. "I don't pine for leadership. But if you want a change, how about Chambers? He's the biggest fellow in the Remove now—an ex-Fifth-Former. It's his place to be leader, and I'm ready to support him."

"I'm the fellow for the job!" shouted Chambers. "If you'll elect me as captain I'll see that all grievances are put right. Nipper's too fond of riding the high horse. He thinks too much of himself. Under my leadership the Remove would be run as it has never been run before!"

"I believe it!" said Gresham tartly.

"Nipper's too strict!" roared Chambers. "He's always down on somebody, with his goody-goody ideas. But, thank goodness, I'm different. I'm free and easy. My policy is to let everybody do very much as he likes."

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I don't believe in all this strictness—all this straight-laced priggishness. If anybody breaks any of the school rules Nipper is down on them."

"That's true enough!" said Gulliver excitedly. "It's about time that Nipper was kicked out!"

"He ought to have been kicked out weeks ago!" declared Gore-Pearce. "Chambers is the man for us!"

"Good luck to Chambers!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Down with Nipper!"

At that moment the door opened, and Nipper himself appeared. He was looking quite calm and collected, and he only smiled when he heard the shouts. After all, they were uttered by the nonentities, and they did not much matter.

A crowd of other juniors came in behind him, consisting of Church, McClure, Archie Glenthorne, Adams, and Russell.

"Hallo!" said Russell. "What's all the excitement in here?"

"They appear to be running me down!" said Nipper calmly. "But I've got broad shoulders, and I can stand it. A skipper's life is a hard one!"

"That's all very well, Nipper, but what are you going to do about all this?" asked De Valerie.

"About all which?"

"Lots of the fellows are saying that you ought to resign!" put in Hubbard. "You made an awful mess of the game this evening, and you allowed those West House chaps to win."

"Rubbish!" said Nipper. "How do you make that out?"

"You dropped Travers, didn't you?"

"I dropped him because he deserved to be dropped."

"There you are!" shouted Chambers, at the top of his voice. "He's still riding the high horse. He thinks he can do as he likes, without being criticised. By glory! I'll tell you what!" added Chambers fiercely. "We'll have this thing settled now—one way or the other!"

"Oh!" said Nipper slowly. "How?"

"I'm going to fight you!" retorted Chambers, his eyes glittering with excitement and triumph. "It'll be a fight for the captaincy!"



CHAPTER 9.

The Challenge!

THERE were many shouts of excitement, and the juniors pressed round eagerly. But Nipper remained quite cool.

He well understood that this was an attempt to force him into action. It wasn't a natural crisis at all, but a manufactured one. Left alone, the Remove would have been quite content. Not ten per cent of the fellows would have maintained their criticisms.

"Just a minute, you fellows," said Nipper quietly. "Before we go any farther, hadn't you better understand the true position?"

Travers, who scented danger, managed to get a word in.

"Why waste time on talk?" he asked.

"Hear, hear!"

"A fight—a fight!"

"Go it, Nipper!"

"Show Chambers what you're made of!"

"Exactly!" said Travers. "Words are idle now. The time for action has come. You can't get away from it, Nipper, dear old fellow. You have been challenged, and if you don't accept it will be taken as a sign of weakness."

But Nipper was not fooled.

"What's your idea, Travers?" he asked coldly. "I believe that you manufactured this silly affair. Why should I fight Chambers? I have no quarrel with him——"

"Yah! You're afraid!" yelled Gulliver tauntingly.

"Funk!"

"You're afraid of Chambers, because he's bigger!"

Nipper coloured. He hadn't thought of it in that way before. But it was an undoubted fact that Cuthbert Chambers was older and bigger. But surely these fellows didn't think for a moment that he—Nipper—was afraid?

"Well, I've challenged you, and if you don't accept you'll stamp yourself as a coward," said Chambers fiercely. "The winner of the fight is to be the captain. I'm ready for the scrap now, if you are, Nipper!"

"But it's all so ridiculous——"

"If you knock me out, I'll promise to be loyal to your leadership!" continued Chambers. "I can't say fairer than that."

"Good for you, Chambers!"

"That's straight enough, anyhow!"

"Oh, rather!"

"But if I win, I shall expect Nipper to resign!" went on Chambers aggressively. And, what's more, I shall expect you fellows to support me!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Count on us, Chambers."

"Go it, both of you!"

Nipper bit his lip. He could see that he was going to be forced into this fight. He wasn't in the least afraid; he was convinced, indeed, that he would soon be able to give Chambers the knock-out. Chambers was big, but he had no reputation as a fighter. It might be just as well, too, to put him in his place, once and for all. His humiliation would be complete if he were beaten in fair fight by the Junior skipper.

"Well, what are you hesitating about?" asked Chambers sneeringly. "Afraid of me?"

"No, it's not that," replied Nipper. "I'm not afraid of you, Chambers."

"Then why don't you accept the challenge?"

"I am accepting it—now!" retorted Nipper. "The whole thing's silly, but you've forced it on me, and there's no alternative. I'm ready to begin as soon as you are."

"Good egg!"

"A fight!"

"Clear the way, there, you chaps!" sang out De Valerie. "Make a ring!"

Church and McClure, who were on the outskirts of the crowd, watched fascinatedly. A fight was always a big attraction, and this fight promised to be something very excep-

tional in the way of interest. For the Junior skipper himself was about to defend his title against this Fifth Form usurper.

"Better see it out, eh?" muttered Church, as he glanced at his companion.

"Yes; it won't take long," said McClure. "Nipper ought to be able to knock Chambers out within ten minutes, and it's only just after half-past six."

Church understood. Handforth would not arrive until seven, so there was plenty of time. Church and McClure had wanted to go out in order to hang about the gateway, so that they could be the first to greet their old leader. But in the circumstances they decided to remain in the Common-room and see the fight.

Nipper and Chambers slipped off their blazers, removed their neck-ties, and rolled up their sleeves. Somebody had produced two pairs of boxing-gloves, and these were donned and affixed by ready assistants.

Vivian Travers stood by, nonchalant and contented. Everything was working exactly as he had planned. It was all very gratifying. The only regret he felt was that he had no grudge against Nipper, and it was rather a pity that Nipper should be used as an innocent victim. But it amused Travers to cause all this commotion. It was helping to liven things up.

De Valerie was appointed as timekeeper, and Harry Gresham accepted the post of referee.

Everybody in the Common-room was intensely excited. The one question that occupied their minds was: Would the scientific Nipper be able to stand up to the burly Chambers?

Whatever the result, a thrilling fight was probable.



CHAPTER 10.

The Fight!

BY the time the first blows were exchanged, everybody in the Ancient House Remove had crowded into the Common-room. The news had spread like lightning, and all those fellows who had been in their own studies now came hurrying to the scene of battle. There wasn't much risk of a prefect or a master interrupting—and even if there had been it wouldn't have made any difference. The thing had to be settled.

"Time!" sang out De Valerie cheerily.

Chambers started off with a rush. He made a blind dash at Nipper, punching wildly and vigorously. Nipper, who had been looking for something of this sort, adroitly sidestepped and avoided the charge, and he managed to get in a beautiful tap on Chambers' nose that caused the ex-Fifth-Former to pull up short, gasping.

"Buck up, Chambers!"

"Go it, Nipper!"

"Show him how to use his fists!"

"He won't last more than a couple of rounds!"

Chambers had all the advantage of height and reach—backed by his greater strength. Even in the Fifth, he had been regarded as a big, clumsy sort of fellow. In the Remove, he stood nearly a head taller than the majority of the juniors.

But those who knew Nipper had no qualms. Nipper was the champion boxer of the Ancient House. Handforth, perhaps, had been more of a slogger—more of a fighter. But Nipper was scientific in his methods, and his boxing was, indeed, extraordinarily good.

Not that it served him well in this particular case.

Boxing was a handicap rather than an advantage. For Chambers knew very little of science, and his fighting consisted of making rushes, hitting out with all his strength in a wild kind of way.

"Steady. Chambers, dear old fellow—steady!" urged Travers. "Don't get so excited about it! Take it calmly—or you'll find yourself flat on the floor, counting the stars!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You leave me alone!" roared Chambers. "Wait until I get one of my punches in! I'll make this young fathead think that he's been hit by a battering-ram!"

Thud! Thud! Smack!

As quick as lightning, Nipper got in two body blows, and a quick lunge to Chambers' face. The ex-Fifth-Former staggered back, gasping afresh, and Nipper, following up his advantage, got in three more blows in quick succession. Chambers staggered back into the crowd.

"Go it, Nipper! You've got him now!"

But Chambers, bewildered and dazed, pulled himself up in the nick of time. He managed to get his guard into something like working order, and then he counter-attacked. By sheer weight of strength, he forced Nipper back into the middle of the ring.

"Time!" called De Valerie.

The first round was over, and there wasn't a doubt that Nipper was the master. Chambers, surrounded by Travers and Gore-Pearce and a number of other fellows, was aware of a mild sensation of panic.

"I can't get near the kid!" he panted.

"He's too thundering quick for me!"

"It's your own fault!" said Travers, in his ear. "You shouldn't be so excited, dear old fellow. When the next round starts, keep cool. Watch him closely, and then get in your knock-out blow—one punch ought to be enough—when you see your opportunity."

Over in the other "corner," Tommy Watson and Tregellis-West and Potts were chuckling round Nipper.

"You ought to get him in this round, Nipper, old boy!" Sir Montie was saying.

"It's frightfully interestin' to watch, but the sooner you knock him out, the better."

"Yes, rather!" said Watson. "It'll be all the more humiliating, if he's whacked in the

second round. Let him have it hot, Nipper, old man!"

"Time!"

The crowd spread out again, and the combatants faced one another. But Nipper could now see that Chambers was different. Obviously he had been taking advice from his supporters. He was more wary—more cool. He no longer indulged in those rash rushes. He was waiting patiently—waiting for an opening.

A few blows were exchanged, and the round was becoming somewhat dull, when Chambers abruptly changed his tactics. With a sudden roar, he rushed in, his powerful right lunging straight at Nipper's chin. In the nick of time, Nipper ducked, and the blow went harmlessly over his head. At the same second, he managed to get in a punch which sent Chambers reeling back, gasping and gurgling.

"Now you've got him!" yelled Tommy Watson.

Nipper pressed his advantage, punching with deadly effect. Chambers' guard went to pieces; he rocked on his heels, his arms flying wildly.

Crash!

It was a beautiful punch—a terrific left-hander to Chambers' chin. With a grunt, Chambers completely crumpled up, his knees sagging.

But in that last second, more by accident than design, he struck out with all his strength. It was a blind punch—without any idea behind it. But as luck would have it, Nipper, in pressing forward after his blow, received Chambers' glove between the eyes.

Thud!

It all happened so quickly that hardly any of the spectators saw it. They knew that Nipper had delivered a knock-out blow to Chambers. But, almost in the same flash, Chambers had got in a knock-out blow on Nipper! Nipper's was intentional—but Chambers' was accidental. Not that it made any difference to the result.

For, as Chambers sagged down and rolled helplessly on the floor, Nipper reeled back, collapsing. The next second, they were both stretched out—and the confusion that reigned in the Remove common-room was akin to pandemonium!



CHAPTER 11.

The Return of the Prodigal!

IGHT—nine—out!"

Harry Gresham finished counting, and a wild roar went up from dozens of throats.

"Great Scott!" gasped Tommy Watson. "They're both out!"

"Good gad!"

"You've counted 'em both out, Gresham!"

ejaculated Sir Jimmy Potts. "Well I'm jiggered! Get some water, somebody!"

There was general confusion and consternation.

"I mean to say, a frightfully poisonous situation, what?" said Archie Glenthorne. "Odds doubts and troubles! It's absolutely imposs. to know which one is whacked!"

"Rats!" said Watson. "Nipper's the winner!"

"Not likely!" roared Gore-Pearce. "He's no more the winner than Chambers is! They're both out!"

"Yes, but Nipper knocked Chambers out by an intentional blow!" protested Watson hotly. "And Chambers only sloshed Nipper by accident! Of course Nipper's the winner!"

"No fear!" yelled Hubbard. "The fight's a draw!"

"I rather think that you are right, dear old fellow," said Travers. "And, as the fight is a draw, it stands to reason that we now have two Remove skippers in the Ancient House. It's a case of honours divided, and the only fair way is to divide the Remove."

"No, no!" went up a yell from Nipper's supporters. "Nipper is still captain!"

"Rot!" shouted Hubbard. "Chambers is captain!"

"Never mind who's captain!" said Gresham impatiently. "We need some water for these chaps! Why doesn't somebody——"

Gresham had started moving towards the door while he was speaking, and now he suddenly came to an abrupt halt. He was staring at the door, which was half open. His sudden silence caused the other juniors to look round, wondering why Gresham had stopped so abruptly.

And then a tremendous shout went up.

"Handy!" roared a score of voices.

Edward Oswald Handforth was standing in the doorway!

Even Church and McClure had not noticed him—and, strangely enough, they were the only fellows who knew that he was expected. Yet they had missed his actual arrival.

"Handy, old man!" gasped Church, leaping forward.

"Welcome back to St. Frank's!" ejaculated McClure.

Handforth stood there, rather dusty after his drive, his hair tousled, and his rugged face alight with bewilderment.

"By George!" he said, at last. "What's all this?"

Church and McClure were wringing his hand and thumping him on the back.

"It's jolly fine to see you back again, Handy!" panted Church. "We didn't tell anybody that you were coming—and that's why they're all so surprised!"

"Oh, so that's it, is it?" said Handforth, as light dawned upon him. "Well, by the look of things, it is a surprise!"

"I would rather call it a shock, dear old fellow," said Travers mildly.

For the moment, the unfortunate Nipper and Chambers were forgotten. The juniors came crowding round the doorway, and they were all looking at Handforth in wonder.

"You haven't come back to St. Frank's, have you?" asked Gresham.

"What do you think I'm doing here, then?" retorted Handforth. "Of course I've come back to St. Frank's. And, by George, it's high time!"

"But I thought your pater was going to keep you at St. Jim's!" ejaculated Travers.

"So he was—but he changed his mind!" said Edward Oswald calmly. "It's just as well that he did, because I was coming back, in any case. But perhaps it's all to the good that everything is smooth. Anyhow, I'm back—for good!"

"Hurrah!"

"Good old Handy!"

"We've missed you, old man—and you're needed now!"

"Yes, rather!"

Handforth nodded.

"I thought I should be needed!" he said significantly. "As I told the chaps at St. Jim's, everything will be in a state of chaos in the Remove, here. They wanted me to stay there, but I told them that it was impossible. I had to come back to St. Frank's to put things in order!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, isn't it true?" roared Handforth, as a laugh went up. "What's been happening here? Why can't somebody tell me? What the dickens is that fathead Chambers doing here?"

"He's been fighting Nipper!" said Church breathlessly.

"What!" roared Handforth. "Chambers—a Fifth-Former—fighting Nipper!"

"But he's not a Fifth-Former now!" explained McClure. "He's been sent down into the Remove!"

"Well, it's about time!" said Handforth. "Why didn't they send him down into the Third, whilst they were about it?"

"And he thinks he ought to be a leader!" said Church. "Anyhow, he challenged Nipper to fight, and they've been going at it hammer and tongs. They're both knocked out!"

"And now there isn't any leader for the Remove!" said Hubbard excitedly. "Chambers can't claim the captaincy, because he's knocked out himself, and Nipper can't keep it, because he was counted out, too!"

Handforth gave a bellow.

"I knew it!" he said triumphantly. "I knew all along that everything would be at sixes and sevens here! By George! It's just about time that I came back—to take charge!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Better leave it alone, Handy!" said Church anxiously. "It won't do any good if you butt in——"

"You silly chump, there's no question of butting in!" interrupted Handforth. "I've come back, and it's as plain as a pikestaff that I'm only just in time. From this minute onwards, I'll skipper the Remove! These other chaps aren't to be trusted!"

"Hurrah!"



Church, thinking only of the imminent return of Handforth to St. Frank's, was an awful failure at cricket. Instead of "stone-walling" and keeping his end up, as he should have done, he slogged out recklessly, and his middle stump was sent flying.

"Good old Handy!"

"Let's have Handy as captain!"

"Hear, hear!"

The excited juniors came crowding round, cheering Handforth to the echo, and enthusiastically supporting him. The truth was, they were pleased to see him back—for the bluff, genial Handy had always been popular.

And now he had arrived at a crucial moment.

