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THE SCHOOLBOY CHANNEL SWIMMER!

A rousing long complete school and adventure yarn featuring the Chums of St. Frank's.

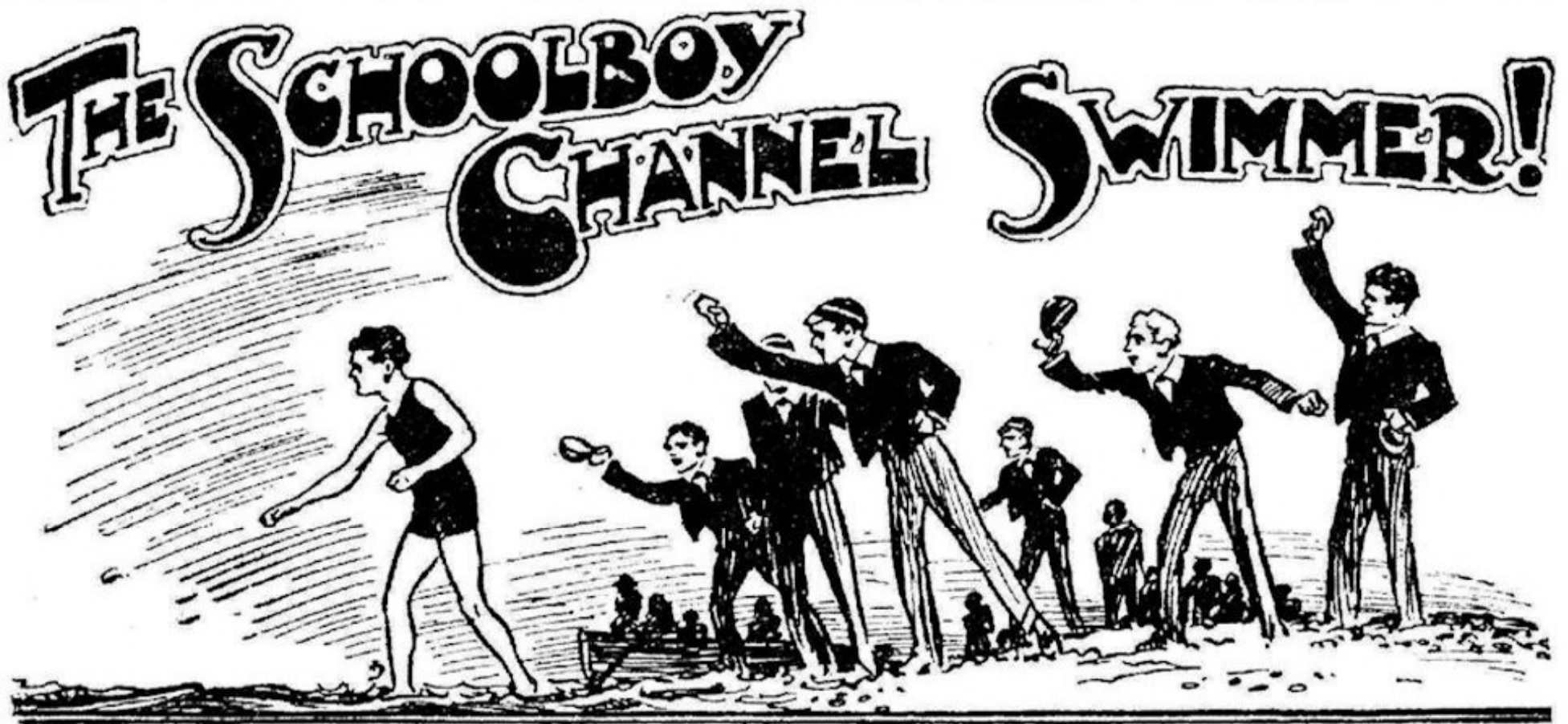
New Series No. 111.

OUT ON WEDNESDAY

June 16th, 1928.



As the motor yacht, with Tom Burton on board, slid gracefully across the harbour, the hundreds of people lining the quay cheered and waved their handkerchiefs enthusiastically.

The Race Across the Channel!A Story that Abounds in Thrills!

By EDWY SEARLES BROOKS

Grown men have attempted to swim the Channel and have failed, but that makes no difference to Tom Burton, the fifteen-years-old schoolboy at St. Frank's—he's out to try his luck, and if grit and determination stand for anything, Tom is certain to put up a good "show."—Ed.

CHAPTER 1.

Off His Rocker!

"ANYTHING the matter, Bo'sun?"

Alan Castleton, of the West House at St. Frank's, gazed at Tom Burton with mild astonishment. It was a fine June morning, and quite a large number of fellows were out in the Triangle sunning themselves before lessons.

"Deaf?" asked Castleton amusedly.

Tom Burton—better known in the Remove as the "Bo'sun"—took absolutely no notice. He was leaning against the doorway of the West House, staring dreamily across the Triangle. His sunny, good-natured face was flushed, and he was evidently "far away."

"Chuck it, Bo'sun!" said Castleton. "What's the matter with you, man?"

But still Burton took no notice. Alan Castleton was one of his study mates—the dreamy Lord Pippington was the other—and it was most unusual for the Bo'sun to be in this abstracted condition.

Until fairly recently, he had belonged to the Ancient House, but now he was one of Reggie Pitt's staunch brigade, and the West House was the richer. For this bluff, big-limbed son of Captain Burton was one of the best.

Finding that words were useless, Castleton tried deeds. He dug Tom Burton in the ribs.

"Ouch!" gasped the Bo'sun, with a violent start.

"I thought that would do it!" grinned Castleton. "Wake up, Bo'sun! Are you catching Old Pippy's complaint?"

"Swab my decks!" ejaculated Burton, staring. "Oh, it's you, shipmate!"

"Yes, it's me!" nodded Castleton. "What's the idea of staring into nothingness, the same as Old Pippy does? Is there anything on your mind?"

Tom Burton's eyes were alight with excitement.

"Yes, by scuppers!" he replied promptly. "I'm going to try it, Castleton!"

"Eh?"

"I'm going to try it!"

"That's fine!" said Castleton politely. "But what are you going to try? Is this a joke? Is it a conun-ca-diddle thing, as the wireless chap says? If so, I'll buy it!"

But Tom Burton wasn't listening.

"Souise me for a lubber!" he ejaculated tensely. "I'm going to have a shot at it! It's a chance in a thousand!"

He walked down the West House steps, and strode across the Triangle, leaving Alan Castleton puzzled and wondering.

"Dotty!" said Alan, shaking his head.

Tom Burton was walking straight on, and he barged straight into Nipper and Tregellis-West and Watson, of the Ancient House. The cheery chums of Study C were chatting with Pitt & Co.—the subject, of course, being cricket. Tom Burton walked right through them, as a lawn mower cuts through a clump of weeds.

"Don't mention it!" said Nipper gracefully.

"Here, I say, Bo'sun!" protested Reggie Pitt. "What the dickens do you think you're doing?"

Burton came to a halt, and turned.

"I'm going to have a shot at it!" he said triumphantly. "Think of it, shipmates!"

Pitt grinned.

"Give us something to think about, and we'll oblige!" he said. "In other words, O oracle, what the dickens are you getting at?"

Alan Castleton came up.

"We'd better grab him, and make him speak!" he suggested. "I've been trying to get him to explain, but it's no good. All he says is that he's going to have a shot at it!"

"Souise me, and so I am!" said the Bo'sun excitedly. "A thousand pounds, messmates!"

"My only hat!"

"Begad!"

"Yes, a thousand!" repeated Burton tensely. "I'm not saying that I shall succeed—but you never know your luck! And nobody ever does anything unless he tries!"

"That's true enough," said Nipper. "In about one minute we shall probably try to bump you, Bo'sun—and the chances are that we shall succeed!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Burton was getting more and more excited.

"I tell you, it's a chance!" he shouted. "Of course, it's a jolly long way—but I'm a good swimmer."

"A good swimmer?" gasped Castleton. "Great Scott! He's getting into deeper water than ever!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's not my way to brag, but why shouldn't I try my luck?" demanded Tom Burton, glaring at the other juniors. "You'll all admit that I can swim, won't you?"

"Oh, rather!"

"We don't need telling that, Bo'sun, old man," said Nipper, smiling. "The way you swam from the Gull Sands to Caistowe—a distance of over five miles—last week was wonderful. And you did it without turning a hair!"

"Begad, rather!" agreed Sir Montie Tregellis-West. "It was a frightfully wonderful thing, Bo'sun—it was, really!"

"Hear, hear!"

All the juniors were ready to agree on this point. Tom Burton's recent swim from the Gull Sands to the mainland was still the talk of the common-rooms at St. Frank's; everybody knew that his great effort had saved the lives of the party that had been marooned on the sandbank.

"Of course, I may be wrong," said Burton, taking a deep breath. "But why shouldn't I have a try?"

"A try at what?" yelled half a dozen voices.

"Why shouldn't I make a big effort to get hold of this thousand-pound prize?" demanded Tom. "After all, I'm a good swimmer, and——"

"Grab him!" said Alan Castleton. "We've had enough of this!"

Tom Burton was seized, and held firmly.

"Souise my scuppers!" he gasped. "Avast there, shipmates!"

"Now, my son!" said Nipper grimly. "Before we go any further, you've got to tell us what you're talking about! What is it that you're going to have a try for?"

"Why, haven't I told you?" asked Burton, in surprise.

"No, you haven't!"

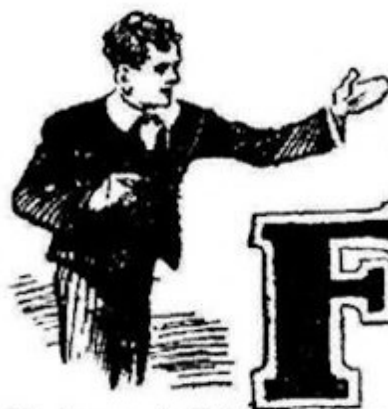
"Well, you can call me a landlubber!" ejaculated the Bo'sun blankly. "I'd forgotten! The fact is, shipmates, I'm going to have a shot at it!"

"At what?" roared the juniors.

"At swimming the Channel, of course!" said Tom Burton.

CHAPTER 2.

The Bo'sun's Ambition!



FOR a moment there was an amazed silence. A number of other juniors had collected round, and they had all heard Tom Burton's astonishing words.

"The Channel?" repeated Nipper. "Which channel?"

"The English Channel, of course," said Tom.

"You're—you're going to have a shot at swimming the Channel?" yelled Castleton.

"That's the idea, messmate!" nodded Tom Burton.

There was another momentary silence, and then it was broken by a prolonged yell of laughter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, my giddy aunt!"

"The Bo'sun's clean off his rocker!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The crowd grew bigger, and Tom Burton stood in the middle of it, flushed and indignant. Everybody was shouting with laughter.

"Oh, Bo'sun, it's the first time we knew that you were a comedian!" gasped Reggie Pitt. "And it's a jolly good joke, too!"

The Bo'sun glared at him.

