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A rousing long complete story of schoolboy frolic and adventure, featuring the Chums of St. Frank's.

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OUT ON WEDNESDAY.

July 14th, 1928.



Zurrrrh ! Suddenly, with a roaring sound, a stream of red and green points of fire shot out from beneath the Austin's chassis. They bombarded Mr. Pycraft's legs, and he danced about like a dervish. "Stop !" he shrieked to Handforth, who was looking on in dire alarm. "Stop the engine, you young idiot !"

Who's Going to be Captain of the Remove—Nipper, Handforth, or Chambers?

THE REMOVE ELECTION!



By EDWY SEARLES BROOKS

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

Election times are always stirring times, and it is just the same at St. Frank's, when the Remove holds an election for the captaincy of the Form. With Nipper, Handforth, and Chambers making speeches galore and doing their best to gain supporters, there's plenty of excitement and fun knocking about. You'll enjoy every chapter of this fine school yarn.—Ed.

CHAPTER 1.

Excitement in the Air!

"FRIENDS, Romans, countrymen——"

"Hear, hear!"

"Hurrah!"

"Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears——"

"Sorry, old man, we haven't any ears to-day—they're sold out!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Nipper paused good-naturedly as a ripple of laughter rang through the audience. It was a warm July evening, and about twenty Remove fellows were gathered round the Ancient House steps, in the bright sunshine. Nipper was at the top of the steps, making his speech. At least, he was trying to make a speech. So far, he had not met with much success.

"Go it, Brutus!"

Nipper's eyes gleamed. So far he had quoted Marc Antony's words from "Julius Cæsar"; but it had struck him that it might be a better idea for him to change to the rôle of Brutus. The quotation would be more apt.

"Romans, countrymen and lovers——"

"Bow-wow!"

"Hear me for my cause, and be silent that you may hear!" shouted Nipper impressively. "Believe me for mine honour, and have respect to mine honour, that you may believe. Censure me in your wisdom, and awake your senses, that you may be the better judge!"

"Frightfully good, dear old boy!" chuckled Sir Montie Tregellis-West. "It fits the case exactly—it does, really!"

"Hear, hear!"

"All right, Nipper—go ahead!"

"We'll lend you our ears, and listen to your words of wisdom!"

"But don't let's have any more of 'Julius Cæsar'!"

"We'll get down to brass tacks, then!" said Nipper briskly. "As you know, we're in the middle of an election campaign——"

"Vote for Chambers!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'm not here to make excuses for myself, or to plead for your votes," continued Nipper. "In fact, there's no need for me to do more than state the brief facts of the case. Until a few days ago, I was your captain——"

"You are now, old man!"

"You'll be re-elected by a terrific majority!"

There was much enthusiasm in the crowd. But, as the majority of them were Nipper's warmest friends and supporters, not much could be gauged from this. Reggie Pitt & Co., of the West House, were present, and Fullwood and Gresham and Archie Glen-thorne and Tommy Watson and Fatty Little. A good few of the rank and file were coming up, too, and they were listening with interest.

"There's not much for me to gas about!" sang out Nipper. "If you're not satisfied with the sports, and with the general running of the Remove, you needn't give me your votes. To-day is Monday, and the election is to be on Wednesday evening. There's plenty of time for you to make up your minds!"

"They're already made up, old man!" said Gresham.

"My two opponents, Chambers and Handforth, are getting up a big campaign, and there'll be so much spouting that you'll be sick of it before Wednesday," proceeded Nipper. "My own case is perfectly plain and straightforward. As the late skipper of the Remove, I merely ask you to vote for me, so that I can carry on in the same old way. Everything was all right until Chambers was sent down from the Fifth——"

"And everything is all right now, too!" said Reggie Pitt. "Chambers is only a wind-bag—a conceited, swelled-headed ass! He's older than any of us, and he's a lot bigger, too. But the very fact that he was sent down proves that he's a dunce and a chump. It's like his nerve to stand for the captaincy."

"He's only standing because he's big and self-important!" remarked Fullwood. "He challenged Nipper to a fight, and got knocked out——"

"But Nipper was knocked out, too!" put in Hubbard promptly. "That's why there's an election. We're not going to support Nipper after he's been down for the count."

"You silly ass!" roared Tommy Watson. "Chambers only hit Nipper by accident!"

"That doesn't matter—he was out!"

"Hear, hear!"

"I'm quite agreeable!" said Nipper good-naturedly. "It doesn't much matter how I got knocked out, does it? A election is the safe way of deciding. If you fellows still have faith in me you'll let me have your votes, and then I shall be captain again, with the approval of the majority."

"It's a cert for you, Nipper!"

"Oh, rather!"

"Personally, I'm not so sure of it!" said Nipper, frowning. "I know that I can rely upon you fellows. But what about the rest?"

"They'll come into line!" said Pitt.

"We're up against Travers!" said Nipper earnestly. "Chambers is the fellow who is putting up for the captaincy—but Travers is the brain behind him. And, as you know, Travers is a scheming sort of bounder."

"Schemers never prosper!" said Fullwood wisely. "It doesn't matter how much Travers boosts up Chambers, he can't make him look anything else but a figure-head. We wouldn't have Chambers for a skipper at any price! And the only other candidate is Handforth!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The shout of laughter which went through the crowd was sufficient to prove that the great Edward Oswald Handforth—recently returned to St. Frank's—stood little or no chance of election. Yet it was known that Handforth was preparing to launch an ambitious campaign.

Unfortunately, the Remove preferred to regard Handforth as a joke. They were ready to support his meetings, and to give him every encouragement, but, when it came to the election, he would probably find that his votes were few.

But his leg had been made to be pulled, and the Remove was prepared to pull it until further orders.

Everybody knew that Nipper was solid and substantial and reliable. The greater percentage of the fellows had already definitely made up their minds to vote for their old skipper, and his speeches, therefore, were without particular interest. In the meantime, there was no reason why they shouldn't have as much fun as possible at the expense of the other candidates.

CHAPTER 2.

Handforth's Programme!



URRRRH!

The sound of an electric motor-horn came to the ears of the crowd round the

Ancient House steps. It was a familiar note, and everybody looked round. There could be no mistaking the buzz of Handforth's Austin Seven's hooter.

For several weeks the leader of Study D had been away from St. Frank's—he had, in fact, been at St. Jim's—but now he was back again, and he was entering wholeheartedly into this election campaign. He had made up his mind to become captain of the Remove, and he had received such encouragement that he really believed that he would be elected. He hadn't the faintest idea that most of the fellows had been spoofing him.

They were ready enough to spoof him now.

"It's Handforth!" grinned Fullwood. "Come on—let's give him a welcome!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Wait a minute!" roared Nipper. "I haven't finished my speech!"

"Blow your speech!" grinned Reggie Pitt. "We'll hear you later, old man! Not that it matters, anyhow—because we're going to vote for you, speeches or no speeches!"

And, chuckling, the majority of the crowd melted away from Nipper, and went farther out across the Triangle. They were just in time to see Handforth's Austin Seven humming sedately round the rear of the chapel. It swung into the Triangle, and a great yell went up. It was a yell of laughter, combined with astonishment.

For Handforth's trusty little Austin was hardly recognisable.

Right across the windscreen was a placard: "VOTE FOR HANDFORTH!" And the sides of the car were plastered with such legends as: "HANDFORTH, THE LIVE CANDIDATE," "VOTE FOR THE FELLOW WHO KNOWS HOW TO LEAD!" "HANDFORTH, THE STICKER—GIVE HIM YOUR VOTES!"

Handforth himself was at the wheel, and, at the back of the little Austin, Church and McClure, his faithful chums, were standing up on the seat, waving flags. Altogether, it was an impressive business.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Good old Handy!"

"There's nothing like making a good show!"

Reggie Pitt caught hold of Jack Grey and Castleton and Goodwin, and drew them aside. One or two other West House juniors came up, too.

"Everything ready?" asked Reggie briskly.

"Yes, rather!" grinned Castleton.

"It's a good thing we had the tip about this stunt of Handy's!" went on Reggie.

"We haven't waited in vain, my sons! Now then—all together! Let's crowd round the Austin, and give Handy wholehearted support! Then he won't suspect us!"

"Good egg!" chuckled the others.

No sooner had the Austin Seven come to a standstill, than Pitt & Co. pressed round, until they were touching the wings and the body. They raised their caps in the air, and cheered vigorously.

"Hurrah!"

"Vote for Handforth!"

"Down with the other candidates!"

"Speech, Handy—speech!"

The Ancient House juniors too, were joining in the demonstration. It was rather fun to spoof old Handy like this. The great Edward Oswald was now standing up on the driving seat, for it made an excellent rostrum. He was looking excited and animated; his face was flushed, his hair was untidy—as usual—and his eyes were gleaming with a war-like fire.

"Silence for Handy!"

"Go it, Handy, old man!"

Handforth raised his arm, and, as though by magic, a complete silence fell. The juniors were so used to pulling Handforth's leg that they did this sort of thing automatically. And Handforth hadn't the faintest suspicion. He really thought that his presence was so

impressive that he commanded this silence and respect.

"Gentlemen——" he began.

"Hear, hear!"

"Bravo!"

"Gentlemen and fellow-sufferers!" roared Handforth. "I am here before you as a champion of liberty——"

"Hurrah!"

"I stand here, on this platform—— Whoa! Steady, there! Don't play the fool with this car, you silly fatheads!"

Handforth had neglected to put the hand-brake on, although he had stopped the engine, and somebody had been careless enough to give the Austin a shove. Handforth rocked precariously, and nearly came a cropper.

"That's better!" he said, after he had bent down and pulled the brake on. "Don't let's have any more messing about! The first chap who touches this car will feel the weight of my fist!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I don't intend to say much at this meeting——"

"Good man!"

"I merely intend to outline my programme!" roared Handforth impressively. "I want your votes!"

"Hurrah!"

"And I mean to have your votes!" thundered Handforth. "Vote for me, and you'll vote for the only live candidate! The others are beneath contempt! I needn't mention Chambers at all, because he's only a loud-mouthed, fatheaded chump. Nipper, of course, is different——"

"Thanks!" said Nipper dryly.

"He's a good, sound fellow—but he's old-fashioned!" continued Handforth. "His ideas are mouldy and moth-eaten! It's high time that a new, virile leader was chosen for the Remove. And that leader now stands before you!"

"Good old Handy—there's nothing like modesty!"

And the crowd pressed round, enjoying itself thoroughly.



CHAPTER 3.

An Unrehearsed Effect!

E

DWARD OSWALD HANDFORTH was much encouraged by the enthusiastic cheering and shouting.

"If you elect me as captain, my policy will be one of push-and-go!" he shouted. "Understand me clearly, gentlemen! Push and go! They will be my watchwords!"

"I can quite believe it, old man!" said Reggie Pitt, nodding. "If ever you become skipper, you'll push everybody you can, and then go!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You'll probably push them in the face!" added Reggie. "And you won't go until you've made them unrecognisable!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You—you silly fathead!" roared Handforth, turning red. "When I say 'push and go,' I mean that I shall be full of vim and—"

"Beans?" suggested De Valerie.

"No, you ass, I shan't be full of beans!" shouted Handforth. "I don't like beans!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I shall conduct the sports with a strong hand!" continued Handforth. "When I'm skipper, I'll have no nonsense! Any fellow who refuses to submit to my authority will be promptly squashed!"

"Well, it's just as well to know that!" said Fullwood. "If we vote for Handy, and get him elected, we shall all be squashed!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I didn't say that!" roared Handforth. "I said that any fellow who refused to submit to my authority would be squashed!"

"Well, we shall all refuse, shan't we?" asked Fullwood blandly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There aren't any complications about my campaign!" continued Handforth loudly. "If you'll elect me as captain, I'll throw myself wholeheartedly into the affairs of the Remove. I shall be down on smoking and gambling in every form. I shall make everybody practice at the nets, and I shall make it a rule to give everybody a chance at the cricket and footer."

"That's the style, old son!"

"There'll be no waiting about, week after week, for a fellow to pick up a game!" roared Handforth. "He'll have his turn—just the same as all the other chaps! Everybody will play in rotation, with no favouritism!"

"Won't that be rather awkward?" asked De Valerie. "What about when it comes to Teddy Long's turn? What sort of a showing do you think he'll give?"

"A good one!" replied Handforth promptly. "When I've finished with him Teddy Long will know how to play!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It'll be the same with all the other slackers!" shouted Handforth. "There'll be no slacking if I become captain! Nipper has been too easy-going—too generous in his methods. I shall be firm—resolute. Slackers will have a pretty thin time with me!"

"Rats!" sang out Hubbard. "You're more of a windbag than that ass, Chambers!"

"If you come over here, Arthur Hubbard, I'll punch your nose!" snorted Handforth.

"Thanks all the same—but I'll stay where I am!" retorted Hubbard.

He was in the centre of the little clique of slackers—mainly consisting of Claude Gore-Pearce, Gulliver, Bell, and a few more of the same kidney.

"Why should we stand this?" murmured Gore-Pearce. "Let's make him a present!"

"By gad!" breathed Gulliver. "Let him have it, then!"

With one accord, the cads pulled their hands out of their pockets, and let fly.

Whizz—whizz!

"As I was saying, gentlemen——"

Thud! Splosh!

Before Handforth could get any further, an over-ripe apple struck him in the neck, and burst like a miniature bomb. At the same second, an even more over-ripe egg hit him in the middle of the chest, and the odour which arose caused Church and McClure to sink back dizzily in the rear seats.

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the raggers.

"Chuck it, you asses!" said Nipper sharply. "A joke's a joke, but there's no need to——"

Whizz!

Something else went shooting towards Handforth, and it struck him on the face and burst in a cloud of powder. The next second Handforth was spluttering and choking and sneezing.

"Pepper!" yelled Reggie Pitt, backing away from the car.

"Oh, my hat!"

"Collar the rotter who threw that bag of pepper!"

But Gore-Pearce & Co. were fleeing, shrieking with laughter. In the meantime, Handforth reeled drunkenly, clutching at the top of the wind-screen with one hand, and clawing at his face with the other.

"I'm blinded!" he gasped. "Oh, the cads! The rotters! I can't see a thing! Everything's gone black— Oh, crikey! My eyes feel as though they are on fire!"

He was in agony, and the juniors pressed round with real concern.

"All right, Handy—we'll help you out, and lead you to the fountain!" said Fullwood.

"This way, old man! You'd better bathe your eyes as quickly as possible!"

"Absolutely!" said Archie Glenthorne. "I mean to say, good gad! Of all the foul and poisonous schemes, this is the foulest!"

But Handforth still clutched at the wind-screen, and waved the juniors back.

"All right—I'm better now!" he gasped, opening his eyes and looking dazedly round him. "I can't see much, but they'll soon get better. And I'm going to finish my speech. I'm in the middle of an election campaign, and I can't allow trifles like this to interfere."

"You'd better bathe your eyes, Handy!" urged Church, who himself had just finished a fit of sneezing.

"No fear!" retorted Handforth. "I'm not a weakling! I'll bathe my eyes after I've finished my speech! Now, lemme see! Where was I?"

Handforth was a fellow who always made light of any hurt. He pretended now that he was not in much pain—whereas he was suffering considerable agony. His eyes, although not seriously injured, were smarting horribly, and everything seemed to be a blur. But he continued his speech, shouting loudly and pretending that he could see as well as ever.

"Yes, my policy will be one of firmness!" he said grimly. "Such fellows as Gore-Pearce and Gulliver and Bell will be held down, and kept in their places. Under my rule, they'll never get the chance of playing any dirty tricks!"

Reggie Pitt & Co., who had stuck very close to the Austin Seven—suspiciously close—now moved away. Castleton, indeed, had

just crawled out from beneath the little car, and nobody had noticed his activities in the general bustle and excitement.

"Come on—let's melt away!" murmured Reggie. "He says he can see us, but I don't believe he can!"

The others took the tip. One by one, they moved further and further away. Handforth, unaware of these activities, continued spouting—proof positive that his eyes were worse than he made them out to be.

And then, unfortunately, Mr. Horace Pycraft hove in sight, and at the appearance of the unpopular master of the Fourth, the juniors added the finishing touch to their disappearing act. They vanished altogether.

But Handforth, unconscious of what had happened, continued his oration.



CHAPTER 4.

Rough on Mr. Pycraft!

M

R. HORACE PYCRAFT came to a standstill, adjusted his glasses, and stared.

"Upon my soul!" he ejaculated, in astonishment.

He couldn't understand it. There was a junior schoolboy, standing on the seat of a small motor-car, talking at the top of his voice. The queer part about the whole thing was that the fellow was talking to the thin air.

"Good gracious!" said the master of the Fourth.

He moved nearer, and Handforth blithely proceeded. His eyes were feeling much better now; the pain had nearly gone, but he kept them closed, as it was easier. But he was satisfied that his blindness was only temporary, and that he was not really injured.

"And that, gentlemen, is my programme!" he shouted enthusiastically. "Every one of you here will realise that I am the fellow to vote for! I want you, one and all, to give me your support!"

"Extraordinary!" said Mr. Pycraft blankly.

"Don't be deluded by the vapourings of Chambers!" roared Handforth. "Don't take any notice of that hulking great lunatic! Nipper, of course, is not so bad. He's one of the best, and if you can't vote for me, vote for him! We must work might and main to keep Chambers out! It will be a bad day for the Remove if that scarecrow is ever elected!"

"Handforth!" shouted Mr. Pycraft, in dumbfounded amazement.

Handforth opened his eyes, and saw a blur in front of him. Then, as his eyes ceased tingling, the blur became the thin, unpleasant features and form of Mr. Horace Pycraft.

"Why, hallo!" said Handforth, blinking. "I—I didn't know you were here, sir!"

"What are you doing, Handforth?" demanded Mr. Pycraft. "What is the idea of standing here, in the middle of the Triangle, talking to yourself?"

"Eh? To—to myself!" ejaculated Handforth, gazing round in wonder. "But—but — By George! Where have they all gone to!"

"Gone to?" repeated Mr. Pycraft. "Are you attempting to deceive me, Handforth? You know well enough that there is nobody here, with the exception of myself!"

Handforth gulped.

"But—but there was a crowd here!" he gasped. "I was addressing a meeting, sir! They all seem to have bolted! Oh, of course!" he added, as an idea occurred to him. "They must have bolted as soon as they saw your face, sir."

Handforth did not mean to be personal; but he had a peculiar way of putting things.

"If you are being deliberately impertinent, Handforth, I shall report you to your House-master!" snapped Mr. Pycraft. "Why should the boys flee at my approach? Don't be ridiculous! This is some practical joke, I suppose? You evidently think that you are being funny!"

"The rotters!" said Handforth indignantly. "They might have told me that they were going! But how the dickens was I to know?"

"Have you no eyes?" demanded Mr. Pycraft suspiciously. "Are you telling me, Handforth, that you did not know that your audience had gone?"

"You see, sir——"

"Nonsense!" interrupted the Form-master. "This is a deliberate attempt at impertinence. Get down from that seat at once!"

"But I haven't finished my speech——"

"Get down!" shouted Mr. Pycraft. "And drive this—this car out of the Triangle! You know well enough that it is not allowed here!"

Handforth looked rebellious. His eyes were now quite normal, for he had only received a very small proportion of the pepper which had been so maliciously thrown.

But Handforth rebelled at the thought of obeying Mr. Pycraft's orders. What right had he to tell him to go away? Mr. Pycraft was the master of the Fourth—not the Remove.

"Look here, sir, I'm not interfering with you!" said Handforth truculently. "As soon as you've gone, the fellows will come back, and I can finish my speech——"

"Another word from you, young man, and I will personally take you to your House-master for punishment!" thundered Mr. Pycraft. "Get down at once! Do you hear me? Get down! And take this car away!"

There was nothing else for it. Handforth pursed his lips, and sat down in the driving seat. It was impossible to defy Mr. Pycraft to his face. At least, it wasn't impossible—but it would have been very risky. It would have meant, at least, a swishing.

"Oh, all right, sir!" he growled. "Keep your hair on!"

"What did you say, Handforth?" barked Mr. Pycraft, although he had heard quite clearly. Handforth wisely did not answer.

The Fourth Form-master fumed. Handforth's injunction that he should "keep his hair on" was most unfortunate, since Mr. Pycraft's hair, at the top, was extremely scanty. And Mr. Pycraft was sensitive on that score.

Handforth switched on the ignition, pulled out the choke, and trod on the self-starter. There was a whirr, and the engine immediately fired up.

"It's a bit thick, sir!" complained Handforth, as he trod on the clutch pedal, and prepared to shift the gear lever. "I hadn't half finished my speech, and the fellows would soon have come back——"

"I want to hear no more!" broke in Mr. Pycraft. "Take this car back to the garage." Zizzzzh—bang!

Without the slightest warning, an alarming sound came from under the trusty little car. It was a fierce, hissing noise, followed by a terrific explosion.

Mr. Horace Pycraft leapt about two feet into the air as a cloud of smoke billowed round him, and Handforth, sitting in the driving seat, clutched at the steering wheel, and his eyes lit up with alarm and excitement.

"Look out!" he howled. "Something's gone wrong! She's exploding!"

Bang! Boom! Zizz!

Apparently Handforth was not far wrong. The reports and explosions which came from underneath the Austin were truly terrific, and never before in his life had Edward Oswald felt so helpless.



CHAPTER 5.

Not Serious!

Z URRRRRRRH! Suddenly, with a roaring sound, a stream of red and green points of fire shot out from beneath the Austin's chassis. They bombarded Mr. Pycraft's legs, and he danced about like a dervish.