He had walked back into St. Frank's, and he had walked into an absolute welter of excitement.

sent down the previous day, the Remove would have been pursuing its usual placid course, with Nipper calmly and capably at the helm. Handforth's arrival at such a moment of chaos was nothing more nor less than extraordinary.

The confusion in the Common-room was worse than ever, for Handforth's dramatic entry had caused a fresh outburst of excitement.

Water, as it turned out, was not needed. Nipper was the first to recover, and he sat up, looking dazed and bewildered. Chambers, at the same moment, was showing some sign of coming round.

"Great Scott!" breathed Nipper, as he blinked. "I thought I was dreaming—and now I know it! I must be seeing things!"

He was looking straight at Handforth, and his gaze was one of wonder.

"That's all right, dear old fellow," said Travers. "You mustn't take any notice of these hideous apparitions."

"Are you calling me a hideous apparition?" roared Handforth aggressively.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Same old Handy!" smiled Travers. "I thought that would have some effect!"

"Then—then it really is Handy?" asked Nipper, staggering to his feet. "Good man! Jolly pleased to see you, Handy! You've sprung a surprise on us!"

"Well, I didn't know it until I arrived," said Handforth, as he shook hands. "Church and McClure knew it about it yesterday, but the fatheads kept it a secret."



CHAPTER 12.

The Hour and the Man!

HANDFORTH had taken advantage of the situation with all his usual impulsiveness.

During his drive from St. Jim's he had formed many pictures in his mind as to the reception he would receive. But never had he imagined any such scene as this.

He had taken it for granted that everything would be upside down in the Remove. His very absence for over a month would be sufficient to cause disorganisation. This, of course, was merely a little conceit of Handforth's.

But for the fact that Chambers had been

"We did it for your sake!" said Church indignantly.

"But you don't mean to say that you've come back into the Remove—back to St. Frank's?" inquired Nipper.

"For good!" nodded Handforth.

"Splendid!" smiled Nipper, shaking his head vigorously, and then tenderly feeling his face. "We can do with you again, Handy, old man. We've missed you tremendously."

"So it seems!" said Handforth, nodding.

Chambers was on his feet by this time, and he was making a very rapid recovery. Nipper, catching sight of him for the first time, did not even know that he had been knocked out.

"Then I lost?" he asked, turning to Tommy Watson. "It's a rummy thing, but I rather thought that I had got in a knock-out blow on Chambers. Yet it seems that I went to sleep for a bit."

"Of course you knocked him out!" said Watson. "That whack of his was only accidental. You were both out!"

"That leaves it 'as you were,' then?"

"No, it jolly well doesn't, Nipper!" said Hubbard hotly. "You've been floored—counted out in fair fight—and I'm bothered if I'm going to support you any more. I don't regard you as my skipper!"

"Same here!" drawled Gore-Pearce. "I'm backing Chambers from now on!"

"Rather!" said Gulliver and Bell.

"And we're backing Handy!" said Church promptly.

"Every time!" added McClure.

The confusion seemed likely to get worse, and Travers raised his hand.

"Peace, dear old fellows!" he urged. "As far as I can see, the situation is rather impossible at the moment. Literally, we have three parties in the Ancient House Remove now. Nipper's party, Chambers' party, and Handforth's party. We can't hope to run things on those lines. We've got to have one leader. We can't hope to carry on properly with three!"

"Well, we've got one leader!" said Gresham promptly. "Nipper's the captain, and this affair hasn't made any difference."

"Yes, it has," said Travers. "Nipper can't keep control after what has just happened. And Handforth's return makes the thing all the more complicated. As far as I can see, there's only one solution—at least, only one satisfactory solution—which will settle the matter without any arguments."

"And what's that?" demanded Handforth.

"We shall have to hold an election," replied Travers calmly. "And whoever is elected the skipper, the Remove must pledge itself to back him up!"

"Hear, hear!"

"An election!"

"By jingo, this is going to be exciting!" grinned De Valerie. "An election with three candidates!"

"If you fellows vote for an election, I'm perfectly agreeable," said Nipper quietly.

"It certainly seems the best way out of the difficulty."

Chambers was just beginning to get a grasp of things.

"An election?" he said dazedly. "By glory! That's the best thing! And if you fellows have any sense, you'll elect me!"

"Rats! We want Nipper!"

"Hear, hear!"

Travers stood by, listening amusedly to all the excited talk. The unexpected advent of Handforth was a very intriguing complication. A straight fight between Nipper and Chambers would have been entertaining enough; but with Handforth as an added candidate there was no knowing what the result would be. For Handforth, by reason of his popularity, seemed likely to gain a number of votes. Nipper could only be certain of the votes of his immediate friends for, owing to the result of the fight, he was now rather discredited in the eyes of the rank and file. Chambers, too, would be certain of a large proportion of votes—since Travers was behind him, and would push him.

Altogether, the situation in the Ancient House Remove was very interesting.

An election for the captaincy was certain. But the identity of the new captain was very, very uncertain!

CHAPTER 13.

Slightly Different!



NELSON LEE, the Housemaster of the Ancient House, came to a halt outside the door of the Common-room, his fingers reaching for the handle. But he paused as he heard the excited commotion within.

"H'm!" he murmured. "Perhaps it would be as well!"

He retraced his steps for a few yards, smiling amusedly. Then walking very heavily he approached the door again, coughing loudly as he did so. He chuckled inwardly as he heard a shout of "Cave!" from within the Common-room. The next moment he tapped on the door and entered.

"Sorry to interrupt," said Nelson Lee cheerily. "But I heard that Handforth had returned, and was— Ah, Handforth! So there you are! Welcome back to St. Frank's, my boy—"

Nelson Lee was aware that most faces in the Common-room were flushed. But as though by magic, order had been completely restored. The juniors were grouped about, chatting; some were sitting at the tables, pretending to read. That thoughtful little warning cough of Lee's had done the trick.

Handforth came forward, his face flushing with pleasure at the warmth of the famous Housemaster-detective's welcome.

"I'm jolly glad to be back, sir!" he said enthusiastically.

"You didn't like St. Jim's, eh?" smiled Nelson Lee.

"Oh, I liked it, sir!" replied Handforth. "St. Jim's is a ripping school—next to St. Frank's, I should call it the best in the country. And all the fellows there are regular top-notchers. Tom Merry and Blake and Figgins and all the rest, you know. Sportsmen to their finger-tips."

"So I have always understood," nodded Lee.

"But, after all, sir, St. Frank's is my real school," said Handforth. "And it's about time that I came back, too. Things seem to be in a bit of a mess."

"Ahem! I am bound to remark, Handforth, that I hadn't noticed it," said Lee dryly. "Well, I won't cause a prolonged interruption. Perhaps you had better come to my study, Handforth, where we can have a little chat. Officially, you know, your status is that of a new boy."

"Oh, what rot, sir!" protested Handforth. "I—I mean——"

"Well, perhaps it is rot, in a way," chuckled Nelson Lee. "But these little rules and regulations must be adhered to."

Handforth left the Common-room, accompanied by Lee, and as soon as the door had closed the hum of conversation broke out again. Church and McClure followed their leader for some little way, and then they decided to wait in the lobby, until he came back from his interview with the House-master. This interview, as they knew, was merely a formal affair, and Handforth would not be long.

"Well, what's going to happen now?" asked Church, scratching his head. "Phew! Things seem to be in a pretty rocky state."

"Yes, and Handy will only make them worse," said McClure thoughtfully. "It's a jolly good thing he's back, because he'll liven things up. But he'll be a hopeless chump if he nominates himself as a candidate for the captaincy."

"It's all rubbish!" said Church, with a frown. "There's no need of a new captain. What's the matter with Nipper?"

"Nothing!"

"Then why have an election?"

The answer was beyond them. In any case, they weren't particularly interested; they only wanted to grab hold of Handforth in private and to thump him on the back and to express their satisfaction at his return.

But they were wrong about the election.

Something definite would have to be done. Among the rank and file of the fellows, Nipper was no longer regarded as captain. He had fought with Chambers and the pair of them had been knocked out. The exact manner of the knocking-out did not matter. There had been a fight, and both combatants had been "sent to sleep." It had been very careless of Nipper to get that knock-out blow. Plenty of fellows were quite ready to

support Cuthbert Chambers—if only for the novelty of the change.

"Let's go to Study D and wait for Handy there," suggested Church, as the lobby began to fill with excited juniors.

"But Study D isn't Handy's now," said McClure.

"That doesn't matter—he'll come there," replied Church. "My hat! I'd forgotten. I wonder what he'll say when he finds that Chambers is in possession?"

"He won't say much—but I can easily guess how he'll act!"

They went along to Study D, and were rather astonished when they found that Chambers was in possession. The lordly Cuthbert was sitting in the easy-chair, nursing his aching head. He looked up balefully at the two juniors as they entered.

"Get out!" he said sourly.

"Oh, but look here, Chambers——"

"Get out!" repeated Chambers. "I want to be alone!"

"Yes, please, Chambers!" said Church meekly. "Is there anything that we can do?"

"No, there isn't!"

"You wouldn't like us to take your shoes off and put your slippers on for you?" suggested McClure solicitously. "You wouldn't like us to massage your head?"

"No, I wouldn't!" snorted Chambers.

"We'll massage it wonderfully," said Church. "Only give us the chance——"

"Confound you, get out of here!" shouted Chambers.

Church and McClure exchanged glances, and their manner underwent a complete alteration. They closed the door, and they advanced into the study with grim, set expressions.

"Did you hear me?" said Chambers, staring.

"Yes, we did, but we're not heeding," said Church. "You hopeless idiot!"

Cuthbert Chambers stared.

"Are you talking to me?" he ejaculated blankly.

"Yes, I am, you bulking great jackass!"

"Why, confound your impudence——"

"You thundering lump of imbecility!" said Church scornfully. "My only topper! Did you really think that Mac and I were your slaves? Did you think that we served you willingly? You duffer, we've only been kidding you!"

"Kidding me!" gasped Chambers, starting to his feet.

"Ever since yesterday evening!" put in McClure scornfully. "We defied you at first, until we found out that Handy was coming back. Then we thought that it would be rather a good joke to pull your silly leg. We're not standing any more rot from you, Chambers. You're a big, swelled-headed lout, and——"

"Are you talking to me?" howled Chambers furiously.

"Yes, I am. You're a half-wit, and you ought to have been shoved down into the fags, instead of into the Remove!" said

McClure, contentedly. "Yes, Chambers. We've been pulling your leg to-day, but we're not pulling it any longer. We're sick of you!"

Chambers tried to speak, but words failed him. He stood there, staring blankly and idiotically at these two juniors whom he had lately regarded as his lackeys.



CHAPTER 14.

Not So Helpless!

NEARLY a full minute passed before Chambers recovered his voice.

He stood there, breathing hard, trying to think clearly. These shocks, coming one after the other, were rather too many for him.

Everything had been going so well, too. Vivian Travers' little trick had apparently succeeded; he had forced the fight on Nipper, and a great many of the fellows had been on his side.

Then the shocks had commenced.

Chambers had not yet recovered from the effects of that knock-out blow. His head was singing and aching, and his jaw was very tender. True, Nipper had been knocked out, too, and he was no longer sure of the Form's united support. But Chambers could hardly claim that he had made a brilliant success of things.

Then the unexpected return of Handforth had given him a jolt. Chambers had never dreamed that the great Edward Oswald would come back. Yet here he was, in the Remove again, assuming his old place. And to cap the lot, Church and McClure were defying him!

It was perfectly true that Church and McClure had been kidding him, but Chambers did not believe it. He assumed that the return of Handforth had given the pair courage. This was hardly fair to them. They had known that Handforth was coming back, and so they had pulled Chambers' leg for their own amusement.

"You—you insubordinate young puppies!" he ejaculated at length. "I'll tan the lives out of you if you talk to me like that!"

"Chuck it, Chambers!" said Church, grinning. "Great Scott! You don't think we're afraid of you, do you?"

"Get out of this study!" thundered Chambers, pointing a quivering finger to the door.

"Rats!"

"What—what did you say?"

"Rats!" roared Church and McClure in one voice.

"You—you—you—"

"This is as much our study as yours!" said Church calmly. "And if we want to stop here, we'll stop. You can go and eat

coke, Chambers. You can fry your face!"

"It's a face that needs frying!" said McClure approvingly. "At any rate, it needs something!"

"You leave my face alone!" hooted Chambers, beside himself.

"Don't worry—we wouldn't touch it for worlds!" said Church tartly. "But the sooner you come down to earth, Chambers, my lad, the better! You're nobody! Understand? Nobody!"

"Good glory!" panted Chambers.

"You're just a great big dunce, old enough to be in the Sixth, and senseless enough to be in a lunatic asylum!" said McClure, thoroughly enjoying himself. "And you thought that we were afraid of you! Ye gods and little fishes! You're only an overdressed scarecrow—with straw for a body, and a turnip for a head!"

"And a hollow turnip at that!" added Church, with relish.

Chambers made a sudden rush at his two tormentors. Words, obviously, were useless. He had them to himself now and he would make them suffer! He felt quite convinced that they were only bold because of Handforth's presence in the school. But even Handforth couldn't help them now, for he—Chambers—had them alone in his study!

And then Chambers received a further shock.

For Church and McClure, instead of backing away, or avoiding his rush, went forward to meet him. As quick as a flash, Church ducked down, seized Chambers' legs, and yanked them up. McClure, at the same time, grabbed his arms, and Chambers went down with a terrific thud.

"Can you reach the ink-pot?" gasped Church.

"Easily!" said McClure.

Swish!

The contents of the ink-pot descended over Chambers' face in a blue-black flood. Church and McClure were strong youths, and Chambers knew—now—that they never could have been afraid of him. For they were dealing with him without the slightest trouble. One was sitting across his chest, and the other had got hold of his legs. He was helpless.

"Gug-gug-gug!" gurgled Chambers. "You—you— Lemme get up! I'll—I'll skin you alive for this!"

"We're just showing you that we're not putting up with any more of your bunkum!" said Church grimly. "Leader of this study, eh? I don't think!"

"We're fed up with you, and you'd better take this as a lesson!" said McClure. "And if you want a word of advice, you'll clear out of this study! Because, if you don't clear out, old Handy will chuck you out!"

As it happened, at that moment Edward Oswald Handforth himself flung open the door and strode in.

"By George!" he said breathlessly. "Good old Study D! I've been longing for this minute— Hallo! What the dickens—"

He broke off rather blankly, and stared at the conglomeration of humanity on the floor.

"It's all right, Handy!" said Church, glancing round. "We shan't be a minute."

"What are you having a game at?" demanded Handforth, in astonishment. "Who's that blue-black nigger?"

"It's Chambers!" said McClure, with a grin. "He's the new leader of this study, you know, and he's just showing us how thoroughly he's got us under his thumb!"



CHAPTER 15.

The Order of the Boot!

EDWARD OSWALD HANDFORTH opened his eyes wider.

"Leader of this study?" he said, in amazement. "How the thunder can Chambers be the leader of this study? What about me? Where do I come in?"

"But don't you know?" asked Church. "Chambers is in this study now!"

"I can see that, you fathead!"

"No! I mean that he has officially come into Study D," said Church. "Mr. Lee told him that he could come here. He thinks he's our new leader, but Mac and I decided, after due consideration, that we would disillusion him."

"Somehow," said McClure, "he doesn't seem to like it. Whoa! Steady, there! Hold him, Churchy!"

But Chambers, with a terrific heave, had managed to get himself free. Church and McClure were momentarily off their guard, and they made no attempt to re-capture their prisoner. It didn't matter now, anyhow.

Handforth was silent for a moment or two, although his expression plainly indicated that he was thinking furiously. Then his cheeks became flushed and hot.

"But it's all rot!" he burst out at last. "This is *my* study!"

"Yes, we know that——"

"My study!" roared Handforth, swinging round on to Chambers. "And this—this silly Fifth Form dummy has had the nerve to shove himself here in my place! Why wasn't I told about this?"

"Oh, cheese it, Handy!" protested McClure. "You wired us that your pater wouldn't let you come back——"

"Yes, but I told you in the wire that I *was*!"

"It was a funny sort of wire," said Church diplomatically. "You told us that your pater had forbidden you to leave St. Jim's, but that you would leave, all the same. We know what an optimist you are, Handy."

Church and McClure knew well enough that they were responsible for Handforth's presence here now. It was they who had persuaded Sir Edward to gratify his son's request.