"It isn't a joke!" he thundered. "I mean it!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I tell you I'm going to have a shot at it," hooted Burton.

His vehemence was so great, his indignation so obvious, that the juniors ceased their laughter.

"He means it!" said Reggie Pitt wonderingly. "Silence, O empty heads, while the great man explains the reason for his temporary insanity!"

Tom Burton flushed deeply.

"Swill my maindeck!" he growled. "I don't want you lubbers to think that I'm boasting about what I can do——"

"We don't think that, Bo'sun, old man," put in Nipper gently.

"Then why are you laughing at me?"

"Eh? Oh, because——" Nipper paused. "The fact is, it seems rather funny," he said genially. "Sorry to upset you, Bo'sun, but we couldn't help cackling. We didn't know you were such an optimist."

"Perhaps I am optimistic!" admitted Tom Burton gruffly. "Maybe I'm a fool for thinking that I can swim the Channel. But there's one thing thundering certain—I shan't swim the Channel if I don't try!"

"Nothing venture, nothing win!" murmured Reggie Pitt.

"Yes, by scuppers, and I've got a chance of winning a thousand pounds!" said the Bo'sun, his eyes gleaming anew. "A thousand pounds, shipmates!"

"What?"

"A thousand quid!"

"Cheese it, Bos'un!"

"Don't you believe me?" said Burton aggressively. "All right! Look at this!"

He pulled something out of his pocket—the crumpled front page of a newspaper. It was one of the big London dailies, and it was that very morning's issue.

"Look at this!" said the Bo'sun, pointing.

He opened the sheet and held it out, and right across the page was the legend, in big type: "Our One Thousand Pound Offer to Young Channel Aspirants."

"You needn't trouble to read it," said Burton, his voice trembling with excitement. "I can tell you the whole thing in half a dozen words. This paper is offering a prize of a thousand pounds to the first British boy or girl under twenty who can beat the existing Channel record!"

"Well, I'm jiggered!"

"And I'm under twenty!" said Burton grimly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Considerably under twenty!" nodded Nipper, with a chuckle. "You're only about fifteen, my son."

"Well, what about Gertrude Ederle?" demanded the Bo'sun promptly. "She's an

American girl—and she swam the Channel and broke all records, and she wasn't out of her teens when she did it! And if an American girl can swim the Channel, why shouldn't I have a try?"

Nipper became thoughtful.

"Of course, lots of people are having a shot at it this summer," he said slowly. "Plenty of youngsters, too. At the rate things are going, they'll soon have to alter the course of the cross-Channel steamers, because the Straits of Dover are becoming littered with Channel swimmers."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There's my uncle, too!" said Tom Burton eagerly.

"Your uncle?"

"By gad, yes!" said Castleton, nodding. "Don't you remember? The Bo'sun was worried about his uncle last week, and he's still worried."

"Uncle Steve!" said the Bo'sun, nodding.

"He's in business in Southampton, isn't he?" asked Nipper.

"That's it, shipmate," said Burton. "He's been having a pretty hard time of it, and he's liable to go into bankruptcy unless he gets some capital. The trouble is he can't find the necessary security. But, souse me! If I can only win this thousand pound prize I'll invest it in Uncle Steve's business, and everything will be all right!"

"Good man!" said Reggie Pitt heartily. "I admire you for your pluck!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Cheese it!" growled Burton, turning red. "There's nothing plucky about it. But here's a chance to win a big prize, and that's a big incentive. If only I can help my uncle's business I shall feel that I've swum the Channel for something worth while. And I'm certain that the investment will be a sound one. I don't want any securities from Uncle Steve!"

The juniors could not help admiring the Bo'sun's simple faith. He had been greatly worried over his uncle's troubles of late, and there wasn't the slightest doubt that his sudden desire to swim the Channel was occasioned by his concern over his uncle's financial difficulties.

If only he could succeed in this swim, and win the prize, he would be able to give his uncle some valuable help. He only wanted to make this attempt to swim the Channel because it might mean the salvation of his uncle. Being modest, the Bo'sun cared little about the glory of the feat. In fact, he hardly gave that aspect a single thought.

"So, messmates, you see how it stands!" said the Bo'sun quietly. "There are no catches about this newspaper offer. Any British youth under twenty can enter for it, and the first one to beat the record will get the thousand pounds. Well, why shouldn't I have a go? I'm game to try!"

"By jingo, you're game enough, old man!" said Reggie Pitt approvingly. "But the great question is—have you any hope of success?"

CHAPTER 3.

Doubts!



NIPPER looked very dubious, and all the other fellows were silent. An elegant figure came strolling up, mildly inquisitive.

"Well, well!" said the newcomer. "What have we here? What is the weighty problem, dear old fellows?"

"It's about the Bo'sun, Travers," said Fullwood. "He's talking about making an attempt to swim the Channel."

"Splendid!" said Vivian Travers promptly. "Good luck to him!"

"You silly ass!" said Tommy Watson. "You don't think he can do it, do you?"

"Why not?"

"Because swimming the Channel is a jolly ticklish job!" retorted Watson.

"Agreed!" said Travers coolly. "But, then, the Bo'sun is the very fellow to tackle a ticklish job. If American girls can swim the Channel, so can British boys! Three cheers for the Union Jack!"

"Idiot!" said Watson tartly.

"Thanks!"

"Well, don't rot, then!"

"Dear old fellow, was I rotting?" murmured Travers. "Is it wrong to be loyal? For once in my misspent life I happen to be serious. Let the Bo'sun go ahead, and jolly good luck to him!"

The other fellows hardly knew how to take Vivian Travers, for he was always inclined to be cynical or jocular.

"Look here, Bo'sun," said Nipper briskly, as he turned to Tom Burton. "We all admire you for your determination——"

"Souse me!" growled the Bo'sun. "I don't want your admiration!"

"But have you considered all the difficulties?" went on Nipper. "I'm the last fellow in the world to try to discourage you. Go ahead, old man, if you think you stand a chance! But isn't it the wise thing to examine all the points?"

"Well, of course," admitted Tom.

"Last week," proceeded Nipper, "you made a gallant swim from the Gull Sands to the coast. It was a distance of five miles, and the sea was pretty rough."

"But he had the tide with him!" put in Jack Grey.

"Nothing can alter the fact, though, that he arrived at Caistowe as fresh as paint," said Nipper. "He did that five miles on his head——"

"And Mr. Fielding told me that I ought to go in for swimming the Channel!" said Burton tensely. "Don't you remember, messmates? Mr. Fielding's a great sportsman, and he knows what he's talking about!"

"Oh!" said Reggie Pitt slowly. "So it was Mr. Fielding who put this idea into your head, was it?"

"Yes!"

"He was probably carried away by enthusiasm," said Fullwood. "For goodness' sake, Bo'sun, be sensible! Everybody knows that Mr. Fielding wasn't really serious."

"Wasn't serious?" repeated the Bo'sun, staring.

"Of course he wasn't!" put in Reggie Pitt. "As Fully says, he was carried away by enthusiasm. He thought you had put up a pretty good swim from the Gull Sands, and he was ass enough to say that you ought to have a shot at swimming the Channel."

"That's it!" said several juniors.

But Tom Burton set his jaw doggedly.

"I don't see why I shouldn't have a try!" he growled.

"Good man!" said Nipper approvingly. "That's the spirit that wins! But, you know, swimming the Channel is very different from swimming from the Gull Sands to the mainland."

"Of course it's different," put in Vivian Travers. "Why tell him that, dear old fellow? It's about twenty-one miles across the Channel, and nearer forty miles of actual swimming, even supposing the currents are favourable. But if the Bo'sun is game, why discourage him?"

"Hang it, I'm not discouraging him!" said Nipper bluntly. "I'm telling him to go ahead. But it's just possible that he hasn't considered all the difficulties. There aren't any treacherous currents off Caistowe. But what about the Channel? Everybody knows that the Straits of Dover is filled with all sorts of cross-currents. Some of the world's champion swimmers have been beaten by them. Men of splendid physique—men of twenty years' experience."

"Yes, and girls have swum the Channel, too!" nodded Travers languidly.

Clang-clang!

The bell for morning school was ringing, and the crowd broke up. Tom Burton went off with Castleton, and the Ancient House fellows drew apart from the others.

Reggie Pitt was frowning as he found himself alone with Jack Grey and Singleton and Goodwin.

"Of course, he's off his chump!" said Pitt gruffly.

"The Bo'sun, you mean?"

"Clean dotty!" said Reggie. "How the dickens can he swim the Channel? What about the expenses? Who's going to back him?"

"Expenses?" repeated Singleton curiously.

"It costs a good bit to make an attempt to swim the Channel," said Reggie Pitt impatiently. "You've got to have a tug, and goodness knows what else! And then there's all the training, too! How is the Bo'sun going to get the time to train? We can't help admiring his spirit, but Nipper

was perfectly right. What about the difficulties?"

"Ay, lad, but Burton's a champion, all the same," said Goodwin firmly.

"But I don't think he'll ever become champion of the Channel," said Pitt, shaking his head. "In fact, we ought to do something about it. We ought to drive this silly idea out of his head. He's already thinking that he stands a chance of winning that thousand pounds, and helping his uncle. It's—it's all wrong! We musn't let him carry on with it."

"But what are we going to do?" asked Singleton, with a smile. "It seems rather off-side to throw cold water on him. He's so jolly keen about it. Besides, we're all ready to admit that he's a pretty marvellous swimmer."

"Yes, I know that," agreed Reggie thoughtfully. "But we've got to save him from himself—we've got to save him from being the laughing stock of the school. He's a West House chap, and it's our job to put things right."

"And how are we going to do it?" asked Jack Grey.

"By going over to Mr. Fielding, and telling him everything," replied Reggie grimly. "A word from Mr. Fielding in the Bo'sun's ear will make him simmer down. It was Mr. Fielding who put the Channel-swimming idea into his head—so Mr. Fielding will have to put it out again!"

And they left it at that, for the clanging of the school bell was very insistent.



CHAPTER 4.

A Surprise!

"READY?" asked Reggie Pitt briskly.

Lessons were over, and as it was a half holiday that day the

juniors had the afternoon to themselves. Reggie Pitt and Jack Grey had just looked into Study S, in the Remove passage in the West House.

"Just coming!" said Alan Castleton.

Castleton was alone in the study—at least, he considered that he was alone. Lord Pippinton was there, but "Old Pippy" was sitting dreamily on the lounge, and he took no interest in the proceedings. Tom Burton had gone off to the river, to indulge in his favourite pastime of swimming.

"We'd better get off, then," said Reggie Pitt. "I wanted Singleton and Goodwin to come, but they're playing in the House match."

Two or three minutes later, Pitt, Grey and Castleton started off on their bicycles. The House match that afternoon was only of secondary importance—the lesser lights were being given a chance—and so the leader of the West House juniors was not required. He was rather glad, for he was free.

The trio made good progress on their ride to Caistowe; and the one subject under discussion, on the way, was Tom Burton's proposed Channel swim.