"Stop!" he shrieked. "Stop the engine, you young idiot!"

"I have stopped it!" roared Handforth, in dire alarm. "I don't know what's happening! She's never done this before!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

A roar of laughter came from the West Arch, and from the door of the gymnasium, and from all sorts of other hidden corners. Apparently there was a big audience. But, very wisely, the audience remained in cover.

"She's blowing herself to bits!" gasped Handforth, in anguish.

Bang! Bomb! Zizz!

The bombardment continued, and by this time the Austin was enveloped in a dense cloud of acrid smoke. Handforth really and

truly believed that the engine was blowing up, or something awful like that.

By this time one or two prefects had arrived on the scene, to find out what all the noise was about, and the doorways of the Houses were crowded with other seniors. Morrow came hurrying up, and his expression was one of bewilderment.

"What's happening here, sir?" he shouted, as he caught sight of Mr. Pycraft.

"How should I know?" said the master savagely. "This—this boy's ridiculous car is positively dangerous! I have always thought it foolish that Handforth should be allowed to own and run a motor-car! This is the result! It is a wonder I am still alive!"

"What about me, sir?" came an indignant voice, from amidst the smoke cloud. "I'm still in the giddy car! Thank goodness, she's better now!"

The din had subsided; only the smoke remained, and even this was drifting away on the evening breeze. Morrow sniffed at the smoke suspiciously.

"There's nothing wrong with the car, is there?" he asked. "I can smell gunpowder!"

"Gunpowder!" yelled Handforth.

"What else?" said the prefect. "All this noise has been caused by fireworks!"

"What!" hooted Handforth, leaping out of the driving seat and rushing round to the front of the car.

He unhooked the bonnet, and lifted it up. A cloud of acrid smoke surged into his face. Then he stared down blankly. Affixed to the chassis, to the steering rods and to the springs were Roman candles, squibs, rockets and other choice fireworks, and it seemed that they had been attached in such a way that they all exploded their contents downwards, towards the ground.

Upon closer examination Handforth saw that the fireworks were strung together so that they could be fixed easily. Some practical joker had obviously crawled under the car, and tied the fireworks in position—while he was making his speech!

Even in Handforth's excited state, he could see that his Austin had been in no danger. All the fireworks were close to the ground, well clear of the carburettor and the petrol tank. Many of them, indeed, were tied towards the rear of the little "bus."

"Well, I'm jiggered!" panted Handforth, scratching his head. "Only fireworks!"

"Bah!" snapped Mr. Pycraft. "I might have known it!"

He realised that he had cut a sorry figure. He had leapt about like a madman—all for nothing! There had been no danger whatever—and yet he had screamed and had shrieked as though the very earth had opened up. He strode away, fuming.

"You'd better take your car away, Handforth!" grinned Morrow. "Some genial friend of yours has been having a little joke, it seems."

"The rotters!" panted Handforth indignantly. "They must have done it while I

was making my speech! And I knew nothing about it!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors were appearing again now, and they were yelling with laughter. Morrow thought it advisable to clear off—and he cleared. An inquiry into this incident was hardly necessary.

"Well, Handy, old man, you can't say your speech wasn't a success!" grinned Reggie Pitt, as he strolled up. "You promised to let us have some fireworks, didn't you?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We've had two kinds of fireworks!" chuckled Castleton. "Fireworks from

and it only took two ticks to tie them on. Then we fixed a fuse to your choke-rod."

"But—but—"

"Don't you see?" chuckled Pitt. "We knew you would use the choke when you started the car—and you did. That fired the fuse, and in about ten seconds all the box of tricks went off. Poor old Handy! I suppose you thought that your engine had blown to bits?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And the Triangle echoed with uproarious laughter. Edward Oswald Handforth hardly knew whether to be relieved or furious. On due consideration, he came to the conclusion



Whiz! Something went shooting towards Handforth, and it struck him on the face and burst in a cloud of powder. The next second Handforth was spluttering and choking and sneezing. "Pepper!" yelled Reggie Pitt.

Handy's throttle, and fireworks from the Austin."

"You rotters!" said Handforth thickly. "You did this, didn't you?"

"Guilty, my lord!" said Reggie Pitt, hanging his head.

"You West House bounders!" roared Handforth. "I'll smash you for this!"

"Mercy!" pleaded Pitt, clasping his hands and looking pleadingly into Handforth's face.

"Oh, kind sir, have mercy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Idiot!" yelled Handforth. "You've messed up everything! How do you think that people are going to take me seriously if you mess up my speeches like this?"

"My dear chap, we thought we were doing you a good turn!" said Castleton indignantly.

"We were drawing attention to you. You need publicity, don't you?"

"But not this kind!" hooted Handforth.

"It was quite easy, too!" grinned Castleton. "The fireworks were already prepared,

that the joke was a pretty good one, and his relief at finding the Austin safe and sound was far greater than his anger.



CHAPTER 6.

Another Surprise!

TEN minutes later Handforth, having put his little car away, was back in the Triangle. His idea was to address another meeting. Unfortunately, the fellows insisted upon grouping themselves together in little clumps, at widely different sections of the Triangle.

The whole election was regarded, more or less, as a mere diversion.

Cuthbert Chambers, late of the Fifth, was Nipper's only real rival. Handforth was merely the comic relief.

But Chambers was a different proposition. He was a big, burly sort of fellow, with any amount of assurance; but most of the fellows knew that he was a windbag, and that, as a leader, he would be a dismal failure.

But it could not be denied that there were many thoughtless fellows amongst the rank and file of the Remove. They would probably vote for Chambers, if only for the novelty of having a change. They knew that they could never be leaders themselves, and they saw no reason why they should not give Chambers a trial as skipper. He was such an absolute ass that he would probably make a mess of things, and that would be most entertaining.

These fellows, of course, were those who cared nothing about the good name of the Junior School in sports. Such stalwarts as Reggie Pitt and Fullwood and Castleton and Gresham were wholeheartedly eager to re-elect Nipper as captain.

But there was Vivian Travers to be reckoned with.

Undeniably Travers was an extraordinarily clever junior. He was likeable, he was humorous, and he always had plenty of money. And, strangely enough, Travers had decided to back Chambers for all he was worth. Travers had not the slightest desire to be skipper himself—or he might easily have won the election. Many of Nipper's staunchest supporters would have gone over to Travers, if the latter had been nominated as a candidate. For Travers had many attractions in his personality, and one felt, instinctively, that he was capable.

But Travers preferred to be the man in the background. It was a whim of his to pitchfork Cuthbert Chambers into the captaincy, and then stand by and watch the results. Travers was rather whimsical in this way, and it is to be feared that he did not care much for the best interests of the school.

Handforth was still trying to get an audience when a good deal of noise was heard proceeding from the Ancient House. All eyes were turned in that direction.

"Hallo!" said Reggie Pitt. "What have we here? Gather round, children, and watch closely!"

"Some more electioneering stuff, I expect," said Jack Grey. "By Jove! So it is! What on earth—well, I'm jiggered!"

A procession had commenced solemnly to file out of the Ancient House doorway. It was headed by four juniors, carrying two great, gaudily-coloured banners. And across the banners were the legends:

"VOTE FOR CHAMBERS!"

"VOTE FOR CHAMBERS, THE FELLOW WITH THE IDEAS!"

A number of other juniors followed behind, and they all wore broad, coloured bands lengthwise across their chests. And each band carried the words:

"VOTE FOR CHAMBERS!"

Almost at the rear came Cuthbert Chambers himself, strutting along with insufferable self-importance. His chin was high in the air, his eyes were defiant, and he was so much bigger than the majority of the Removites that he looked quite impressive.

"Now there's going to be a rag!" chuckled Harry Gresham. "Old Chambers is going to make a speech!"

"Oh, is he?" roared Handforth. "What about me? I've been trying to make a speech for the last ten minutes, but nobody will take any notice of me!"

"You've had your say, Handy," replied Reggie Pitt. "Now it's Chambers' turn. Let's give him a cheer, you chaps!"

"Hurrah!" shouted the juniors, with such a tremendous amount of enthusiasm that it was obviously forced.

"You're not going to listen to that fat-head, are you?" demanded Handforth.

"Why not?"

"Because it's a waste of time!" replied Handforth indignantly. "Everybody knows that Chambers is an arrant duffer!"

But nobody took any notice of Handforth. The fellows crowded round the procession, and Chambers was cheered to the echo; and although the majority of these cheers were in derision, nevertheless, a good many of them were sincere. Nipper did not blind his eyes to the fact that Chambers was gathering more and more supporters.

But Nipper was not tempted to indulge in any such theatrical display as this. He had the reputation for being safe and solid and reliable. He would only do himself harm if he got up such processions, with banners flying and flags waving.



CHAPTER 7.

The Invitation!

CUTHBERT CHAMBERS held up his hand for silence.

"Gentlemen of the Remove—"

"Go it, Chambers!"

"Bravo!"

"Do not imagine, for one moment, that I am about to make a speech!" continued Chambers calmly. "That's where you're wrong! You thought that this was going to be an election speech, didn't you? Well, it's not!"

Chambers was speaking so fluently that it was fairly obvious—to the keener minds, at least—that his speech had been carefully prepared. And it did not need much guesswork to come to the conclusion that Vivian Travers had done the preparing.

"No!" said Chambers. "My first big speech will take place later on this evening, in the Lecture Hall."

"Well, thank goodness!" said De Valerie. "We needn't be in the Lecture Hall!"

"I believe in doing the thing thoroughly!" continued Chambers, raising his voice. "The

chair will be taken at eight o'clock, prompt, by my friend, Vivian Travers——"

"I thought Travers would be in it somewhere!" sang out Castleton.

"At seven o'clock, prompt, the feed will start!" said Chambers.

"Eh? What's that?"

"Feed!"

"My only hat!"

"Did we hear aright?" murmured Pitt. "Chambers, old man, kindly say that again."

"At seven o'clock, prompt, the feed will start!" repeated Chambers obligingly. "Let me take this opportunity of inviting the Remove, one and all, to a regular hearty spread—in honour of my being nominated as a candidate in this important election."

"Good old Chambers!"

"By jingo! This is doing the thing properly!"

"My hat, rather!"

There was a distinct change in the attitude of the crowd. Even those who had cheered in derision were now changing their tone. Any fellow who would stand a big feed was worth supporting. At least, he was worth supporting until the feed was over. The juniors were not famous for their long-sightedness. The immediate present was good enough for them.

"I want you all to understand that there's no spoof about this," continued Chambers earnestly, and with a large amount of bombast. "When I say a feed, I mean a feed. Not just a few sandwiches, and two or three bottles of pop. No! A real feed—with more than enough grub to go round, and bags of ice-cream to finish with!"

"Good man!"

"I suppose this is honest injun, Chambers?" asked Doyle.

"Absolutely official and guaranteed!" replied Chambers promptly.

"It's nothing but bribery and corruption!" snorted Handforth, turning red with indignation. "My only sainted aunt! I'm not going to descend to such questionable methods! I'll get my votes on the square."

"Cheese it, Handy!" protested Goodwin.

"Cheese it be blowed!" roared Handforth.

"You don't call this a straight game, do you? Anybody will 'fall' for a feed, and after they've eaten at Chambers' expense they'll feel more or less obliged to vote for him. It's nothing but an electioneering trick."

Nipper smiled.

"Perhaps it is—but it's not crooked, Handy," he said. "It was rather a bright idea of Travers to think of it."

Chambers scowled.

"I'm giving this feed!" he said coldly.

"And who are we to inquire into the whys and wherefores of it?" asked Reggie Pitt.

"A feed, my infants, is a feed! I rather think that Chambers can rely upon a full gathering."

"Hear, hear!"

"I said I wasn't going to make a speech, but, now that I'm on my hind legs, I'd

like to say a few more words," shouted Chambers, his eyes gleaming. "I've heard that some of you are saying that I'm a windbag and an ass."

"Don't you believe it, Chambers!"

"You're a good chap."

"A fellow who'll invite the whole Form to a feed is a sportsman!"

"Yes, rather!"

Cuthbert Chambers was very gratified. Travers had told him that the announcement regarding the feed would cause an electrical change; but he had hardly expected such a wholehearted reception as this. Even the fellows who were looked upon as Nipper's certain supporters were rallying round him.

And Chambers felt that it was a good opportunity to add a few words of his own—words that Travers had not put into his head. Incidentally, Travers was on the outskirts of the crowd, frowning slightly. He had no faith in the ex-Fifth-Former, and was afraid that Chambers might put his foot in it.

"Yes, I've been called a windbag!" Chambers shouted. "But I want to say this; I'm ready to stand or fall by my policy!"

"What is your policy?"

"Let's have it, Chambers!"

"Go it, old scout!"

"No," replied Chambers. "I shan't outline my policy until after the feed. And then, I fancy, I'll give you all a few surprises. If I'm elected captain, the keynote of my rule will be novelty. Things have gone to pot for too long. Not only in the Remove, but in the Fifth—and in the Sixth!" he added sternly. "It's high time that reform was brought about. Reform, with a capital R! And my aim will be to institute these reforms."

"Chuck it, Chambers!" protested Harry Gresham. "Either tell us what you mean, or leave the speech until later on. What sort of reforms can you bring about, anyhow?"

"You'll see!" replied Chambers calmly. "Don't imagine that there's any truth in Handforth's suggestion. This isn't bribery or corruption. To-night's feed will be absolutely bona fide. There'll be no compulsion at all. Stay away, if you like, or come if you like."

"I rather fancy we'll come!" grinned De Valerie.

"Yes, rather!"

"What I mean is, you needn't vote for me afterwards, unless you want to," declared Chambers. "You've all got your own minds, and I want to make it clear that I don't expect any support because of this feed. The whole idea of the spread is to get a big meeting."

"Well, there's nothing like being candid!" said Pitt.

"Good old Chambers!"

"Dash it, he's fair enough!"

This unrehearsed little speech of Chambers' was having a good effect, and Travers felt

pleased. His man wasn't such a mug, after all.

"Well, that's all I mean to say now," concluded Chambers. "But don't forget—seven o'clock sharp! Only Remove fellows invited or admitted!"

"Why not include the Fourth?" suggested Bob Christine casually. "You can rely on the Fourth, Chambers, to give you lots of cheers!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's not cheers I want, but votes!" retorted Chambers. "And the Fourth Form isn't in this picture, anyhow."

"I thought we weren't, somehow!" sighed Christine.

Chambers and his party went off, with their banners and flags still flying. And now there were no derisive cheers. The majority of the Removites were talking enthusiastically. Chambers was certainly an ass, but when it came to an election campaign he knew what to do!



CHAPTER 8.

The Meeting!

NIPPER was looking thoughtful when Tommy Watson and Fullwood and Gresham gathered round him. In fact, they were all thoughtful. And Archie Glenthorne, when he came up, was positively alarmed.

"It seems to me, laddies, that the good old fat is absolutely in the fire," he observed. "I mean to say, this dashed feed, and all that sort of thing! Good gad! This blighter of a Chambers means to steal the blessed election!"

"Can't *we* organise a feed, too?" suggested Tommy Watson.

"Well, we're the committee, and we ought to be able to do something," replied Fullwood thoughtfully. "There's still to-morrow evening—"

"And Wednesday!" said Nipper. "Don't forget the Yexford match on Wednesday afternoon!"

"What's the Yexford match got to do with it?" asked Gresham.

"Well, it may have a lot," replied Nipper. "Until the election, I'm still acting-skipper, and I shall captain the Junior Eleven against Yexford. If we bring off a handsome win, it'll be rather telling."

"Jove! I hadn't thought of that!" said Reggie Pitt, who had joined the group. "A handsome win will have a big influence on the polling, Nipper, because the polling will take place the same evening."

"It acts two ways—that's the trouble," remarked Nipper. "If we happen to lose

the match—and it's always likely—I shan't stand an earthly at the polls. Being skipper of the side, I shall get all the blame for the defeat."

"Then it's a dead certainty that we mustn't lose!" said Pitt firmly.

"As for a feed to-morrow evening—nothing doing," said Nipper. "Let Chambers and Handforth get up to these stunts. But if I did the same, everybody would think that I was afraid of losing the election."

"Yes, you're right!" agreed Fullwood. "The keynote of your own campaign must be confidence. Let these other fatheads get on with their theatrical tricks. It's the steady man who wins in the end."

Nipper nodded.

"That's why I'm not worrying," he said. "If you want to know the absolute truth, I'm as keen as mustard to hear these new ideas that Chambers is going to spring on us. If he starts any kind of reform, he'll find himself in a bit of a hole. The lot of a reformer is generally a hard one."

The juniors chuckled, and hurried indoors to get their prep over. By all appearances, the evening was going to be exciting, and there would be no time for prep after the feed started. Far better to get it over in advance.

At seven o'clock, sharp, the guests began to pour into the Lecture Hall. Many of them were sceptical. They had an idea that they were being fooled. But all such suspicions were rapidly killed.

For the Lecture Hall was filled with tables and forms, and every table was loaded with food. Even at the first glance, the juniors could tell that this was no commonplace feed. It was something exceptional.

As a matter of fact, Chambers had spent every penny of his pocket money on this spread—and Travers had added a few pounds of his own. He had convinced Chambers that the money would be well spent.

"I say, this looks like the real thing!"

"Good old Chambers!"

"By Jove! He's doing us proud!"

"Rather!"

The juniors were full of such comments as they took their places at the tables. In the meantime, Willy Handforth and a crowd of other fags were busy up one end of the big hall preparing drinks. Evidently they had been engaged as waiters for the occasion. No doubt they had been promised a share of the feed as a reward for their services.

The platform, of course, was deserted. But there was a screen up there, and, unknown to the mass of Removites, Cuthbert Chambers and Vivian Travers were ensconced behind the screen, watching the proceedings.

"All goes well, dear old fellow," murmured Travers, when the guests had nearly finished crowding in.

"By glory, I believe this stunt is going to do the trick!" said Chambers breathlessly.

"It'll help towards it, at any rate," agreed Travers. "The main thing is to get the chaps into a good humour for the speech. And there's nothing like a feed for putting people into a good humour. Well, well! What devices we must utilise in these elections!"

"But it's all fair and above board!" protested Chambers. "Even Nipper himself admitted it. Well, shall I go down? They're all expecting me, you know. What shall I do when they cheer me?"

"Make no mistake—they'll be cheering the feed, not you," murmured Travers whimsically. "But never mind! It will seem like the real thing. Try to look modest, dear old fellow. It'll be a frightful task, I know, but in these things we can only do our best."

"Ass!" said Chambers coldly.

Travers chuckled, and a moment later Chambers emerged dramatically from behind the screen and strutted across the platform. His idea of modesty was somewhat bizarre. For any figure more utterly conceited and bombastic could not have been imagined. He literally oozed with self-importance.

But the majority of the juniors did not notice it; or, if they did, they ignored it. Chambers was the host, and, after all, he was permitted to be a little swanky.

"Hurrah!"

"Good old Chambers!"

"Three cheers for the host!"

The cheers were given with much gusto, and Chambers felt more pleased with himself than ever. Everything was going very swimmingly. He descended from the platform and went to the table of honour at the end of the hall.

Here he sat with his election committee—which consisted of Travers, his chief agent, Claude Gore-Pearce, and Gulliver and Bell.

"We don't want any speeches now!" sang out Chambers cheerily. "Let's all have the feed and enjoy ourselves."

"Hear, hear!"

"Pile in, everybody!"

"Good egg!"

"Now then, you fags!" said Chambers briskly. "Look lively, there!"

"Keep your hair on!" replied Willy Handforth coolly. "I'm in charge of these fags, and I don't need any reminders, Chambers!"

Travers looked round the many tables, and a slow smile overspread his good-looking features.

"Friend Handforth is conspicuous by his absence!" he murmured. "And, by the same token, Church and McClure are also absent. I wonder what can be keeping the dear old fellows?"

"Bother Handforth—and Church and McClure, too!" said Chambers. "It's a jolly good thing they're not here. Jealous, I suppose!"

And the great feed went merrily on, the non-arrival of Handforth & Co. casting no gloom over the proceedings.



CHAPTER 9.

Handforth's Ruse!

WELL, aren't we going, Handy?"

"No, we're not!"

"But look here —"

"Dry up!"

Church and McClure gazed at their leader rebelliously. It was a few minutes after seven, and they were in Study D. The evening sunshine was streaming through the windows, and, ordinarily, Church and McClure would have longed to be out of doors. But just at present they were as keen as mustard upon getting into the Lecture Hall.

"It's all very well to go on like this, Handy, but what about the feed?" demanded Church. "Hang it, if Chambers is giving a free feed, there's no reason why we shouldn't join in it! We've been invited, haven't we?"

"Of course we've been invited!" said McClure indignantly. "The feed's started by this time!"

Handforth looked at his chums with withering scorn.

"I'm ashamed of you!" he said sternly. "There was I, at St. Jim's, longing to be back here, so that I could take up the leadership of this study again. And when I get back, what do I find? By George! I find both of you prepared to go to a feed that's given by my rival!"

"Oh, come off it!" growled Church.

"Nipper's gone to the feed, hasn't he?"

"Bother Nipper!"

"But Nipper's another candidate—and, besides, it's only right that you should go, so that you can hear what Chambers is going to spout about——"

"Chambers isn't going to spout at all!" interrupted Handforth darkly. "I'm going to spout!"

"In the Lecture Hall?"

"Yes!"

"What the dickens——"

"I'm going to give a speech to the whole Remove!" said Handforth, his eyes gleaming. "The fact of the matter is, my sons, an idea has come to me!"

"Oh, crumbs!"

"A corking, topping, gilt-edged wheeze!" said Handforth gloatingly. "In fact, I don't mind saying that it's the greatest idea of the year!"