"What the deuce does it matter whether Handforth was coming back, or not?" put in Chambers savagely. "This is my study—

and I'm staying here! You can get outside as soon as you like, Handforth!"

"What?" gasped Handforth.

"You heard what I said!"

"Why, you—you silly great idiot——"

"When I came down into the Remove, I had to have a study—and I chose this one!" said Chambers fiercely. "It's mine, do you understand? Mr. Lee told me that I could come in here! And you're an intruder!"

"An intruder—in my own study?" ejaculated Handforth blankly. "I've got more right here than you have, you prize lunatic! Why wasn't I told about this?" he went on, turning back to his chums. "Why didn't you tell me that this Fifth Form insect had planted himself in Study D?"

"Dash it, we haven't had a chance!" protested Church. "We only saw you for a couple of minutes in the Common-room. We had an idea that there would be trouble——"

"Trouble?" interrupted Handforth, with a scornful laugh. "That's not the right word to use, my son! There's going to be slaughter! I've never heard of such a nerve in all my life! Planting himself here—in my study—and setting himself up as leader! By George!"

Handforth looked positively bewildered. But only for a moment or two. He was essentially a fellow of action. Suddenly he squared his jaw, strode to the door, and flung it open. Then he turned and looked at Chambers.

"There you are!" he said dangerously.

"There's the door, Chambers! Get out!"

"Why, you silly young fool——"

"Get out of this study!" roared Handforth. "I'm leader here!"

Chambers was taken aback at this characteristically high-handed behaviour of Handforth's. Not that Handforth considered it high-handed. He had always meant to come back to St. Frank's, and he couldn't understand why the general run of fellows had been surprised at his return.

"Did you hear me?" snapped Edward Oswald.

"Yes, I did!" panted Chambers, breathing hard. "And I'm not going! Confound you, Handforth! This is my study now—and you can go and find another!"

"Why, you—you——" began Handforth.

"Why argue?" put in Church. "There are three of us, aren't there?"

Handforth started.

"By George!" he said. "So there are! Come on! All together!"

The unfortunate Chambers was seized before he could even make the slightest attempt to dodge. He wasn't merely thrown out of Study D; he was hurled out on his neck. He flew through the doorway, his arms and legs waving wildly.

Thud!

He hit the floor with a crash that made the walls shake.

"And if you come in again, we'll chuck you out really hard!" said Handforth threateningly. "Your study, eh? By George! I'll show you whose study it is!"



s hurtled out of Study D and landed with a thud in the corridor. "Let him have his books and things!" roared Handfor
Chambers was being bombarded with a pile of books, notes, and all sorts of other articles which came flying through the

"What about his books and things?" asked McClure.

"Let him have 'em!" retorted Handforth.

And the next moment Chambers was being bombarded with a pile of books, shoes, cricket-pads, and all sorts of other articles of personal property.

Slam!

The door of Study D closed, and Cuthbert Chambers gazed blearily at the wall in front of him. He was beginning to get a suspicion of an idea that his campaign was not absolutely successful.



CHAPTER 16.

A Shock for Handy!

FOOTSTEP sounded further down the passage, and something familiar in the tread caused Chambers to

glance round hurriedly. His breath came in with a gulp.

"Old Lee!" he breathed.

Nelson Lee walked up, paused, and looked at Chambers rather grimly. It was difficult for Nelson Lee to pass the spot, for Chambers was half across the passage, and the litter round him, and on the top of him, was indescribable.

"I think you are Chambers, are you not?" asked the Housemaster, peering closely at the inky face.

"Yes, sir!" muttered Chambers.

"There appears to have been a little trouble," continued Nelson Lee. "No, Chambers. It is unnecessary for you to make any statement. I am not entirely lacking in intelligence, and I can see what has happened."

Chambers was on the point of going into a long tirade against Handforth; but Nelson Lee turned away, tapped on the door of Study D, and walked in.

He found Handforth & Co. dusting themselves down. All three were looking hot and satisfied. But their expressions changed when they beheld the grim figure in the doorway.

"Handforth!" said Nelson Lee sternly. "Am I right in assuming that you are responsible for Chambers' ignominious exit from this study?"

"The awful sneak!" gasped Handforth indignantly. "Why, I never thought that Chambers could have done—"

"You are doing Chambers an injustice," said Nelson Lee curtly. "He has not spoken a word to me. But I happen to have some wits of my own, Handforth. Am I to understand that you and these other boys threw Chambers out of this room?"

"Well, it's my study, sir!" said Handforth defensively.

"You admit your guilt?"

"What else can we do, sir?" growled Edward Oswald. "It's obvious, isn't it? Chambers was too big for his boots, so we taught him a lesson. We booted him out, and pelted him with his own books and things."

"Each of you will write me five hundred lines!" said Lee. "And you, Handforth, will please understand that this is not your study."

"Not my study!" ejaculated Handforth, staring.

"Of course not!"

"But—but—"

"You will go into Study I, with Fullwood and Russell," said Nelson Lee. "I have already had a word with these boys, and they are agreeable. You will come with me, Handforth."

But Handforth was too flabbergasted to move.

"Study I!" he repeated breathlessly. "Oh, rot, sir! You—you can't mean it! This is my study! I always used to be in Study D—"

"We are not talking about the past, Handforth—but the present," said Lee. "And you must remember that you are, to all intents and purposes, a new boy. You left St. Frank's, apparently, for



Chambers hurtled out of Study D and landed with a thud in moment Chambers was being bombarded with a pile of b

good. Now that you have come back, you must not think that you can resume the old order of things exactly where you left them off."

"But why not, sir?"

"I do not propose to waste time in explaining the thing to you," replied Nelson Lee. "Surely it needs no explanation? It ought to

be mere imposition of five hundred lines will not suffice. Your punishment will be much more severe."

There was no doubt about Nelson Lee's sincerity. His tone was very stern. Chambers, from that minute onwards, was officially protected. Even Handforth, rashest of all fellows, would hardly be rash enough to defy his own Housemaster. It was this very fact which caused him to look at Lee in bewildered consternation.

"Do you mean that I can't stay here, sir?" he blurted out.

"Really, Handforth, I thought that was very obvious."

"But—but it's my study——"

"Let me hear no more of this nonsense!" said Lee firmly. "You are a very obstinate boy, Handforth. I regret the necessity of talking to you in this way immediately on your return——"

"I'm sorry, sir, but Churchy and Mac and I have always been in Study D together," interrupted Handforth anxiously. "Dash it, I don't want to be obstinate or impolite. But couldn't you manage to chuck Chambers out? I—I mean, couldn't you transfer him to another study, sir?"

"Your tone is more reasonable now, Handforth," said Nelson Lee. "I am sorry, but I cannot turn Chambers out. It would not be fair to him. He made the request that he should be allowed to use this study, and at that time you no longer belonged to this school. You must accept these little inconveniences with a good grace."

"Oh, I say, sir!"

"If, of course, you can come to some amicable arrangement with Chambers, all well and good," continued Nelson Lee dryly. "Aren't you making rather a big fuss over a trifle, Handforth?"

"A trifle!"

"Certainly it's a trifle!" replied Lee. "There is nothing to prevent Church and McClure from inviting you into their study, and the whole matter really resolves itself into a quibble. As I have said, if you can convince Chambers that it would be advisable for him to shift, you can go ahead. But I shall certainly not order him out. In the meantime, you will join Fullwood and Russell in Study I."

And Nelson Lee, with a nod, took his departure.

"Let him have his books and things!" roared Handforth. Next all sorts of other articles which came flying through the doorway.

be obvious to you, Handforth. This is not your study now, and you acted with great rashness when you turned Chambers out. If any further incident of that kind occurs, a

master's attitude. What else could Nelson Lee have done? In common fairness, he could not have ordered Chambers into another study. Handforth had come back unex-



pectedly, and it was up to him to accept the new conditions.

"A trifle!" breathed Handforth, in a dazed voice.

"Eh?" said Church.

"You heard him, didn't you?" ejaculated Handforth wonderingly. "He called it a trifle! A quibble! Great guns! Did you ever hear such rot in all your life? I'm not allowed to stay in my own study—and he calls it a trifle!"

"What's the good of making a fuss?" put in McClure. "After all, we can still have you here, Handy," he added cheerfully. "Mr. Lee's quite right. There's nothing to prevent us from inviting you——"

"You hopeless idiot!"

"Here, I say——"

"So you are!" said Handforth, frowning. "Being a guest in a study isn't like being leader! What the dickens can I do as a guest? If I want to slosh one of you in the eye, I can't do it!"

"Yes," said McClure, "that's what I was thinking of."

Church nodded.

"I think you'd better go into Study I, Handy," he said brightly.

The possibilities were good—from the point of view of Church and McClure. Their old leader had hit the nail on the head. As a guest, it would be impossible for him to empty the teacups over their heads if they displeased him; it would be distinctly bad form for any guest to rub his host's face in the coal-box.

As leader, Handforth could do these things with impunity, and probably would do them. Church and McClure were feeling quite braced. But Handforth, on the other hand, was indignant.

"You traitors!" he said coldly. "As soon as ever I get back, you turn against me! I expect I've been away so long that you've half forgotten me. Out of sight—out of mind!"

"Chuck it, Handy, old man!" protested Church, really hurt. "Mac and I have been miserable without you."

"Then why don't you support me now?" demanded Handforth aggressively.

"How the dickens can we support you?" asked Mac. "What can we do? Mr. Lee has given his decision, and we're helpless. But the position isn't so bad. You can still come here as our guest——"

"Don't say that again!" roared Handforth. "Rats and blow! I'm jiggered if I'll be satisfied with a rotten arrangement like that!"

But he could think of no alternative; and, in consequence, he was inclined to be irritable and downhearted. His return to the old school was not so joyous as he had expected.



CHAPTER 17.

Excitement Brewing!

THE door opened abruptly, and Chambers strode in.

Chambers had washed himself, and had changed. He was looking himself again, and he was aggressive in the knowledge that he not only had a perfect right to be here, but that Handforth & Co. would not dare to repeat their former tactics.

Moreover, Cuthbert Chambers had come prepared. Gore-Pearce and Gulliver and Bell were with him. They crowded in the doorway.

"By George!" said Handforth, taking a deep breath.

"Outside, Handforth!" said Chambers triumphantly. "Here's the door! Clear out! You're not wanted in *my* study!"

"You silly fathead——"

"You'd better look sharp!" added Chambers curtly.

"Steady!" put in Church, before Handforth could release the flood of words that surged for articulation. "Handforth is our guest, Chambers. Mac and I have got as much right in this study as you have, and Handy is staying until we ask him to go."

"Rot!" said Handforth hotly.

"Eh?" gasped Church. "I'm trying to help you——"

"Then you can keep your help to yourself!" bellow Handforth. "If I can't be in this study as leader, I won't be here at all! By George! I've got it! I challenge you to a fight, Chambers!"

"Oh!" said Chambers. "What for?"

"The winner remains leader of this study."

But Chambers wasn't taking any.

"Of course, I could knock you sideways, but I'm not accepting that challenge!" he said contemptuously. "Why should we fight over nothing? I'm here with official permission—and you can go and eat coke!"

Handforth seemed on the point of exploding, but he suddenly pulled himself together, and then strode out of the study without uttering a word. Church and McClure followed him. With a deft kick, Gore-Pearce slammed the door.

"If I had stayed there another two seconds, I should have forgotten what Mr. Lee told us!" breathed Handforth hoarsely, as he came to a halt in the lobby. "By George! Turned out of my own study! It's—it's unbearable! I'm not going to stand it, either!"

"You can go into Study I——" began Church.

"Either I have Study D, or no study at

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all!" interrupted Handforth fiercely. "I'm not the kind of chap to put up with interlopers! Chambers is a rotten outsider, and if he had a grain of decency he would shift out of Study D of his own accord."

And Handforth stuck to his vow.

He made no attempt to join Fullwood and Russell in Study I—and it cannot be said that these two juniors were miserable with disappointment. On the whole, they felt very satisfied.

And Handforth remained without any study at all. Church and McClure were worried—for this attitude of Handforth's augured trouble. Handforth still had his mind set on resuming his position as leader of Study D, and he was baffled by the fact that he could not again resort to violence.

Not that the matter received any further attention just then. For there was a good deal of excitement in the Remove. While Handforth had been giving his attention to trifles, the Remove had come to an important decision. In short, a full meeting of the Form was called immediately, and every fellow had to attend in the Lecture Hall.

Reggie Pitt and all his men from the West House had come over. They did not board in the Ancient House, but they belonged to the Remove, and any stir in the Remove was as much their concern as Nipper & Co.'s.

"We'd better go, Handy," said Church, as Handforth lingered in the lobby, his hand thrust deeply into his trousers pockets, and his brow black. "They'll be waiting for us!"

"Go?" repeated Handforth. "Go where?"

"Into the Lecture Hall."

"What for?"

"The meeting."

"What meeting?"

"Oh, crumbs!" groaned Church. "You know there's a meeting of the Remove called, don't you?"

"Is there?" said Handforth, without interest. "Let it be called, then! Who cares? Blow the Remove!"

"You hopeless ass!" said McClure, in alarm. "You know jolly well that it's an unwritten law that everybody must turn up. It's rotten bad form to stay away! Even the rotters attend a Form meeting."

Handforth's eyes gleamed.

"Which reminds me!" he said darkly.

"Talking about unwritten laws! What about the unwritten law of studies? I've always been in Study D, and Chambers, by refusing to get out, is absolutely violating the unwritten law——"

"Oh, leave Study D alone for a bit!" urged Church earnestly. "Let's go along to the meeting, Handy. This is your first evening back at St. Frank's, and you don't want to create a bad impression, do you?"

"I'm not interested in this Form meeting," growled Handforth. "Some rot about the sports, I expect. A lot of silly chin-wagging about the hurdle race, and the——"

"You silly ass!" said Church. "It's about the election!"

Handforth started.

"The election!" he ejaculated. "Why the

dickens didn't you say so, you chump? I'm one of the candidates!"

He sprang into activity, and fairly bolted towards the Lecture Hall. Church and McClure followed, exchanging grins.

"Same old Handy!" murmured Church.

"Only a bit worse!" said McClure, with a chuckle.

When they arrived at the Lecture Hall, they found Reggie Pitt on the platform, addressing the crowd. Not that he was heard. Everybody seemed to be talking at once, and the commotion was truly terrific.

"We're all in this together!" Reggie was shouting, at the top of his voice. "It may be an Ancient House row, but we West House men are in the Remove, too, and we're going to have our little say!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Down with Chambers!"

"Down with Nipper!"

All sorts of shouts rent the air.

"Personally, I don't consider that Nipper's prestige has been injured in the least!" continued Pitt. "That silly fight was forced on him, and, according to all I can hear, he won it——"

"He was knocked out!" yelled Hubbard.

"Yes—by accident!" retorted Pitt. "And he knocked Chambers out fairly and squarely."

"That doesn't matter!" shouted somebody else. "We're not going to support a skipper who allows himself to be floored by a chump like Chambers! The Remove needs a new captain!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Let's have an election!"

"Hurrah!"

The excitement was growing. The Remove was in a thoroughly turbulent mood, and all the cool-headed fellows could see that an election was the only possible solution. Nipper's supporters were content enough, for they were satisfied that he would easily be at the top of the poll.

It would really do the Remove good to have the election—if only to establish, once and for all, Nipper's prestige. As soon as he was re-elected, all this bother would die out; and, incidentally, Chambers would be finally discredited, and knocked off his perch.

"An election will settle everything!" shouted Pitt. "It'll be a straight fight between Nipper and Chambers, and any fellow with an ounce of sense can foretell the result. Still, there are plenty of people here with only a grain of sense, so the sooner we have this election, the better!"

"Hi! Hold on!" bellowed Handforth, pushing his way through the crowd and leaping on to the platform. "What's all this rot you're saying, Pitt?"

"I haven't said a word of rot," replied Reggie.

"Yes you have!" roared Handforth. "You said that it would be a straight fight between Nipper and Chambers. What about me?"

"My dear chap——"

"Where do I come in?"

"You don't come in," explained Reggie.

"You go out!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Which reminds me," went on Pitt, reaching forward and seizing Handforth's fist. "How the dickens are you, old man? I heard that you were back, and then I understood why there was so much noise in the Ancient House."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Jolly pleased to see you again, Handy!" said Pitt heartily.

"You're a silly fathead, but thanks!" growled Handforth. "What do you mean by accusing me of the commotion? It was worse before I walked in! And as there's going to be an election, I'm standing for the captaincy!"