"We've got to do everything we can to discourage the ass!" said Reggie Pitt firmly. "I hope we shan't be misunderstood. It isn't that we haven't got faith in the Bo'sun. We know he's a marvellous swimmer, and he's as game as they make 'em, too."

"Rather!" said Castleton. "The Bo'sun is as good as gold!"

"But for his own sake we've got to make him put the brake on, eh?" asked Grey.

"That's it!" said Pitt. "In his eagerness, he hasn't thought of the snags. And, as far as I can see, the whole project is bristling with snags. If he goes ahead, he's bound to come a cropper, and then everybody will laugh at him. We want to save him from that fate."

Truth to tell, Reggie Pitt was very concerned about the Bo'sun. Reggie held Tom Burton in very high regard, and he hated the thought of the sunny son of the sea being chipped unmercifully, after his ambitious house of cards had collapsed.

"Yes, snags," repeated Reggie Pitt. "Snags everywhere! First of all, there's the expense."

"A pretty nasty hurdle," said Castleton.

"Only rich people can afford to make an attempt to swim the Channel," said Reggie. "Or, if they aren't rich, they've got to have somebody to back them. There's the expense of training, and the expense of hiring a tug, or a team launch—and plenty other ways of getting rid of ready money, too."

"The poor old Bo'sun hasn't thought of all that," said Grey.

"And what about the Head?" asked Castleton. "In order to attempt a Channel swim, the Bo'sun will have to get special leave; not for a day or two—but for a week or two! And when the Head hears about the affair, he'll jolly soon bring the chopper down."

"That's what I'm afraid of," said Reggie Pitt gruffly. "The Head'll laugh at it, and tell the Bo'sun to get back to his studies! That's why we're going over to Mr. Fielding now—to save poor old Tom from these shocks. A word from Mr. Fielding will do the trick."

"It'll be like magic!" smiled Jack Grey. "I say, why not get Mr. Fielding to come back with us to St. Frank's? Let him have five minutes talk with the Bo'sun, and then we shan't hear anything more about this Channel swimming wheeze."

"That's exactly what we shall try for," said Reggie firmly.

When they got to Caistowe, they were lucky in finding Mr. Fielding at home. As a matter of fact, he was just setting off for the harbour, his intention being to test one of his new motor-boats. Mr. Fielding was an enthusiastic sportsman, and he had plenty of money to indulge his fancies.

"Well, boys, how are you?" he said heartily, as he surveyed the trio. "Got over your experience of last week?"

"Yes, rather, sir!"

"That's good!" said Mr. Fielding. "How's the youngster who was injured?"

"You mean Archie Glenthorne?" said Pitt. "Oh, he's about again, sir. Limps a bit, but he's practically himself."

"Splendid!"

"To tell you the truth, sir, we came over this afternoon especially to see you about last week's affair," said Pitt pointedly. "You remember how Tom Burton swam from the Gull Sands to Caistowe? You came to our rescue in your motor-boat, and

"Ah, a wonderful swim," nodded Mr. Fielding enthusiastically. "By gad! I haven't got over it yet! That boy is a marvel!"

They were standing on the gravel path, outside Mr. Fielding's house, and he now led the way across the green lawn to a garden seat. He sat down, and lighted a cigar.

"Yes, that boy's a wonder!" he said firmly. "He saved your lives on that day, by his gallant swim."

"We know that, sir," said Pitt quietly. "But something you said to Burton has put rather big ideas into his head."

"Something I said?"

"Yes, sir," replied Reggie. "You didn't mean it, did you, when you told him that he ought to go in for swimming the Channel?"

"Yes, by glory, I did!" said Mr. Fielding promptly.

"What!"

"Of course I did!" said Mr. Fielding. "That boy isn't any ordinary swimmer. He's exceptionally gifted—and he's got the stamina of a giant!"

"I say, sir, but it's serious!" said Pitt earnestly. "Tom Burton has practically taken you at your word. He's talking about having a shot at swimming the Channel."

Mr. Fielding jumped up, his eyes gleaming.

"Splendid!" he exclaimed. "By the Lord Harry! The boy's got grit!"

Pitt and the other juniors stared at him blankly.

"But—but you don't approve, do you, sir?" ejaculated Pitt.

"I certainly *do* approve!"

"But—but we came here to ask you to see the Bo'sun!" said Reggie. "We want you to discourage him——"

"Rubbish!"

"But look here, sir——"

"Nonsense!" said Mr. Fielding. "Discourage him, eh? Not me, my boys—not me! If your young friend has made up his mind to have a shot at swimming the Channel, I'll do everything in my power to help him!"

"Oh, my hat!" said Reggie.

"Well I'm blowed!" murmured Castleton.

"I'll back him for all he's worth!" said

Mr. Fielding enthusiastically. "I'll help him in his training—and, yes, I'll provide a motor-boat for him, too! That boy is plucky, and I'm proud of him!"



CHAPTER 5.

Mr. Fielding Gets Busy!

EGGIE PITT was now looking flushed and excited.

"We didn't think you'd take this view, sir!" he said eagerly. "By Jove! It's wonderful of you, sir!"

"Wonderful nothing!" said Mr. Fielding, with a frown. "This boy is ambitious and he deserves to be encouraged. Mind you, I wouldn't talk like this unless I was certain that he stood a chance. But he *does* stand a chance, and a good one, too! You could have knocked me down with a feather when he told me that he had swum the five miles from the Gull Sands. Why, he was as fresh as a flower when he had finished! Didn't show the slightest sign of fatigue."

"But it's an awfully difficult job, sir, to swim the Channel!" said Castleton.

"Granted!" nodded Mr. Fielding. "It's no child's play. But your friend, Burton, is an exceptional swimmer. He's got the skill, he's got the stamina—and, by gad, he's got something far more important—determination! It's the spirit to win that gets a fellow through!"

"Oh, rather, sir!"

"Every time, sir!"

"And the Bo'sun's got that spirit, too, sir!"

Mr. Fielding looked at the three juniors severely.

"Then what is your idea in coming to me?" he demanded. "If you're so sure of young Burton's determination, why do you want me to discourage him?"

"We don't want to, sir," replied Reggie Pitt. "But we thought—— That is, we had no idea that you would take this view. We only wanted to discourage him because we thought it would be impossible for him to stand the expenses."

"The boy deserves to be backed," said Mr. Fielding firmly. "I wouldn't consider the matter for a moment if I had any doubts. Mind you, he may not succeed in his swim—but I'm downright certain that he'll put up a good fight."

"And what about his training, sir?"

"I'll see to that," replied Mr. Fielding. "If it comes to that, he can use my house as his headquarters—and train here, in Caistowe."

Reggie Pitt and his two companions were catching some of Mr. Fielding's enthusiasm. Now that the project was becoming a possibility, the Removites changed their views.

"If you want to know the truth, I was wondering if young Burton would take any



Sneering as usual, Gore-Pearce had insinuated that Reggie Pitt might have "laked" the papers in the satchel. "You rotter!" roared Pitt indignantly. He opened the bag and shook the scraps of paper up and down in front of Gore-Pearce's eyes. "Now, then, take it yourself!" said Reggie hotly. "Shake it up as much as you like!"

notice of my words," said Mr. Fielding, in a satisfied voice. "I'm glad—confoundedly glad!"

"There's something else, sir," said Pitt hesitatingly. "The Bo'sun really got the idea this morning—when he saw an announcement in one of the papers about Channel swimming. A thousand pounds is being offered to any British boy or girl under twenty—"

"Oh!" said Mr. Fielding slowly.

"But you mustn't think that the Bo'sun is influenced by the thought of getting the money for himself, sir!" went on Reggie. "There's an uncle of his in Southampton—in business. The business is pretty rocky, owing to the lack of capital, and the Bo'sun wants to win that prize so that he can help his uncle."

Mr. Fielding changed his expression.

"Good!" he said. "That's fine! My opinion of the boy is higher than ever. He's not thinking of any glory—of any possible personal gain? He wants to make this attempt so that he can help a relative, eh? Excellent!"

"Of course, we're jolly glad to hear this, sir," said Castleton. "We think you're a brick for deciding to help the Bo'sun—"

"Rubbish, my boy!"

"But what about the Head, sir?" went on Castleton. "The Bo'sun is only a Remove

fellow, and the Head might have something to say about all this."

"You're not suggesting that your headmaster is likely to forbid the attempt?" asked Mr. Fielding.

"Yes, I am, sir," said Castleton. "Dr. Stafford is a bit old-fashioned in his ideas, you know, and he might not approve. He might think that it's a crazy idea for a junior St. Frank's fellow to make an attempt on the Channel. And the chances are that he will bring his foot down with a wallop."

"H'm!" grunted Mr. Fielding, stroking his chin. "That's true! Still, there's one solution to the little problem. I must have a talk with your headmaster, and try and convince him that the boy should be allowed to go ahead. I'll get Burton the necessary leave of absence," he added confidently.

"When, sir?" asked Pitt. "Do you mean that you're coming over to see Dr. Stafford?"

"Yes."

"To-day, sir?"

"There's no time like the present," replied Mr. Fielding promptly. "I'm not very busy this afternoon, so I'll come straight away. Dr. Stafford is at home, I suppose?"

"I think so, sir," said Castleton eagerly. "There's a big First Eleven match on to-day, and the Head is generally at home on such occasions."

"Then I'll get my car out and run over to St. Frank's now," said Mr. Fielding.

"May we come with you, sir?" asked Castleton. "We can leave our bikes here, and come back for them afterwards. But we'd love to be at St. Frank's when you arrive."

"Certainly," smiled Mr. Fielding. "Come along with pleasure!"

So it came about that Pitt and Grey and Castleton were with Mr. Fielding when the latter's car glided into the Triangle, half an hour later.

Luckily enough, Tom Burton was standing in the shade of West Arch, talking with Nipper and Church and McClure and one or two other Removites. The genial Bo'sun was looking worried, and it was only too clear that the juniors had been persuading him to give up his "crazy" project.

"Hallo! Look who's here!" said Nipper, as the car appeared. "I'm jiggered if it isn't Mr. Fielding, of Caistowe!"

The Bo'sun jumped, his eyes glittering.

"Mr. Fielding!" he shouted. "Swab my decks! He's the very man I want to see!"

He ran out into the Triangle, and Mr. Fielding gave him a cheery shout of welcome.

"Well, Burton, my boy, I've come over especially to see your headmaster," said Mr. Fielding genially, as he shook hands.

"To see the Head, sir?" ejaculated the Bo'sun, staring. "But—but—"

"I'm going to help you in this Channel swimming idea of yours, young man!" said Mr. Fielding firmly. "Between the two of us, we ought to pull it off!"



CHAPTER 6.

Seeing the Head!

MR. FIELDING'S words had the effect of a bombshell.

"You're going to help him, sir?"

shouted Nipper.

"Yes!" replied the Caistowe sportsman. "If Burton really wants to make an attempt on the Channel, I'm ready to back him! I'll see to his training, I'll provide him with the necessary motor-boat, and accompany him on his swim, too!"

"Great Scott!"

"Well, I'm blessed!"