"Well, there's nothing like being modest about it," remarked Church.

"Rats! You'll agree with me when you hear this stunt!" said Handforth. "That's why we haven't gone to the feed. Just think of the opportunity! The whole Remove is gathered together. What other chance shall I have of getting everybody in one room like that?"

"Well, practically no chance at all," admitted Church.

"Of course I shan't!" said Handforth. "You know what a lot of fatheads the chaps are! As soon as I start making a speech they walk away! But this time I'm not going to be dished! I shall have them all in the Lecture Hall, and they won't be able to get away. They'll be compelled to listen!"

"Oh!" said McClure, with interest. "And how? Who's going to compel them?"

"I am!"

"Of course, if you're thinking of performing a miracle——"

"I'm not!" said Handforth. "It's a thoroughly practical idea."

"Then it'll be a new one for you!" murmured Church.

"The feed is a matter of absolutely no importance," said Handforth. "But if I can make a big speech to the whole Remove, it'll be a triumph for me! We're going straight to the Lecture Hall now, and we're going to walk on to the platform. Then I shall make my speech!"

"Wonderful!" said Church, with heavy sarcasm. "And do you suppose for a moment that the chaps'll listen to you?"

"They'll have to listen!"

"Supposing they refuse?"

"They won't refuse!" said Handforth confidently.

"Well, then, supposing they make all sorts of cat-calls and drown your voice?" asked McClure. "I'll admit that they'll have to make an awful din to drown your voice—but, just for the sake of argument, supposing they do?"

"There'll be no drowning my voice!" replied Handforth, with such conviction that his chums became curious. "While I'm making my speech there won't be a sound! Nobody will dare to interrupt! And I shall keep on talking for as long as I like. Half an hour—one hour—two hours if I want to! And not one of those fellows will murmur a word! By George! This time I've got 'em on toast! They're bound to listen to me!"

"Oh, you're crazy!" said Church impatiently. "The thing's impossible—and you know it!"

"Do I?" chuckled Handforth. "Look here, do you remember, before I went away to St. Jim's, how pig-headed and obstinate I was?"

"Why before you went away to St. Jim's?" asked Church in astonishment.

"You silly ass!" roared Handforth. "Are you suggesting that I'm pig-headed and obstinate now?"

"Ahem! Well, never mind!" murmured Church.

"I'm talking about the time when the Remove was against me!" said Handforth. "When I acted the giddy goat and got it in the neck!"

"Well?"

"Do you remember how I went on the platform of the Lecture Hall once, and nearly drowned everybody by turning the fire-hose on them?"

Church and McClure started violently.

"Great Scott!" yelled Church. "You don't mean that you're going to——"

"Exactly!" nodded Handforth, grinning.

"But you're mad!" ejaculated McClure. "You're stark, staring mad! Why, you silly idiot, you got a flogging the last time! It'll mean the sack if you do it again—especially as you'll cause a lot of damage with all those tables and things in the place!"

Church and McClure were thoroughly excited; they knew that their leader was in a ripe mood for any kind of mischief. He was reckless enough, too, to carry out this escapade.

But Handforth regarded them calmly, and his grin became wider.

"Don't get so jolly excited!" he said. "I'm not really going to drench them. It will only be a threat!"

"Oh!" said Church. "Only a threat?"

"That's all!" nodded Handforth. "We'll march on to the platform, and during the first second you two will grab the two fire-hoses. I'll go to the centre of the platform and start my speech."

"Yes, but——"

"Come on! Leave the rest to me!" said Handforth briskly. "Don't you see the braininess of the wheeze? I shall tell the Remove that I'm going to make a speech, and I'll say that if anybody makes an outcry I'll give orders for the hose-pipes to be turned on. At the first shout everybody will be drenched! At the first move towards the platform the drowning process will begin. My lad's, it's a cert! I shall make my speech, and not one of those fatheads will dare to move an inch, or utter a sound!"

Church and McClure felt very relieved. The situation wasn't as bad as they had feared. For they, it seemed, were to hold the hose-pipes.

And that made all the difference!



CHAPTER 10

The Stolen Meeting

HANDFORTH was very proud of his plan.

It was so simple; so straightforward; so easy of accomplishment. And the audacity of the thing appealed to his reckless nature.

Cuthbert Chambers had called this meeting, and had gone to the expense of providing a big feed, so that he should have the whole Remove present. And Handforth, calmly and smoothly, would "steal" the meeting and address it himself! In a word, he would gain the benefit of Chambers' money.

At least, Handforth imagined that he would. He did not trouble to go into details. It did not even occur to him that the meeting might fail to be influenced by his speech. His main idea was to get everybody worked

up into such a pitch of enthusiasm that he would be certain of their votes.

Church and McClure had said no word to one another, but they had exchanged significant glances. And if looks could speak, then Church and McClure held a whole conversation. They had plainly agreed that those hose-pipes would not be turned on, whatever orders Handforth gave. But they did not think it worth while mentioning this decision to Handforth.

"Well, here we are!" said Edward Oswald exultantly, as he came to a halt outside the door of the Lecture Hall. "Ready, you fellows?"

"Yes!" said Church. "It's a pity, of course."

"What's a pity?"

"We shan't be able to join the feed after this——"

"Confound the feed!" interrupted Handforth impatiently. "Isn't it possible for your minds to rise above grub? I'm surprised at the pair of you!"

He opened the door of the Lecture Hall and strode in. Church and McClure followed him closely. Everything had been pre-arranged. Before anybody in the packed gathering could guess Handforth's intentions, he had leapt upon the platform, and Church and McClure rushed after him.

"Here, what's the game, Handy?" shouted Nipper, full of suspicion.

There was a general shout when Church and McClure were seen to grab the hose-pipes, and to rush forward to the edge of the platform with the heavy nozzles. Chairs were tipped back as the juniors leapt up, and excited shouts filled the air. The great feed was rudely interrupted.

"Silence, everybody!" shouted Handforth, holding up his hand.

"Confound your nerve!" shouted Chambers hotly. "What do you think you're doing, Handforth? This is my meeting! Get off that platform!"

"Stand still!" roared Handforth. "By George! If anybody in this hall moves, or utters a sound, I shall give the order for these hose-pipes to be turned on!"

"Oh, my goodness!"

"Grab him, somebody!"

"He'll do it, to!"

As though by magic the juniors stood stock still, just as they were. Some had half risen, and were afraid to change their attitudes. They knew—from past bitter experience—that Handforth was hopelessly rash.

"That's better!" shouted the leader of Study D. "Remember! If anybody moves, Church and McClure will turn the nozzles and drench the lot of you!"

"Well, well!" murmured Travers. "Handy is getting quite brainy in his old age. A really clever little stunt, this!"

"Silence!" bellowed Handforth.

"Sorry!" said Travers humbly.

"It's no good saying you're sorry!" retorted Handforth. "Let this be a warning. If anybody else speaks the hoses will be

turned on. Don't move, any of you! Don't make a sound! Church, get that nozzle ready! You, too, Mac!"

"We're ready!" said Church promptly.

"Rather!" agreed McClure.

And they sounded so convincing that the Remove stood, or sat, helplessly looking on.

The situation was certainly novel.

Nobody dared to disobey Handforth's orders. For nobody had the slightest desire to get soaked to the skin. Those polished hose-nozzles looked like the menacing muzzles of guns as Church and McClure held them "at the ready." The silence in the Lecture Hall was becoming oppressive.

"Well, we thoroughly understand one another, eh?" laughed Handforth. "Good! Now I'm going to make my speech. If you don't like it, you'll have to lump it. But before I've done I'll prove to you that I'm the only candidate in this election—the only one that matters!"

Judging by the expressions on the faces of his audience, he was not likely to get many supporters. If looks could kill, Handforth would have dropped dead on the spot. But he wasn't even withered.

"I've got you all in a very nice little trap!" he said genially. "You daren't move, and you daren't speak. Good enough! I'll do all the speaking for the next half-hour. Or, possibly, it may be an hour. It all depends!"

"Good gad!" came a murmur from Archie Glenthorne. "This is most frightfully awkward! I've got one of these dashed sandwiches half-way to my dashed mouth——"

"Church!" rapped out Handforth. "Get ready——"

"Hi, stop!" gasped a dozen wild voices.

"Silence!" thundered Handforth. "By George! Are you going to obey me or not? All right, Archie—you can eat that sandwich! But don't make another move afterwards!"

But just then Vivian Travers started, and stared in consternation at the closed door. He uttered a gasp, and Handforth half turned his eyes in Travers' direction.

The door was to his side, and a little to the rear, so that he could not see it. But he could see Travers staring—staring in dismay.

And then Travers spoke.

"Cave, dear old fellows!" he ejaculated, in a gasping voice. "Great Samson! The Head!"



CHAPTER 11.

Not Very Successful!

HANDFORTH jumped. Church and McClure half turned.

"The Head!"

Handy panted, swinging round. "Oh, my goodness! I didn't know—— Eh? What the dickens——"

"On him!" roared Travers. "Quick, you chaps! Grab Church and McClure!"

In a flash the quicker-witted juniors saw through Vivian Travers' ruse. The Head

wasn't here at all—and wasn't likely to come. But Handforth and Church and McClure had swung round, and were momentarily off their guard.

And during those fateful seconds Nipper, Castleton, Pitt, Watson, Travers and Chambers made one wild dash at the platform. It was all over almost before the Study D trio could pull themselves together.

"Hi!" Handy howled. "You—you rotters! Look out, Church! Now, then, Mac! It's only a rotten trick! The Head isn't here at all! Turn those nozzles——"

"Too late, old scout!" shouted Pitt. "Good old Travers! We've done the trick!"

Church and McClure were fairly obliterated. They went down beneath a writhing mass of humanity. This, incidentally, was most unjust; for Church and McClure had never had any intention of turning on those hoses. But the Remove was not to know this.

Handforth was seized, too.

He was grabbed from behind, from the front, and from both sides. He was whirled off his feet, he was bumped, and he was sat upon. After about twenty seconds he was speechless. All the breath had been knocked out of him.

"Turn them out—all of them!" shouted Chambers furiously. "By glory! It's a jolly good thing we were smart enough for them! They might have soaked us all to the skin!"

Handforth was hustled to the doorway. Some of the fellows dragged him, and another crowd of fellows pushed him. Finally, he was sent hurtling out into the passage with such force that he turned a couple of somersaults, crashed into the opposite wall, and subsided into a disorderly heap. A moment later Church and McClure came whizzing out after him.

Slam!

The door was closed, and the unfortunate trio sorted themselves out, and tried to remember what had happened last.

"Well, that's that!" said Travers urbanely. "A good stunt of Handy's, but badly executed. He oughtn't to have been taken in by a simple dodge like that!"

"What are we going to do now?" demanded Chambers. "That ass is crazy enough to come back again!"

"Let him come!" grinned Nipper. "A few of us will get nearer to the platform, and we won't give him another chance to try the same wheeze."

And the Remove went back to the tables, and continued the great feed. It was only about half over, and the election was momentarily forgotten. Speeches would come later—and the Remove was prepared for them. But the Remove was certainly not prepared for any speech from Edward Oswald Handforth.

Outside, the unhappy trio dolefully picked themselves up. They were utter wrecks. Handforth was torn and tattered. His nose was bleeding, his left ear was twice its normal size, and one of his shoes was completely missing.

Church and McClure were nearly as bad.

"Marvellous!" said Church, as he looked at Handforth out of one eye. "Congratters, Handy!"

"You traitors!" said Handforth hoarsely.

"Oh, it was a wonderful wheeze!" said McClure, as he leaned forlornly against the wall. "It couldn't possibly fail! Oh, no! That was a splendid speech of yours, Handy!"

Handforth was rapidly recovering.

"You sarcastic fathead!" he fumed. "It was all your fault, too! If you had backed me up, we should have succeeded!"

"Well, I like that!" said Church hotly. "Those chaps were on us before we could even get to the taps! We didn't stand a chance!"

"If you had been quicker, you could have turned them on!" retorted Handforth.

Church and McClure did not think it necessary to tell their leader that they had never had any intention of turning the taps on. But it was perfectly true that they could not have done so, even if they had intended otherwise. That sudden rush had been too devastating—too lightning-like.

"Well, that's done it, of course!" said Church. "We've missed the feed, and the plot has failed. All our trouble for nothing! We can't do anything now!"

"Can't we?" said Handforth, with a new gleam in his eyes. "That's just where you're wrong, my sons! I've got another idea!"

Church tried to speak, but words failed him. He sank helplessly into McClure's arms. But as McClure was equally feeble, they both sank limply to the floor.



CHAPTER 12.

Another Try!

HANDFORTH gazed down at his chums with indignation and dismay.

"What's the matter with you, you silly chumps?" he demanded. "What are you sprawling there for?"

Church and McClure got to their feet with a great show of dizziness.

"You can't mean it, Handy!" panted Church. "Great Scott! You're not going to try something else, are you?"

"Yes, I am!"

"Don't!" urged McClure. "Handy, old man, once is enough. They'll simply slaughter us next time!"

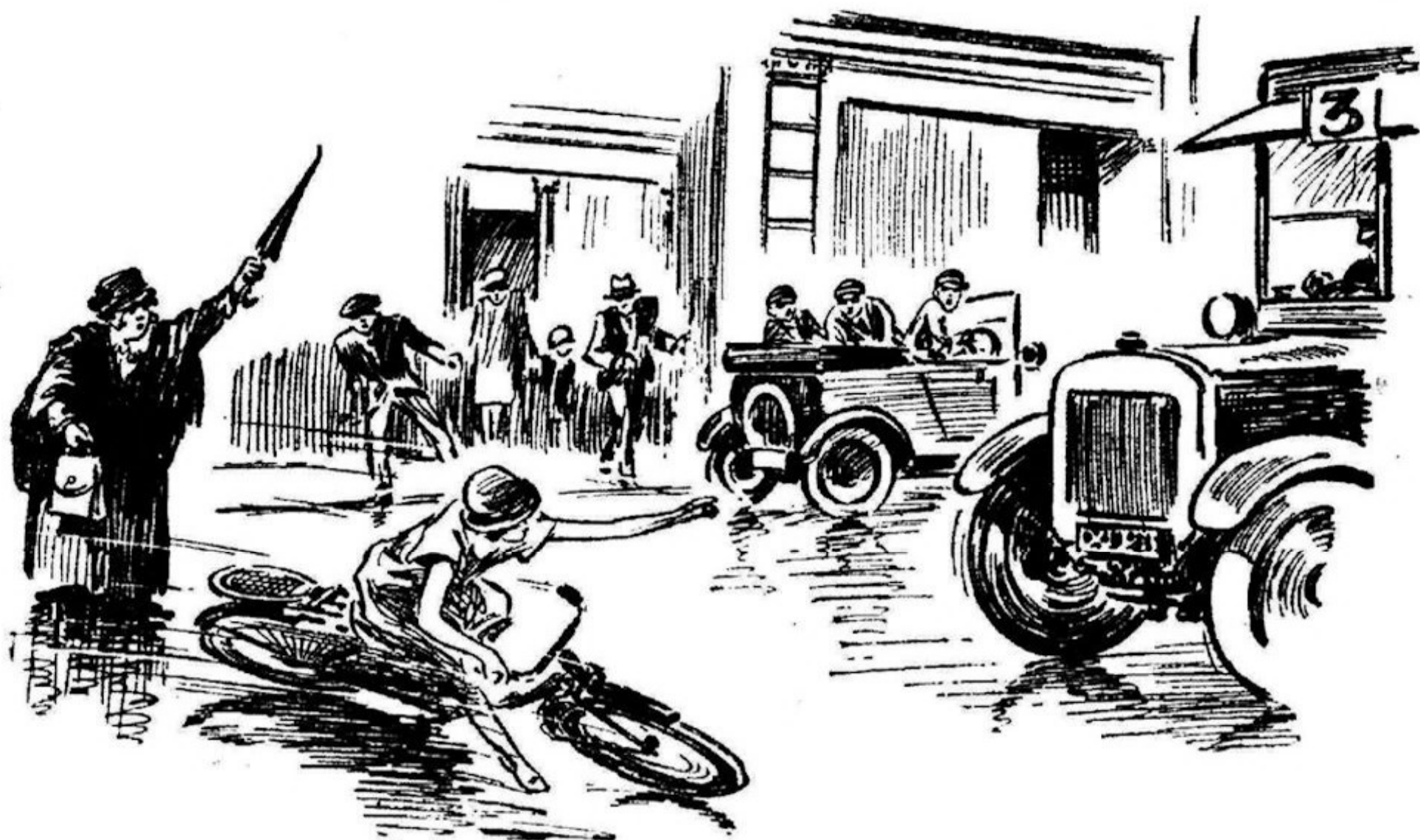
Handforth looked at his chums with cold disdain.

"Don't worry!" he replied. "You fellows won't come in in this act!"

"Oh!"

"I'm going to do it entirely on my own!" said Handforth. "But we can't stay here like this! Let's get back to the study—and then we can discuss the new plan!"

It was certainly a wise decision, for if any prefect or master had come along and had



Mary Summers' bike skidded on the wet road, and she went sprawling—right in front of the oncoming motor-'bus! Shrieks arose from all sides, while Handforth & Co., sitting in the Austin Seven, gazed on in helpless horror.

seen Handforth & Co. in that condition, there would have been a good many awkward inquiries.

Luckily enough, they got back into their own quarters without being spotted, and there, with much difficulty, they tidied themselves up.

"Of course, I can't make a speech now!" said Handforth glumly. "That's koshed in the eye! But, by George, I can prevent Chambers from making *his* speech!"

"How?" asked his chums.

"Oh, this is going to be easy!" replied Handforth. "I'm dished out of my speech, and I'll jolly well see that Chambers is dished out of his! At least, we shall have the satisfaction of knowing that we've messed up the meeting!"

"Won't it be rather bad form to do that?"

"You're out of your mind, Walter Church!" retorted Handforth curtly. "You know jolly well that political meetings are always busted up by the rival parties. And that's what we're going to do—bust up Chambers' meeting!"

"But it's impossible!" protested McClure. "There are only three of us! How the dickens can we—"

"Listen to me!" broke in Handforth, bending over the study table. "If you want to know the truth, Travers put this idea into my head!"

"Oh, did he?"

"Travers suddenly yelled out that the Head had come into the Lecture Hall!" continued Handforth tensely. "Like an ass, I believed him for a minute, and I turned round. And

so did you fellows. That's what kyboshed us!"

"Yes, but I don't see——"

"You will in a minute!" said Edward Oswald. "The Head is going to the Lecture Hall again!"

"But he hasn't been there once yet!" pointed out Church.

"You know what I mean!" roared Handforth. "The Head is going into the Lecture Hall in about ten minutes' time—before the feed is over—and he's going to order everybody out!"

"Is he?"

"Yes!" said Handforth. "The Head is going to tell Chambers that he mustn't hold any more meetings, and he's going to order everybody in the Remove to go to their studies. Of course, the chaps will go—and Chambers' meeting will be done in the eye!"

"Well, you're a marvellous chap, Handy," said Church, with admiration. "The puzzle is, how the dickens do you know anything about the Head's movements? How do you know that he'll go to the Lecture Hall in ten minutes' time?"

"Because I shall be the Head!" replied Handforth triumphantly.

"Wha-a-a-at!"

"I'm going to impersonate Dr. Stafford!" grinned Handforth.

"Oh, crumbs!" breathed Church dazedly.

"Help!" murmured McClure.

Handforth regarded them with a changed expression.

"Don't you think it's a good wheeze?" he demanded.

"Oh, rather!" said Church hastily. "Topping! Marvellous!"

"But—but supposing they spot you?" gurgled McClure.

Handforth waved the objection aside.

"They won't spot me!" he said confidently.

"Just you wait until I've got my make-up on! Now do you appreciate the idea? I shall walk straight into the Lecture Hall, order the chaps out, and they'll meekly go! And poor old Chambers won't know the truth until his meeting has been dispersed!"

Church and McClure experienced great difficulty in keeping their faces straight. They knew, from past experience, what a scream Handforth was when he attempted any of his famous impersonations. There were some fellows in the Remove who could disguise their voices really wonderfully; fellows who could use make-up with magical effect.

But Handforth was not one of them.

As an actor, he was the most hopeless specimen that had ever used grease-paint. And the idea of him going into the Lecture Hall, in the guise of the Head, was rather too much for Church and McClure. Yet it was impossible for them to tell their leader that he was only asking for more trouble. In the first place, he wouldn't have believed them, and, in the second place, it would have been a highly dangerous proceeding.

So they kept quiet about it.

Furthermore, they felt that it would do him good. He would come an awful cropper, and it might teach him a lesson.

"I'll tell you what!" said Church, as an idea occurred to him. "Why shouldn't Mac and I go to the feed?"

"Eh?" said Handforth, with a start. "You—you blessed traitor—"

"Nothing of the sort!" said Church hastily. "Don't you see the idea, Handy? If we go to the feed, nobody will suspect anything. And then, later, you'll come along disguised as the Head, and—"

"By jingo, that's brainy!" said McClure enthusiastically.

But Handforth threw cold water on the brilliant suggestion.

"No!" he said. "I need you fellows—to help me in my make-up!"

"But look here—"

"I don't want any arguments!" interrupted Handforth. "Besides, the fellows would be more suspicious than ever if you went back, and I didn't go with you. They'd guess that I was up to something. No—I need you!"

"Oh, well, if you really think—"

"I do really think!" said Handforth. "I shall want you fellows to keep watch for me, after I'm disguised. One of you'll have to go on in advance, to see that the coast is clear, and the other will have to bring up the rear. Come on! Let's get busy!"