"Hurrah!"

"Good old Handy!"

The meeting settled itself down to an enjoyable half hour. Edward Oswald Handforth could not have arrived back at St. Frank's at a more opportune moment. He was here for the election—to provide comic relief.

Happily, Handforth himself did not know this.



CHAPTER 18.

Handforth's Programme!

ENTLEMEN—

"Hear, hear!"

"Go it, Handy!"

"I won't make a long speech——"

"Good!"

"You won't make a speech at all, by the sound of it!" grinned Reggie Pitt, as the Lecture Hall became filled with laughter and shouts. "Besides, what about me? I hope you realise that you've butted in, Handy?"

"Eh?" said Handforth. "How have I butted in?"

"Well, I rather thought I was making a speech," explained Reggie.

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"But you've finished!"

"I have now!" nodded Pitt. "I realise that there's no hope for a humble microbe like myself in the presence of such a popular speaker. Get to it, old man! Let them know you're here!"

"Just a minute!" sang out Fullwood, from one of the front seats. "Are you going to make an electioneering speech, Handy?"

"Yes, I am."

"On whose behalf?"

"My own, of course!"

"Then don't do it!" said Fullwood. "If you want to make a speech, make one in support of Nipper. Nipper and Chambers have both been nominated as candidates—but I don't seem to remember that you've been nominated."

"I'm nominating myself!" retorted Handforth promptly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"That's no good!" said Fullwood. "Any candidate must have at least two backers—"

"All right—there they are!" said Handforth, pointing to Church and McClure.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Church pushed forward.

"Mac and I are Handy's backers!" he shouted. "We hereby nominate Edward Oswald Handforth as a candidate for the captaincy of the Remove. How's that?"

"Quite in order!" grinned Fullwood.

"Then perhaps I can make my speech?" suggested Handforth sarcastically.

"Not just yet," replied Fullwood. "It's not my business, but there's one little thing I'd like to point out. Do you realise that you're liable to split the vote?"

"I'm liable to do which?"

"Split the vote," repeated Fullwood. "Far better let it be a straight fight between Nipper and Chambers. If you do that, Nipper's bound to be re-elected."

"But I don't want him to be re-elected!" said Handforth, staring. "I've come back to St. Frank's to put things in order—and my only chance of doing that is to become skipper."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"All the same, you'll never get in, Handy!" said Gresham earnestly. "Fullwood's right. By your standing for the captaincy, you'll only split the vote, and give Chambers a chance of getting in."

"Rats!" retorted Handforth. "Who the dickens is going to vote for that hulking great idiot, Chambers?"

"We are!" roared a dozen of Chambers' supporters.

And they made so much noise that the party seemed much larger than it actually was. However, Handforth was not discouraged. He waved his hand, as though sweeping aside these objections.

"Chambers is the fellow who ought to stand down!" he shouted. "Let it be a straight fight between Nipper and me! Or, better still, elect me at once, and save all the trouble of a campaign!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'm the fellow for the captaincy!" shouted Handforth, warming to his work. "Why waste time on a lot of speechifying and elaborate voting? Let's get the thing settled on the spot!"

"Yes, but how?" asked Castleton, of the West House.

"By voting for me!" replied Handforth.

"Well, that's simple enough," agreed Castleton. "How about taking Handy at his word, and electing him straight away? We can settle it in two ticks. A show of hands will do the trick!"

"Good man!" said Handforth enthusiastically.

"All in favour of Handy as captain, show hands!" grinned Castleton.

A yell of laughter went up as two lonely hands arose from the mob of juniors. Needless to say, one belonged to Church, and the other to McClure.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Good! That's settled!" said Castleton blandly.

Handforth went crimson, and the laughter continued. It was rather a staggering shock for the great Edward Oswald. He had expected to be received on his return to St. Frank's as a conquering hero. He had anticipated that everybody would shout with delight at the idea of his taking the reins.

And here they were, treating him as of old! Apparently he had dropped back into his old place as though he had never even left! He was still regarded by the Form as a sort of joke. He might never have been away from St. Frank's at all!

"You—you cackling lunatics!" he bellowed wrathfully.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I've come back here to restore order——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'm going to win the captaincy!" shouted Handforth aggressively. "I've come to the conclusion that a full campaign is necessary! We need a week, at least, and by polling day I shall have convinced you that I'm the man for the job! My policy will be a strong one."

"With plenty of punch in it, eh?" asked Pitt innocently.

"Yes!" retorted Handforth. "As soon as I'm captain, I shall rule with a rod of iron! Any fellow who refuses to turn out for cricket practice will feel the weight of my fist! Any fellow who jibs against my authority will have both his eyes blacked."

"Good old Handy! That's the stuff!"

"Vote for me, and keep Chambers out!" exclaimed Handforth. "Chambers is a wind-bag—an empty-headed ass! There's nothing much wrong with Nipper, except that he's too slack. It needs me to rule the roost."

"Isn't it about time you dried up, old man?" asked Nipper good-humouredly. "We're not supposed to make any party speeches at this meeting, you know. It's just a nomination meeting, and there's lots to do yet. We've got to decide on the polling day, and——"

"I can't help that!" interrupted Handforth.

coldly. "I'm going to finish my speech, and you can save your breath! Anything you say to me goes in one ear, and comes out the other!"

"I know that!" nodded Nipper. "There's nothing inside to stop it!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And the howls of laughter which arose put Handforth off his stroke to such an extent that he gave up his speech as a bad job. But he had at least decided upon his course of action.

He was standing for the captaincy—and he was optimistic enough to believe that there was a chance of him winning it. But the Remove thought otherwise!



CHAPTER 19.

Chambers Scores.

CUTHBERT CHAMBERS was looking very subdued when Travers came across him in the cool of the

Triangle, shortly after the meeting.

"Anything troubling you, dear old fellow?" inquired Travers.

Chambers scowled.

"You're a fine sort of chap!" he complained. "I thought you told me that everything was going to be all right? You're a wash-out, Travers!"

"Ungracious words!" sighed Vivian Travers. "I am beginning to think, dear old fellow, that you're not worth troubling about. If it wasn't for the prospect of seeing some fun, I'd drop you like a hot coal."

"You drivelling young idiot——"

"Also, I feel partly responsible for your being sent down into the Remove," continued Travers calmly. "So I'll carry on with the good work. And why blame me for your own failure?"

"My failure?" snapped Chambers. "Confound you, it was your idea!"

"It was my idea that you should challenge Nipper, and knock him out," agreed Travers. "I was foolish enough to assume that you could do it. If you had succeeded, no election would have been necessary. You would have been skipper by right of conquest."

Chambers was silent; he knew the truth of Travers' words.

"However, perhaps it's just as well," continued the schemer of the Remove. "We are, at least, being provided with some excitement. And the unexpected return of Handforth makes the thing all the more interesting."

"Oh, does it!"

"Of course, I don't expect you to appreciate it—but it does, I assure you," smiled Travers. "What we must do now, dear old fellow, is to go ahead and win. And I rather fancy that we shall succeed. When the election comes off, you'll be at the top of the poll."

Chambers flushed with excitement.

"Good glory!" he panted. "Do you think I really stand a chance?"

"A chance!" laughed Vivian Travers. "There's no chance about it. You're as good as captain. Leave it to me, dear old fellow. Regard me as your election agent. I'll arrange your meetings, and prepare your speeches, and when polling day comes you'll be the winner."

There was something very confident in Travers' tone, and Chambers, who already knew what Travers could accomplish, once he set his mind to it, began to revive his hopes. Perhaps things weren't so bad, after all. In fact, the recent events may have been all for the best.

So Chambers went off to his study, full of fresh enthusiasm for the fight—little realising that he was a mere nonentity, and that without Travers his chance wouldn't have been a million to one. It was Vivian Travers who was really standing for the captaincy—not Chambers.

On the way to Study D, the ex-Fifth-Former collected a number of his new friends. Gore-Pearce & Co. and Hubbard and Long all squashed into the study, and they all promised Chambers their support.

Handforth, very thoughtful and abstracted, came along the Remove passage soon afterwards. He had complained that the juniors were treating him as though he had never been away; yet he was falling into the same habit himself.

With really surprising facility he had dropped back into his old ways. He could scarcely realise that he had ever spent a month at St. Jim's. He even went to Study D automatically. He had forgotten that he no longer had any right there.

He opened the door, walked in, and then stopped.

"Great pip!" he ejaculated blankly.

The air was thick with tobacco smoke. Claude Gore-Pearce was lounging near the window, with a cigarette between his lips. Chambers was leaning on the mantelpiece. Gulliver & Bell were sitting on the table. The whole room, in fact, was filled with undesirables.

Before Handforth could say anything further, Church and McClure came up behind him, and pushed in.

"Here, I say!" protested Church indignantly.

"Clear out, you!" shouted Chambers, pointing at Handforth. "This isn't your study, and you jolly well know it."

"You—you smoky rotters!" ejaculated Handforth furiously. "What the dickens do you mean by contaminating this study——"

"Mind your own business!" snapped Chambers.

Handforth gulped, and remembered Nelson Lee's stern words. Chambers had told him to mind his own business, and Chambers had spoken the truth. Study D was no longer his—Handy's—concern. Although he knew it, it nevertheless came as a fresh shock to him.

"All right!" he said huskily. "You've got

the laugh over me now, Chambers, but, by George, you won't have it for long! I won't rest a minute until I've got you out of this study."

Chambers laughed jeeringly.

"Try and get me out!" he sneered.

Handforth could not trust himself to speak, and he turned on his heel and stalked away. Church and McClure remained in the doorway. They were dismayed. They knew they could do nothing against this mob.

"Isn't this a bit thick, Chambers?" asked Church hotly. "We've as much right in this study as you have!"

"All right!" said Chambers. "You can come in. We're not stopping you, are we?"

"We don't want to be here with these smoking cads!" shouted McClure.

Cuthbert Chambers shrugged his shoulders.

"My dear kids, you'd better realise that these gentlemen are my guests," he said. "I'm not in the habit of restricting the pleasures of guests. If you don't like their company you can keep out."

And Church and McClure kept out.

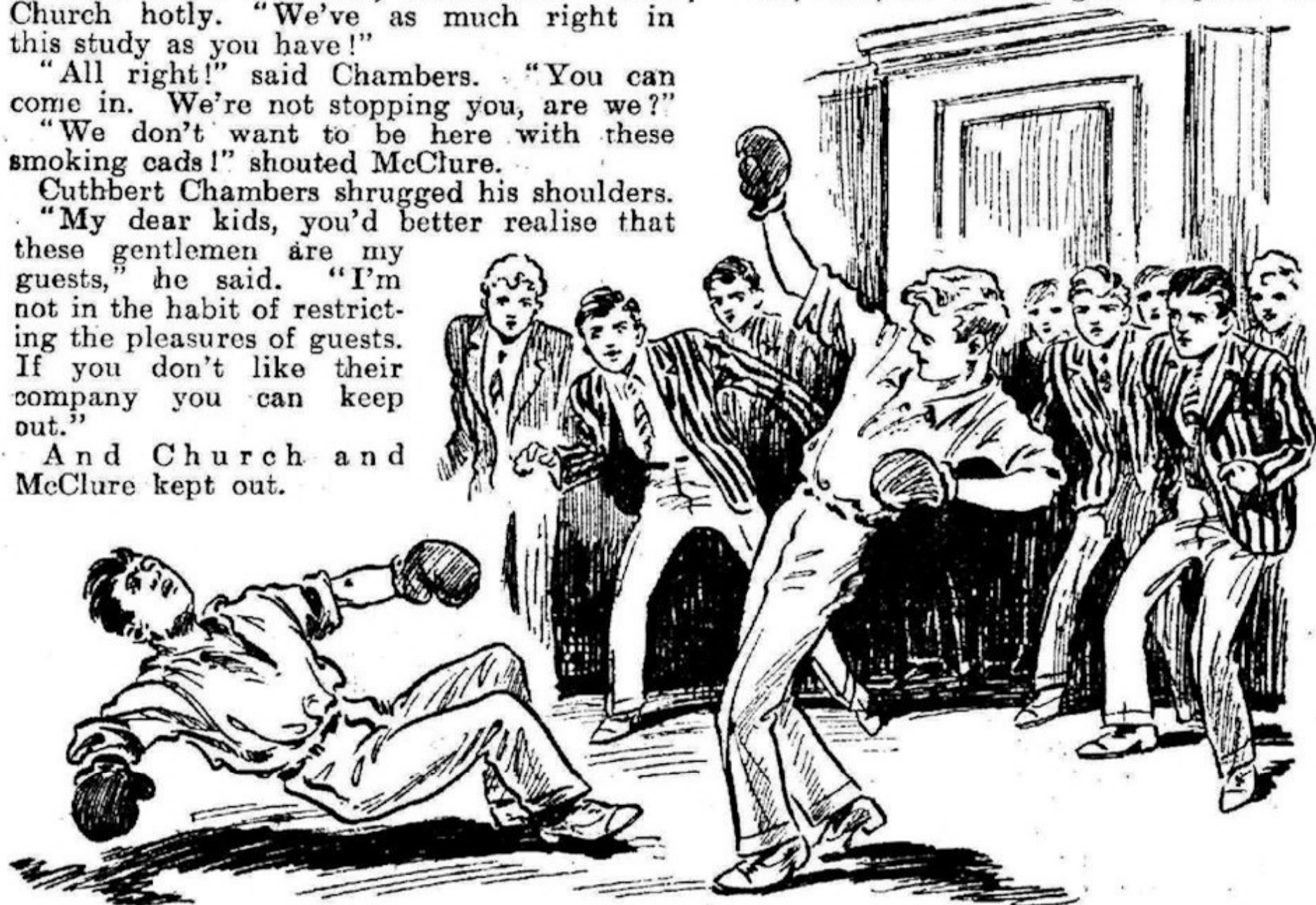
Former blandly. "Do you think I don't know your little ways? I knew you'd come back, sooner or later. Now that you're here, you might as well whack out five bob!"

"What!" roared Handforth.

"Five bob!" said Willy calmly.

"You—you young highway robber!" said Handforth wrathfully. "Two minutes after I see you, you come out with your usual stunt. I'm jiggered if I'll give you five bob!"

"Oh, well, we won't argue!" replied Willy,



There was an extraordinary ending to the fight. Nipper got in a fine blow to Chambers' face but, almost in the same flash, Chambers lunged out and caught Nipper on the jaw. The two combatants reeled and collapsed on the floor—both "out"!

CHAPTER 20.

Advice from Willy!



WELL, if it isn't Ted!" Willy Handforth, of the Third, came to a halt in the lobby, and he cheerfully held out his hand to his elder brother. Edward Oswald took it indifferently. He regarded his minor as a person of little or no importance.

"Hallo, Willy!" he growled. "Haven't had time to see you before. You didn't know I was coming back, did you?"

"Of course I did!"

"Why, Churchy and Mac told me that they hadn't breathed a word!"

"My poor ass, I didn't need to be told by Churchy and Mac," replied the Third-

eyeing his major in a critical way. "What's wrong, Ted? What are you worrying about? Study D?"

"Yes, I am."

"I've heard about it, of course," went on Willy. "The fellows look upon it as rather a good joke."

"Then they're mad!" retorted Handforth. "It's not a joke at all. It's a tragedy. I'm not going into any other study, and I can't even have the pleasure of kicking Chambers out. I don't know what the dickens to do!"

"Use your brains," advised Willy. "I understand that Mr. Lee has forbidden you to use your fists, but brains are better than fists any day."

"Don't be a young ass! What can I do? I went to Study D just now, and the place it filled with smoking cads—Chambers' guests."

"Well, it's his study."

"And I can't sneak, either!" said Handforth major exasperatedly. "I've got to

stand by and see my study befouled like this. I'm so—so helpless!"

Church and McClure came up, bubbling over with indignation.

"We're not going to stop in that beastly den!" said Church hotly. "Chambers had the nerve to invite us to stay. He said that all those cads are his guests, and that he has a perfect right to invite them."

"Then he's wrong," said Edward Oswald Handforth, with a start.

"Eh? How is he?"

"Isn't it one of the rules of the Junior studies that the majority shall decide?" asked Handforth keenly. "There are three fellows in nearly every study. If two of them decide against the third, he's got to give way."

"But I don't see——" began Church.