"Avast there!" bellowed the Bo'sun. "Is this right, skipper? Do you mean it?"

Mr. Fielding smiled.

"How many more times have I got to say that I mean it?" he said amusedly. "There, young man! Don't get so excited! I'm proud of you!"

He clapped Tom Burton on the back.

"Yes, proud of you!" he repeated. "The very fact that you are willing to make the attempt proves that you've got the grit in you! I'm an idle good-for-nothing, and I might as well spend some of my time in a good cause for once! Bo'sun, lad, you can

count upon me to back you all the way through!"

"Thanks awfully, sir!" said Tom huskily. "By scuppers! You're a brick, sir!"

Nipper's eyes were gleaming.

"By Jove, Bo'sun, I'm glad!" he said heartily. "I've been doing the best I could to dissuade you, but I hope you don't misunderstand me. I've got plenty of faith in you, old man, but there were so many difficulties in the way that I didn't want you to get a shock. Mr. Fielding's promise has made all the difference!"

"Yes, rather!" said the other juniors.

"Hallo, hallo!" murmured Reggie Pitt. "Here comes old Barry! Now for some fireworks!"

Mr. Beverley Stokes, the Housemaster of the West House—affectionately known amongst the juniors as "Barry"—came over and shook hands with Mr. Fielding, with whom he was well acquainted.

"Delighted to see you here, Mr. Fielding," said the young Housemaster. "If you've called to see Mr. Lee, I'm afraid you'll be disappointed. He happens to be away this afternoon."

"No; I've called to see you, and the headmaster," replied Mr. Fielding. "I think you're the gentleman who guides the destinies of this youngster, aren't you?"

He indicated Tom Burton, and Barry Stokes grinned.

"Fortunately, he doesn't need much guiding," he replied. "The Bo'sun is quite a good man."

"Well, let's be blunt about it," said Mr. Fielding. "Young Burton is a wonderful swimmer, and he has made up his mind to make an attempt at the Channel."

"The deuce he has!" said Mr. Stokes, with a start. "Bravo, Bo'sun! I wish you luck!"

"Thanks, sir!" gasped Burton. "Does that mean that you'll let me have special leave?"

"My dear fellow, I'll not only give you leave, but I'll give you my blessing," replied Barry Stokes cheerily. "Any St. Frank's junior who is optimist enough to think that he can swim the Channel is a hero! And, by Jove, I'm not so sure that you don't stand a chance! You're pretty hot stuff on swimming, aren't you? Unfortunately, the headmaster may drop a spanner into the works."

"Do you think he'll be hard to manage?" asked Mr. Fielding, with concern. "This boy is so keen on the thing that I want to help him. I'd like to go and see Dr. Stafford now, and it would be an excellent idea if you came along with me, Mr. Stokes."

"I'm your man!" said the Housemaster promptly.

They went off at once, and the Remove fellows waited in the Triangle, talking excitedly. Tom Burton was surrounded by a big crowd now, and everybody was congratulating him.

"Steady, shipmates—steady!" said the Bo'sun. "We don't want to be too previous, do we? It's quite possible that the Head will forbid it."

"You've got old Barry on your side, anyhow," said Pitt, with delight. "Barry's a sport!"

"Rather!"

Dr. Stafford was just coming out of his front door when Mr. Fielding and the Housemaster reached the other side of Inner Court. The meeting was most opportune.

"Can you spare a few minutes, sir?" asked Mr. Stokes. "I think you know Mr. Fielding, of Caistowe, don't you?"

"Why, yes, to be sure," said the Head, as he shook hands. "Have you come over to see the match against Redcliffe, Mr. Fielding? I understand that the school is making a good showing."

"Ahem! Well, hardly," said Mr. Fielding hesitatingly.

"Then let me personally escort you to the pavilion——"

"If you don't mind, Dr. Stafford, I should like a few words with you in private at once," said Mr. Fielding. "That is, Mr. Stokes and I are both anxious to speak to you."

"Indeed!" said the Head, rather surprised by his visitor's serious tone.

"It's about Burton, of the Remove, in my House, sir," said Barry Stokes gently.

"Ah, Burton!" nodded the Head. "Isn't he the remarkable boy who made that wonderful swim last week? A creditable achievement, Mr. Fielding! I understand that you were present at the time?"

"It was my motor-boat that went to the Gull Sands," agreed Mr. Fielding. "As for Burton, his performance in swimming from the Gull Sands to the coast was not merely meritorious, but astounding."

"A splendid young fellow!" beamed Dr. Stafford.

"Burton himself has now decided to make an attempt to swim the Channel," went on Mr. Fielding. "Naturally, this attempt will depend upon your willingness to grant him special leave——"

"One moment, sir!" interrupted the Head, in astonishment. "Surely you cannot be serious?"

"But I am."

"Are you telling me that this junior school-boy—this Removite—is thinking of attempting to swim the Channel?"

"That is so, Dr. Stafford."

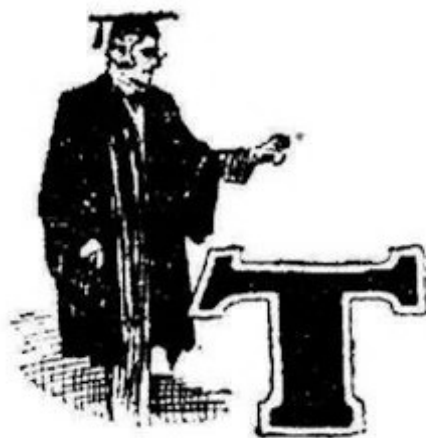
"Absurd!" said the Head coldly. "Upon my word! I hope I am a reasonable man, Mr. Fielding, but this is pure nonsense!"

"I am sorry you should have that opinion, sir—because I am prepared to back young Burton right through," said Mr. Fielding quietly. "My object in coming here is to ask you to grant him special leave, so that he can immediately start the necessary training."

"I am sorry, Mr. Fielding!" said the Head stiffly. "But I am afraid I must be very firm in this matter. In no circumstances can I allow Burton of the Remove to make this preposterous attempt!"

CHAPTER 7.

All Serene!



HERE was something very final about Dr. Stafford's tone. He made the pronouncement as though the subject was definitely closed.

Mr. Fielding and Barry Stokes exchanged a quick glance.

"The proposition is not so ridiculous as you seem to think, sir," said Barry gently. "At first glance, perhaps, it is startling to hear of a junior schoolboy having a shot at the Channel——"

"It is not only startling, Mr. Stokes, but quite out of the question," said the Head, in a chilly voice.

"I am sorry you should take that view, sir," said Mr. Stokes. "I am the boy's Housemaster, and I think you will give me credit for knowing his character and his capabilities. If he were any other boy I might well hesitate before approving of Mr. Fielding's proposition. But, knowing Burton as I do, I most heartily desire him to make this attempt."

The Head pursed his lips.

"Good gracious!" he said, at length. "Surely, Mr. Stokes, you do not imagine that Burton stands the slightest chance of success!"

"I think he stands a very excellent chance of success!"

"You surprise me!" said the Head, in astonishment. "Really, Mr. Stokes, this is most disturbing! I do not want to be unnecessarily sceptical, and you must forgive me for my attitude. But this boy is only about fifteen years of age, and it would be cruel to encourage him in this absurdity."

"I should be the last man to encourage him if I thought there was any chance of the affair ending farcically," put in Mr. Fielding quietly. "The very fact that I am willing to back the boy is surely sufficient evidence that I have faith in him?"

"Quite so, Mr. Fielding—quite so," said the Head. "But is your faith justified?"

"I think it is," replied the Caistowe sportsman. "You were not present, Dr. Stafford, when Burton finished his swim from the Gull Sands. But it was I who picked him up in Caistowe Bay. The boy was absolutely fresh! He showed not the slightest sign of fatigue."

"But the distance was only five miles—and, I understand, he had the assistance of the tide," said the Head.

"I will grant that," agreed Mr. Fielding. "But the sea was very choppy at the time—and swimming was difficult, even with the assistance of the tide. And yet Burton looked as though he had not swum a hundred yards. I was astounded."

"H'm!" mused the Head. "I do not know what to say."

"The boy possesses a magnificent physique," put in Mr. Stokes quickly. "As a swimmer, he is phenomenally gifted. As you know, sir, he holds all the St. Frank's records for swimming. Of his stamina, I have not the slightest doubt. He is capable of great feats of endurance—and I honestly and truly believe that, granted favourable conditions, he can conquer the Channel."

"I am convinced of it," added Mr. Fielding firmly.

The Head was wavering.

"But he is only a boy!" he protested.

"I wish you would get the question of age out of your mind, sir," urged Mr. Fielding. "As you are probably aware, the Channel has already been conquered by an American girl."

"Yes, of course," said the Head. "Miss Ederle, I believe?"

"She was only eighteen when she swam the Channel," said Mr. Stokes. "And if an American girl of eighteen can succeed in this difficult feat, what is to prevent a British boy of fifteen emulating her?"

"I see—I see!" murmured the Head.

"The present record is held by a Frenchman, I think—a man named Michel," said Mr. Fielding. "He swam the Channel in eleven hours and five minutes—a truly remarkable performance. Young Burton is anxious to lower this record, if he possibly can. I have seen him swimming, and I know that he possesses a wonderful stroke."

"And what of his parents?" asked Dr. Stafford. "Do you think they would agree?"

Barry Stokes laughed.

"Captain Burton?" he repeated. "My dear sir, the boy's father will be the first to support him. And here is Mr. Fielding, with every facility at his disposal, ready to back the attempt."

"But what of Burton's studies?"

"He will need a clear fortnight of freedom, so that he can go into training unhampered by school work," said Mr. Fielding. "After that, I have no doubt he will be willing enough to put in some extra hours at his studies. Not that it is a really important question," he added dryly. "Think of the prestige for St. Frank's, sir, if one of its junior schoolboys succeeds in swimming the Channel!"

"Of course, I quite see your point," admitted the Head, stroking his chin. "My only fear is that the boy will make a hopeless failure of the attempt. And then St. Frank's will only receive ridicule."

"Then you can put that fear definitely out of your mind," declared Mr. Fielding. "Whether Burton succeeds, or whether he fails, there can be no question that he will put up a fine performance."

The Head suddenly smiled.

"Upon my word, gentlemen, you have convinced me," he said good-naturedly. "Providing Burton receives his father's consent, I

will grant him this special leave. After all, the boy's very willingness to make the attempt is an indication of his pluck and determination. It would be a great pity to stifle those fine qualities. Yes, yes! I will make a point of sending for Burton at once, so that I can personally wish him the best of luck."

"That's splendid, sir!" said Mr. Stokes delightedly.

"And you won't regret your decision," declared Mr. Fielding. "With your permission, sir, I shall take Burton to my own house at Caistowe, so that he can use it as his training headquarters. I shall personally supervise his training, and I hold myself responsible for his safety."

And so it was settled.

By tea-time, the whole school was talking about it. The seniors were inclined to be indignant. The juniors raved unrestrainedly.

A Channel aspirant from St. Frank's—and, what was more to the point, from the Junior School!