Church and McClure gave it up as a bad job. They had made a last desperate attempt to join in that famous feed, but it had failed. Their only consolation was the thought that they would have a good laugh before many more minutes had elapsed.



CHAPTER 13.

Dr. Stafford No. 2!

VIVIAN TRAVERS raised his glass of foaming lemonade.

"Here's to the health of our worthy host!" he said cheerily. "Drink deeply, dear old fellows!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Good old Chambers!"

The feed was nearing its end. And the Remove, with a feeling of resignation, sadly realized that it would now be called upon to pay the price.

And the price would be fairly heavy—for Cuthbert Chambers was going to make a speech!

However, there were still some minutes left before the joys of the evening would be over. The speech was timed for eight o'clock, and the quarter-to had only just chimed.

Chambers was beginning to look at Travers and the other members of his committee. The programme was simple. At eight o'clock, to the minute, the entire committee would take possession of the platform. The chairman would then formally open the meeting, would make a speech, and then introduce the candidate. Everything was going to be done in the correct style.

"Well, it's been a jolly good feed!" said Reggie Pitt complacently. "Thank goodness the speech was timed for eight o'clock."

"Why?" asked Grey.

"Well, Chambers won't be able to speak for much more than an hour, even if he wants to!" replied Reggie. "At least, I hardly think the school authorities will advance the bed-time hour, just to oblige Chambers."

There were many chuckles. Supper was at nine o'clock, but Chambers knew well enough that nobody would want any supper. At all events, nobody except Fatty Little. After an hour's respite, Fatty would probably go into Hall and consume as much supper as any ordinarily hungry junior. But the other fellows would no doubt be ready enough to "cut" supper, and stay in the Lecture Hall until bed-time.

Chambers was not particularly pessimistic. He really and truly believed that the juniors would want to stay. For he was going to make such drastic proposals that a very lively controversy would be raised.

And then, at about six minutes to eight, just when somebody else was getting to his feet to propose a toast, the door suddenly opened, and a strange figure strode sharply into the Lecture Hall.

"Stop!" came a commanding voice.

"Good gracious! What is all this?"

Every eye was turned upon Edward Oswald Handforth. And, strangely enough, every

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eye recognised Edward Oswald Handforth in the first glance. If it came to that, every eye had also recognised Handforth's characteristic stride, and his voice, although deep and gruff, was unquestionably his own. By no wild stretch of the imagination could it be likened unto the refined, modulated tones of Dr. Malcolm Stafford.

"Good gad!"

A murmur from Archie Glenthorne was the first sound from that startled throng. Then, before a general shout of laughter could go up, Vivian Travers sprang to his feet. On principle, Travers never neglected an opportunity of leg-pulling.

"Really, dear old fellows, where are your manners?" he asked sternly. "Get to your feet at once! Can't you see that the Head is here?"

"But—but—" began Chambers, stuttering.

"Stand up, all of you!" said Travers. "The Head's here. For the love of Samson! Can't you see it's the Head?"

Even the dullest-witted junior saw Travers' point, and leapt to his feet. And everybody in the Lecture Hall stood at attention, looking very respectfully at that grotesque figure near the doorway.

Of course, everybody knew that Handforth was trying it on again! He had failed in his first stunt, and so he was indulging in another! Handforth had always been a stickler.

But how in the world he could imagine that he looked like Dr. Stafford was beyond the ordinarily human comprehension. Indeed, his assumption that his impersonation was good was little better than an insult to the Head.

For, whereas Dr. Stafford was a dignified, stately figure, Handforth was a figure of comedy.

He was wearing a gown and mortar-board—and this wasn't really so bad. The gown,

of course, was too big for him, and it trailed on the floor. It was his face which nearly caused the Remove to lose its control.

Handforth's face was of a deep, ruddy red, and even the grease-paint had not been evenly applied. There were whiskers which Dr. Stafford had never owned, and never could own. Yet Handforth had an idea that these false whiskers were an exact representation of the Head's.

A pair of heavy glasses were stuck on the end of his nose, and his false eyebrows were rather like George Robey's.

Handforth had pulled himself up to his full height, and now he stood there, surveying the Remove with a stern gaze. And, within, he was singing a song of triumph.

He had succeeded!

One glance at the Remove told him this. Everybody was on his feet, respectful, silent. Without question, they had accepted him as the Head!



CHAPTER 14.

Not Quite So Good!

"WHAT does all this mean?" demanded Handforth, in a stern voice.

He made a sweeping gesture, indicating the tables and the crowd, and if Travers had not promptly taken command of the situation, half the fellows would probably have burst into a roar of laughter.

"We've only been having a feed, sir!" said Travers.

"A feed!"

"Yes, sir," said Travers respectfully. "There's nothing wrong in a feed, is there, sir?"

Handforth uttered a snort.

"How dare you, Travers?" he demanded, in an exact representation—as he assumed—of the Head's coldest tones. "How dare you, boy? What do you mean by telling me that there is nothing wrong in a feed? This is a Lecture Hall—not a restaurant! By what right do you litter the place with crumbs, and——"

"We received permission from the Housemaster, sir!" said Travers.

"Oh, did you?" roared Handforth. "Do you think I care twopence—— Ahem! I can only conclude that the Housemaster was unaware of the real circumstances. I do not approve of this—this nonsense! Every boy here will write me five hundred lines!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Great Scott!"

"Silence!" thundered Handforth. "How dare you interrupt?"

There were a good many gasps, and Travers turned swiftly upon the crowd.

"Yes, how dare you?" he said, winking violently. "Great Samson! Have you no respect?"

"I am very glad to see, Travers, that you, at least, know your place!" said Handforth approvingly. "Now, boys, I cannot allow this rot—— I mean, this nonsense, to continue! I have only punished you lightly, but the meeting must disperse."

"Why, you confounded——" began Chambers thickly.

"You mean, you want us to get out of here, sir?" asked Travers, with interest.

"I not only want you to get out of here—but I command you to get out of here!" retorted Handforth sternly. "By George! And I'm not going to be kept waiting, either! Out you go—the whole crowd! Dismiss!"

The Form could have shrieked with mirth, but, heroically, it held itself in check. This was rather too good to be spoilt. As for Handforth, his success had already got into his head; never for an instant did he believe that his leg was being pulled.

"I'm sorry, sir, but we're just going to hold an important meeting!" said Travers politely. "Chambers is going to give a speech, and——"

"I don't care what Chambers is going to do!" bellowed Handforth, his glasses dropping off his nose. "There'll be no meeting in this Lecture Hall to-night! You silly ass, that's the very reason I'm here, to——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

A ripple of laughter ran through the Form, and Handforth started.

"Silence!" he shouted. "Good gracious! Are you daring to laugh at me, you young rotters? Silence, I say, or I will swish the lot of you!"

The chuckles died away.

"Now!" continued Handforth, pointing dramatically at the door. "Out you go! All of you—in double file! Go to your studies, and——"

"Sorry, sir, but it can't be done!" said Travers calmly.

"What! What did you say, Travers?"

"It can't be done, sir!" replied Travers coolly. "You see, it's nearly eight o'clock, and the speech is timed for eight."

"How dare you?" demanded Handforth hotly. "Haven't I given you my orders?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then why don't you obey?"

"Because we're going to hold the meeting, sir," said Travers meekly.

"In defiance of my instructions?"

"Yes, sir."

Handforth breathed hard. He hadn't anticipated any such defiance as this. It was obvious to him that the fellows accepted him without question as the Head. But it upset all his calculations to find that they were prepared to defy the Head!

And a good many others took the cue from the wily Travers.

"We'll back you up, Travers, old man!" said Reggie Pitt. "I don't see any reason why we should be ordered out of this Hall before we've finished!"

"Not likely!" said Fullwood. "Let's go ahead with the meeting!"

"Hear, hear!"

"And blow the Head!" said Gresham recklessly.

Handforth rocked on his heels.

"You—you impudent young rotters!" he shouted thickly. "How dare you!"

"I don't know how we dare—but we're daring, sir," said Travers. "And if it's all the same to you, we'll now carry on!"

"But it's not all the same to me!" howled Handforth.

"Then we'll carry on without it being all the same to you," said Travers genially. "Sorry, sir! We don't like being disrespectful to our headmaster, but a meeting is a meeting. Good-evening, sir!"

"Shut the door after you, please, sir!" said Castleton politely.

"Why, you—you—— Enough!" fumed Handforth, striding up and down, and swishing a cane that he had thoughtfully brought with him. "This is rank insubordination! I order you to leave this Lecture Hall, and you calmly defy me!"

"Shocking, isn't it, sir?" murmured Travers.

"Travers!" roared Handforth. "Stand out here!"

"What for, sir?"

"I'm going to cane you!"

"In that case, sir, I don't think I'll stand out there!" said Travers. "In fact, I'm sure I shan't! You can go and cat coke!"

"Yes, you can go and boil yourself!" shouted somebody else.

Handforth reeled afresh.

"I'm fed-up with this!" he panted. "For the last time, are you going to obey me?"

"No!" roared the Remove in one solid, devastating voice.

Handforth was completely baffled. His impersonation had been a complete success, and yet his plan was a complete failure! The Remove believed that he was the Head, but the Remove defied him! It was a deadlock which floored him.



CHAPTER 15.

Getting Down to Brass

Tacks!

ING-DONG!

"There goes eight o'clock!" said Travers briskly.

"Well, Chambers,

what about it? Time we were on the platform, eh?"

"Yes, rather!" said Cuthbert Chambers, with a start. "Where's the rest of the committee?"

Handforth came to himself with a jerk.

"Stop!" he thundered. "Unless every boy obeys me on the instant——"

"Cheese it, Handy!" said Travers plaintively.

"Wha-a-at?" gabbled Handforth.

"Haven't we had about enough, dear old fellow?" said Travers. "You surely don't think that we mistook you for the Head, do you?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

A howl of laughter swept through the Lecture Hall. And Handforth, in that second, realised the truth.

"You—you rotters!" he howled. "You've been pulling my leg!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Who told you I wasn't the Head?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We didn't need any telling, old man!" chuckled Nipper. "I hate to be so candid, but this impersonation of yours is hopeless. You don't look a bit like the Head!"

"But—but you all thought I *was* the Head when I first came in!" ejaculated Handforth, staring.

"That was only our little joke," murmured Travers. "Would you like to go out quietly, or shall we use force? As a candidate in this election, it would be rather undignified for you to make your exit on your neck. However, take your own choice!"

Handforth tried to think of something adequate to say, but there were no words in the English language that could express his feelings. So he gave one of his most violent snorts, wrapped his gown round him, and strode towards the door.

Unfortunately he had overlooked the fact that the gown was trailing about his feet, and he had only taken a couple of strides before he tripped, blundered forward, and nearly turned a somersault.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Handforth's exit was precipitate. He fairly bolted, and he did not even have the consolation of venting his indignation upon Church and McClure. For those youths, wise in their generation, had made themselves scarce.

They had heard everything from outside the Lecture Hall door; so they dodged neatly aside as Handforth came out, and then

joined the crowd in the Hall. They thought it far safer to be in this noisy company for the time being.

They were glad they had come, too. Chambers' election committee had taken possession of the platform, and the Remove was settling itself down to the big speech. At last the interruptions were over, and Chambers was about to get down to brass tacks.

"Gentlemen——"

"Hear, hear!"

"Go it, Travers!"

Vivian Travers had come to the edge of the platform, and was speaking.

"Before calling upon our mutual friend, Chambers, to address you, I have a few words of my own to say," continued Travers smoothly. "It has been said, not entirely without reason, that my friend Chambers is lacking in initiative and pep."

"Hear, hear!"

"You've got him taped, Travers, old man!"

Chambers turned red.

"Look here, Travers——" he began.

"I am ready to grant you that Chambers is not, at first glance, a sound proposition to vote for," continued Travers evenly. "But why should you come to these false conclusions? Remember, dear old fellows, that Chambers has never had a real chance."

"He was skipper of the Fifth once!" sang out somebody.

"And what a mess he made of it!" chimed in another voice.

"The Fifth?" repeated Travers, with scorn. "Are you suggesting that the Fifth is any criterion to judge by? I think you all know that the Fifth, as a Form, is a wash-out."

"Well, that's true!" admitted half the Remove.

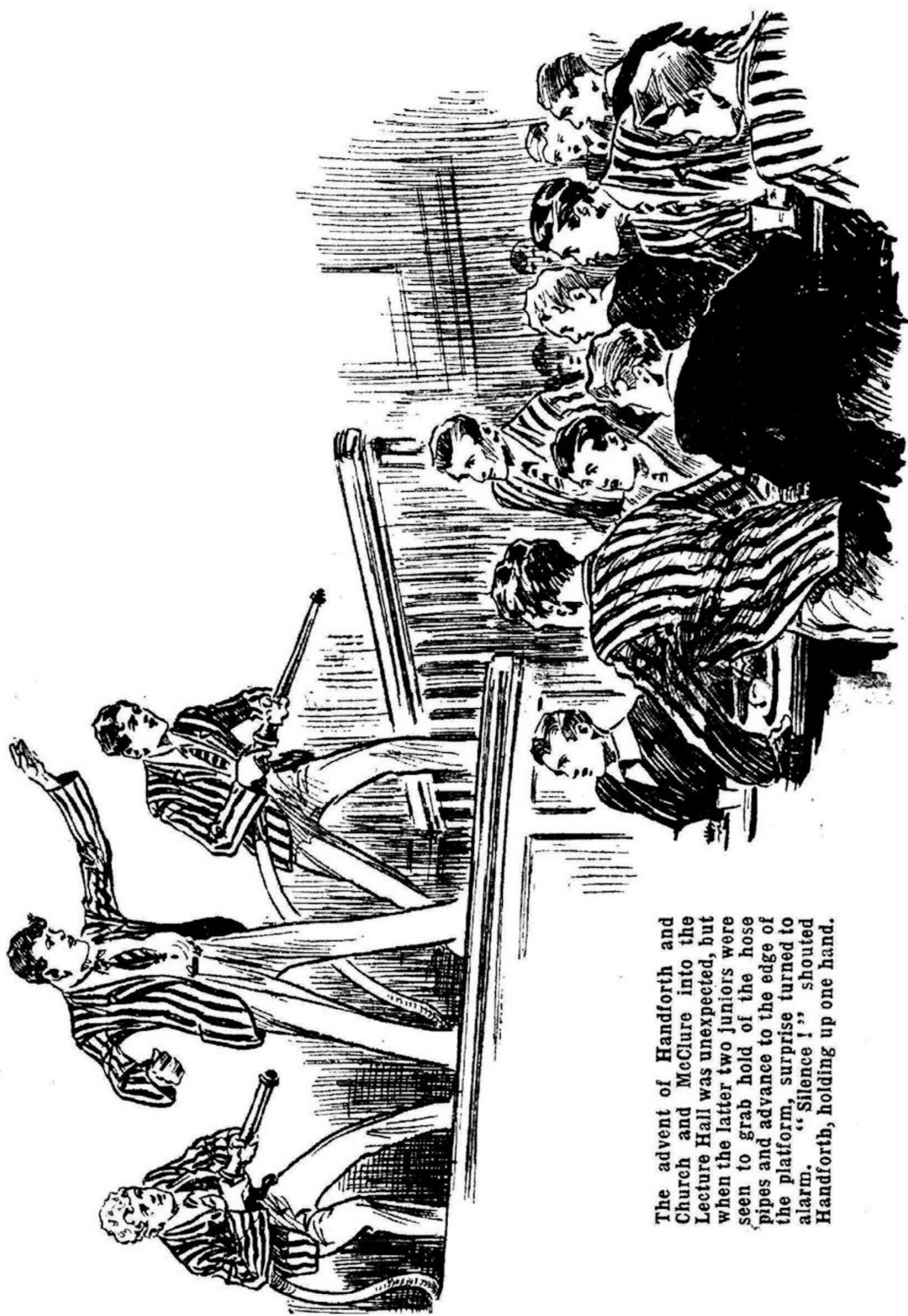
"Nobody in the Fifth dares to do much," said Travers. "They are too much on their dignity—they think that they are lordly seniors, and so they are afraid to show any spirit. How can Chambers be blamed for making a poor showing while he was captain of the Fifth?"

"Browne isn't doing so badly!" said Tommy Watson.

"Browne, I will grant you, has got a fairly firm half-nelson on the Fifth!" said Travers, nodding. "But then, Browne is a very exceptional sort of fellow. He knows how to deal with these half-baked monstrosities. The Remove is entirely different. The Remove is a brisk, active Form, and therefore it needs a brisk, active skipper. Here, in my friend Chambers, you have the very man."

"Come off it, Travers!"

"Why not give Chambers a chance?" demanded Travers. "Why condemn him before he has had an opportunity of proving his worth? As captain of the Remove, he will have an outlet for his abundant energy and pep. Up till now, these qualities have



The advent of Handforth and Church and McClure into the Lecture Hall was unexpected, but when the latter two juniors were seen to grab hold of the hose pipes and advance to the edge of the platform, surprise turned to alarm. "Silence!" shouted Handforth, holding up one hand.

been stifled in him—held down—suffocated. Give Chambers a chance to put his brilliant schemes into execution!"

"What brilliant schemes?" asked Reggie Pitt politely.

"You will learn of these very shortly," replied Travers. "I shall soon call upon Chambers to make his speech, and then he will outline his novel and revolutionary policy. I only ask you to give him a fair hearing."

"If he isn't too gassy, we'll hear him all right!"

"Yes, rather!"

"I know, of course, that the majority of you have decided to vote for Nipper!" continued Travers coolly. "I have nothing to say against Nipper. He is a splendid fellow—a fine captain—honourable and trustworthy."

"Hear, hear!"

"Good old Nipper!"

"At the same time, and with no reflection upon Nipper, isn't it time that he had a rest?" said Travers. "Let Chambers step into the captaincy, and——"

"Let's hear what his policy is!" shouted Castleton.

"Yes, yes!"

"Dry up, Travers, and let Chambers speak!"

Vivian Travers wisely took the hint. Everybody in that crowded Lecture Hall was eager to hear Chambers—and this was the moment for Chambers to come forward.

"Gentlemen," shouted Travers, "I call upon Cuthbert Chambers to address you!"

I'm not going to make all sorts of promises that I shan't fulfil!"

"Then you'll be a new kind of candidate!" said Castleton.

"I am a new kind of candidate!" replied Chambers promptly. "As you know, three fellows are putting up for election—Nipper, Handforth, and myself. I rather think we can wash Handforth out completely. He's only a joke, anyhow!"

"Good old Handy!"

"He's worth quids really!"



CHAPTER 16.

Taking Their Breath Away!

CHAMBERS was decidedly nervous, for he had expected Travers to make a much longer preliminary speech. But, with an effort, he pulled himself together, and strode towards the edge of the platform.

"I am not going to be formal, or anything like that!" he began bluntly. "I want you to vote for me in the election on Wednesday. I want you to put me at the top of the poll!"

"But why?" asked Pitt in surprise. "You're up the pole already, Chambers!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Fortunately, Chambers took the sally in good part.

"We're all up the pole, more or less," he replied promptly. "But I've set my heart on becoming captain of the Remove. I want you fellows to take me seriously—I want you to realise that I'm in deadly earnest. And

The advent of Handforth and Church and McClure into the Lecture Hall was unexpected, but when the latter two juniors were seen to grab hold of the hose pipes and advance to the edge of the platform, surprise turned to alarm. "Silence!" shouted Handforth, holding up one hand.

"Hear, hear!"

"But he's no good as a captain!" said Chambers. "Nipper, of course, is a different proposition. Nipper is a sound man, steady, reliable, and——"

"What's the idea of all this?" interrupted Nipper gruffly. "How many more times are you fellows going to call me sound and reliable? What do you think I am—a clock?"

Chambers rather brainily seized upon the point.

"Yes!" he retorted. "That's just it, Nipper! You're a clock! Term in and



term out, you go ticking on! Tick-tock! Tick-tock! Always the same, always reliable and unfailing!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"As long as you're kept wound up, you pursue the same steady, unswerving course. But that's just where you're wrong! We need something fresh in the Remove—something new! If I'm elected as captain, you'll get something new!"

"Good gad! I rather fancy that we shall get something poisonous!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Cut the cackle, Chambers, and get to the hosses!"

"Hear, hear!"

"If I'm skipper, I shall institute all sorts of new rules and regulations," shouted Chambers. "For instance, I intend to appeal to everybody in the Remove. The rank and file will benefit from my captaincy. As things are now, matters are in the hands of a chosen few. Nipper has his own friends, and he generally selects his elevens from the same group——"

"I've got to select my elevens from the



available men!" interrupted Nipper. "Sport at St. Frank's, Chambers, is taken rather seriously. I can't play duffers!"

"My policy will be to train everybody the same so that there are no duffers!" replied Chambers. "And then, again, I have another scheme. An elaborate scheme for the supplying of pocket-money to everybody who is in need."

The Remove pricked up its ears. In fact, the Remove became positively interested.

"A scheme for providing us with pocket-money?" shouted Hubbard. "By Jove! That sounds pretty good."

"Let's have it, Chambers!"

"In a word, if I become captain, I shall immediately bring into force a system of income-tax!" said Chambers impressively.

"What!"

"Income-tax!"

"Great Scott!"

"My only sainted aunt!"

Without doubt Chambers had sprung a bombshell on the Remove. Everybody was talking at once, and there was a sign of laughter. A good many of the fellows believed that it was a joke.