"Why, it's easy," interrupted Handforth. "You and Mac must go back to Study D and tell Chambers that you object to his guests. By all the rules of Junior studies, he'll have to tell them to get out. You're two against one."

Church and McClure looked dubious.

"It wouldn't work," said Church.

"Not on your life!" agreed McClure.

"But you've got the right to demand——"

"Hold on, Ted!" interrupted Willy. "What's sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander. Why not play Chambers' own game? You'll soon have your study back if you do that!"

"What do you mean?" asked Edward Oswald, staring.

"If Chambers can fill Study D with his guests, Church and McClure can fill it with theirs!" said Willy cheerfully. "And they'll have right on their side, whereas Chambers hasn't. If you do the thing properly you'll drive him potty. He won't need to be kicked out of Study D—he'll transfer on his own account."

Edward Oswald began to look excited.

"But—but how can we do it?" he asked breathlessly.

"The first thing is to keep cool," replied Willy. "Don't do anything, say, until tea-time to-morrow. Give Chambers plenty of time to think that he's triumphant. I'll lend you a hand, Ted."

And Willy proceeded to outline a few suggestions.

"By George!" said Edward Oswald Handforth at length. "I never knew you were so brainy, my son. Why, if this thing works, I shall get back into Study D again, and everything will be 'as you were'!"

"That's what you want, isn't it?"

"Of course it is," grinned Handforth. "Once I'm leader of Study D again, I shall be able to enter heart and soul into the election campaign. What's more, I shall become skipper of the Remove."

"Ahem! We won't discuss that point," murmured Willy. "Anyhow, you can rely upon me, old man. And now," he added casually, "what about that five bob?"

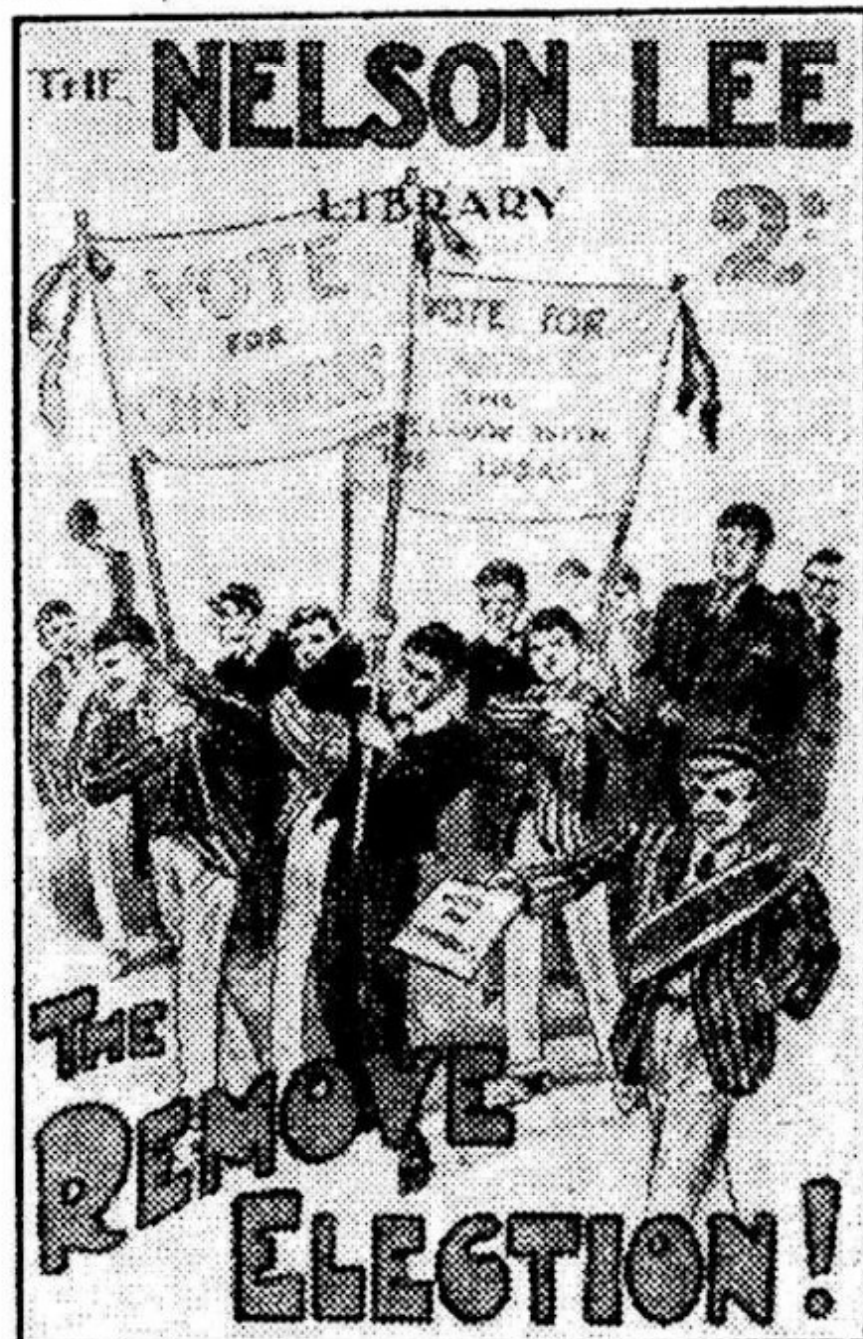
"Why, you—you——"

"Oh, do cheese it!" sighed Willy, holding out a grubby palm. "Five bob, Ted!"

And Handforth paid up. He knew, from long experience, that resistance was worse than useless. Moreover, now he came to think of it, Willy thoroughly deserved the money.

So when the Remove went to bed that night a good many things were brewing. First and foremost was the election for the captaincy. Everybody, except Travers and Chambers, took it for granted that Nipper

NEXT WEDNESDAY!



would be re-elected. But Travers, at least, knew that Chambers would be the new captain. His confidence was supreme.

Vivian Travers had made up his mind to get Chambers in, and there was something uncannily skilful about the way in which Travers handled such problems. Even Chambers hadn't the faintest idea how the miracle was to be accomplished. But it was obvious that Travers had something up his sleeve.

In one dormitory at least complete satisfaction reigned.

Handforth & Co. were united once again. Church and McClure felt that old times had come back, and Handforth was happy in the conviction that he would once again be leader of Study D within twenty-four hours.



CHAPTER 21.

A Surprise for Chambers!

DO you think it'll be all right?" asked Hubbard dubiously. Cuthbert Chambers laughed.

"Of course it'll be all right," he replied. "Leave it to me, kids!"

"THE REMOVE ELECTION!"

Who's to be captain of the Remove? Nipper, Handforth, or Chambers?

Nipper: ex-captain, extremely capable, and the ideal sportsman; Handforth—well, who can imagine good old blundering Handy as captain? Anyway, he's certain of two votes! Chambers: a burly ex-Fifth-Former who is backed by the wily Vivian Travers.

The Remove experience amusing and exciting times right up to the day of the election. All three candidates make speeches galore, and Chambers and Handforth get up ingenious stunts to convince the electorate that there's only one man who is worth voting for.

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"But Church and McClure might complain——"

"Let 'em complain," broke in Chambers. "I don't care what they do! I'm the leader of Study D, and if I choose to bring half a dozen guests to tea, I can do it. If they don't like it, they can lump it!"

It was tea-time on the following day, and Chambers had collected a number of his new friends together. He did not entirely approve of Gore-Pearce and Gulliver and Bell. In fact, he regarded them with contempt. But they had promised him their votes, and he could not afford to offend them.

As for the juniors, they were of the insignificant type. They looked up to Chambers with something akin to awe. He was a big fellow, who had recently been a senior—a powerful, dandified chap. They

could have asked for nobody better as a leader. He was just their type.

And it was rather a good joke to see Handforth mooning about, dished out of his study by Chambers. It was an even better joke to remember that Handforth dared not use any violence.

"Well, come on!" said Chambers cheerily. "There's heap of stuff in the cupboard, and if we want some more one of you fellows can run across to the tuckshop. I'm standing this feed!"

"Good man!" said Hubbard enthusiastically.

And Gore-Pearce & Co. and Teddy Long were in hearty agreement. Doyle and Owen major, of the West House, were there, too. Travers had been at them, and they had promised to support Chambers in the election. A feed was the very thing to seal the bargain. Travers, let it be mentioned, was not present. It was he who had planned this affair, but he did not intend to participate; he was content to remain in the background.

"It'll be a bit of a squash, but we shall manage," said Chambers, as he opened the door of Study D. "These rooms are too confoundedly small—— Why, what the deuce—— Well, I'm hanged!"

His jaw dropped as he stared into the apartment, and his guests, crowding behind him, looked over his shoulder. There was every reason for their blank astonishment.

For Study D was already occupied—much occupied!

There wasn't an inch of space to spare. The table was set for tea, and it groaned under the weight of bread and butter and cakes and pastries. Church and McClure were evidently presiding, and the guests consisted of Handforth major, Willy, and a whole mob of grinning Third Formers.

In fact, at the first glance, it seemed that the entire Third had squashed itself into the room. Actually, there were not more than ten fags.

"Hallo, Chambers!" sang out Church, with a welcoming smile. "Sorry, old man! Afraid there's not much room! Still, I dare say you can squash in."

Chambers found his voice again.

"What's all this?" he roared aggressively.

Handforth opened his mouth to speak, but he closed it again as he caught Willy's eye. He remembered that he was only a guest. It was not his place to interfere. All the talking had to be done by his chums.

"What's all what?" asked Church, in surprise. "Is there anything wrong?"

"You young idiot!" howled Chambers. "I've come here for tea!"

"All right! There's plenty!"

"And I've brought some friends with me!" yelled Chambers.

"Afraid there's no room for your friends," replied Church, shaking his head. "Especially friends of your sort. No, Chambers, Mac and I are first, and you'll have to grin and bear it."

Chambers nearly burst a blood-vessel.

"You young rotters!" he hooted. "I'm leader of this study, and I'm going to bring my friends in! I'm boss! Understand?"

"Finished?" asked Church patiently.

"No, I haven't!"

"Then I'll wait until you have," said Church.

The guests within the study were making a big pretence of being in polite ignorance of the argument. They were carrying on as though Chambers did not exist, and this exasperated the ex-senior more than ever.

"Get out of here!" he shouted. "Church, you young fool! Order this rabble to clear out of my study!"

"Which rabble?" asked Church, looking round. "The rabble isn't in the study yet, Chambers," he added, staring at Gore-Pearce & Co.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The guests, in spite of themselves, roared with laughter.

"Good egg!" grinned Handforth. "And look here, Chambers, if there's any more of your rot— Eh? Oh, sorry!"

Handforth subsided as McClure tugged at his arm.

"I'll give you just one minute to clear out!" stormed Chambers, who was beside himself with rage and exasperation. "I'm not going to have my study turned into a fags' warren! Clear out—all of you!"

"Rats!" said the fags in one solid voice.

Chambers felt helpless. He always felt helpless when he was called upon to face a difficulty. He was all bluster and conceit. When it came to a test, he invariably crumpled up. He felt humiliated. He, the great Chambers, defied by his own study mates!

He had brought his guests here on purpose to have the laugh over Handforth—and Handforth was having the laugh over him.

"Are you going?" he demanded fiercely.

"They're going after tea—but not before," said McClure. "Church and I invited these chaps here, and they're stopping here. If you like to squeeze in, you're welcome. It's your study, and we can't keep you out. But there's no room for any of your pals!"

Chambers realised that he was in danger of being eclipsed in front of all his new friends. And it was vital that he should retain their support. They formed the nucleus of his party.

"You young rotters!" he shouted desperately. "I'll soon show you whether I'm to be defied or not! I'll get a crowd of fellows, and I'll come back and throw you all out!"

"By gad! That's a jolly good idea!" said Gore-Pearce. "We'll fetch some of the Fourth Formers—Merrell and Marriott and their lot! We'll soon have these fags out on their necks!"

"Yes, rather!" panted Chambers. "I'm the dictator of this study, and I'll have my way! Of all the infernal impudence!"

And just then Biggleswade, of the Sixth, appeared on the scene.



CHAPTER 22.

A Complete Success!

D AVID BIGGLESWADE was an easy-going, good-natured prefect. As a rule, he turned a deaf ear to any little irregularity; but there was so much noise coming from Study D that he felt compelled to look into it.

"What's the trouble here?" he asked mildly, as he walked up.

Chambers turned on him, and his eyes glinted.

"I'll soon tell you!" he snapped. "I brought these friends of mine to tea in the study. And look what I find here!"

Biggleswade pushed his way through the juniors, and gazed into Study D. There was a general chorus of welcome, for "old Biggy" was very popular amongst the fags.

"You kids seem to be enjoying yourselves," he remarked, as he stood in the doorway.

"Just a little tea-party," said Church. "Mac and I invited them, Biggy. If it wasn't so crowded, we'd ask you to join us."

"That's awfully good of you, but, as a matter of fact, I have an appointment elsewhere," said Biggleswade. "Well, what's the matter?" he added, turning to Chambers. "What are you grouching about? I can't see anything wrong."

"Can't see anything wrong!" repeated Chambers thickly. "How on earth can I get into this study with all my friends?"

Biggleswade grinned.

"Well, it does seem a bit difficult," he admitted.

"Aren't you going to do anything?" demanded Chambers hotly. "Aren't you going to tell these fags to clear off? They've no right here!"

"Yes, they have!" put in Church. "They're my guests!"

"Confound your guests!" roared Chambers. "It's a plot, Biggleswade! It's a plot to keep me out of my own study!"

"But it's Church's study, too," said Biggleswade. "Where's McClure? Isn't he here?"

"Yes, I'm here," said McClure, appearing behind a platoon of fags. "This is our party, Biggy—Church's and mine."

"You both agreed to it, eh?"

"Yes, of course."

"Then I'm afraid we can't do anything, Chambers," said Biggleswade, turning to the ex-Fifth-Former.

"What do you mean—can't do anything?" roared Chambers. "You're a prefect, aren't you? You can tell these cheeky fags to clear off! They won't take any notice of me, but you belong to the Sixth—"

"It wouldn't make any difference if I belonged to the House of Lords!" interrupted

Biggleswade. "There are three of you fellows in this study—Church, McClure, and yourself. Well, Church and McClure have invited these guests, and they were here before you. There's no argument about it, Chambers. You and your friends will have to clear off."

"Wha-a-at!"

"You'll have to clear off," repeated Biggleswade, with relish. "You know the rules of these studies, Chambers. It's two against one, and you're in the minority."

"But I'm the leader of the study!" howled Chambers.

"That doesn't make any difference!" said the prefect. "Hang it, you can't be idiot enough to expect that these kids will turn out for you! They're in the middle of their tea! You'd better make yourself scarce."

"I'm hanged if I will!" shouted Chambers furiously.

Even the good-natured Biggleswade frowned at this.

"If you talk to me like that again, Chambers, I'll give you a hundred lines!" he said, still frowning.

"You'll—you'll give me lines!" gasped Chambers.

"Yes, I will!"

"But—but—"

Chambers broke off, gulping. When excited he was liable to forget that he was no longer in the Fifth, and as a Removeite he was always open to the danger of receiving lines from a prefect. He felt positively homicidal as he gazed at the mild Biggleswade.

"And don't let me hear any more noise in this passage!" said the prefect gruffly. "Church and McClure are holding a well-mannered tea-party, and they're absolutely within their rights. If you interfere, Chambers, I shall see that you are reported to the Housemaster."

"I tell you it's a plot!" panted Chambers. "They've done it purposely—so as to keep me and my friends out!"

"Rubbish!" said Biggleswade. "Now, then—clear off!"

"But look here——"

"Clear off!" said Biggleswade. "Go on, all of you! If I have any more of your cheek, I'll fetch my cane!"

For a moment it seemed that the excited Chambers was about to attack Biggleswade, but he recovered himself in the nick of time. Then, with set lips, he strode off down the passage, accompanied by Gore-Pearce & Co., and the other juniors.

There were many subdued chuckles from inside Study D.

"Thanks, Biggy, old man!" said Church cheerily.

"That's all right!" said Biggleswade. "Carry on, kids!"

He closed the door of Study D, and strolled away. And while Chambers & Co. gathered in the lobby, to hold an indignation meeting, Church and McClure and their guests were laughing uproariously in Study D.

"By George!" said Handforth. "We've done the trick!"