"Well, well!" said Travers complacently. "Nobody can say that St. Frank's isn't up to date!"

"Yes, we're certainly in the swim!" agreed Nipper, grinning.

"And the Bo'sun will do it, too!" said Reggie Pitt enthusiastically. "Good man! He may not beat Michel's record, but I'll guarantee that he'll swim the Channel! He's a marvel!"

And even cricket was given a second place in the common-room that evening. Channel swimming had become the one topic of conversation.



CHAPTER 8.

In Training!

THE interest did not wane with the passing days.

On the very next half-holiday, a whole crowd of Remove fellows got on their bicycles, and pedalled off to Caistowe. Tom Burton's determination to attempt the Channel swim was no longer regarded as a joke. St. Frank's was agog with interest. The seniors still continued to look upon the whole business with disapproval. It was like the nerve of a mere junior to go in for a thing of this kind! Unfortunately, the seniors had nobody in their ranks who could approach Tom Burton's form.

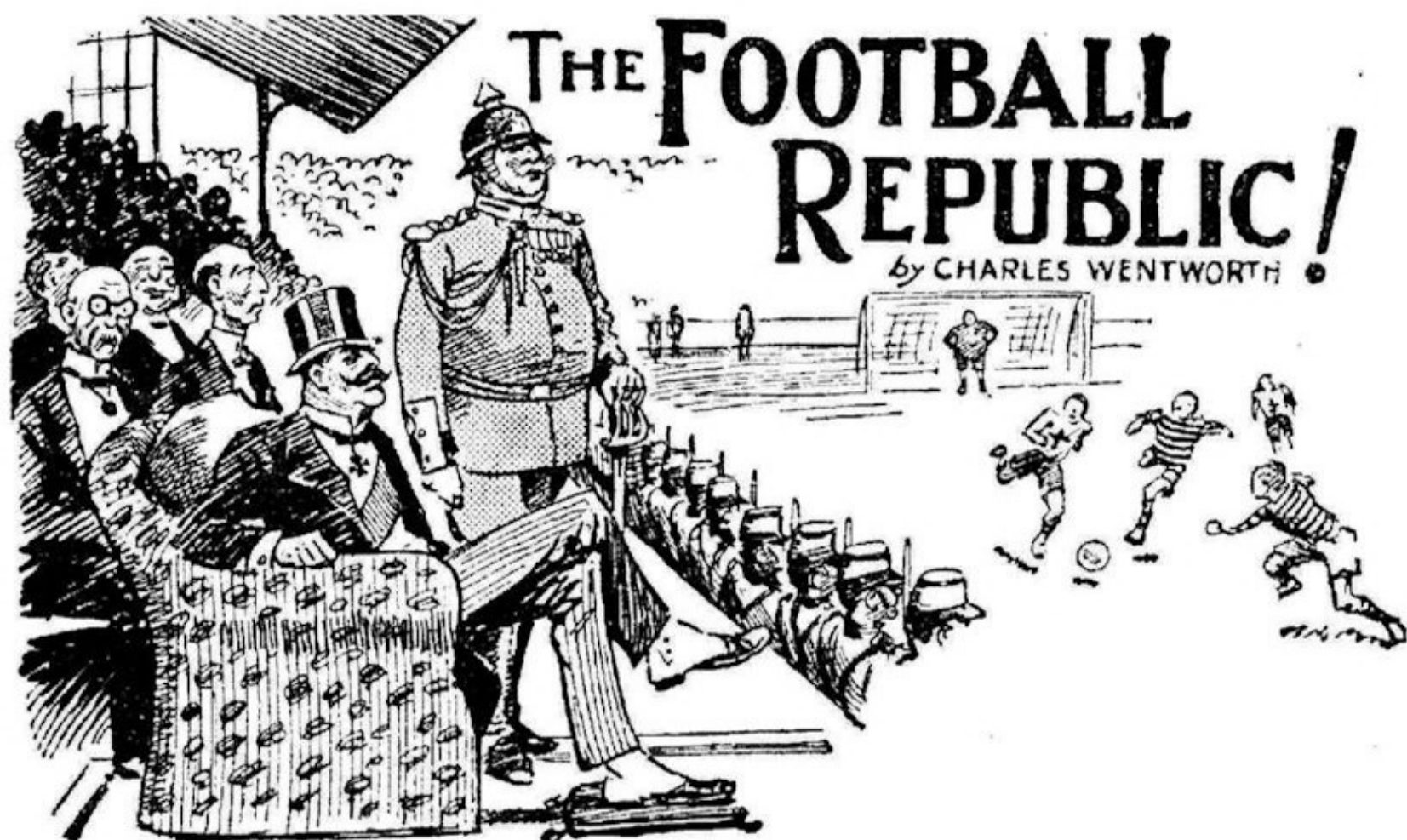
Everybody in the Remove was an expert on Channel swimming. Everybody knew all the facts and figures.

"I don't see why the Bo'sun shouldn't do it!" remarked Nipper, as he and the other Removites cycled to Caistowe.

"He's going to do it!" said Reggie Pitt confidently. "He's a West House chap!"

(Continued on page 14.)

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(Continued from page 12.)

"Rats!"

"Of course, I'm not denying that a good deal will depend upon luck," went on Reggie. "Swimming the Channel is something like playing a game of bridge—you can't do much unless you have the cards. And the Bo'sun won't succeed unless he has favourable conditions. Given those, his skill and stamina will carry him through."

"I believe it, too!" said Fullwood. "In a direct course, it's only about eighteen miles across the Straits of Dover, and the Bo'sun has already proved that he can swim until further orders."

"If he could do the eighteen miles straight off, the thing would be a cert, dear old fellows," said Travers. "But according to all the text books on the subject, it's necessary to swim about forty miles, owing to the set of the tides. But, of course, he may be extra lucky."

"In the old days, they didn't know the tricks of the Channel, as they do now," said Nipper. "For instance, when Burgess swam the Channel in 1911, he took nearly twenty-two hours, and it was reckoned that he swam about sixty miles!"

"They know more nowadays!" said Reggie complacently. "So many people have been swimming the Channel during the past few years that they've got to know all its tricks."

"Yes, rather!" said Fullwood. "Look at the way Michel took advantage of the tides when he swam the Channel in eleven hours. Of course, the Bo'sun has taken on a pretty hefty job. It'll be a miracle if he lowers Michel's record."

"He'll do it!" said Reggie Pitt, with supreme faith.

"Hear, hear!" sang out the other West House juniors.

Nipper and the Ancient House contingent chuckled. Just because Burton now happened to be a West House fellow, Reggie Pitt and his men looked upon him as their own especial property.

Of late, there had been a perfect epidemic of newspaper buying at St. Frank's. As a rule, the juniors took very little interest in the morning papers. But now they grabbed them eagerly, and searched the columns for the latest information regarding the many Channel aspirants.

The London papers had made quite a feature of Tom Burton's training. Such headlines as "Schoolboy's Remarkable Progress," and "St. Frank's Junior in Training,"

and "Plucky Schoolboy's Chances," were commonplace.

St. Frank's, in fact, was in the public eye. Every day the juniors examined the weather reports, and they were particularly anxious to know the condition of the Channel.

Just at present, the weather was exceedingly fine, for an anti-cyclone had spread over the entire kingdom, and had extended over the better part of France and Belgium and Holland. The days were sunny and windless.

"I don't believe in too much training!" said Reggie Pitt, with a frown. "As soon as the Bo'sun is ready, he ought to make his attempt. This weather won't last for ever, you know!"

"Just what I was thinking," said Nipper. "The conditions are absolutely ideal now."

"Yes, but the Bo'sun hasn't trained sufficiently yet," argued Fullwood. "Hang it, he's only been on the job for two or three days."

When they reached Caistowe, they found Tom Burton down on the beach with Mr. Fielding. A number of Press photographers had just been snapping him, and crowds of interested spectators were round, too.

"Good old Bo'sun!"

"Bravo!"

The juniors crowded round, and Mr. Fielding smiled good-humouredly.

"I was rather expecting you fellows," he said. "Well, the Bo'sun is progressing. Yesterday he swam sixteen miles without turning a hair!"

"Swab my decks!" growled Burton. "It wasn't anything, skipper! The sea was as calm as a river!"

"Sixteen miles, eh?" said Reggie enthusiastically. "Jolly good, Bo'sun! Were you exhausted when you came out?"

"Just a bit tired, shipmate," said the Bo'sun.

"Nonsense!" laughed Mr. Fielding. "He came out of the water as energetically as he had entered! The boy's a wonder! Yes, and what's more, he's in perfect condition."

"Then why shouldn't he make his attempt almost at once, sir?" asked Nipper.

"He's going to!" replied Mr. Fielding, in a confidential undertone. "But this is on the strict q.t., understand! If the weather keeps as it is for the next two or three days, our young friend is going to make his bid for the record."

"Good egg!" said Reggie breathlessly.

"We're not saying much about it yet!" went on Mr. Fielding. "Too much training will do the boy harm. And the sooner he makes his attempt, the better. Once this spell of fine weather has gone, we may have to wait weeks and weeks for another favourable opportunity."

There was further excitement among the juniors.

So Tom Burton was going to make his "shot" at the Channel long before his fortnight of special leave was over! This decision was a very wise one. The juniors knew, only too well, that a fellow could easily get stale through over-training.

It was far better to take advantage of this weather, and go out for the record at once.

By doing this, too, the Bo'sun would steal a march on any possible rival.

And, as it happened, a very formidable rival was already in the field!



CHAPTER 9.

Startling News!

NEXT morning the weather conditions were inspected very anxiously by the Remove.

But the juniors needn't have worried. The sky was cloudless, and there was hardly any wind. The barometer, too, was high. Nipper & Co. were down early, and they met Reggie Pitt and a few other West House enthusiasts in the Triangle.

"Well, there's no sign of any change, thank goodness," said Reggie Pitt, as he stood in the warm June sunshine. "What's the latest about the Channel tides?"

"Nobody's got a paper yet," replied Nipper. "But if the Bo'sun is wise, he'll start his swim to-morrow, or the next day at latest."

"I'm not so sure about him being wise," said Fullwood. "He's only been training for three or four days, and it's unheard of for a Channel swimmer to start on the job until he has had two or three weeks hard training."

"Yes, and the majority of them overdo it," said Reggie Pitt sagely. "They use up their energy in their practice swims—and then, just when they decide to go all out for the big event, the weather changes, and they have to wait two or three weeks!"

"Exactly!" agreed Nipper. "And during the period of waiting they go stale. Once this weather breaks up, there might not be another favourable chance until August, or September. In my opinion, it's now or never!"

"Besides, the Bo'sun's had all the training he needs!" argued Singleton. "Some of you fellows seem to forget that he has been swimming every day for weeks past. He has practically lived in the river—and I don't know how many times he has gone to Caistowe, for sea swimming. He's in tip-top condition now."

A shout went up as Vivian Travers was observed in the gateway. He had a newspaper in his hand, and it was evident that he had made an early visit to the village. The Removites ran up, and crowded round him.