"You won't stand much chance of being at the top of the poll if you carry on with this scheme, Chambers!" shouted Fullwood. "Income-tax people are pretty unpopular!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Give me a chance to explain," exclaimed Chambers. "This won't be the ordinary kind of income-tax. It won't be an imposition. In fact, it's all in favour of the taxpayers."

"Then it'll be a new kind of income-tax!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It is a new kind!" shouted Chambers impressively. "Of course, if you don't want it, you needn't have it. But it's my scheme for making things generally better in the Remove. I think you all know what it is to be hard up——"

"Hear, hear!"

"You never said a truer word, old man!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And you all know how difficult it is to borrow money," continued Chambers. "How often have you been round from study to study, trying to raise the wind?"

"So often that we've lost count!" said Reggie Pitt, shaking his head.

"Yes, rather!"

"Under my system, there will be no such lean times in the future!" shouted Chambers. "It may seem like a dream to all you fellows. It may seem to you that I am talking through my hat. But, if you will be patient, and if you will let me explain, I will show you how this wonderful system can be put into operation."

"What wonderful system?" asked Fullwood sceptically.

"A system whereby every needy junior will be able to obtain cash without the slightest difficulty!" replied Chambers promptly. "A system whereby poverty will be for ever banished from the Remove!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You can laugh—but I can give you proof!" roared Chambers.

"Then why don't you?"

"If you will give me time, I will proceed to explain!" said Chambers. "But I hesitate to do so. Nipper is present, and so are some of Handforth's supporters. I have no guarantee that they will not steal my idea, and promise not to put it into operation——"

"You needn't worry, Chambers!" sang out Nipper. "Go ahead with your idea. I give

my word that I won't attempt to put it into operation if I win the election!"

"That's a definite promise?" asked Chambers.

"Yes, a definite promise!"

"And we'll give our guarantee for Handforth!" put in Church. "Won't we, Mac?"

"Like a shot!" grinned McClure. "You can take it from us, Chambers, that Handy won't borrow anybody else's ideas. Besides, why worry about him? You know jolly well that he doesn't stand a chance in a million of being elected!"

Cuthbert Chambers nodded.

"Yes," he said. "We can cut Handforth out. And now that I have Nipper's word of honour, I can go ahead!"

If any of the Removites had been fed up with the proceedings, they had entirely lost that feeling now. They wanted to remain—they were keen upon hearing by what extraordinary statement Chambers could justify his promise.

Income-tax in the Remove would indeed be a novelty! And pocket-money for all needy juniors would be more novel still. Nobody believed that Cuthbert Chambers would be able to adopt any such plan.

The Remove, as a whole, was on tenterhooks of expectancy, and there was a hush when Chambers consulted a few notes, and then prepared to continue his speech.



CHAPTER 17.

The Great Scheme!

GENTLEMEN—

"Go it, Chambers!"

"We're all waiting, old man!"

"Gentlemen of the

Remove, I urge you to give me at least five minutes' silence!" shouted Chambers, with unwonted gravity. "Before going into the intricacies of this scheme, let me say at once that I am prepared to give it a sound send-off by establishing a working fund of twenty pounds."

"My only hat!"

"Twenty quid!"

"He's only spoofing!"

"Nothing of the sort!" roared Chambers, "I am prepared to whack out twenty pounds the very instant I am elected to the captaincy. This money will be put aside, and held as a reserve."

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"But you haven't got twenty quid, Chambers!"

Vivian Travers rose to his feet, moved towards the edge of the platform, and held up his hand.

"One moment!" he said. "Pardon my interruption, Chambers, but I think I had better explain to the populace that I am acting as guarantor."

"As which?"

"I am guaranteeing this twenty pounds!" said Travers coolly. "There is no spoof about it—no deception. Upon Chambers being elected to the captaincy, the twenty pounds will be handed over in cash to a special financial committee."

"By jingo!"

"That's fair enough, anyway!"

"And we know that Travers has heaps of money!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You must understand that this reserve fund will be only a beginning," said Chambers, referring to his notes again. "Now, here is the income-tax proposal."

"Good man!"

"That's what we're waiting to hear!"

"Everybody in the Remove," said Chambers, "receives a certain amount of pocket-money every week. In some cases it is comparatively small, in other cases it is comparatively large. Some of you get as little as half a crown a week; others are lucky enough to get ten bob, or even a quid. Fellows like Travers and Tregellis-West and Glenthorne are even luckier."

"Never mind about the giddy millionaires!" grinned Doyle, of the West House. "What about the ordinary chaps? What about fellows like me? I get five bob a week!"

"It is fellows like you who will benefit mostly," replied Chambers promptly. "Glenthorne and Tregellis-West and Travers don't need to borrow money. They're never hard up—or, at least, very seldom. It's the rank and file that will gain by this income-tax plan."

"Robbing the rich to serve the poor, eh?" said Fullwood dubiously. "That's not a sound proposition, Chambers—"

"Rats!" interrupted Chambers. "Nobody will be robbed—the scheme will be just as fair for one as for the other. My proposal is to levy a tax of one penny in the shilling on everybody in the whole Form."

"Oh, my hat!"

"A penny in the shilling!"

"What's the idea of it, Chambers?"

"I'll tell you!" said Chambers. "Nobody will notice this tax much. It's too small to cause any inconvenience. For example, a fellow who gets half-a-crown a week pays twopence-halfpenny income tax. A chap who receive five shillings pocket-money pays five-pence tax, and so on—whatever the amount."

"That's easy enough to reckon," said Do Valerie. "But what becomes of this money?"

"It goes into the Financial Fund!" replied Chambers.

"And what's the Financial Fund for?"

"It's a supply of money upon which anybody can draw," said Chambers impressively. "It often happens that fellows get stoney broke in the middle of the week——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It always happens!"

"Nearly everybody is stoney by Thursday or Friday!"

"Yes, rather!"

"Well, this scheme of mine will solve the difficulty," said Chambers calmly. "Say, for example, that a fellow is absolutely broke to the wide on Thursday of any week. Well, he comes to the Financial Committee—which will be open for business at a certain hour every day—and he borrows, say, two shillings."

"That's handy."

"He borrows this two shillings from the Financial Fund," explained Chambers. "Of course, he cannot expect to get this money without interest. So he agrees to pay a penny in the shilling interest."

"Oh!"

"We thought there was a catch in it!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There's no catch!" roared Chambers, flushing. "It's perfectly straightforward and honest. The fellow borrowed two bob, and when Saturday comes he pays two-and-two-pence back—in addition to the income tax on his usual pocket money."

"H'm! It sounds complicated," remarked Reggie Pitt.

"But it's not complicated!" snapped Chambers. "It's as simple as A B C. Once it's working, it'll go absolutely smoothly. It can't fail. And, with a good reserve fund at the back of us, nobody will ever need to be short of pocket-money."

"But why charge interest?" demanded Gresham. "It's too much like—like money-lending!"

"I didn't want to charge interest," replied Chambers. "But, upon seeking advice, I came to the conclusion that interest would be absolutely necessary. If the money was lent without any interest being charged, then everybody would be swarming for loans in the middle of the week. But, by fixing a nominal rate of interest, like a penny in the shilling, it will keep fellows from rushing us. They'll hold out until the end of the week, until their pocket-money is whacked out. Only the most urgent cases will borrow from the fund."

"By Jove! That seems sound enough!"

"It looks all right in theory!"

"And it'll be all right in practice!" said Chambers. "Elect me as captain, and you'll never be short of pocket-money again!"

"Wait a minute, Chambers!" said Nipper. "Supposing everybody wants loans at once?"

"Well, that won't make any difference," said Chambers. "Naturally, the Financial Committee can't lend more than it's got, but even if the whole Reserve Fund goes—which is extremely unlikely—it will only be temporary, for at the end of the week it will all come back, because the fellows will pay up out of their regular pocket-money."

"But will they pay up?"

"They'll have to!" replied Chambers grimly. "Any defaulter will be barred from ever borrowing another penny again! Oh, yes! We shall guard against that sort of thing!"

The Remove began to feel that there was something really brilliant in the scheme, after all. It had rather taken their breath away at first, but now they were getting used to it. And there wasn't the slightest doubt that Cuthbert Chambers had taken a big step towards winning the captaincy!



CHAPTER 18.

On His Mettle!

NIPPER said very little. But he thought a great deal.

He was convinced, in his own mind, that this elaborate scheme of Chambers' would fall to the ground if it was put into practice. It sounded very nice—very smooth. But if it ever came to be put into operation it would probably crumple up.

However, the rank and file of the Remove did not think of this; to them the idea seemed good, and it was Chambers who had suggested it. It was Chambers who would put it into operation if he won the captaincy. Therefore, Chambers gained a good many supporters at this all-important meeting.

"There's one point that I can't quite understand," said De Valerie, frowning. "Who gets the interest that is charged on the loans?"

"It all goes into the fund."

"And what happens to the extra money that comes in?" asked De Valerie. "What I mean is, who gets it?"

"If you're implying that I'm going to keep that money for myself, you're a young ass!" said Chambers hotly. "I don't touch a penny—and don't want it! The whole proposal is for the benefit of the Remove. At the end of each term, the Reserve Fund will be wiped out. In other words, it will be spent on a huge last-evening feed."

"Oh!"

"That sounds pretty good!"

"It is good!" declared Chambers. "It can't be anything else but good! All you do is to pay one penny in the shilling income-tax every week, and this enables you to borrow from the fund whenever you like—providing, of course, that you pay it back at the end of the same week. And when the term closes, the whole fund is used on a big feed."

"Jolly good!"

"Well, it's straightforward enough!"

"Couldn't be simpler!"

"It just amounts to this," said Chambers. "The most persistent borrowers will naturally pay more than anybody else—because the

penny-in-the-shilling interest will swell the resources of the fund. So the big feed, at the end of the term, will be largely paid for by the fellows who have done the most borrowing."

"Clear as mud!" said Reggie Pitt, scratching his head.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It'll be clear enough as soon as it gets into working order!" said Chambers confidently. "It's not quite fair to pull the scheme to pieces now. Give it a trial! That's what I say, my lads! Elect me as skipper, and give this income-tax scheme a trial!"

"Good old Chambers!"

"The man with the ideas!"

"I want your votes!" shouted Chambers, holding out his hands towards the audience.

"I want them all! Elect me, and you elect a live captain! I shall be strict, but I shall not be arbitrary."

After a few more words in the same strain, Cuthbert Chambers sat down, and the Re-

move cheered and clapped. On the whole, the speech had been eminently successful.

And then the Remove dispersed, and all the fellows went to their various studies, discussing the latest situation. On the whole, Chambers had done much to further his cause.

Next day it was just the same.

Chambers was no longer spoken of as an ass and a duffer; the juniors were seriously thinking about electing him. They were comparing him to Nipper, and, although Nipper was generally respected, and although his popularity did not suffer one whit, a feeling was growing that he should be given a rest.

After all, it would only be fair to let Chambers have a shot at this income-tax scheme of his. Besides, it appealed to the fellows. From bitter experience they knew how difficult it was to borrow money in mid-week, when practically everybody was broke. It would be a great comfort to know that they could go to the Financial Committee and obtain a few shillings to carry on with.

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Speeches were the order of the day again. In the Triangle, Chambers and Handforth and Nipper were making speeches at every opportunity. Chambers pegged away at his income-tax proposal, arguing its merits and its advantages. And it was noticed that his audiences were much larger than those of the other candidates.

Handforth, indeed, hardly got anybody. When the fellows did condescend to listen to him, they only did so in a spirit of levity. It was rather amusing to listen to the leader of Study D spouting at the top of his voice and explaining exactly why it would be a wise thing to elect him.

Nipper stuck to his same old policy. He declared that the captain of any Form should confine his attentions to the sporting interests and general smooth running of the Form. He had no sympathy with income-tax schemes and similar fantastic proposals. He was wholeheartedly in favour of carrying on in the time-honoured fashion. He did not believe in any new-fangled stunts.

But, although the sound fellows were solidly behind Nipper, it could not be denied that the bulk of the Removites were attracted by the novelty of Chambers' programme.

"I'm afraid things are beginning to look a bit wonky," said Tommy Watson, as he and Tregellis-West and Nipper gathered for tea in Study C that evening. "Confound the chaps! They're rallying round Chambers by the dozen!"

"They don't seem to recognise that he's a windbag!" said Tregellis-West.

"I'm not worrying," said Nipper calmly. "You mustn't forget, you chaps, that there's the Yexford match to-morrow, and the polling for the captaincy will take place in the evening, after the team gets back."

"And you're captaining the Eleven," said Watson thoughtfully.

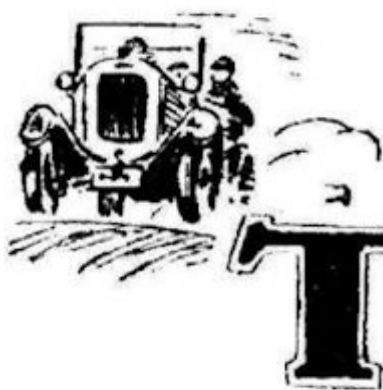
"Exactly!" said Nipper. "We've just got to win that match to-morrow! And if I put up a particularly good performance it will help enormously. At heart, the fellows are really mad on sports. A decisive win to-morrow will put me at the top of the poll."

"Begad! It's a frightful position, dear old boy!" said Sir Montie, shaking his head. "It is, really! Because, don't you see, it cuts both ways. If you score a century, or anything like that, the enthusiasm will be tremendous, and you'll be elected. But what if you score a duck?"

"Then my doom will be sealed!" replied Nipper coolly.

"Cricket is a most frightful game of chance," said Tregellis-West. "That's what makes it so excitin', of course. One never knows what one is going to do. But really, old boy, you'll have to give of your very best!"

And Nipper knew it, too. The Yexford match, indeed, was vital!



CHAPTER 19.

Off for the Fateful Match!

THE weather was very fine the next day, and the Remove was feeling very bucked when lessons were over.

It was a half-holiday, and there was an important match on. Further, there was the election to cause added excitement. The campaign was practically over; the candidates had made their final speeches. Nothing remained, now, but to play Yexford, and then hold the election in the evening.

If there was one point which worried Vivian Travers, it was connected with the Yexford match.

Travers was quite satisfied that Chambers was "good" for the captaincy if all went well. Most of the Removites were greatly impressed by the income-tax scheme, and they were anxious to see it in operation. And they could only see it in operation if Chambers won.

But the Yexford match gave Travers a few qualms.

He knew that Nipper was a first-rate cricketer, and he also knew that Nipper would seize this opportunity with both hands. He would play to-day as he had seldom played before, and if he could only arouse a tremendous enthusiasm in the Remove by giving a dazzling display on the cricket field, his election would be certain.

But Travers did not think of getting up to any shady trickery in order to ruin the match. His only move was to get up an agitation for the inclusion of Chambers in the Eleven.

This, at first sight, was a piece of folly. For if Chambers failed it would tell badly against him; it would ruin all his chances.

But Travers had been putting Chambers through his paces a good deal during this week: he had been at the nets with him, and had coached him. Chambers hadn't liked it, but Travers was a very clever cricketer, and he gave Chambers some good tips. And, surprisingly enough, the ex-Fifth-Former was now showing a fair amount of ability.

The fact was Chambers had set his heart on winning the Remove captaincy, and so he was on his mettle. He, too, knew what the result would be if he played well in the Yexford match.

At first Nipper was inclined to debar Chambers from the team, but he soon saw that this would seal his fate. Everybody would say that he was keeping Chambers out because he was afraid of him. Besides, Chambers had done so well at the nets that Nipper could hardly refuse him. So in the end Chambers' name was put down on the list.

"Everything will be all right, dear old fellow," declared Travers. "But you've got

to play the game of your life to-day! We can't expect anything sensational, of course; but, as long as you put up a good show, you'll have the Form's support."

"By glory!" said Chambers, taking a deep breath. "I'll show 'em!"

Handforth took up an attitude of lofty indifference.

"I'm fed-up!" he said, as everybody was preparing to leave. "I'm fed-up with everything! Nobody takes any notice of me, and I've come to the conclusion that the Remove isn't worth bothering about!"

"Good man!" said Church, with relief. "You couldn't do better!"

"You silly ass!" snapped Handforth.

"Eh? I'm only agreeing with you——"

"Then dry up!" growled Handforth. "I'm disappointed! I gave the fellows credit for more sense. Yet they're all falling over one another in their eagerness to give this rotten income-tax scheme a trial! I've got hundreds of better plans up my sleeve——"

But at this point he broke off, for a chorus of cheery feminine hails came to his ears. And then he beheld Irene & Co., of the Moor View School, in the gateway with their bicycles.

"We just stopped to wish you luck in the Yexford match!" said Irene, as Handforth & Co. and a number of other juniors hurried to the gateway. "You're playing, Ted, aren't you?"

"Yes, rather!" said Handforth. "I suppose you girls can't come over and watch?"

"Sorry," said Doris Berkeley, "but it's imposs. We're going to a tennis tournament at Caistowe."

"Yes, but tennis can't be compared to cricket!" said Handforth in surprise.

"Of course it can't!" said Mary Summers gravely. "Still, Ted, I'm afraid we can't very well get out of it. But you'll have the consolation of knowing that we shall try to be with you in spirit."

There were many chuckles, and Handforth grunted.

"Let's change the subject!" he said gruffly. "I want you girls to wish me luck in the election this evening."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Irene & Co. laughed merrily, and Handforth turned red.

"Here, I say! There's nothing funny in it!" he protested.

"I'm sorry, Ted, but we're all in favour of Nipper," said Mary Summers, with a smile. "Nipper's certain to win, too, isn't he?"

"I'm afraid he isn't!" said Nipper dryly.

"What!" exclaimed Mary, open-eyed. "You don't mean to say that Ted——"

"No, not Ted!" smiled Nipper. "But there's Chambers, you know."

"But Chambers is—is—— Well, we hardly thought that Chambers was a serious rival!" remarked Marjorie Temple.

"He wasn't until a day or two ago—but most of the fellows are rather keen on him now," replied Nipper. "There's no time to

go into details, and, in any case, why not leave it until the election is over?"

The girls were rather upset to hear this piece of news. They had taken it for granted that Nipper would be elected by an overwhelming majority. However, as Nipper had said, there was no time to explain, for the Junior Eleven was going to Yexford by train, and the fellows had to get down to the station.

A good many other fellows were going, too—and some were cycling.

Handforth, of course, was going in his Austin Seven, with Church and McClure, and he decided that he would go round by Caistowe—so that he would have the pleasure of accompanying the girl cyclists this far on the journey.

"It's all right," he said, "we shall be able to put on speed afterwards, and we'll get to Yexford long before the match."

In Caistowe, naturally, he insisted upon stopping at one of the biggest confectioners, and he treated all the girls to ice-cream.

If it hadn't been for Church and McClure, he would have wasted half the afternoon in the seaside resort. But Handforth was playing in the Yexford match, and his presence on the cricket field was rather necessary.



CHAPTER 20.

A Narrow Escape!

BEST of luck, Ted!"

"Thanks, Irene!" said Handforth warmly. "But you needn't worry—we'll

win!"

Irene Manners and the other girls were just preparing to depart. The tennis tournament was taking place on the other side of the town, and the Moor View girls now took a different route from Handforth & Co.

They started off on their bicycles, and Handforth, in the meantime, climbed into the driving-seat of his Austin, and started the engine.

"We shall have to buck up, Handy!" said Church, from the rear.

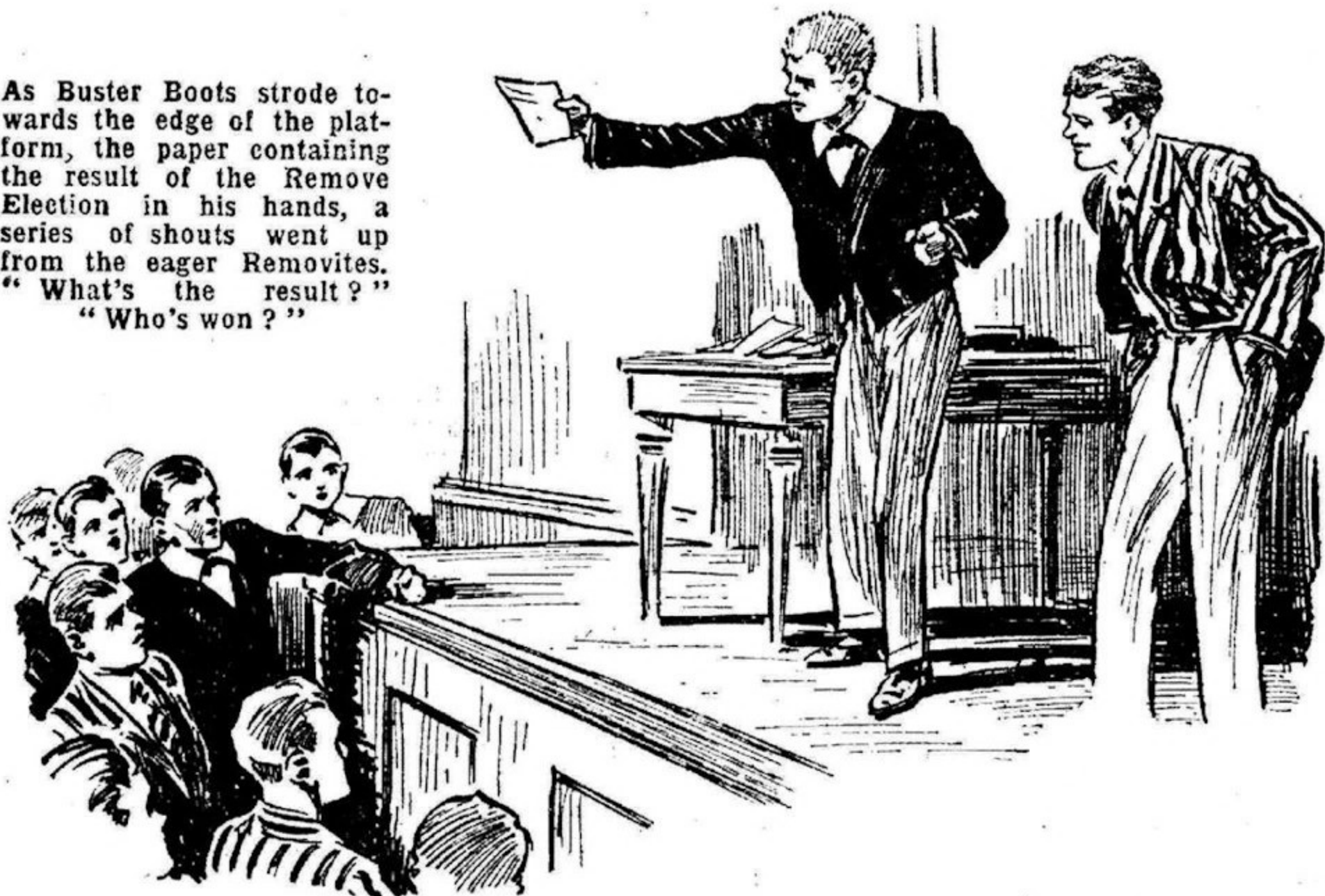
"Tons of time!" said Handforth calmly. "Once we get on the move, we can—— Great Scott! Look out, there! Oh, by George!"