"We've started on the right road, anyway," nodded Willy. "Chambers won't be able to do a thing, and as long as we stick to this policy we shall be safe. We won't touch the bounder, or his friends, either. We'll treat them as though they didn't exist. And I'll bet my best Sunday topper that we'll beat Chambers in the end!"



CHAPTER 23.

Getting Worse!

IR JAMES POTTS helped himself to a tart, and he looked thoughtfully across the tea-table at his

study mate.

"What's your game, Travers?" he asked curiously.

"Game, dear old fellow?" murmured Vivian Travers. "What game?"

"Don't be so jolly innocent!" replied Jimmy Potts. "Why the dickens are you so thick with that ass, Chambers? I know thundering well that you don't care twopence about him! He's only an inflated gas-balloon!"

"An apt description," nodded Travers. "But it amuses me to support him."

"Why does it?"

"Oh, I don't know; fancy, I suppose."

"You can't fool me like that, Travers," said Jimmy. "Chambers is the biggest duffer in the Remove. You're not really going to support him in his idiotic election campaign, are you?"

"I'm going to get him elected," replied Travers coolly.

"You must be off your rocker!"

"But think of the fun, dear old fellow!" smiled Travers. "With Chambers skipper of the Remove, anything might happen! These are the dog-days, Jimmy, and we need something to liven us up."

A tramp of feet sounded in the passage, and a moment later the door of Study H was thrown open, and Chambers walked in.

"I want to speak to you, Travers!" he said fiercely.

"Well, well! What's it all about?" asked Travers. "Pray don't trouble to knock, dear old fellow. Make yourself thoroughly at home."

"I can't be bothered with knocking!" snapped Chambers. "Those young rotters, Church and McClure, have played a trick on me!"

"Wicked youths!" said Travers severely. Chambers poured out his story. And while Vivian Travers listened with assumed gravity, Jimmy Potts openly grinned.

"Well, you can't blame them," he remarked, at length. "Church and McClure are within their rights——"

"I wasn't talking to you!" interrupted Chambers harshly.

"Oh, keep your hair on!" said Jimmy coldly.

Travers was looking thoughtful.

"I'm not a bit surprised," he remarked. "The return of Handforth has made a bit of a difference, and perhaps you'd better get out of Study D, Chambers——"

"Not likely!" said Chambers. "I'm hanged if I'll get out!"

"But it may be good policy to do so," urged Travers. "You tell me that young Willy was in the study, too? H'm! That looks bad! Of course, it was a dodge—and is worked. If you want to avoid a lot of trouble, Chambers, you'll get out of Study D of your own accord."

"But it was you who advised me——"

"Never mind what I advised you!" broke in Travers. "Handforth is back—and Handforth is a sticker. He's a dogged worker, too. You'll never have any peace as long as you stay in Study D. Why not transfer into here?"

Jimmy Potts opened his mouth to speak, but Travers turned to him before he could utter any of the words that were on his lips.

"You don't mind, Jimmy, do you?" went on Travers coolly. "You don't object to Chambers coming into this study?"

"I—I—— Well, dash it, I suppose not!" said Potts. "But I don't quite see——"

"That's all right, then," said Travers calmly. "Get your things, Chambers, and transfer into this study. It'll be so much easier, dear old fellow."

But Cuthbert Chambers was several kinds of an ass.

"Thanks all the same, but I'm not going to knuckle under like that!" he said savagely. "I'm the leader of Study D—and Handforth can go and boil himself! This evening I'm going to show him who's boss!"

Chambers then strode out of the study, slamming the door.

"A nice, quiet young gentleman!" murmured Travers languidly.

"You—you rotter!" gasped Jimmy Potts. "What do you mean by inviting him into this study?"

"You can take my word for it, Jimmy, that Chambers will be well-behaved," said Travers. "He's coming in this study, of course. That's inevitable. He'll probably transfer during the evening. Well, well. We'll see."

"But I don't want him here!"

"Neither do I, if it comes to that," admitted Travers blandly. "But there'll be lots of fun, if only you'll be patient, Jimmy."

And Jimmy Potts couldn't get any more out of his remarkable study mate.

Chambers, in the meantime, had gone off to Study A, where he was the guest of Gore-Pearce & Co. He stopped talking for more than an hour after the meal had been finished. Then he went off to Study D.

All was quiet as he approached, and he suddenly flung open the door, and walked in. Church and McClure were sitting at the table, busy with their books. There was nobody else in the little apartment.

"Oh!" said Chambers, walking in and

closing the door. "They've gone, have they?"

Church looked up.

"Ages ago!" he replied.

He turned his attention to the books on the table again, and Chambers grunted.

"Doing your prep., eh?" he said gruffly.

"Yes," replied McClure. "Do be quiet, Chambers! I'm right in the middle of a rotten piece of grammar."

Both the juniors bent over their work, and Chambers grunted again.

"I want to tell you fellows something!" he said fiercely. "You're not going to hold any more tea-parties in this study! Understand? I'm leader here, and I'm not going to put up with—— Are you listening to me?"

"Eh?" said Church, looking up, as he abstractedly sucked the end of his pen-holder. "Talking to me?"

"Yes, I am!"

"Sorry!" said Church. "I didn't catch it."

"I said, I'm not going to let you fellows hold any more parties in this study!" repeated Chambers. "You'd better understand, once and for all, that I'm the big noise here!"

"Yes, there is a bit of a noise!" admitted Church musingly.

"What!"

"It's those chaps out in the square!" said Church, frowning at the window. "Why can't they go away?"

Chambers gave it up. Church and McClure were so engrossed in their prep. that they had no ears for his complaints. So, after standing in front of the fireplace for about a quarter of an hour, Chambers got out his own books, and sat down at the table. He came to the conclusion that it would be a good idea for him to get his own prep. out of the way.

But he had scarcely begun before a loud thump sounded on the door, and the handle rattled. The next second Edward Oswald Handforth strode in, carrying a trombone.

"Ready, you chaps?" he asked cheerfully. Slam! Slam!

Simultaneously, Church and McClure closed their books, and jumped to their feet.

"Just finished!" said Church brightly. "Good man! You've borrowed a trombone, eh? What about the rest of the fellows?"

"They're coming now!" said Handforth. "The whole giddy band!"

And Cuthbert Chambers, with his eyes nearly standing out of his head, saw a whole string of fags marching solemnly into Study D. They were headed by Willy, and every one of them was carrying a different kind of musical instrument!



CHAPTER 24.

The Last Straw!

NEVER once had Handforth looked at Chambers; and even the fags, as they piled in, seemed to have no knowledge of Chambers' presence.

"Well, we're all here," said Willy briskly. "It ought to be a pretty good band, on the whole. We've got a trombone, a violin, a cornet, a trap-drum, a saxophone, and a mouth-organ."

"Good egg!" said Church. "Let's begin practice!"

Handforth put the trombone to his mouth, and an ear-splitting blast tore devastatingly into Chambers' left ear. Very thoughtlessly, Handforth had placed the end of the trombone about two inches from Chambers' head. The ex-Fifth-Former leapt to his feet, shouting at the top of his voice.

"Hi!" he howled. "You—you silly fool! You've deafened me!"

Handforth lowered the trombone.

"Oh, hallo!" he said, in surprise. "Are you here, Chambers?"

"Yes, I am!" roared Chambers furiously. "Get out of here, confound you! Get out with those rotten instruments!"

"Here, I say!" protested Church. "Come off it, Chambers! Mac and I have finished our prep., and now we're going to practise for our special jazz band."

"You needn't take any notice of us," said McClure kindly. "Just carry on with your prep., old man, and forget that we're here."

Chambers fairly danced with rage.

"How can I get on with my work if all you youngsters are crowding in the room?" he shrieked. "This is my study, and I'm the leader——"

"Chuck it, Chambers!" said Church. "Mac and I are responsible for all this. These fellows are our guests. We're in the majority. If you don't like the noise in here, the only thing you can do is to leave. But we're within our rights."

"Let her go, you fellows!" said Handforth

And the next second the most unearthly, horrible din broke out within Study D.

It was excruciating in its horror. Not one of those instruments was played correctly, and the nerve-shattering tumult that they created was incredible. Cuthbert Chambers backed away, holding his hands to his ears.

"Stop!" he shouted. "I'll smash you——"

"Aren't you getting tired of saying that?" broke in Church coldly. "We've finished our prep, and——"

"But this is my study!" hooted Chambers. "How can I work in this diabolical din?"

"That's your problem!" said Church blandly. "And you'll probably have a lot of it, too, Chambers. If this first rehearsal is

successful, we're going to have a practice every evening for the rest of the term."

"What?" gurgled Chambers.

"Oh, rather!" said Church. "And you can't stop us doing it, either! It's two against one all the time, Chambers. Mac and I are absolutely within our rights. And if you like to complain, you'll get no sympathy from any of the prefects, or the masters."

"Ready?" sang out Willy. "Now then—one, two, three!"

It started again—weird, blaring, and indescribably awful. Chambers shouted at the top of his voice, but nobody took any notice. Probably they didn't hear him.

And so the "practice" continued, until the unhappy Chambers was nearly driven out of his mind. Work, of course, was out of the question; and Chambers was helpless.

"Stop!" shrieked Chambers, as he fought desperately, and at last reached the door. "Lemme get out of here!"

"Hallo!" said McClure. "Going?"

"Yes, I am going!" panted Chambers. "And I'm not coming back!"

"That's the best thing you've said for ages!" remarked Church. "You're not coming back, eh?"

"I'm fed up with you! Fed up with all your rot!" thundered Chambers. "I'm transferring into Study H, with Travers!"

"By George!" shouted Handforth exultantly. "You've said it, Chambers, and you can't back out of it!"

"I don't want to back out of it!" retorted Chambers sourly. "You're welcome to the rotten study!"

And he went out of the room, slamming the door.

"Good old Handy!" grinned Church happily. "It's worked!"

"And I'm leader of Study D again!" said Handforth, as he looked round the room with breathless triumph. "Willy, my son, this wheeze of yours is a corker!"

Chambers went out, fuming and boiling. He heard the echo of laughter as he strode down the passage.

The trick had worked. And now Edward Oswald Handforth was back in his old position as leader of Study D.

And in the Remove generally there was a good deal of excitement over the coming election.

What was it that Vivian Travers had up his sleeve?

THE END.

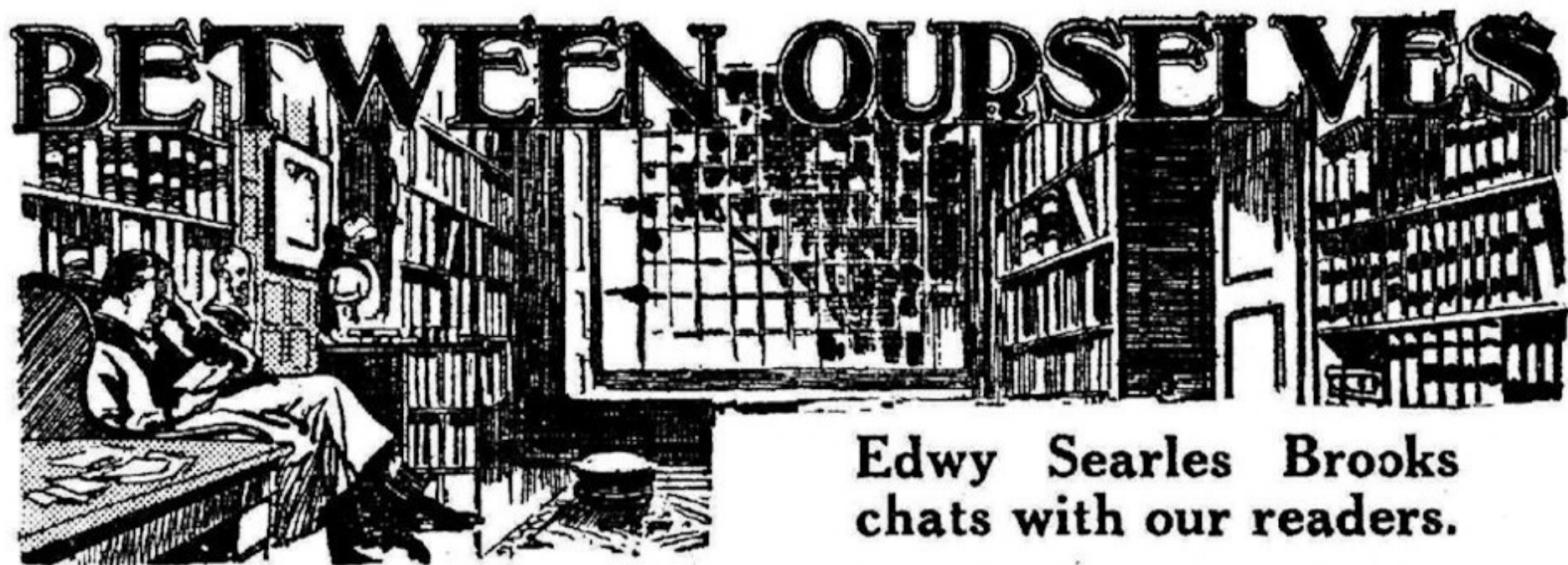
NEXT WEEK'S LONG YARN IS ENTITLED:—

*Stirring times
at
St. Frank's!*



*Edwy S. Brooks
at
his best!*

IT'S A CORKER!—DON'T MISS IT!



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.

I'M sorry I can't give you the information you want, R. Markham (Sydney). There has been no No. 586 of the Old Paper. But No. 568, which was the last number of the Old Series, was called "Handy's Round Up." Perhaps this is the one you mean? And the series containing the stories about Ezra Quirke ran from No. 542 to No. 549 inclusive.

I believe I've heard that yarn of yours before, Percy Young, (Liverpool), but I'll admit that I had forgotten it. Anyhow, it's well worth repeating, so that other readers can try it on their chums. Now, let me see. How does it go? Give a sentence in which the word "and" occurs consecutively five times. Well, here's the answer, according to your version, Percy: An innkeeper was once having his sign—Pig and Whistle—repainted, and during the proceedings the innkeeper came out and said to the artist: "When you paint the sign, will you leave more space between 'Pig' and 'and' and 'and' and 'Whistle'?" It isn't bad at all, is it?

The age of the Third-Formers at St. Frank's, Frank Dayman (Wellington, N.Z.), averages between twelve and fourteen, and Willy Handforth is no exception to the rule. I'm afraid it's rather difficult to tell you who was skipper of the Fourth before Buster Boots came. You see, at one time there wasn't any Fourth Form at all; but when the Remove got too big, it was divided into two. There are no First or Second Forms at St. Frank's. In the dim ages of the past they existed, but the Third Form is now the lowest. Handforth & Co. are just about fifteen years of age—each. And Alec Duncan is the same.