"What's the latest, Travers?" went up the shout.

"A bombshell, dear old fellows," said Vivian Travers coolly. "Literally, a bombshell!"

"What do you mean, you ass?"

"Exactly what I say," replied Travers. "Prepare yourselves for a shock. Earle Stanton is liable to kick off on his Channel attempt at any moment!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"And who the dickens is Earle Stanton?"

"As far as I can make out," said Travers, "he is picturesquely known as 'The American Boy Wonder.' In fact, he seems to be hot stuff!"

"American?" repeated Fullwood.

"Yes."

"What rot!" said Fullwood. "How can he be an earl? There aren't any earls in America?"

"I believe you're right," nodded Travers. "But 'Earle' happens to be the fellow's Christian name. Or, as they say in America, his first name."

"Let's have a look at that paper!" said Nipper briskly.

"With the greatest of pleasure," smiled Travers. "But I can tell you the whole thing in a nutshell. Earle Stanton is a Boston boy, of sixteen, and he has been in secret training for some weeks past. Now at last an enterprising journalist has succeeded in getting hold of the facts. Nothing definite is known, but it is rumoured that the American Boy Wonder will start his Channel swim to-day!"

"To-day!" yelled a chorus.

"Alas, it is only too true!" sighed Vivian Travers. "Fortunately, the appearance of Earle Stanton on the scene makes no difference to the Bo'sun's chance of winning the thousand quid. Only British boys are eligible. At the same time, it would be pretty rotten if this American won the toss and took first knock!"

The Remove was full of consternation. Before half an hour had elapsed, many other newspapers were available, and they all featured the "story" of Earle Stanton, the American Boy Wonder. And there could be no doubt that the whole thing had been very effectively staged by young Stanton's backers.

With true American love of putting over a stunt, they had kept young Stanton's training a secret until the last moment. Now, with a tremendous flare of trumpets, the facts were made known. Earle Stanton, aged sixteen, of Boston, Mass., U.S.A., was ready to start his Channel swim at any moment! And, what was more to the point, he would probably be on his way—according to the newspapers—before another issue of the dailies could be printed.

"It'll be absolutely rotten if this American chap gets ahead of the Bo'sun," said Nipper, in a worried voice. "What are we going to do about it?"

"Hadn't we better ring up Mr. Fielding's house, and have a word with the Bo'sun?" suggested Reggie Pitt. "Perhaps they haven't seen the newspapers yet?"

"That's not very probable," said Nipper. "All the same, it's a good idea. We must have a word with Tom Burton! We want to know what he's going to do!"

They hurried to the telephone in the Junior Common-room of the Ancient House. A crowd of fellows hung round, eager and anxious. Within a couple of minutes, Nipper had got the number, and he was relieved to find that the Bo'sun was available.

"That you, Bo'sun?" said Nipper, after a pause.

"Why, hallo, shipmate!" came the Bo'sun's cheery tones. "What's the trouble?"

"Haven't you seen the newspapers?"

"Swab me for a landlubber!" laughed the Bosun. "I can't be bothered with newspapers! I've just come in from a practice swim. I was up at five o'clock, and—"

"Well, Bo'sun, you'll have to put some speed on!" said Nipper briskly. "There's an American boy in the field!"

"Souise me!"

"A chap named Earle Stanton, of Boston," said Nipper. "There's quite a lot about him in the newspapers this morning. He's been keeping his training a secret, but now he's ready to make his attempt on the Channel! In fact, there's just a chance that he'll start his swim to-day!"

"By scuppers!" ejaculated the Bo'sun excitedly. "Is this a fact, messmate?"

"Yes, of course it is!" said Nipper. "And we want to know what you're going to do, Tom."

"Mr. Fielding is making arrangements for me to start my swim on Saturday—"

"Saturday!" yelled Nipper. "And to-day's only Thursday! You can't wait until then, Bo'sun!"

"I can't, by scuppers!" agreed Tom Burton grimly. "Leave it to me, shipmate! I'll go and see Mr. Fielding now—and I'll ring you up later."

"You mean, you're going to alter the plan?"

"Yes, rather!" said Tom. "I'm as fit as a fiddle, and I'm impatient. I don't want to wait till Saturday! Great marlin-spikes! We don't want this American chap to get ahead of us, do we? St. Frank's must be first!"

"Good old Bo'sun!"

A few moments later Nipper rang off, and there was much excitement in the Remove. They had to wait now—they had to wait until Tom Burton rang up and told them of the latest decision.

CHAPTER 10.

The Challenge!



MR. FIELDING was in the big lounge hall of his house, standing by the open door, when Tom Burton approached him. Mr. Fielding was reading a newspaper.

"Have you seen it, sir?" panted the

Bo'sun. "Have you seen the news about the American boy, skipper?"

Mr. Fielding turned.

"Yes," he replied. "I am reading it now. They have been keeping very quiet about young Stanton!"

"What are we going to do, sir?" demanded the Bo'sun excitedly. "This American chap is going to start on his swim to-day!"

"There is no definite statement to that effect, Bo'sun."

"Well, he might do, sir."

"What he might do, and what he *does* do, are two very different things," smiled Mr. Fielding. "Now, Bo'sun, you musn't excite yourself. The Channel is open to everybody, and we cannot grumble at these Americans for their modesty. I rather admire them."

"Modesty!" gasped the Bo'sun. "Souise me for a mackerel! Modesty in Americans!"

Mr. Fielding chuckled.

"A most unusual trait, eh, Bo'sun?" he smiled. "Yet we must be fair. As a rule, the Americans are overfond of talking for weeks in advance. It is refreshing to see a reversal of the order. Earle Stanton and his backers have kept very quiet, which makes it difficult for me to believe that they are Americans, by the way! Anyhow, to-day's report is the first news we have had that this Boston boy has been in training. And now he's ready to start on his swim. Splendid!"

"Splendid!" said the Bo'sun, staring.

"I am quite delighted," said Mr. Fielding calmly. "For, frankly, Bo'sun, I believe that you will prove the better of the two."

"That's very nice of you, skipper, but what if this American boy gets the start?" asked Tom Burton anxiously. "His swim will be all over by Saturday—"

"No doubt!" interrupted Mr. Fielding, stroking his chin. "Look here, Bo'sun, I've been thinking. How do you feel?"

"Fit, sir."

"Ready to make an immediate start?"

"Try me, skipper!" said the Bo'sun eagerly.

"Good! Then we'll be off this afternoon!"

"You—you mean that I'm to have my try at the Channel at once, sir?" asked Burton breathlessly. "Swab my decks! That's good hearing, cap'n!"

"I'm glad you think so," replied Mr. Fielding. "The conditions could not be more favourable. This morning I have received reports from Dover and from Cape Grisnez. The Channel is in an unusually docile mood. The currents are favourable, and the barometer is steady. Furthermore, the temperature of the Channel waters is several degrees higher than usual. It would be folly to miss this opportunity, Bo'sun."

"It certainly would, sir."

"It all depends on you," said Mr. Fielding. "But if you are feeling strong enough, and plucky enough—"



Without doubt, Earle Stanton, Tom Burton's rival in swimming the Channel, was a formidable opponent. He was a fair young giant; his frame was big and brawny, and his muscles were like masses of coiled rope beneath his sunburned skin. "He's got the advantage of our man in size, sir," said Nipper, addressing Stanton's backer. "But size doesn't always count, does it?"

"Oh, cheese it, sir!" growled Tom Burton. "It's not a question of pluck! I shall go off my rocker with anxiety unless we do something straight away! When do you reckon we shall leave port?"

"This afternoon."

"Why not this morning, sir?"

"Because certain preparations must be made," smiled Mr. Fielding. "You'd better take another light practice this morning, Bo'sun, while I attend to all the details. I shall have my biggest motor-boat ready, and we'll slip down the Channel during the cool of the evening. On second thoughts, it would be a better plan to take the small motor-yacht. More room on it—and she's got cabins and a saloon. There'll be quite a crowd with us, including Press photographers and other newspaper representatives. We're not going to have any quibbles about this, Bo'sun! So we shall have plenty of witnesses!"

"But if we don't start until this afternoon, sir, I shan't be able to enter the water until nearly midnight!"

"That's exactly what I am planning," nodded Mr. Fielding. "At midnight, the tides will be in their most kindly condition. Even if we started earlier, it would be useless, for you couldn't enter the water until midnight. So we'll settle it at that. We'll take the yacht, and we'll leave Caistowe late in the afternoon."

The Bo'sun, of course, had his head filled with nothing else but the thoughts of the swim. But there were a hundred and one details for Mr. Fielding to attend to.

Without waiting for any breakfast, the famous sportsman went off, knowing full well that he had to pack a full day's work into a single morning.

The first thing Tom Burton did was to ring up St. Frank's.

Nipper and Reggie Pitt and a few others were hanging about in the Junior Common-room, waiting for the call to come, and Nipper fairly leapt at the telephone when the bell rang.

"Hallo!" he said sharply. "Hallo! Eh? Yes, rather! It's me—Nipper! That you, Bo'sun?"

"It's all right, messmate!" came the Bo'sun's eager voice. "We're starting this afternoon!"

"What!"

"Not the swim!" said Burton. "The swim will start at about midnight, from Cape Grisnez. But we shall be leaving Caistowe in Mr. Fielding's motor-yacht, at about tea-time."

"Good man!" said Nipper heartily. "This means you're going to make an effort to beat the American chap, eh?"

"You bet it does!" said the Bo'sun. "I'm going all out, shipmates!"

"And Mr. Fielding is taking his motor-yacht, is he?" said Nipper thoughtfully.

"By Jove! I wonder——"

"You wonder what?"

"Never mind!" said Nipper. "Thanks awfully, Bo'sun, for ringing up. I'm jolly glad to hear that something definite is settled. You'll be leaving Caistowe Harbour at about tea-time, eh?"

"That's it!" said Burton. "I'm going for a final practice swim now."

"Good man! You'll win, Bo'sun!" said Nipper confidently. "The whole of St. Frank's is backing you, don't forget. And you've just got to pull it off!"



CHAPTER 11.

The Deputation!

EXCITEMENT ran high when the news was spread.

Practically the whole Remove gathered in the Triangle, and the air was full of shouts. Nobody had expected Tom Burton to make his attempt on the Channel so early. Less than a week had elapsed since the idea had been first mooted, and many fellows were doubtful. They considered that the Bo'sun had had insufficient training. The majority, however, were enthusiastically certain that the Bo'sun would "pull it off."

"We shan't even be able to see him off!" said Reggie Pitt dolefully. "They might leave at about four o'clock this afternoon, and we shall be stewed up in the class-room until it's too late! What a frost!"

"Yes, and what about the swim itself?" asked Jack Grey indignantly. "Burton's a St. Frank's chap, and he ought to have a crowd of St. Frank's fellows with him on the swim to encourage him!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Yes, rather!"

"Absolutely, laddies!" said Archie Glen-thorne firmly. "I mean to say, it'll be somewhat poisonous for the dear chappie if we're not on the good old spot! What about rallying round and doing something?"