The words came out of his mouth in a choking gasp.

And there was every reason for his shout of alarm. Glancing up by chance, he had seen Irene & Co. cycling off down the busy street. It was in the height of the holiday season, of course, and Caistowe was crowded.

A water-cart had evidently passed along this thoroughfare shortly before, for the paved road was considerably wet. And Mary Summers, who was just in the rear of all the other girls, had swerved suddenly in order to avoid an excited old lady, who had run off the pavement in order to attract the attention of a bus conductor.

As Buster Boots strode towards the edge of the platform, the paper containing the result of the Remove Election in his hands, a series of shouts went up from the eager Removites. "What's the result?" "Who's won?"



It all happened in a flash.

Mary's front wheel skidded violently, and, although the girl was a good cyclist, she found it impossible to maintain her balance.

Crash!

Over she went, the bicycle slithering along the wet road. And Mary herself was sprawling in the road, right in front of the oncoming motor-'bus!

Shrieks arose from all sides. Handforth and Co. sat frozen in the Austin Seven. Irene and the other girls, glancing back, practically fell off their own machines.

Fortunately, the 'bus was already slowing down, the conductor having pulled the bell in response to the old lady's signals.

The heavy vehicle did not even skid, but came to an abrupt standstill a foot or two from Mary, as she was quickly scrambling to her feet.

"Oh, thank goodness!" breathed Handforth dazedly. "I thought—I thought——"

"Yes, it was a pretty narrow shave!" said Church huskily. "If that 'bus had been going quicker——"

"Don't!" muttered McClure.

They leapt out of the car, ran forward, and pressed round Mary as Irene and the other girls came up.

"Are you hurt?" went up a general chorus.

Mary laughed, looking flushed and embarrassed.

"No, it was nothing!" she protested. "Oh, please don't make a fuss!"

"You've ruined your frock!" said Handforth.

"Oh, what does it matter?" asked Mary.

"Please, Renie! Let's be getting on. Come on, girls! It'll be simply terrible if a crowd collects!"

Hastily the girls picked up Mary's fallen bicycle, and then they escaped down a side street; in less than a minute the main thoroughfare was normal again. Handforth climbed back into his Austin Seven, and he did not conceal the fact that he was a bit shaky.

"She might have been killed!" he said gruffly. "The Caistowe authorities ought to know better than to make the roads all wet and skiddy like this!"

Church and McClure thought it unwise to get up any argument regarding the Caistowe Town Council. So they contented themselves by remarking that they were heartily thankful that Mary had come to no harm.

By the time they arrived at Yexford they had almost forgotten the incident; and they were surprised to find that Handforth had got there on time. The match was practically due to start—but he wasn't late.

"It's about time you turned up, dear old fellow!" remarked Travers, who was one of the first to approach the Study D trio. "We're just going on to the field."

"Did Yexford win the toss, then?" asked Handforth indignantly.

"Alas, yes!"

"Like their cheek!"

"I agree with you!" said Travers. "You ought to have been here a little earlier——"

"Couldn't be done!" said Handforth. "We were delayed in Caistowe. Mary Summers was nearly killed in an accident!"

"For the love of Samson!" ejaculated Travers, staring.

"Well, she might have been nearly killed," amended Handforth. "She skidded right in front of a 'bus, and I can tell you that Churchy and Mac and I got a shock. We thought it was all up with her!"

And Handforth explained the circumstances with an unnecessary wealth of detail. Travers listened, much relieved when he heard that Mary had come to no harm.

But later his eyes began to gleam in a purposeful way.

"Well, well!" he murmured. "It's an ill wind that blows nobody good! I wonder if we can make capital out of this little incident?"

Judging by the satisfied expression on his face, he had already decided upon a scheme. And when it came to schemes, Vivian Travers was without a rival!



CHAPTER 21.

The Rumour!

JUST as Handforth was ready to go on to the field, Travers approached him, looking rather thoughtful. Church and McClure were there, too.

"Oh, there's just one little thing, dear old fellows," said Travers. "You haven't said anything to Nipper about Mary's narrow escape, have you?"

"Not a word," replied Handforth.

"Then don't!"

"Why not?" asked Church.

"Well, there's a general kind of idea that Mary is Nipper's special girl chum," said Travers dryly. "He's not a temperamental bloke, but if he heard that Mary had had an accident he might be off his form."

"H'm! Perhaps you're right—although I don't think there's much in it," said Handforth. "Still, it's just as well to be on the safe side."

Travers nodded, and walked away.

"Rather a brainy idea of the chap's," commented McClure. "It's a good thing we hadn't been gassing about the affair. It's an important match, too. If Nipper makes a poor showing, we shall be in the soup."

"Why shall we be in the soup?" asked Handforth, staring.

"Well, Nipper won't get any votes this evening."

"And who wants him to get any votes?" said Handforth tartly. "You silly fatheads! You know as well as I do that I'm going to win this election!"

"Ahem! Yes!"

"What are you coughing for?"

"Nothing—only a tickle in my throat!"

"Rot!" said Handforth suspiciously. "You fellows believe that I'm going to lose, don't you?"

Church and McClure didn't merely believe it—they were certain. But in the circumstances they decided to remain silent.

"Well, I'm not going to lose!" said Handforth firmly. "You chaps may think I'm dotty, but I'm telling you straight from the shoulder that I shall be skipper of the Remove by this evening. And if you like I'll tell you how I'm going to work the trick!"

"We should love to know!" said Church.

"It's as simple as winking!" answered

NEXT WEDNESDAY!



Handforth. "I'm going to score a century in this match off my own bat. And every body will be so jolly enthusiastic that——"

He paused, noting that his chums were making queer, gurgling noises.

"You can laugh!" he snorted. "But wait and see! I made a century for the First Eleven at St. Jim's——"

"Aren't you ever coming, Handy?" sang out Harry Gresham.

And Handforth was obliged to abandon the argument.

Church and McClure were quite prepared to admit that if he scored a century in this vital game he would be a long way on the road to victory in the election. But centuries

aren't scored every day in cricket matches—junior, senior, or otherwise.

To make the issue more interesting the Yexford Junior Eleven proceeded to knock up a very formidable score. Gresham and Travers and Hussi Kahn were at the top of their form, and they bowled splendidly. But it was a batsman's wicket, and the Yexford fellows were keen, sound cricketers, too. They were difficult to dismiss.

In fact, the innings did not close until the tea interval, and the St. Frank's fellows were feeling somewhat exhausted after a long spell of leather-hunting. The Yexford total was 185, which was an excellent score for a

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There's that income-tax scheme, too. It sounds all right in theory, but how will it work in practice? Juniors who only receive half-a-crown and five bob a week pocket-money won't be very keen to fork out their twopence-ha'pennies and five-pences every week.

As for Chambers, he discovers that captaining the Remove is not an easy job; or a pleasant one!

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junior school eleven. It wasn't sensational, of course, but it was distinctly good.

“We're going to have all our work cut out to whack 'em,” said Nipper, as he strolled on to the field, after the brief tea interval, with his men. “We don't know much about 'em this season, but I believe they've got some hot bowlers.”

“Don't worry!” said Handforth. “You can rely on me for a cool hundred.”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“I'm going to make a century in this match!” said Handforth calmly. “By George! If I can score a hundred for the St. Jim's First Eleven, I'll eat my hat if I can't score a hundred for the St. Frank's Junior Eleven!”

“We all have our little idiosyncrasies,” murmured Travers.

“Rats!” said Handforth. “If the rest of you can knock up a century between you, we shall win by a handsome margin.”

Nobody, of course, took any notice of this. Chambers was unusually quiet. He had done nothing particularly good in the field; he had made one or two quick returns, and had muffed one or two balls. But, on the whole, his performance had been just ordinary—neither good nor bad.

Most of the fellows had expected that he would bounce about in his usual way. But, strangely enough, he was quiet. Nipper, more shrewd than the others, had no difficulty in guessing that Travers had been having a serious, heart-to-heart talk with the ex-senior.

Just before the Yexford Eleven came out, Nipper found himself talking with Chambers and Travers. They had drawn him apart from the rest of the fellows, discussing some trivial point of the game.

It had been decided that Nipper and Reggie Pitt should go out to open the St. Frank's innings, and it was time for Nipper to put on his leg-pads.

“Well, if you chaps will excuse me——” he began.

But just then Gore-Pearce, elegant as ever, strolled up.

“Heard the news, you chaps?” he asked languidly.

“What news?”

“About the accident in Caistowe?”

“We haven't heard about any accident in Caistowe,” said Nipper. “Not that I'm surprised. There's an awful lot of traffic in Caistowe during the summer. Anybody hurt?”

“Worse than that,” said Gore-Pearce, with a sort of relish. “Somebody we know, too. One of the Moor View girls.”

Nipper stared, his face changing colour.

“Not—not killed?” he asked very quietly.

“Afraid so.”

“But—but——”

“Mind you, I wouldn't be certain,” added Gore-Pearce casually. “It's only a rumour. Somebody came along about half an hour ago and said that this girl had been run over by a 'bus and killed. That's all I know!” he added, with a yawn. “But it sounds true enough.”

“There was an accident, anyhow,” put in Travers, nodding. “I heard about it, too. But I didn't think it was serious.”

Nipper clutched at Gore-Pearce's arm. There were lots of girls at the Moor View School, and the majority of them were only on mere nodding terms with the St. Frank's fellows. Of course, the accident might have happened to any one of them. But yet——

“Do you know who the girl was?” asked Nipper steadily.

“Sorry, I've forgotten,” replied Gore-Pearce. “I did hear the name, but—— Oh, yes, I remember. Mary Summers!”

CHAPTER 22.

OF His Form!



NIPPER stood as though turned to stone. "Hard lines!" he heard Travers saying, through a kind of thick wall. "Mary was a jolly decent girl, too—one of the best. Great Samson! It's getting positively dangerous to be about in the streets nowadays—cycling especially."

Nipper, his brain whirling, suddenly seized Gore-Pearce so fiercely by the shoulder that the millionaire's son uttered a cry.

"Here, keep your confounded hands——"

"Are you sure of this?" panted Nipper. "You say that Mary Summers has been killed?"

"That's what I heard——"

"Who did you hear it from?"

"Oh, I don't know—one of the Yexford chaps," replied Gore-Pearce, lying glibly. "I wouldn't know him from Adam again."

"Are you sure that it was Mary Summers, and not some other girl?"

"Of course I'm sure!" said Gore-Pearce. "But what difference does it make? One girl's very much the same as another, isn't she? Oh, by gad! I'd forgotten," he added, with a grin. "You were rather sweet on Mary, weren't you?"

Crash!

Nipper couldn't help it. The suggestion of a sneer in Gore-Pearce's tone made him see red. He struck out fiercely, and Gore-Pearce went over backwards, howling.

"You cad!" panted Nipper.

"Steady, dear old fellow!" murmured Travers. "Everybody's looking at us. If it comes to that, Pitt's waiting for you, too. The Yexford fellows are on the field. You can't keep them waiting."

"But I want to find out for certain about this accident!" said Nipper feverishly.

"Can't I ask somebody?"

"Who is there to ask?"

"Somebody told Gore-Pearce——"

"Yes, but he doesn't even know the fellow's name," said Chambers, breaking into the conversation for the first time. "You can't go about a strange school asking everybody if there's any truth in a rumour that a girl has been killed! It would look—well, funny!"

Nipper breathed hard.

"I must know!" he muttered.

Vivian Travers felt rather conscience-stricken. It was he who had engineered this very questionable stunt. Travers was a queer kind of mixture, and in some ways he was frankly unscrupulous. In other ways he was one of the best fellows under the sun.

He had set his heart upon boosting Chambers into the captaincy, and he had had a grave fear that the Yexford match would add so much to Nipper's prestige that the

voting would go all in his favour that evening.

And so, hearing of the mishap to Mary, Travers had made capital out of it. After all, rumours are always liable to get about—especially tragic rumours—and Travers had consoled himself by the thought that even if he didn't start the rumour, somebody else might.

Yet now Travers felt guilty. He had hardly believed that Nipper would take this shock so badly. And Travers, in his sincere desire to make amends, really only made matters worse. The decency in him—and there was a lot—urged him to square this trick.

"If I were you, Nipper, I'd take no notice of the silly story," he said quietly, as he pulled Nipper aside. "Forget it, dear old fellow. It's not true!"

"How could the story get about then?"

Travers had no immediate answer for that poser. He had drawn Nipper aside because he did not want Gore-Pearce to hear that he was backing out of the little plot.

"If it comes to that, how does any rumour get about?" he said, after a slight pause. "I heard the yarn from Handforth, and I asked Handforth not to say anything to you about it in case it put you off your form."

"That was very decent of you."

"Rot!" said Travers, now thoroughly uncomfortable. "As a matter of fact, Handforth told me that Mary skidded in front of a 'bus, but wasn't even hurt."

"And Gore-Pearce says that she was killed!" said Nipper huskily. "How am I to know the truth? She might be unhurt, or she might be dead! Hang it, I'm not a sentimental idiot, but I—I—— Well, I rather liked Mary, and I'm not ashamed of saying it."

Travers compressed his lips. He simply couldn't go through with it. He was on the point of telling Nipper, then and there, that Mary was quite safe, and that the rumour was a false one, set about by himself, but just then Reggie Pitt came running up.

"I say, Nipper!" he protested. "Come on! They're waiting!"

"Sorry!" muttered Nipper. "All right, I'll come."

They hurried off towards the pavilion, leaving Travers rather stranded. Gore-Pearce strolled up.

"Well, it worked!" he said savagely.

"Shut up!" snapped Travers.

"Here, I say——"

"Confound you, I'm glad Nipper knocked you down!" said Travers curtly. "By Samson, you deserve it!"

In the meantime Pitt was looking rather askance at Nipper.

"You've heard, then?" he asked quietly.

"Heard what? You mean about Mary?"

"Yes," said Reggie. "Horrible, isn't it?"

"What have you heard?" demanded Nipper.

"She was run over in Caistowe——"

"Then it's true!" said Nipper bleakly. "It

must be true if everybody's talking about it like this."

"Mind you, it was only Gulliver who——"

"What does it matter?" broke in Nipper. "I've got to find somebody—so that I shall know the definite truth."

But a crowd of Yexford juniors pressed round, and Nipper and Pitt were more or less hustled out on to the field to open the St. Frank's innings. True, Nipper had made one or two hurried inquiries, but none of the Yexford men had heard anything about the accident. It was only natural, perhaps, that they should evince very little interest in it. The Moor View girls were nothing to them, and one can always view with complacency the tragic accidents that happen to perfect strangers.

So Nipper went to the wicket in a state of acute suspense.

Travers, in his effort to undo the harm, had made things worse. For if Nipper had been convinced that Mary was dead the blow would have stunned him, but would have put him out of his suspense.

As it was, he only had a rumour to guide him.

It might be true, or it might not be true. His interest in the game had dropped to zero. His main idea, as he took guard, was to get his innings over, and to rush round making inquiries. It might be a good idea to telephone to the Moor View School. They would know the truth there!

Thus it was that the junior skipper received the first ball of the St. Frank's innings while in a condition of mental anguish. And to say that he was off his form would be putting it mildly!



CHAPTER 23.

The Fatal Innings!

NOT that Nipper had the slightest intention of letting the side down. Great as his anxiety was he suddenly gripped himself, and swore that he would make a good showing. But nothing could alter the alarming fact that the longer he played, the longer would be his mental torture. His main desire was to hurry off the field, and to find a telephone; but his duty was to remain, and to help Reggie Pitt to give the St. Frank's innings a good send-off. Thud!

He stonewalled the first ball quite automatically. It struck his bat, and went dead, rolling only a foot or two. It hadn't been a stroke at all, but it was sufficient to awake him to a sense of realities.

When the second ball was delivered he obtained a firmer hold on himself, and did his best to thrust the tragic rumour out of his mind. Down came the leather, and up went Nipper's bat.

Clack!

This was more like it. It was a splendid hit, and the ball went soaring away, well beyond the reach of any fieldsmen.

"Oh, well hit!"

"That's the style, Nipper!"

"Good man!"

He scored a three, and Reggie Pitt cautiously obtained a single with the next ball. And then Nipper faced the bowling again.

But for the rest of that over he was useless. Everybody could see that he was quite off his form, and the St. Frank's fellows round the ropes were not only apprehensive, but puzzled.

Hardly any of them had heard the rumour, and they were at a total loss to understand Nipper's listlessness. He seemed so jumpy, too—so nervous. His usual quiet confidence had deserted him.

He managed to get a two at the beginning of the second over, and he was just preparing to receive the next ball when he vaguely heard a laugh from the side of the field. He recognised that laugh. It belonged to Claude Gore-Pearce.

It was only a trifle, of course.

But Gore-Pearce's laugh reminded him of the rumour again—just as he had partially succeeded in concentrating his mind on the cricket match. He thought of Mary Summers; he pictured her being run over by the 'bus—

Crash!

"Oh!"

"How's that?"

"Out!"

Nipper looked round dazedly at his wicket. The ball had been easy to play—a perfectly normal non-tricky delivery. At any other time he would have sent that ball well beyond the boundary. As it was, he had made no attempt to play it, and it had shattered the wicket.

"Dreaming?" asked the wicket-keeper politely.

"Eh? Oh, I—I don't know!" muttered Nipper.

He tucked his bat under his arm, and walked to the pavilion. Out for five! And he was the skipper—and everybody had been expecting him to do such big things!

"Confound it!" muttered Travers, biting his lip. "Well, I've done the trick—but I don't feel particularly pleased with myself. And, by Samson, I didn't mean to do it, either! It was a cad's business!"

There were a few claps of sympathy as Nipper entered the pavilion. But curiously enough Nipper wasn't upset. His main sensation was one of relief. Now he would be able to discover something definite.

He happened to run into Handforth just in front of the pavilion. Harry Gresham was just going out to the wicket, to take Nipper's place, and he murmured a few words of condolence as he passed. But Nipper didn't even hear them.

"Do you know if there's a telephone anywhere near, Handy?" he asked bluntly.

Handforth stared.

"What do you want a telephone for?" he asked. "And how should I know? Ask one of these Yexford men! What the dickens is the matter with you? What do you mean by only making five rotten runs?"

"Oh, don't question me now!" said Nipper. "I must find a telephone and— Oh, just a minute, Handy!" he added, as a thought struck him. "Somebody told me that you heard about the accident."

"Accident!" echoed Handforth. "Well, I'm blowed! So that's why you were so rottenly off form? Who was cad enough to tell you about it?"

"Never mind that!" said Nipper. "The rumour is going about everywhere. Lots of chaps are saying that Mary has been killed—"

"Killed!" gasped Handforth. "You—you howling idiot! Mary Summers is as safe as you are!"

Nipper's heart gave a leap.

"How do you know that?" he demanded. "If only I can find out something definite—"

"Well, you can find it out now!" interrupted Handforth. "I saw the thing! Churchy and Mac and I were only ten yards away when the accident happened."

"Great Scott! And was Mary badly hurt?"

"She wasn't hurt at all!" growled Handforth. "She just skidded, and slithered over. Didn't even bruise herself—at least, not that I know of. The 'bus came pretty near, but it stopped well clear of her."

Nipper's face completely changed, and his eyes were expressive of great relief. In a way, he looked rather self-conscious.

"What a fool!" he muttered bitterly. "I ought to have known better than to have taken any notice of Gore-Pearce—"

"Gore-Pearce!" snorted Handforth. "Why, you hopeless lunatic, you know the chap is a liar! It was a trick! By George! They wanted to put you off your form! I'll bet Travers started the whole thing!"

But Nipper shook his head.

"I don't think so," he replied. "Travers acted very decently. He advised me to take no notice of the rumour. Well, thank goodness I know the truth now! But I'm afraid it's lost me the captaincy."

Tommy Watson and Tregellis-West were full of deep concern as they discussed the matter with their leader. Travers couldn't resist the inclination to go across and have a few words with Nipper.

"I'm frightfully sorry, dear old fellow," he said earnestly. "But I'm afraid I played a dirty trick on you."