You don't say whether you are a member of the League or not, Edward Stubbs (Walsall). But if you *are*, I dare say you could get hold of some old back numbers by asking

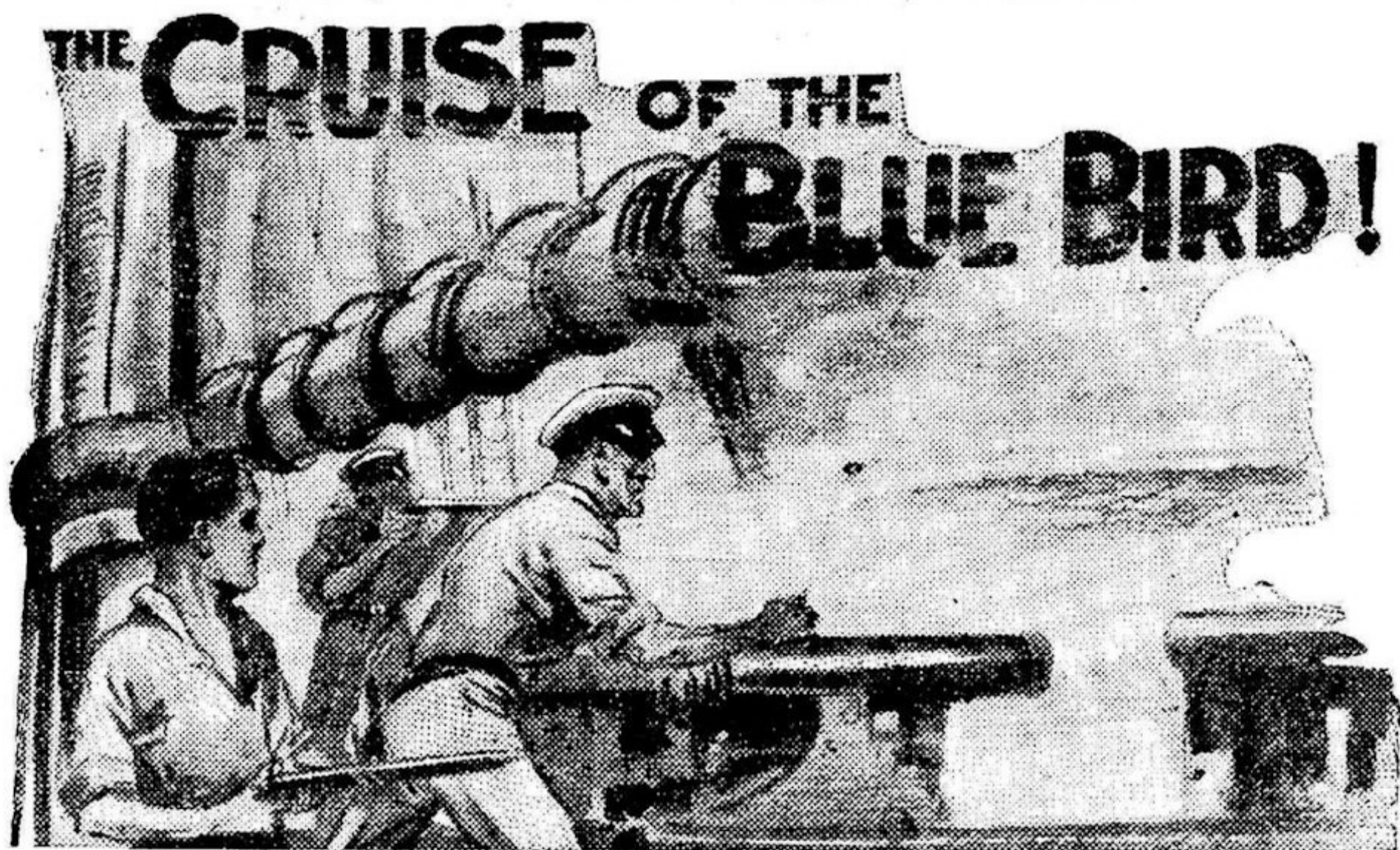
the Chief Officer to insert an advert for you. But why go to this trouble? Why not buy the "Popular" every week? The earlier adventures of Nipper & Co. are appearing in that journal, you know.

You should really write to the Editor about your binding idea, Eric Bournes (Sydney). But I'm afraid it would be impracticable to have the serials run so that they finish in the same number as the last of a St. Frank's series. And why is it necessary, anyhow? All you fellows who want to bind your copies can easily do so in quarter-yearly volumes.

I'm going to repeat a portion of your letter, Ashton Butler (Sydney), as it will show home readers how enthusiastic your Australians are: "To return to my chief object in writing to you, I can only say how pleased we Australian boys are with the 'Nelson Lee Library.' It is the sort of book that upholds England's slogan, 'British & Best.' I am President of a St. Frank's Club that boasts of thirty-seven loyal 'Nelson Leeites.' In Tasmania the Old Paper is threepence, but I am willing to pay as much for it as it can ever rise to, as I and other boys get more than our money back with it. I have already sent in my League Application Form, and I suppose my medal is on its way by this time. In my club, I have every copy as far back as the New Edition of the 'Nelson Lee,' kept for looking up to read again. The Club has a weekly order at the news-agent's for forty copies a week." Now, I wonder how many home Clubs can equal this?

Edwy Searles Brooks

A blackbirder—a vessel engaged in visiting out-of-the-way islands and recruiting native labour by force—comes to Graden Island, little suspecting that Captain Manby is there—and thus starts the excitement!



By COUTTS BRISBANE

WHAT HAPPENED IN THE PREVIOUS CHAPTERS.

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. 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. There Rua-Rua tells Manby that he knows of an uncharted island in which is a lagoon full of pearls, and that he will lead the captain there if he promises to let him go free. Manby refuses; and later, in revenge, Rua-Rua tries to kill Jack, but fortunately he is unsuccessful, the native himself being killed. Captain Manby tells Sinclair, the mate on board the Blue Bird, that he intends to find this unknown island himself. While they are talking Ah Moy, the Chinese cook, announces that a strange vessel has just come in sight!

(Now read on.)

The Blackbirder!

"Stay where you are, Jack," said Manby, as he went on deck, followed by the mate.

"But I'm all fit now," grumbled Jack. "Fetch me a suit of dry togs, Ned. I can't stick lying down in day-time."

Ned slipped out to their cabin. As he did so, he saw Captain Manby and the mate speeding aloft with glasses. They reached the main top and stopped, looking out across the near sea and the outer line of reefs some four miles away at a black smudge of smoke drifting across the sky. Mr. Sinclair looked long, then lowered his glasses with a growl.

"What's the matter? Do you know her?" asked Manby.

The mate had spent the greater part of his seafaring life amongst the islands, and so knew a great deal more about them and their frequenters than his captain.

"Know her, the black scut? Yes, I do, sir. I've seen her once before and heard a lot too much about her. She's a Peruvian or Chilean blackbirder."

"What? I thought that sort of thing had been all done away with a dozen years ago!" exclaimed Manby.

"What's a blackbirder, sir?" asked a voice from the vicinity of Manby's foot. Ned, leaving Jack to dress, had climbed aloft to see what was happening.

"Hallo! A blackbirder is the term applied

to a vessel engaged in recruiting native labour from the islands," explained the captain. "Once upon a time blackbirders used to supply labour for the Queensland sugar plantations. A schooner would arrive at an island, get a lot of natives aboard, make them drunk, then sail off with them. They were signed on for three or five years. They had to get all their supplies from the plantation store at the plantation price, so when they were returned to their homes there was precious little to show for all their labour. It was an iniquitous business, and has been long abolished."

"Then what's that ship?" asked Ned.

"She's a Peruvian, or Chilian, or some other dago nationality from South America. They've taken up the business for the mines and plantations there, and they're worse than the Queensland lot, for labourers don't often come back," replied Mr. Sinclair. "They're thoroughpaced scoundrels, but their game is about finished. They dare only put in an appearance at some out-of-the-way place that hasn't got a wireless."

"Well, they won't get any men here if I can help it!" said Manby. "I'll signal her that she can't come in."

Sinclair smiled ruefully. He saw that his skipper had for the moment forgotten that he was no longer in command of one of His Majesty's ships with many men and powerful guns.

Manby saw and understood. He laughed.

"No, I suppose that would be no good. But we can try what bluff will do. Rout out that spare length of stove-pipe, lash it to the muzzle of the signal gun, and train it over the fo'c'sle head. It'll look like a three-inch from a distance, and the row it'll make should be appalling, eh?"

"Good notion, sir! It should work if they don't come too close. I'll get to it. She won't be in for an hour yet at least. Let's hope that it'll work, for she probably carries a heavy crew of cutthroats with plenty of firearms!"

"Carry on, then!" ordered Manby. "I'm going ashore to warn Hutton and Mitchie. There they are on the beach."

They scuttled down on to the deck, and Manby and Ned, not calling the crew, pulled the cutter to the beach, while Sinclair, in hot haste, set about rigging up the improvised cannon. Hutton came down the sand and met the boat. He was excited.

"Can you make out that steamer?" he called, as soon as he was within shouting distance. "Has she got a big house aft, with two ventilators just forward of it? We couldn't make out clearly."

"Yes; and Sinclair says she's a South American blackbirder. D'you know her?" replied Manby.

"Know her? Yes!" yelled Hutton. "The beast came here three years ago and bagged some of the island men. We couldn't stop them. I suppose they have come back for more."

"They shan't have them if I can help it.

I'm going to try bluffing 'em. If that doesn't work, then we'll have to try what rifles can do. You'd better warn your fellows and the natives. We'll get back. I'll do the best I can for you."

"I'm not one for coddling Kanakas!" exclaimed Hutton heatedly. "But when I think of those poor beggars being carried off, I want to shoot the scoundrels."

"Well, I'm not sure that it won't come to that," commented Manby. "But bluff's our best game. See you later, I hope. Pull, Ned!"

Bluff!

THEY returned to the Blue Bird, to find Sinclair busy with the stovepipe gun and a bit of sheet zinc, which he was bending into the shape of a quick-firer shield. Manby nodded approval.

"That's a good notion if they don't come too close," he said. "And I think I may be able to stop that. Here are the keys of the arms chest, Ned. Serve out rifles and ammunition to all hands, as before. And cutlasses to the cutter's crew, in addition. Hallo, Jack! D'you feel better?"

Jack had come out of the cabin dressed in dry clothes. He was looking fit enough, save for a bruise on the cheek and a haunted look in his eyes when he remembered the awful moments at the bottom of the lagoon.

"I'm all right now, father, thank you. Shall I help Ned?"

"Yes. Serve out arms. Bo'sun, clear the cutter. Cutter's crew stand by for arms."

Meanwhile the disreputable steamer had rounded the end of the outer line of reefs, and was slowly approaching the mouth of the lagoon. She was still a couple of miles away, so there was plenty of time.

Captain Manby dived into his cabin. There followed the sound of various chests and lockers being opened and shut, then, as the boys finished the distribution of the arms and themselves took the light Winchesters which they had used on the previous day, he emerged wearing an old uniform cap and coat—relics of the days when he had commanded one of His Majesty's smartest light-cruisers. With a sword at side he looked extremely official.

Ordinarily, of course, Captain Manby wouldn't have dreamed of pretending to be what he was not, but now he deemed that the occasion justified deception. Graden Island was far away from law and order, and they had to help themselves by whatever means they could employ. If he could only make these scoundrels think that he was a port officer with force enough behind him to make good any threats he might use, then they would most probably go away quietly without attempting anything.

But if the bluff should fail—if they should discover that his sole force was one small schooner with a Kanaka crew, and that there were only two white men on the island—then they would probably defy him, and go ashore and endeavour to gather in some of the in-

habitants, either by cajoling them with liquor or by plain force, as best suited their purpose. In that case Manby was determined to make a fight for the islanders, though it would assuredly be a fight against odds.

He cast a glance round the deck. The cutter's crew, with rifles and bandoliers, and cutlasses hanging by their sides, stood ready to drop into the boat. Forward, Mr. Sinclair was getting the faked signal gun into posi-

"Yes, sir," replied the mate. "How would it do if I did a little bit of hand flag-wagging to the shore, up the lagoon a bit, as though I were signalling? I'd say something about manning the battery. If there's anyone aboard that craft that understands the signalling code, as is likely enough, it would help, eh?"

"You have the idea, Mr. Sinclair. Wait till they can see you, though. Bluff's a good dog, but he doesn't always bite. Stand by the gun till you see them anchor."

With that Captain Manby dropped into the cutter and took his place in the sternsheets.

"Pull, boys! Get to the entrance of the lagoon before that fella steamer," he ordered.



Hidden in the shadow of the reef, Jack and Ned saw the two boats from the blackbird pass up the lagoon. Both were crowded with men, and there came the glint of rifle barrels.

tion, with its muzzle pointing threateningly over the bows.

"Run up the ensign," Captain Manby ordered.

One of the crew sent it aloft in a ball, man-o'-war fashion, as the captain had taught him. It broke out as it reached the peak and flapped languidly in the breeze. It was the blue ensign, which Captain Manby, as an officer of the Reserve, was entitled to fly, and it helped a good deal towards the effect Manby wished to produce.

"Step the boat staff and fly the boat ensign, too," Manby continued. "Tumble in, lads. Mr. Sinclair, I'm going to try to carry things off with the high hand. You will watch me. If I wave my cap twice, in this way, you will fire the gun. Set one man pacing aft, sentry fashion, with his rifle on his shoulder. You understand?"

The men gave way, the oars swinging with beautiful precision that alone suggested the man-o'-war. They reached the inner side of the lagoon entrance, through which the flood was now pouring, just as the sinister steamer appeared, nosing her way through.

Her appearance was in keeping with her ill repute. Her plating was rusty in many places where the paint had scaled off, the upper parts of her stump masts were sooty, her smokestack, badly stayed, sat awry, while her deck cabins, originally painted white, were now piebald with patches of bleached wood showing through. The canvas dodger of the bridge was black, except where it had been recently repaired with bits of coconut-fibre matting. Altogether she was an advertisement that crime wasn't a very paying profession.

"What a filthy-looking ship!" exclaimed

Ned Sutton. "I've never seen one so dirty. Even a collier looks clean compared with her."

"It's in keeping with her crew. See the scallywags! Gutter rats and dockside sweepings, I'd say. And, luckily, that sort aren't much account when it comes to fighting," Captain Manby growled.

A dozen men had appeared forward, looking over the rotting rail at the trim boat. Grimy with dirt, clothed anyhow in ill-fitting garments, they made a strange contrast to the clean, spick-and-span crew of the cutter, with Captain Manby, in white trousers and blue-and-gold coat and cap—an unmistakably genuine naval officer—sitting trimly erect aft.

Evidently boat and crew impressed the gang. They shouted aft, whereat more heads appeared, and a couple of blackbearded men on the bridge stared through glasses.

"Row in under her bows," commanded Manby. As he neared the steamer, which was circling into the lagoon, he stood up and waved his cap twice.

A moment later a jet of smoke darted from the bows of the Blue Bird, which lay in plain sight off the wooded point that hid the bungalow. Five seconds after, the report—a really astonishing noise, part brassy clang, part booming bellow—came rolling over the water.

The glasses of the men on the bridge switched convulsively to the schooner, and Captain Manby rose.

On Board the Blackbirder!

"ANCHOR here!" he roared. "Anchor at once. I am coming aboard."

The pair on the bridge lowered their glasses, spoke together hurriedly, then the engine-room bell—a cracked bell that made a dismal, flat clatter—rang. The engines stopped, reversed, and amidst a clamour of shouting, an anchor splashed from the bows while a ladder swung down the rusty side amidships.

"Billy Cheese, Long Jacko, take your rifles and follow me," ordered Manby. "You will stop at the top of the ladder and stand there with your rifles on your shoulders. Savee?"

"Yas, sir!" chorused the stroke and the man behind him.

"You will not speak a word. If there is a row you will cover the nearest of the ship's officers, but you will not shoot till I give the word. Savee?"

"Yes, cap'n, sir."

"Oars!"

The boat glided to the foot of the ladder, the bowman hooked on, and with slow and dignified step Captain Manby ascended to the deck, where he was received by the two men who had been on the bridge. As he stepped inboard, Billy Cheese and Long Jacko took up their places, sloped their rifles, and endeavoured to look as much like statues as they could, though their eyes turned

every way over the dirty deck and the staring ragamuffins fore and aft.

"I am the captain of the port," said Manby crisply. "Your papers, please."

"But-a, capitan, this is new way," began the foremost of the pair, who appeared to be the skipper. "When we com-a here——"

His mate whispered something. He nodded.

"Yes-a, capitan, I get. Not knowing this island have been made port, not having all quite-a ready. In a minute. You have-a drink?"

"No, thank you. And bring your log as well."

"Yes-a, capitan. You come a cabin, have a leetle drink?"

"No, thank you."

The skipper of the Blackbirder shrugged, made a clumsy salute and, turning, went into the after-deck cabin. The mate remained, grinning blandly, but casting continual nervous glances from Manby to the cutter, and from that to the schooner.

Very plainly he was puzzled. This was a British island, and Britishers have never been very prone to officialism. Usually they wait till an island community is fairly numerous and well established before saddling it with the expenses of port authorities and police. So far as he knew, there were only a couple of planters on Graden Island at his last visit. He looked along the shores of the lagoon for signs of more white people—then, probably concluding that their houses must be beyond the point, shrugged his shoulders and grinned some more.

"Good men, eh?" he said, nodding at the two by the gangway.

"Yes. Excellent rifle shots, too," replied Manby curtly. "Where are you from and where bound?"

"Cobija, yess. To thees——" He waved a hand vaguely about the horizon. "All thees islands, yess. I notta talk-a mooch thee English."

Here, to his evident relief, the skipper returned, carrying a bundle of dirty papers and a dog-eared logbook. Manby glanced over the former first. The ship was the Pangolin of Cobija, her master was named Innocente Gomez.

"Innocente!" murmured Manby. "That's more than you look. These seem to be in order. Logbook, please."

He glanced at the later entries and smiled, for the skipper's delay was at once explained. He had been writing up the log. It was in Spanish, a language of which the captain knew only a few words, while the hand was vilely illegible. He passed papers and book back to the skipper.