"But what can we do?" asked Church helplessly. "Even if it were a half-holiday we could only go to Caistowe and see the Bo'sun off in the yacht. The actual swim doesn't start until midnight—from the French coast."

"We shall have to wait until to-morrow!" growled Fullwood disconsolately. "And it might be mid-day before we hear anything definite. I say, what rot! Can't somebody think of something?"

But it was time for morning lessons. The bell was insistent, and could not be ignored. Mr. Crowell was very good-tempered, on the whole. The Remove did practically no work, but the Form-master, knowing the facts, was reasonable.

As soon as lessons were over—much to the relief of the Remove, to say nothing of the relief of Mr. Crowell—a kind of mass meeting was held in the Triangle. It was blazingly hot out there, for the day was cloudless, there was no wind, and the temperature was somewhere in the region of the eighties.

"We want to be in this Channel-swimming business!" said De Valerie grimly.

"Hear, hear!"

"I don't see why we should be left out of it!" went on De Valerie. "It's not fair! The Bo'sun is a Remove chap, and we ought to get a look in!"

"Yes, but how?" demanded Doyle, of the West House.

"There's only one thing to be done," said Nipper briskly, as he pressed his way into the middle of the throng. "We've got to get up a deputation to the Head!"

"He won't listen to us!" said Pitt sadly. "You know what the Head is. He doesn't see things in the same way as we do! We regard the Bo'sun's swim as all-important, but the Head probably thinks it's a mere trifle."

"Then we've got to educate him," said Nipper firmly.

"Hear, hear!"

"Let's ask him for a half-holiday!"

"Good!"

"No, that's not necessary!" said Nipper. "I've just come from the telephone, and I've been talking to Mr. Fielding."

"What?"

"The yacht won't start from Caistowe Harbour until five o'clock," said Nipper. "So we can do our lessons this afternoon, as usual. We don't want to ask too many favours of the Head."

"But there's nothing to worry about!" said Doyle excitedly. "We can easily get to Caistowe by five o'clock, and then we can give the Bo'sun a good send-off!"

"Yes, rather!"

"Hurrah!"

"We want to do more than give him a good send-off!" shouted Nipper. "I think that Reggie Pitt and a few others, at least, ought to go on the yacht and encourage the Bo'sun during his swim!"

"Hear, hear!"

It was a perfect roar of approval.

"Naturally, we can't all go on," went on Nipper. "But it's only right that a representative few should be on that yacht. Mr. Fielding, by the way, is an absolute sportsman. He told me that we can all come along if we want to. There's plenty of room on the yacht—plenty of accommodation. And the more the merrier!"

"Hurrah!"

"Bravo, Mr. Fielding!"

"As soon as I heard that he was taking the yacht, I started thinking!" continued Nipper cheerfully. "Mr. Fielding is agreeable, and now it rests with the Head. So let's fix on this deputation, and go to the Head's house right away. There's no time like the present!"

"Absolutely not!" agreed Archie Glen-thorne. "In the circs., dear old cheese, I rather think you'd better leave this to me. I'll have a heart-to-heart talk with the Head, and convince him that——"

"I'm afraid you'd take too long, Archie," interrupted Nipper gently. "You're inclined to be long-winded, old man."

"Good gad!" said Archie. "Long-winded? Oh, I see what you mean! Long-winded, what? Not absolutely concise and brief? A dashed foul accusation! I rather pride myself on being snappy."

But Archie was ignored.

"Four of us will be enough," said Nipper. "We don't want the deputation to be too large or the Head might get ratty. Reggie Pitt, Singleton, Travers and myself. How's that? Two Remove fellows from each House?"

"What about us?" demanded Buster Boots, of the Modern House.

"You don't count!" replied Nipper.

"You silly ass——"

"You're in the Fourth, and the Fourth doesn't get a look in!" went on Nipper briskly. "The Modern House and the East House are out of this business! It's a Remove stunt, my lad!"

"Yes, rather!"

"Buzz off, you silly Fourth-Formers!"

And John Busterfield Boots and his men, much to their disgust, were shouted down.

The deputation, consisting of Nipper, Pitt, Travers and Singleton, then marched off to the Head's house. The rest of the Remove waited in the Triangle, anxious and excited. Nobody quite knew what the deputation was about to propose.

This wasn't surprising, for the deputation itself was rather hazy as to

what it wanted. But one thing was certain. They were full of determination—full of eagerness. And they weren't going to let the Head rest until he had promised to let the Remove take a part in this great Channel swim!

But, as Nipper well knew, it was going to be a ticklish proposition!



CHAPTER 12.

Not So Easy!

D

R. MALCOLM STAFFORD adjusted his pince-nez, and eyed his visitors inquiringly.

"Ahem! I think I can guess why you have come to see me," he said dryly. "I have already learned that Burton is to leave Caistowe this afternoon in order to be at Cape Grisnez by midnight, when he means to commence his Channel swim. No doubt you want my permission for some special send-off. Is that it?"

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"Well, hardly, sir," said Nipper. "It's rather more than that."

"Indeed!" said the Head.

The deputation was standing in front of his desk, and all four juniors were looking calm and determined. This was a very exceptional occasion, and they knew that they were in for a fight. Why was it that headmasters were always so hard to manage?

"We want you to let us go on the yacht, sir," said Nipper boldly.

"On the yacht?" repeated Dr. Stafford. "Do you mean that you want to go on board the vessel before it sails?"

"We want to go *with* the yacht, sir," murmured Travers. "To be more exact, we want to be with Burton during his swim."

"That's it, sir," said the other members of the deputation.

Dr. Stafford looked astonished.

"Am I to understand that you are asking my permission to go on Mr. Fielding's yacht, and to accompany Burton throughout his swim?" asked the Head. "Are you suggesting that you should be at Cape Grisnez when the swim starts, and that you should be up all night, following the swim?"

"You've got it in a nutshell, sir," said Nipper.

"Then I am very much afraid that I must give you a big disappointment," said Dr. Stafford coldly. "I am prepared to consider any reasonable request. But this is most unreasonable. It is, in fact, out of the question."

"We thought you'd say that, sir," remarked Travers smoothly. "But will you allow us to point out the urgency of the case? It's not merely for ourselves that we're asking this. There's Burton to consider."

"I fail to see how Burton can be affected," commented the Head.

"Oh, but he can, sir!" argued Travers. "He'll have a much easier time if a crowd of Remove fellows are on the yacht, cheering him and encouraging him. Our scheme is to buck him up all the way across. And we shall take it in turns, too, to swim alongside, so that he's got—"

"That is enough, Travers!" interrupted the Head. "I cannot allow this."

"But, sir—"

"In the special circumstances, I shall allow you an hour off this afternoon," said Dr. Stafford. "Therefore, if you wish, you may go to Caistowe and give Burton some encouragement before he starts. But as for accompanying him on the swim—no!"

"But why not, sir?" asked Nipper earnestly. "Burton is the very first St. Frank's fellow to try it, and it's only right that we should spur him on all we can!"

"And it'll be only the Remove, sir!" urged Reggie Pitt. "The other Forms don't count!"

"Good gracious!" said the Head. "I really thought that you were talking about yourselves—just the four of you! Are you suggesting, Pitt, that the entire Remove should go on this expedition?"

"Yes, sir!"

"Then it is more impossible still!" declared the Head finally. "In fact, it is ridiculous! I am surprised that you should come to me with such a preposterous suggestion!"

"It's just a difference of opinion, sir," murmured Travers. "You think it's preposterous, but we think it's the best idea of the term! Mr. Fielding has invited us, too. He says that we can all go if we get permission."

"Then Mr. Fielding was very unwise!" said the Head curtly. "I am surprised that he should act so thoughtlessly. Why, if I gave my consent to this request, you would all be away from this afternoon until about mid-day to-morrow. What about your sleep?"

"We don't need any sleep for once, sir!" argued Nipper.

"I am ready to believe that you would forgo your night's rest quite willingly," said the Head dryly. "But, Hamilton, I cannot even consider this proposal. I do not wish to be harsh, and I quite appreciate your eagerness. But there is the rest of the school to consider."

"How, sir?"

"If I allow the Remove to accompany Burton's swim, the whole school will want to go," said Dr. Stafford. "It is inevitable. And even you must realise that such a thing is impossible."

"Yes, of course, sir," said Nipper quickly. "The whole school can't go—we should need a liner! But Burton is a Remove chap, and the Remove has a special interest in the swim."

"And a special reason for expecting favourable treatment, sir," added Travers.

"Oh, indeed!" said the Head, adjusting his glasses. "So the Remove demands special favourable treatment?"

"Not demand, sir," said Travers. "But it certainly hopes."

"Please, sir!" urged Reggie Pitt, bending over the desk. "We're Burton's chums, you know—we want him to whack this American boy. We want him to beat the record for the Channel! And if we go on the yacht, so that we can shout encouragement to him, it'll make all the difference! A thing like this doesn't happen every term, sir, and we're asking you to be specially generous."

Dr. Stafford removed his pince-nez, polished them, and placed them back on his nose.

"H'm! Well, of course, there is something in your argument," he said at length. "Upon my word! I hardly know what to say."

"Be generous, sir!" exclaimed Pitt eagerly.

"I have a mind to be generous," replied the Head. "But, my dear fellows, there is a difficulty. I cannot possibly allow the entire Remove Form to go on this trip. It is too unreasonable—too much to expect. And yet I agree with you that Burton needs every possible encouragement."

"The Remove's presence on the yacht would buck him up enormously, sir," said Nipper.

"I dare say it would," nodded the Head. "And I have not the slightest doubt that it would buck the Remove up, too!" he added, with a smile. "You tell me that Mr. Fielding has issued a general invitation?"

"Yes, sir."

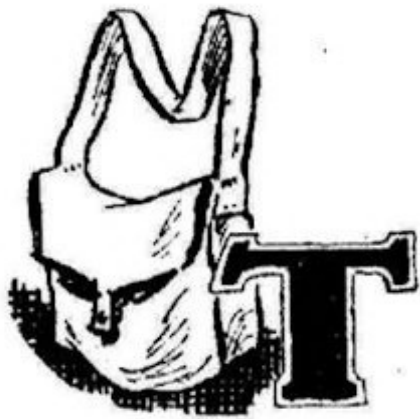
"I do not doubt your word; but I must, of course, verify this," said the Head thoughtfully. "I shall make a point of ringing up Mr. Fielding during the afternoon."

"But—but we want to know at once, sir!" said Pitt, in dismay.

"Then you shall know at once," replied the Head. "Since Mr. Fielding has issued this invitation, and since he is willing to accept the responsibility for your safety, I do not propose entirely to disappoint you."

"Then you have decided on something, sir?" asked Nipper.

"Yes," replied Dr. Stafford, as he thoughtfully leaned back in his chair. "I have decided!"



CHAPTER 13.

The Lucky Twelve!

THE deputation waited breathlessly while Dr. Stafford amused himself by keeping them on tenterhooks.

"This is my decision," said the Head at length. "Twelve of you shall go."

"Oh, sir!"

"Thanks awfully, sir!"