"How do you mean?" asked Nipper, staring.

"Well, they say that open confession is good for the soul—and I've got to own up!" said Travers quietly. "I can do some things with perfect composure, but this rather hurts me. The fact is, dear old fellow, I put Gore-Pearce up to that dodge."

"You did!"

"At the time, I didn't quite realise how

badly it would bowl you over," said Travers. "I'm really most horribly sorry. And you can take it from me that I'll explain the whole truth to the fellows before the election."

Nipper found it impossible to be angry; there was something very sincere and decent about Travers' apology.

"That's all right!" he growled. "Let's say no more about it. I was a fool to take any notice. By Jove! Can't we be idiots at times? I'm generally the first to tell people not to take any notice of rumours! And to-day I've messed up my innings, and ruined my chance of the captaincy, by doing the very same thing!"

Nipper blamed himself entirely.

He should have had more sense than to credit the story. And he could not blame Travers, because Travers had done the honourable thing by confessing.

The only satisfaction Nipper obtained was by watching the fine stand by Reggie Pitt and Harry Gresham.

They put on 64 runs between them before Pitt was caught out, and the partnership was broken. After that, the other St. Frank's cricketers proceeded to knock up the runs. Incidentally, Handforth's wonderful century shrunk to a boisterously-hit fourteen, after which he was clean bowled. He left the wicket disgusted.

Then, when victory seemed reasonably certain, a minor collapse occurred. Fellow after fellow came out. Cuthbert Chambers was sixth man in, and nobody expected him to do anything.

Astonishingly enough, Chambers scored 20 runs off his own bat. The Removites watched fascinatedly. Chambers' innings was destined to go down in St. Frank's history. He played every ball that should have been left alone, and missed every ball that he should have hit.

His cricket, indeed, was awful to watch. Handforth was reckless enough, but Chambers was worse than reckless. With him, it was just fool's luck. He struck at the ball, and didn't even know where it had gone after he had hit it.

But nothing could alter the fact that he scored 20—while partner after partner went under. And so, by a freak of chance that was almost akin to a miracle, Chambers hit the winning run of the match a minute before the last St. Frank's man was dismissed.

It was amazing. Chambers—20, not out! And he, and he alone, had saved the St. Frank's Junior Eleven from defeat!



CHAPTER 24.

The Polling!

"GENTLEMEN—"

"Dry up, Travers!"

"We don't want any speeches now!"

It was evening and

the Lecture Hall in the Ancient House at St. Frank's was crowded. The entire Remove was present for the purpose of polling their votes. It was the moment of the election.

The polling was to be done in the proper way. A slip of paper had been given to every fellow, each paper containing the names of the three candidates. Voters were requested to put a cross against their own choice.

Needless to say, the Yexford cricket match had had a tremendous effect upon the polling. All the more thoughtful fellows voted for Nipper without question—thoroughly satisfied that he was the best man for the captaincy, and that his showing in the match was only a bad patch.

But the general run of Removites were not so far-seeing.

They were creatures of the moment, easily swayed by trifles. They knew that Nipper had made an awful mess of his innings, and they knew that Chambers had unexpectedly and dramatically saved the game.

Incidentally, Chambers was the most surprised fellow in the Remove. Never for a second had he expected to score any more than seven or eight runs. It was one of those surprises of cricket that often happen.

Not that Chambers admitted his surprise to anybody.

He made capital out of his luck, and his bragging and boasting on the way home had rather sickened some of the fellows. But most of the juniors held that Chambers was justified in boasting. He had something to boast about!

"Gentlemen——"

"Dry up, Travers!" roared the Remove.

"I not only refuse to dry up, but I insist upon a hearing!" shouted Travers. "You are about to record your votes, and it is not too late for me to give a word of explanation in regard to Nipper's dismal failure in the match."

The Remove listened, astonished at Travers' earnest tone.

"What are you getting at, Travers?" asked Fullwood, staring.

"You are all inclined to be down on Nipper for making a hash of his innings," said Travers. "But before you record your votes I would like to say that it was I who put him off his stroke."

"What the thunder——" began Chambers hotly.

"Sorry, dear old fellow, but it's got to be done," said Travers. "I'm not a saint, but then, on the other hand, I'm not an out-and-out rotter. At least, I hope I'm not."

"The fellow's mad!" said Chambers savagely.

He was mortally afraid that Travers was about to ruin everything. And Chambers could do nothing.

"Just before Nipper's innings, he was told that Mary Summers had been killed in an accident," explained Travers, to the hushed Remove. "It was my idea—and I'm ashamed of it."

"Well I'm blessed!"

"The nerve of the fellow!"

"You rotter!" shouted Handforth scathingly.

"I was a rotter—but I hope I am now atoning," replied Travers, with perfect composure. "I tried to put Nipper straight on the point before he went to the wicket, but I hadn't time. So now, before the polling. I want you all to know that the only fair thing for you to do is to wash to-day's match out of your minds. Make your decisions regardless of the match."

"We can't do that!" said De Valerie. "We can't forget things to order, Travers. Besides, what's the good of a skipper who allows his personal feelings to get the better of his play?"

"Hear, hear!"

"That's a jolly good point!" roared Chambers, seizing upon the chance. "Are you going to vote for Nipper? You've heard that Travers schemed a faked rumour, and I needn't say any more about it. But what of it? By what right did Nipper let the side down?"

"He was a weakling!" sang out Hubbard.

"That's the word!" agreed Chambers, getting more and more excited. "He heard a silly rumour that some girl had been killed, and he makes a hopeless hash of his innings. What about the strong man now? I'm jolly glad that Travers told you about it all—because you can now see that Nipper is no good!"

There was a wild confusion of talk. Cunningly enough, Chambers had touched the vital spot. Of course, it was an entirely false argument. Nipper would have had to be superhuman to have played his innings as though he had heard nothing. But the excited Remove did not trouble to think of that.

"Look here, let me say a word!" shouted Nipper. "I don't admit for a moment that I was weak. I heard that Mary Summers had been killed——"

"And, being in love with her, you went wonky with the shock!" grinned Gore-Pearce.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

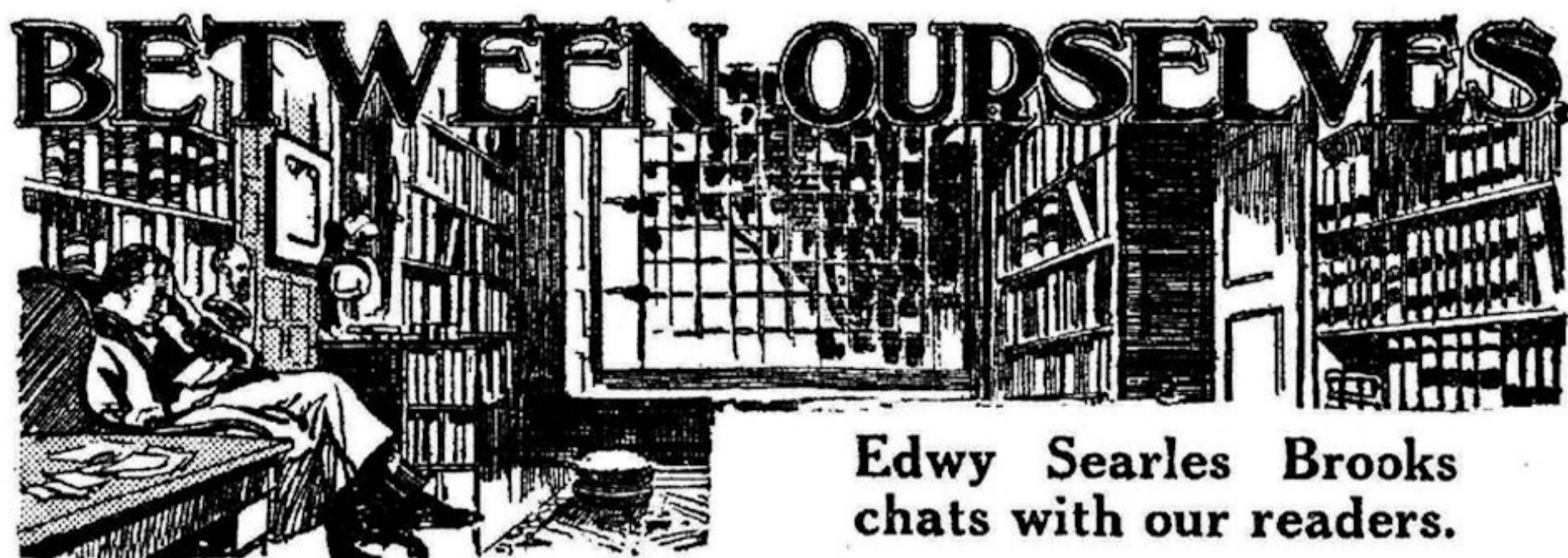
"You cad!" shouted Nipper furiously.

"Hold him, somebody!" said Chambers, as Nipper made a rush towards Gore-Pearce. "What's the good of this? Why waste a lot of time? You all know the facts, and if you want to alter your votes you can do so. We'll give you five minutes by the clock. After that the polling will start."

Nobody thought of questioning Chambers' unwarrantable assumption of authority. There was a good deal of talk, and some of the fellows unfolded their ballot papers, and were uncertain as to whether they should change their minds. But, on the whole, hardly anybody made an alteration. Those juniors who had been influenced by Nipper's bad showing in the match were just as much influenced by the new development.

They held that Nipper, being the captain of the side, should have risen above his per-

(Continued on page 43.)



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.

LONG before you read these lines—
P. Raghavandra Bhat (Calicut, India)
—I shall have finished writing a series about India. They will probably be starting within a week or two of the present issue. But, of course, I leave it to the Editor to make the usual announcements.

* * *

Quite a number of you have been asking me to write a Holiday Series with India as the background, so I've "been an' gorn an' done it." But if all our Indian readers expect me to confine my tales to such places as Bombay and Calcutta they'll get a shock. These stories will be about Hussi Ranjit Lal Kahn, and his far-off country of Kurpana. Needless to say, the St. Frank's chaps and the Moor View girls will meet with all sorts of exciting adventures. Lord Dorrimore will be very much to the fore, too.

* * *

Your inquiry, Charles F. J. Dainty (Edinburgh), should be addressed to the Editor. And, if you ask him very nicely, I expect he will tell you everything you want to know about the illustrations in the Old Paper.

* * *

Your letter, Ken Gray (Melbourne), was real "dinkum oil," as you might say yourself. Thanks muchly for the newspapers, and for your graphic description of the heavy thunderstorm that you experienced. But you mustn't imagine that we don't get similar storms over here. Happily, they're few and far between, but now and again day will be turned into night, and we'll have torrential rain and terrific lightning. Still, we've certainly got the drop on you when it comes to winter-time. We *do* get snow occasionally. This last winter, in fact, we had an enormously heavy dose, when many of our main roads were utterly impassable for days. I dare say you would have revelled in it, but we didn't think so much of it. Snow and frost are jolly fine if you've only tobogganing and skating to think about; but when

you want to get about your business, and you find the roads blocked, you're inclined to regard snow as the very dickens of a nuisance. In a word, it all depends upon the point of view.

* * *

Thanks for your description of the Australian type of football—Maurice Garrett (Geelong East). Naturally, you and all other Australians swear by your own game. Just as naturally, Association supporters swear by Soccer; and Rugby enthusiasts think that every other kind of football is rotten. It's just a question of each to his own taste. I'm a Soccer "fan," and by making this statement I shall probably give you a pain, Maurice. But then, I've never seen the Australian game; and what the eye doesn't see, the heart doesn't grieve about.

* * *

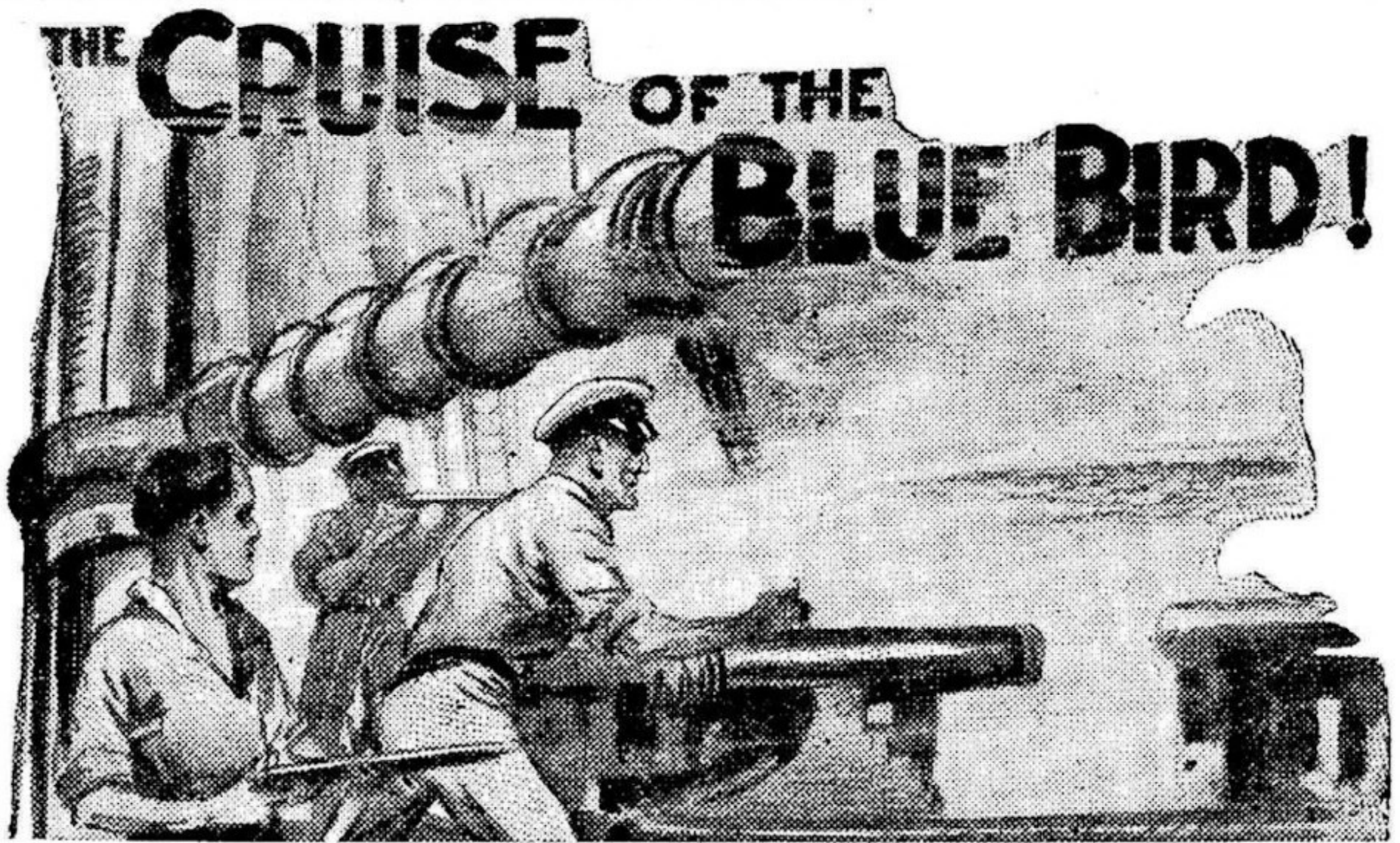
I agree with you—"Disgusted" (Stapleford Abbots)—that an overdose of betting, like smoking, is harmful. I don't think that any youth should indulge in betting, even in small doses. When he's a man, he's his own master, and if he likes to be a chump with his money, it's his own concern.

* * *

I think it would be a good idea if you all made a point, when signing your names to your letters, of writing in full the Christian name by which you are usually addressed. Then, if you give your full name, in print characters, somewhere in your letter (give your age as well, if you like), I shall know whether you are a boy or a girl, a man or a woman, and I shan't be liable to make a bloomer in addressing you. Don't forget, will you? Thanks!

Edwy Searles Brooks

SOUTH SEAS ADVENTURE YARN!



By COUTTS BRISBANE

WHAT'S ALREADY HAPPENED:

CAPTAIN MANBY is skipper of the schooner Blue Bird, which is lying at anchor in the lagoon of Graden Island, in the Southern Pacific. He is accompanied by his son

JACK MANBY, and his nephew

NED SUTTON, two adventure-loving boys. From a native Captain Manby has learned that in the Malea atolls is an uncharted island—supposed to be practically inaccessible—the lagoon of which is full of pearl shell. The captain intends to try and find

this unknown island, but just at present he is having trouble with a blackbirder—a vessel which visits islands and recruits native labour by force—which has come to Graden Island. Manby learns from Ned and Jack that, under cover of darkness, the crew of this vessel, called the Pangolin, has gone ashore. He sends a man named Hutton on to the island to collect the natives, then himself follows with the majority of the Blue Bird's crew.

(Now read on.)

The Signal!

FROM the shore came faint sounds of many feet which quickly died away as Hutton and Mitchie led the now repentant Solomon labourers away through the palm grove at speed. For several minutes no sound but the faint plash of oars broke the night silence. Captain Manby's party were near the head of the lagoon now. Any moment might show the blackbirders' boats ahead. Then, without any warning, there came the sound of a shot, a ragged volley, and a wild yell of fury and terror.

A red fire blazed up suddenly ahead, showing dark figures silhouetted against it. More shots, more yelling, then the rattle of an automatic pistol and the voice of Hutton from

the trees calling to his fellows to be steady. A line of white showed ahead. It was the beach at the head of the lagoon, and a few moments later the boats containing the Blue Bird's party ran their bows upon it. Out tumbled the crews, ran the boats up, grabbed their rifles, and would have rushed forward had not Manby's voice steadied them.

"Get in line there. No firing till I give the word. Follow close. Ah, there they are!"

The fire which had been lighted at the first alarm flared brighter, showing the roofs of the village behind it, and a compact body of men—obviously the raiders from the blackbirder, Pangolin—moving swiftly forward, evidently with the intention of getting behind the huts.

The "blackbirders" may be a tough lot . . . but the "Blue Birders" are tougher still.

Came a rush of dark forms—Solomon Islanders—from the grove, knives glinting in the firelight. The raiders halted, let fly a volley that dropped several of the leaping figures and drove the others back pell mell.

"Lie down when they fire!" howled Hutton from the darkness to the Solomon Islanders.

"Take good aim, men. Fire!" shouted Manby, and set the example.

Many of the bullets went wide, but none the less, several of the raiders fell. Up rose a dreadful yell of surprise. The men of the Pangolin, having doubtless discovered the fraud put upon them by Manby, had made the old error of despising their enemy, and now they were to pay for it.

They had taken it for granted that they would fall upon a sleeping village, and so be able to capture many of the inhabitants as they straggled out, half asleep and wholly bewildered. Instead, they were themselves surprised by the sudden blast of lead from their rear, while out of the darkness of the grove on their flank rose the wild howling of the Solomon men, eager to be at close grips with them.

There was but one thing to do—retreat while they could. They faced round, located the enemy in their rear by the flashes of the rifles, and blazed away in return. Billy Cheese, yelling and firing beside Jack and Ned, screamed shrilly and dropped with a bullet through his leg; Corky Sam, a quiet man who seldom opened his mouth, fell on his face, shot through the heart.

"Lie down! Blaze away, but don't waste a shot!" roared Manby.

The men from the Blue Bird obeyed, but at that moment the fire died down and the raiders were lost to view. Somewhere in the darkness their feet thudded upon the coral, then Hutton's men, with a thundering roar, broke from his discipline and came raging on. Some distance along the beach a fresh burst of rifle fire blazed out, checking their rush. Then followed the plash of oars.

"They're getting away!" shouted Manby. "Hutton! Keep your fools in hand! We can't fire because of them."

"Can't!" bawled Hutton in reply. "They're all over the shop. Where are you?"

"Here! Back to the boats, men! We must get after them, Hutton."

Shouting orders, he herded his crew back to the boats. They were run into the water, the men got aboard. Wildly yelling, the Solomon men came prancing along the beach. They were too excited to distinguish friend from foe, but fortunately the boats began to move before they came up, and though a spear or two came hurtling through the air, they did no damage.

"Give way, men! Pull for all you're worth!" roared Captain Manby.

But already the raiders were gone from hearing—and even as the boats gathered speed, down came a heavy shower of rain, while a furious blast of wind, first squall of the coming gale, beat down upon them.

And then, rising high above the noise of

wind and downpour, came the thunderous bellow of the Blue Bird's gun. She was being attacked!

The Attack!

L EFT aboard the schooner with two Kanakas and Ah Moy, Mr. Sinclair, the mate, had had the signal gun run aft. He shoved a bag of nails and an assortment of broken bits of brass and iron on top of the blank charge, and stood by it, ready to train the gun over either side of the ship.

He sent one man aloft with his rifle and a bunch of blue lights, after ordering him to be ready to light up at a word. Then, with the remaining man and Ah Moy by his side, he leaned over the stern rail.

"Heap big steamah. Heap lot men," remarked Ah Moy pleasantly. "Thley killee us, eh, spousee come aboard?"

"I guess they would, Ah Moy," agreed the mate. "But it's to be hoped they won't want to do that. I guess they'll have other things to think of before the captain's done with them. Hadn't you better take a rifle?"

"No likee shootee. Too muchee noissee. Likee better Chinese knife," replied the yellow man, and waved his razor keen short sword. "Spousee man get alongee thlis, no standee much chance."

"I guess not," muttered Sinclair, for he had examined the sword. In the expert hands of its owner it was calculated to make wounds beyond the power of most men to heal.

"Hello! Hark at that! There they go!"