"On the occasion of your last visit here you took away some natives, who have not since returned," said Manby. "The port authorities, since established, do not propose to have any more of that sort of thing. But that it occurred years ago, I would detain the ship. As it is, you will sail at once," he finished sternly.

The skipper's jaw dropped. So did the

mate's, for, though he might not be able to speak English, he was assuredly able to understand it.

"But, capitan, my machine she is broke. The engine-man he say must have five-six hour in the smooth to mend proper. And we must get the water!" He spread his hands imploringly. And, as though to prove his words, there came a clang of hammering from below. "We must get the water, capitan, and the machine mend."

Manby relented. To insist on the ship going out with defective machinery might mean the end of her if a gale came up.

"Very well," he said grudgingly. "I give you till six o'clock to-morrow morning. No one is to go ashore except a watering party. They will water at the mouth of the stream there. A guard will be on duty to see that no one goes further, with orders to fire on stragglers. No boats to go up or down the lagoon. You understand? If you give me the least pretext, I will send a guard aboard and hold the ship for inquiry. You had better water now, at once."

"Yess, capitan, yess," replied the skipper. "I have him now, yess at once."

Captain Manby swung round with a curt nod and descended to the boat. Billy Cheese and Long Jacko, still striving to look like statues, followed at his heels.

"Give way," he ordered, and steered to the beach beside the mouth of a small stream that ran into the lagoon. There he landed four men.

"You will stay here," Manby said. "If those men come ashore for water you will go back among the bushes. You will not speak to them. If they try to go into the island you will fire one shot over their heads. If they do not go back you will fire at their legs. You boys had better go, too," he added, speaking to Jack and Ned. "You may not have a chance of stretching your legs on shore again for a while. Take charge."

"Yes, sir," said the two boys, and scrambled on to the beach.

"Remember, no shooting unless it's absolutely necessary to stop them from wandering into the island," concluded Manby, and so returned to the schooner, very well pleased with the success of his stratagem.

What Happened in the Night!

"I DON'T know what the guv'nor said to those beauties, but they looked very sick as he came down the side," remarked Jack, as, having set two of the four men to march up and down at the edge of the bush fringing the palm groves, he and Ned squatted in the shade.

"Oh, the row that gun made put a fear into them!" replied Ned. "They're getting a boat over. There are barrels and a water-tank in it. They're coming for water."

As the boat neared the beach the boys drew back their men into cover, after making sure that they had been seen.

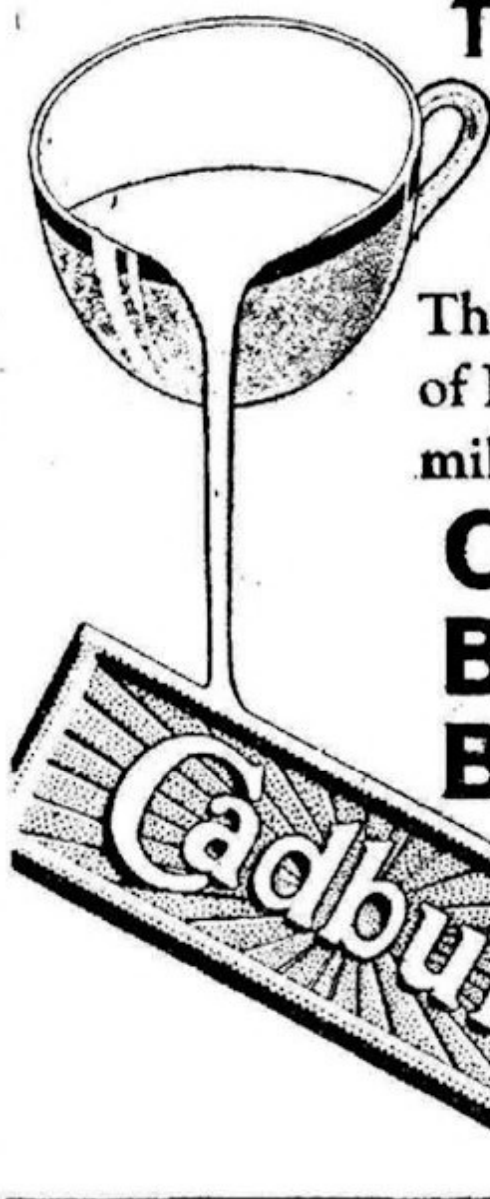
"Then they'll be afraid of being sniped at if they try anything," said Jack sagely.

But the watering party made no attempt to leave the beach. They washed and filled the barrels and tank, loaded them into the boat and returned to the ship, hoisted in the water and came back with more barrels. They were all quite orderly. Returning, they hoisted the boat in.

"That means that they have finished," said Jack. "And the guv'nor must have been watching them, too, for here comes our boat."

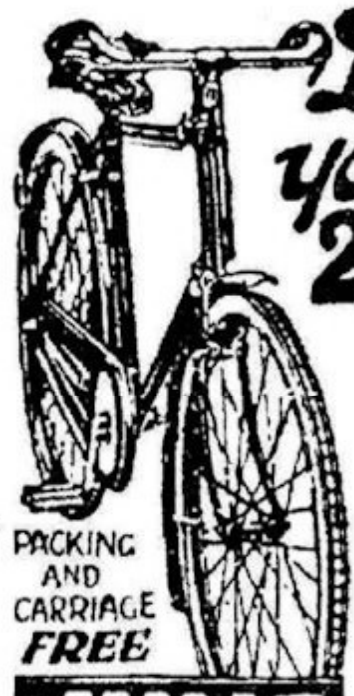
(Continued on next page.)

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Ned, who was watching the steamer through glasses, shut them with a snap. Sinclair, furnished with an old, undress uniform coat of Captain Manby's, was in the boat. He grinned broadly at the boys.

"Stand up and salute me," he said, as he came up the beach. "We are to do things all man-o'-war fashion to fool those dagoes. The captain brought it off first class. It must have been as good as a play. I'm to withdraw the guard and take you back, but the boat patrols till dark, see? After that, I don't think they'll try any tricks. Didn't the old brass pot make a racket?"

"Never heard such a row," agreed Jack, as he and Ned saluted the mate as smartly as they knew how. "It scared the dagoes."

They were taken on board the schooner, then the boat returned to row leisurely about not far from the steamer. The sun set, darkness came, and the boat returned. The sound of hammering still came from the Pangolin, but the mate reported that no attempt to go ashore had been made.

Shortly after, Hutton came on board and heard the result of the captain's bluff. Ned beckoned to Jack, and the two boys slipped out of the cabin, leaving their elders talking.

"I'm not quite sure about those fellows," whispered Ned, nodding in the direction of the Pangolin. "I don't know if you have noticed it, but all that hammering has made exactly the same sound. It has been the same note all the time. Listen to it!"

Another burst of clanging came up the lagoon. Jack listened.

"Yes. What about it?"

"Coming out from England in the liner, there was some trouble in the engine-room. It wasn't much, and it was repaired while we were lying in Colombo, but I noticed that the engineers made a varied sort of noise, and the hammering was in different keys when they hammered different bits of metal. But this noise has been exactly the same all the time, as if someone was whacking away at the same bit of metal."

"Yes, you're right, though I hadn't noticed it before," Jack replied.

"And there's another thing. While I was watching the ship through the glasses, I saw a man greasing the blocks of the boat-falls. That looks black, doesn't it? What if there's nothing wrong with the machinery? Perhaps they set a man to hammering a bit of plate, and perhaps they greased the boat-falls, with the notion of lowering a boat quietly after dark and taking a look at the top end of the lagoon."

"Perhaps you're right. Shall we tell the guv'nor?"

"Wait a bit. The dinghy's alongside. Let's take our rifles, and paddle down the lagoon and take a look at the steamer."

"But they'd see us moving against the white line of the beach," objected Jack.

"Yes, but they wouldn't see us if we kept over in the shadow of the reef."

"All right. Get the rifles." Jack went forward to where the look-out man lounged on the fore'sle. "We go in dinghy a little

way, Tin Pot," he said softly. "Go, look see, along that steamer."

"Allee right, Mistaire Jackee," replied the man, with a grin. He had no orders to prevent anyone from leaving the ship. "You not go much close topside. No good men."

So without hindrance the two boys dropped into the dinghy. Paddling silently across to the inner side of the reef, and keeping close to it, they made towards the steamer. There was no moon, and the sky was now overcast with scudding clouds that veiled the brilliance of the stars. A storm was coming.

"What a racket that chap's making with his hammer," whispered Ned. "Hallo! What's that ahead?"

Something had splashed a little way off. The boys stopped and peered into the darkness. Again came a faint splash, then Jack caught sight of something shadowy moving silently towards them.

"Boat! In quick!" he hissed. "Close to the reef."

The light dinghy spun round and slid into a tiny cove of coral. The boys eased her to a stop with her nose in a bunch of weeds. The shadow glided nearer with never a sound now to betray its passage, and passed within a few lengths—near enough for the crouching pair to catch the glint of rifle barrels, and to see that the boat was crowded with men. Scarcely had it passed than another shadow followed. Both boats headed up the lagoon and disappeared. Jack raised his rifle for an alarm shot.

"No," whispered Ned, laying a detaining hand on his friend's arm. "Let's get back and tell uncle. He'll decide what to do."

They paddled silently back and burst into the cabin with their news. Captain Manby nodded at Mr. Sinclair and Mr. Hutton, who were with him, and rose, the light of battle glinting in his eyes.

"Two boatloads, eh? The native village lies at the head of the lagoon, doesn't it, Mr. Hutton?"

"Yes. I made the people go into hiding. But now they will have returned, thinking all's safe. But I made the labourers camp close to the bungalow. They're all armed with copra knives, fish spears and clubs."

"Good!" exclaimed the captain. "Rouse them out and lead them to the native village quickly. If those scoundrels attack, try and hold them until we can take them in the flank, or rear. Mr. Sinclair, call all hands."

Hutton dropped into the dinghy and rowed himself ashore, while the men on board the Blue Bird mustered, lowered the cutter and gig and manned them. Sinclair, much to his disgust, was again left aboard, with two hands and Ah Moy.

And the boats sped off up the lagoon!

(Captain Manby and his companions seem "booked" for plenty of excitement and trouble. The blackbirder's crew are a villainous lot, and they certainly hold the advantage. Next week's instalment will tell you how things fare with the intrepid Britishers.)



Our Weekly Pow-Wow

By
The Editor.

Your Editor welcomes letters from all his readers: send him one now. Address it to: The Editor, "Nelson Lee Library," Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

WHAT'S that, Harry Walsh? You want to read about the early adventures of the Boys of St. Frank's? Then you can soon be satisfied. Stories dealing with the early adventures of Nipper and his cheery chums are now appearing in our grand companion paper, "The Popular," which is published every Tuesday, price twopence. Edwy Searles Brooks is, of course, the author, and he writes in his usual inimitable style with which all N.L.L. readers are so familiar.

"The Popular" is one of the best two-pennyworths on the market, and in addition to the St. Frank's yarns contains many other grand features; also a Birthday Club scheme whereby readers can obtain free copies of the 1928 Holiday and Hobby Annuals. Get a copy of "The Popular" to-day, boys!

An Old Supporter.

And yet not so old as all that. To hand is the cheeriest letter from Mr. Joseph Dean, Washpool, Rainow, nr. Macclesfield, Cheshire. He says he has old series N.L.L. 408-416, and 418 to 568, also new series Nos. 1-2 and 5-103, and would be glad to help those who want such copies.

Funny Things from the Past!

"The real worth of anything
Is just as much as it will bring,"
as the poet pointed out in wise fashion. If you can find a purchaser, and if the special item is what he is looking for, then a market can be made. But what a chance! I was asked about a battered coin which had the faint alignments of a gentleman wearing a stringy wreath of laurel, and garbed, so far as I could make out, in an old bath-towel. Someone seemed to have had a bitter grudge against that coin. It had been stamped on in irritable fashion, and the margin—oh, the margin was sad enough to make anyone sorry. Some enthusiastic collector might like this effigy of a long-vanished Roman emperor, but however old, it was hardly worth having. It is very seldom that one finds an old coin in good condition, and it is rarer still to get

hold of one which is worth more than, say, twice its face value.

A Dog's Life!

An Australian reader sends me word of an exciting game played in North Melbourne. A dog joined in and followed the ball and barked, and nipped at the heels of the nearest player to make him get a move on. The umpire turned nasty and barked, too, and who'd blame him? The new member would play, declining the umpire's ruling, and at last the ref. in a fury stopped the game and ordered the canine animal off the field. The dog refused to go. *J'y suis, j'y reste.* That was his motto, like the gallant Marshal MacMahon. All efforts to remove him failed, but at last he was caught at a boundary with his head on one side, waiting for a player to shoot. How's that umpire?

A Complaint!

Talking about animiles, here's a letter about the lion which took its hook off the Southampton boat. My correspondent says such things should not be allowed. They were not allowed. This lion did its level best, but the bottom fell out of its cage. What was it to do? It might, sure, have clawed the sides, but perhaps it had not time. It did not escape; the cage escaped it. It was much as with the old horse cab, the bottom of which fell out. There was the old lady inside, running hard—somebody saw her legs going like machinery—while the thoroughbred in the shafts was putting on real h.p. like mad.

A Few Acknowledgments.

A St. Helier chum asks for a new Portrait Gallery of St. Frank's. Here's a letter from Charles Killick, 93, Elms Road, Clapham, London, S.W.4, in which the writer says Handforth's blunt, self-satisfied nature is well liked. This correspondent is keen on printing, and wants details of an inexpensive hectograph, which I have sent him. He also wishes to hear from others keen on printing and cycling. T. W. Gibbs, 1, Railway Terrace, Wool, Dorset, has a club that is going

OUR WEEKLY POW-WOW!

(Continued from previous page.)

great guns. Its London address is 100, Dalston Lane, Dalston, E.8.

Can anyone oblige L. W. Tilbury, 126, Ongar Road, Brentwood, Essex, with some of the early stories of the cheery Nipper?

Will bikists drop a line to H. MacMahon, 50, Long Street, West Broken Hill, N.S.W., Australia? He is an ardent wheelman, and has just taken to steel wheels, though wooden wheels are much used in his country.

"Jockie," of Aberdeen, says his brother used to have a down on the N.L.L., but now asks forgiveness, as he thinks the paper is the grandest ever.

A. Karpel, Rock Lodge, 1, Brownlow Road, Tamboers-Kloof, Cape Town, says the yarns are top-hole; he wants to hear from readers, and would send views of South Africa.

A St. Frank's Poem.

William A. Lester, of Walsall, sends me a poem about the yarns. How's this?

"Nipper discovered the chaps to be
Most cheerful and quite honest,
With these he went on many a spree
Through the neighbouring Bellton
Forest."

Charles V. Brereton, 50, High Street, Congleton, Cheshire, is trying all he knows to get a correspondent in U.S.A. Won't some supporter in Uncle Sam's land oblige?

A Chance for Writers.

A. Horton, Jun., Manchester Royal Infirmary, Oxford Road, Manchester, tells me he wants articles, drawings, etc., for his amateur magazine.

"Tiffi," of Huddersfield, wants to go to sea, and asks how it is to be managed. He must try his hardest to get taken on by a shipping firm, that's all.

CORRESPONDENTS WANTED.

Samuel A. Birley, 28, Raynville Road, Victoria Park, Kirkstall, Leeds, offers 63 copies N.L.L. between 341-350, old series. He also wishes to correspond with readers abroad; all letters answered.

Lewis William Barnfather, 62, Hamilton Road, Dollis Hill, Willesden, London, N.W. 10, would like to correspond with readers anywhere, especially in New Zealand.

A. Horton, Jr., Manchester Royal Infirmary, Oxford Road, Manchester, wishes to hear from readers who are interested in his amateur magazine; he is on the look-out for articles, stories, and drawings.

T. W. Gibbs, 1, Railway Terrace, Wool, Dorset, wants to hear from readers, especially those overseas, who will join his Imperial Correspondence Club. Will London readers write to F. W. Minde, 100, Dalston Lane, Dalston, London, E.8, the club's London sec.

George Tait, 33, Richmond Place, Edinburgh, wishes to correspond with readers, age about 15, in Japan, Belgium, France, and Germany.

H. Claud Wileman, 5, Hawarden Road, Colwyn Bay, North Wales, wishes to hear from the Australian readers who wrote to him. Change of address is responsible for replies not having been sent.



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