The sound of the first shots came down the lagoon, followed by a burst of firing. The mate hitched his shoulders impatiently. He had seen a bit of fighting aboard a destroyer during the World War, and, like an old war horse, he wanted to be in it again.

He glanced down the lagoon towards the anchored Pangolin. In addition to her mast-head light, a couple of lights now showed close to the water. They had been lit to guide the returning boats. A plume of smoke, red above the smokestack, showed that her stokers were busy, ready to get under way at a moment's notice.

Sinclair glanced up at his own masthead light, then at the glow on either beam amidships, for Captain Manby had ordered lights to be placed there for his own guidance.

"Reckon they'd be best out," thought Sinclair. "He won't need them—and if those fellows come back disappointed they'll mebbos give us a volley. I'll—"

"Bloatee comee," observed Ah Moy. "Squallee comee. Wet rainnee, he comee, too."

With a swish and a roar the squall broke, but not before Sinclair had seen two dark shapes speeding towards the schooner. Someone howled an order, there came a bump on the port side. With a heave Sinclair swung the muzzle of the gun that way.

"Light up!" he roared to the man aloft.

A rifle flashed from the water, a bullet whizzed uncomfortably close to his head; and then the blue light's ghastly flare gleamed down through the sheet of rain and showed a boat alongside, while another sped towards the steamer.

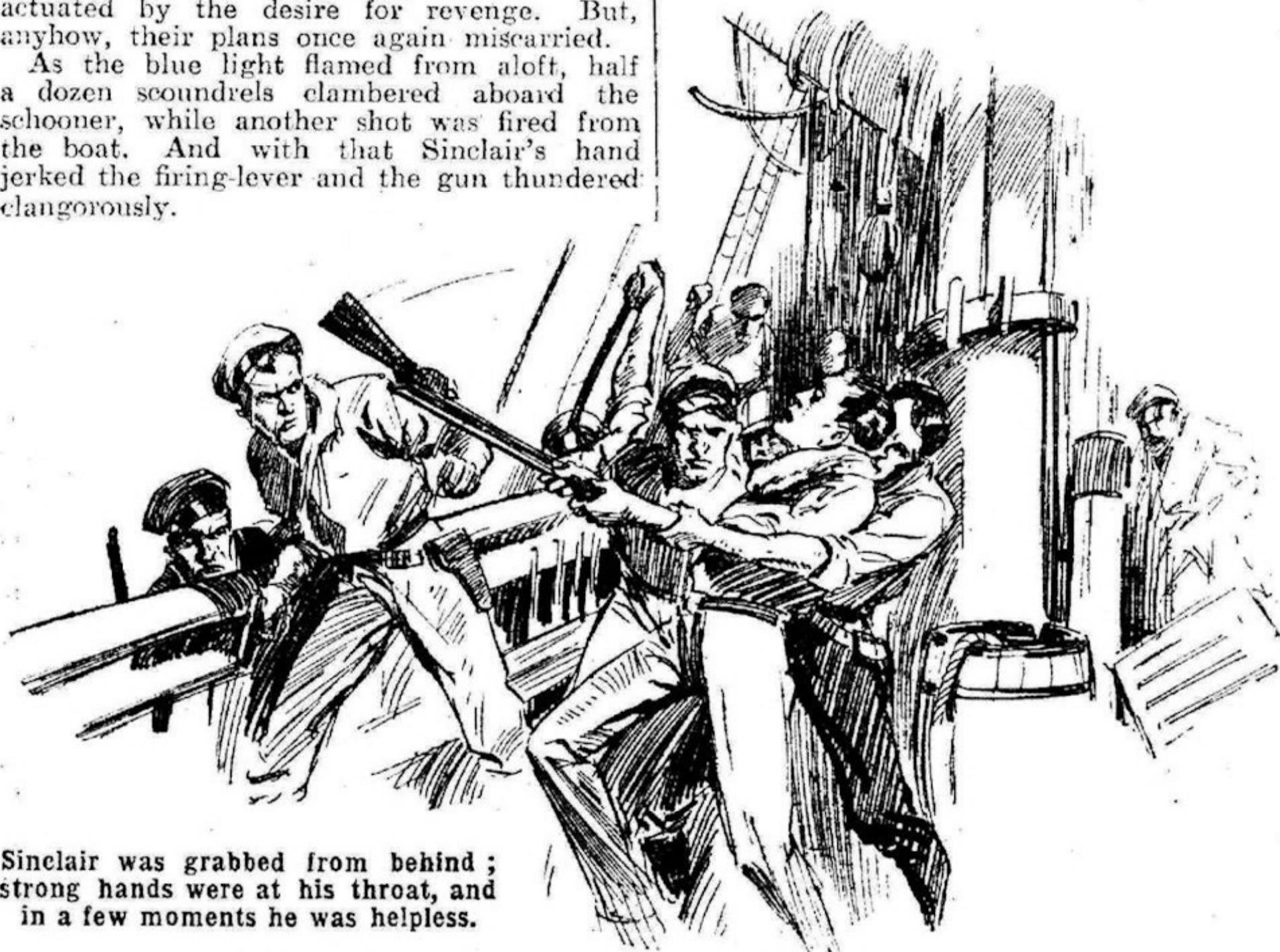
Doubtless the blackbirders had thought to capture whoever had been left aboard the schooner, and so secure hostages who might be exchanged at a good rate, for money or provisions, or perhaps they were merely actuated by the desire for revenge. But, anyhow, their plans once again miscarried.

As the blue light flamed from aloft, half a dozen scoundrels clambered aboard the schooner, while another shot was fired from the boat. And with that Sinclair's hand jerked the firing-lever and the gun thundered clangorously.

He was gripped, thrown down. Strong hands were at his throat, someone who held an arm slipped handcuffs over the wrist and clicked one half-shut. He freed himself for a moment, was caught again.

"I'm for it," he thought. "If the captain doesn't come quick I——"

A man screamed shrilly, there was the heavy thud of a falling body—Ah Moy was busy with that terrible knife of his!



Sinclair was grabbed from behind; strong hands were at his throat, and in a few moments he was helpless.

The range was a bare thirty feet, the charge beautifully suited for its work. The blast of nails and scrap iron took effect amongst the boarders, hurling one into the water and wounding every one of them, so that the deck was suddenly strewn with fallen men.

The sudden and terrific discharge was enough to have discouraged much braver men than these scourgings of tropical ports, but the skipper of the Pangolin was desperate. He needed a prisoner or two to bargain with if he was to stay in the port at all, for he had no notion that the gun which made such a terrific din was in reality but very little use except at close quarters. With a howl of rage he leaped aboard, driving the rest of the boat's crew before him.

Sinclair fired his rifle into the middle of them, winging one man as they charged at him, fired a second shot and missed as a thrown knife lanced his arm, then, regardless of his wound, clubbed the weapon and smashed the butt on the head of the foremost of the attackers as they closed, yelling.

An awful yell, a shot, then another heavy fall. The man aloft had lit a second blue light. In the augmented blaze Sinclair, throwing off the suddenly relaxing hands of the man who held him, looked round and saw Ah Moy; the Chinese cook was taking grim toll of the enemy.

Ah Moy was perhaps no fighting man. Very wisely he disliked the chance of getting hurt. Even as the raiders appeared and the gun had roared, Ah Moy had made a flank movement which brought him round the after-cabin hatch to the rear of the second party. Then, as they all flung themselves upon the mate, he had brought his terrible short sword into action.

Coming as this attack did, silently, efficiently, it broke the nerve of the scoundrels. Two of them were down, a third reeled across the deck, stumbled over the rail broken by the discharge of the cannon and fell into the lagoon. With that the others went over-side also, dropping into their boat.

A spurt of flame from further up the lagoon, a whistle of bullets, told that Manby

was returning at speed. But no speed he could make sufficed to catch the fugitives. The bitter fear of death urged them to amazing efforts. Their boat shot away and was swallowed up in darkness as Captain Manby came alongside his vessel and sprang aboard. The man aloft lit yet another blue light, disclosing the deck as a shambles.

"They—they came aboard, and I gave them a dose of the nail medicine, sir," said Mr. Sinclair hoarsely, for his throat was swollen from mishandling. "And Ah Moy settled some of them."

He stopped, staring at his bleeding forearm. He hadn't felt the wound in the heat of action. Now it pained him. He remembered the second Kanaka boy, who had done nothing in the fight, and looked round, to see him sitting on the deck trying to bind up a wound in his leg.

"Good work, Ah Moy. Good work, Mr. Sinclair!" said Manby. "Sit down, man. You're hurt. Here, boys, tumble up and help. I'll be back in a minute, Sinclair. I must go after those fellows and——"

"They're moving, dad!" cried Jack, who had come on board. "Look at her lights!"

Whoever had survived to command the steamer had evidently resolved to put to sea, despite the rising wind. Probably the blackbirders thought that no storm could be more dangerous than the terrible men of the Blue Bird, who might be running alongside at any moment and driving them from their dirty decks. In a wild panic they got up their anchor, which had been hauled short, and with flaming funnel surged out to sea.

Those aboard the Blue Bird saw her toss as she encountered the first of the swells, then go heaving away. She seemed to round the end of the outer reef in safety, then was lost to view.

"If she comes to grief there'll be no tears spilled over her," said Captain Manby, and turned away, snapping orders.

The wounded had to be attended to first. The big cabin was converted into a surgery, and there the skipper got busy, with Ah Moy and the boys as assistants.

Mr. Sinclair's wound proved to be but slight. It was far otherwise with the four men of the Pangolin. They had been peppered with nails at short range, and though Manby cleansed the wounds and extracted the missiles, recovery would take time.

"And then you'll have the pleasure of staying in gaol," he explained to them in scrappy Spanish and French. "For I'm taking you along to a judge who'll give you your deserts."

Then he turned to those of his own men who needed attention, and made them comfortable. None was very badly hurt, though three would not be fit for duty for some weeks. And one poor fellow, Corky Sam, lay on the beach at the head of the lagoon where he had fallen with a bullet through his heart.

About an hour after the Pangolin had gone out into the rising storm, Hutton and Mitchie

came aboard and sat wearily down as Ah Moy, assisted by a couple of the crew, cleared the cabin.

"I don't think those brutes are likely to come back here again in a hurry. There were three dropped ashore. The Solomon boys finished them, and they lost more here beside the wounded prisoners you have," said Hutton, when he heard what had happened on the Blue Bird. "No, I guess they've had their lesson. We've had a fierce time with our labourers. They got right out of hand, and would have run amok in the native village if we hadn't managed to stop them. We had to give them some baccy to celebrate their glorious victory, though they didn't do very much. Two are dead and three wounded, but I think they'll be good now. And since we've had a hard evening, I guess we'll call it a day. You won't be able to sail to-morrow, so we'll say good-night."

The two returned to their bungalow. Captain Manby went round the ship, saw that the wounded were comfortable, set the watch and returned to the cabin.

The boys, wearied out, had dropped asleep in their chairs. He roused them and sent them to their bunks, but for a while he stayed awake, listening to the sound of the hurricane that was now raging.

Inside the lagoon the schooner rode comfortably at her anchor. Outside the tempest beat the sea in a wild fury. As he dropped asleep Manby half-remembered Hutton's words.

"I guess you are right," he muttered. "Those blackbirders aren't likely to come back to Graden Island—at least, not alive."

—

Their Just Deserts!

CAPTAIN Manby was early astir. The gale was blowing with even greater violence, and during the dark hours it had swung about, till now it was blowing almost directly from the opposite quarter to that in which it started. Great breakers were thundering on the reef that fenced the lagoon, sending showers of spray flying across to spatter the wavelets within. The palm-trees bent before the blast like whip-staves, while the wind in the schooner's rigging was like the music of some huge harp.

Manby went aloft with his glasses, to be followed a few moments later by the two boys, who, hearing him stirring, had ventured out. They clung to the rigging, flattened to the stays by the violence of the wind, standing just below the captain while he slowly scanned the horizon.

Presently he shouted something that was lost in the din, then pointed to a spot away beyond the outer reef. He handed his glasses to Ned. Adjusting the focus, the boy stared in the direction indicated. The sea was whipped to a level sheet of curdling grey-white foam, with the dark teeth of the

reef showing at intervals. Beyond, the sea stretched away and away till it was lost in foam mist. But at the farthest verge was something dark; something that moved, that grew rapidly larger, that took on shape as it came nearer.

"I—can't make it out! A ship, is it?" cried Ned.

Captain Manby read his lips and nodded.

"Pangolin!" he shouted. His trained seaman's eyes had picked up certain details in that apparently shapeless blur and identified them while Ned was still uncertain whether the thing he saw were a ship or not.

The steamer was now a battered wreck. Her funnel and masts were gone, her big deck cabin was being swept at every surge, but her builders must have put honest work into her, for she still rode high upon the mountainous waves despite the terrible battering she was enduring. She was coming on stern first, her deck cabin serving as a sort of sail, and this alone prevented her from falling, broadside on, in the trough of a wave and being rolled over and under.

There was a movement on the Blue Bird's deck. The watchman had seen the captain and the boys go aloft. Then he had sighted what they were looking at, and the word had passed. The crew came on deck by ones and twos, and gathered in the fore rigging. Mr. Sinclair, his arm bandaged, came up the after rigging and swung himself to a perch beside the captain. In silence everyone watched the oncoming vessel.

She had cleared the outer reef by a very narrow margin. It was as if the powers of ocean were bringing her back to the scene of her last crime against humanity. If the tide had been making it would have been just possible that the incoming water would have sucked her through the gateway of the lagoon; but now it was ebbing, and the opening was a battlefield of opposing forces. Cross-seas leapt and swirled there, beating upon the coral pillars that were the gateposts with appalling violence.

On came the doomed ship. She was opposite the gateway now, but a bare dozen cable-lengths from safety. A cross current caught her, swirled her round like a top. A huge sea rolled in, and over she went. For an instant she wallowed in the trough, then another wave caught her, tossed her up as though her two thousand tons had been but a featherweight, and with a crash that sounded high above the roaring of the waters and the wind, hurled her upon the outer side of the reef.

For a few moments her stern showed above it, then it slid down into the awful cauldron of deep water. The Pangolin, with her guilty crew, was gone!

No one moved for a little while. Jack and Ned looked at each other with awed faces. The crew of the ship had been scoundrels who had ruthlessly dealt out misery and death for years, yet this awful end, just though it was, made the boys pitiful. Cap-

tain Manby turned to them at last, motioning to them to descend.

"A terrible sight, boys," he said, when they were all four in the cabin. "But don't forget it was a better end than they would have come to otherwise. The rope would have had them sooner or later."

"And it's an end that many an honest sailor man has come to," added Sinclair.

"Isn't there a chance that one or two of them might have come ashore?" asked Jack in a flat voice.

"Not an earthly. If they weren't drowned at once or smashed on the reef—well, the lagoon was full of sharks driven in by the heavy weather—and it's empty of them now," said Sinclair. "So the best thing you can do is to forget it. Any orders, sir?" Sinclair added, turning to Manby.

"No. We sail when the storm's over, first to Bauro, to hand over those prisoners and make a report of all that has happened here, then we'll make for Malea."

As the captain mentioned the last word, Jack and Ned leapt to their feet excitedly. They knew, of course, of the pearl shell that was supposed to be there, and they had impatiently been wondering when Captain Manby intended to start on the trip—the "fortune-hunting trip!" as Ned put it.

"By Jove, that's good news!" he exclaimed now, looking at his uncle. "And do you think that this pearl shell is really there!" he added.

Manby nodded.

"I'm sure it is," he said.

"It'll be touch and go, but I reckon the luck is due to change for you, sir," put in Sinclair. "We've had a rough passage so far. Now we're going to have the smooth—you see if we don't!"

And with a happy smile, Sinclair went out to prepare for sailing.

(Next week finds them well on the way to the Malea atolls—and fortune! There are many wonderful adventures in store for Captain Manby and the two boys, and you'll be well advised not to miss a single chapter of this ripping serial.)



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Early Adventures at St. Frank's.

By the way, one of these five stories deals with the early adventures of Nipper and his cheery chums at St. Frank's. They've been appearing every week for some time now, and many, many NELSON LEE-ITES have written me telling me how they appreciate them. Edwy Searles Brooks is, of course, the author, and—well, that's enough said, what?

Slip round to your newsagent now, lads, and ask for "The Popular."

Easy Swimming Strokes.

A reader in County Cork asks about swimming. He can't swim like a cork—not yet; a few strokes, then he gets muddled. He is evidently concentrating too much on the strokes. He keeps his body too stiff. A stiffened body always weighs more, and is therefore far more difficult to control in the water. He must make up his mind to take easy strokes—just sprawling his body about in the water. He will find that little swimming instinct which is in most of us, and which gets swamped by book work, takes

the lead. Relax the limbs and swimming will be the easiest thing in the world. Concentrating on special movements is much like a fellow handicapping himself with rules of grammar when he is speaking a language.

Navvies and Navies.

A Birmingham chum asks where the word "Navy" comes from. It is from navis, a ship, so far as that goes. The navy, with his big biceps, got his name from the fact that the navy worked at inland navigation, otherwise the canals.

A Menagerie at Home.

How's this for a bit of excitement? Ronald Mason writes from Melbourne to say that at his home there is a paddock containing four tailabies, a cockatoo, a bear and a magpie. There must be a fair shindy when they all get chatty.

A Bit Thin.

A Manchester chum complains bitterly that he is far too tall, and thin to boot. What is he to do about it? The answer is—nix. People laugh. Let 'em. When the grouser has filled out a bit, folks will say, "See that tall and handsome, well-proportioned fellow. Wish we were his build."

An anonymous reader at Croydon asks me if "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde" is a fit book for him to read, and who wrote it, anyway? Robert Louis Stevenson is the author. The story is a real gripper. I am sure my chum will get a thrill.

CORRESPONDENTS WANTED.

John Levy, 3, Hollywood Avenue, Southwick, Sunderland, would like to hear from Sunderland and district members. He apologises to all who wrote to him for absence of replies, but he mislaid addresses, and would like to hear again.

Charles H. Dalton, 80, Blatchington Road, Hove, Sussex, wishes to correspond with readers. All letters answered.



(Continued from page 35.)

sonal feelings. And, as he hadn't risen, he wasn't worth voting for. So Vivian Travers' effort to undo the harm was futile.

Then came the polling.

It was a long, confused business, with everything going wrong. Twice the ballot-box was lost in the crowd, and no less than three juniors were more or less knocked out—Handforth being responsible for five black eyes within the space of five minutes.

However, in the end, every ballot paper was obtained, and then came the business of sorting out the votes and counting them.

This was another long, confused affair. The trouble was, everybody wanted to join in. A special committee had been appointed, but this was forgotten in the general excitement. Finally, in order to obtain some sort of definite result, a neutral committee was brought in.

The ballot papers were handed over to Bob Christine and Buster Boots, of the Fourth. They, being disinterested parties, counted the votes and sorted them out in about thirty-five seconds. The Remove, in the meantime, waited in a fever of impatience.

"Here's the result!" sang out Buster Boots, as he strode towards the edge of the platform with a piece of paper in his hand. "Can't understand why you fellows made such a fuss over it!"

"Never mind that—what's the result?"

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New Series No. 115.

"Yes, let's have it, Boots!"

"Who's won?"

Buster Boots took a deep breath, looked round, and shook his head.

"Of course, I knew that you Remove fellows were half-wits and imbeciles, but I never thought you were so dotty as this!" he said candidly. "I'm jiggered if you haven't elected Chambers as skipper!"

The shouts of anger against the Fourth-Former were changed to cheers from Chambers' supporters.

"And here are the figures!" yelled Boots. "Chambers, 23; Nipper, 20; Handforth, 2—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Good old Church and McClure!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Handforth reeled.

"Two!" he hooted. "Rats! Rot! There must be a mistake! I demand a recount! In fact, I demand another election!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

As a matter of fact, the votes were re-counted half a dozen times, but nothing could alter the original finding. Cuthbert Chambers had beaten Nipper by three votes. Even if Church and McClure had voted for Nipper, Chambers would still have won.

So, at least, Church and McClure had the satisfaction of knowing that their loyalty to their leader had not brought about Nipper's defeat.

And that evening the Remove tried to settle itself down. The election was over, and Cuthbert Chambers was "in." The Remove was now wondering how long it would be before its new skipper put his novel scheme of income tax into practice.

THE END.

(Chambers has achieved his ambition and now he's captain of the Remove. In next week's yarn, entitled "The Split in the Remove!" you'll read of his startling efforts as leader of the Form!)



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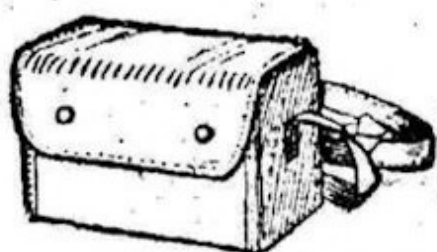
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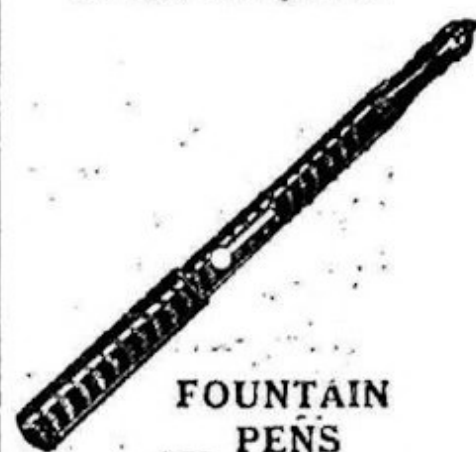
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