"Yes, twelve of you," repeated the Head. "In granting this special leave, I am taking into consideration the fact that Burton will be encouraged and cheered by your presence. I think my decision is a generous one, and I hope you will agree with me. Twelve Remove boys have my permission to make this trip on Mr. Fielding's yacht. Naturally, this is subject to Mr. Fielding's verification of what you have told me regarding his invitation."

"Of course, sir," said Nipper. "And we think it's very sporting of you, sir!"

"Rather, sir!"

"A dozen of you will, I fancy, make quite sufficient noise to encourage the swimmer," said the Head dryly. "As to which twelve boys shall go, I will leave this to the Form to decide. I dare say you have your own methods."

"We'll wangle it, sir," declared Travers.

"You will do what?" asked the Head.

"Arrange it, sir," said Travers coolly.

"Well, you may go," smiled Dr. Stafford.

"As soon as you have reached your decision, the names of the twelve boys must be handed in to your Housemaster. That is all."

"Thank you, sir!" chorused the members of the deputation.

"One moment, though!" said the Head. "It is most unlikely that you will settle yourselves to work this afternoon. The twelve boys who are elected need not attend in the Form-room, but can get off to Caistowe as soon as they like, after reporting to their respective Housemasters."

"You're a brick, sir!"

"Yes, rather!"

"Thanks awfully, sir!"

The deputation went out, gleeful. And there was a great roar in the Triangle when the Head's decision was disclosed. It was a mingled roar of indignation and approval.

"Only twelve of us!" shouted Church. "What about all the others?"

"Naturally, they won't be able to go," said Nipper. "But I think it's jolly decent of the Head to allow a dozen to go on the trip. He's a sportsman!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Bravo, the Head!"

"And how the dickens are we going to decide?" demanded Hubbard. "If it's left to Nipper or Pitt, they'll choose their own pals, and the rest of us will get left out in the cold!"

"Oh, you can trust them to work it in their own interests!" sneered Gulliver.

"Yes, they're good at that sort of thing!" said Gore-Pearce sourly.

• Nipper was quite calm.

"Look here, you fellows, there's only one way in which this thing can be settled!" he shouted urgently. "There's got to be a meeting of the full Remove——"

"There's a meeting already!" interrupted De Valerie. "Everybody's here!"

"Then we might as well settle it at once!" said Nipper, as he cast his eye over the throng. "There's going to be no favouritism in this business. The twelve who go will be the twelve lucky ones."

"What do you mean, dear old fellow?" asked Travers.

"I mean that we're going to draw lots," replied Nipper.

There was an immediate uproar.

"Hear, hear!"

"Good old Nipper!"

"No favouritism—the same chances for all of us!"

"Bravo!"

"But wait a minute!" sang out Gresham. "I'm not quite sure that this will be fair."

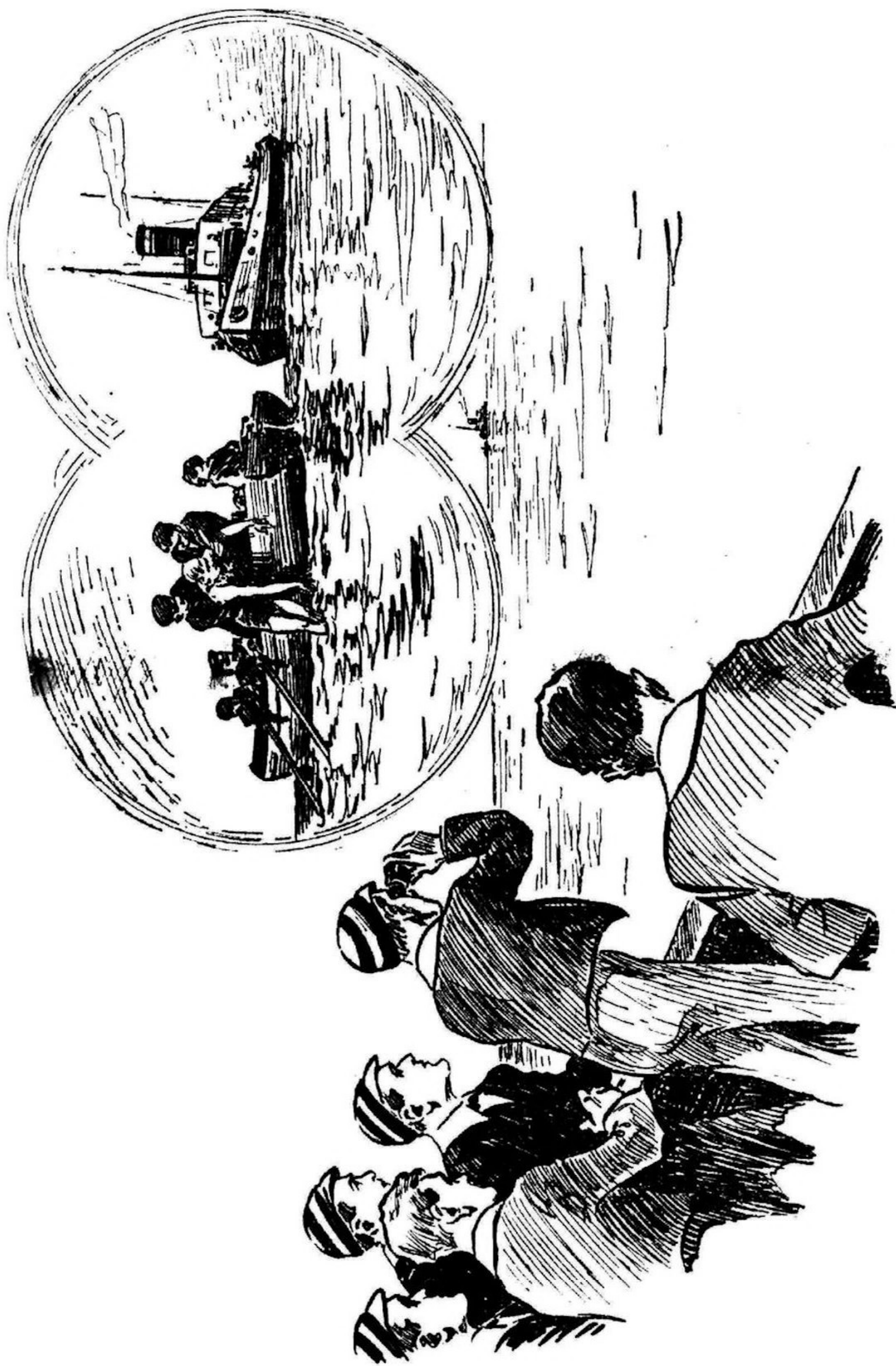
"Not fair?" said Pitt, staring. "What do you mean?"

"Well, the Bo'sun is a West House chap," said Harry Gresham uncomfortably. "Naturally, you West House fellows are more interested in him than we are——"

"Rats!" roared the Ancient House Removites.

"Well, at least, they think they are!" amended Gresham. "And if we draw lots, as Nipper suggests, there's a distinct chance that Reggie Pitt himself will be left out in the cold."

"That's true!" agreed Pitt. "What of it?"



Looking through the glasses, Reggie Pitt saw something that made him thrill. There was a boat bobbing about on the sunlit sea, and he saw the limp figure of the American youth being pulled over the gunwale. Earle Stanton had failed—and Tom Burton was still swimming strongly!

"Well, you're the leader of your side," said Gresham. "It'll be a bit beastly if you are unlucky in the draw!"

"Can't help that!" said Pitt cheerily. "I'm willing to take my chance with all the other chaps."

"Good old Reggie!"

"All right, then—go ahead!" said Gresham. "But I was going to offer to stand down, if some of the others would back me up."

"Very generous of you, old man, but there's nothing doing!" said Nipper politely. "Everybody in the Remove has the same chance in this draw—and that's as it should be. The Head had given permission for twelve of us to go, and the sooner we can get it settled, the better. Now then, we'll soon know our fate!"

The business of drawing lots was quickly arranged.

Two or three juniors hurried indoors, and when they emerged they were carrying a satchel, of the kind that is used in paper chases.

"There can't be anything fairer than this!" said Reggie Pitt, who was carrying the satchel. "There's a scrap of paper in here for every fellow in the Remove—just one each to go round. And twelve of them are marked with a cross."

"Good egg!"

"Let's have a dive!"

"The fellows who pick the papers with a cross will be the winners," said Reggie. "Now then, line up! We don't want any confusion or excitement. Take it calmly, children!"

"I'm not sure that it's fair!" said Gore-Pearce. "You may have arranged those papers—"

"You rotter!" roared Pitt indignantly. "Look here!"

He opened the satchel and shook the scraps of paper up and down, in front of Gore-Pearce's eyes.

"Now then—take it yourself!" said Reggie hotly. "Shake it up as much as you like—and examine every scrap of paper, if you want to!"

"Why take any notice of the rotter?" said Nipper. "We know it's fair enough, Reggie. Let's go ahead!"

Gore-Pearce retired, confused. And the business of drawing lots commenced.

"Rats and blow and dash!" said De Valerie, who was the first one to take a dip. "I've drawn blank!"

"Hard luck, old man!"

"Next, please!" said Reggie briskly.

"Why not take a dip yourself?" suggested somebody.

"All right!" said Pitt. "I might as well, I suppose!"

He dived his hand in, and his heart beat rapidly as he saw that a cross was on the scrap of paper that he produced.

"Thank goodness!" he gasped. "I'm next man in!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Good old Reggie!" said Nipper heartily. "I'm glad you've drawn lucky!"

Travers plunged his hand in, and then sighed.

"Well, well!" he said, tossing his blank scrap of paper away. "I was never any good at this sort of thing! I'd rather back a horse any day!"

And so the draw went on.

CHAPTER 14.

A Little Bargain!



UPON the whole, the draw was singularly well balanced. For in the end it was found that seven Ancient



Looking through the glasses, Reggie Pitt saw so on the sunlit sea, and he saw the limp figure of Stanton had failed—and T

House fellows had been lucky, and five West House juniors.

And both Nipper and Reggie Pitt—the Junior leaders respectively—were in the picked dozen.

There was plenty of grumbling, naturally, but nobody could say that the draw had been unfair. For everybody in the Remove had stood exactly the same chance.

The twelve fellows consisted of Nipper, Watson, Gresham, Church, Fullwood, Archie Glenthorpe and Teddy Long, of the Ancient

House; and Pitt, Castleton, Fatty Little, Singleton and Johnny Onions, of the West House.

"Lucky beggars!" said McClure enviously. "It's like your nerve, Churchy, to leave me out in the cold!"

Church looked uncomfortable.

"Sorry, Mac, but how could I help it?" he protested.

"Ass! I was only kidding!"



le him thrill. There was a boat bobbing about youth being pulled over the gunwale. Earle still swimming strongly!

"If old Handy had been here, he would have kicked up a terrific fuss!" said Church. "By the way, you chaps, I had a letter from Handforth this morning, and——"

"Blow Handforth!" interrupted De Valerie. "We're not interested in Handy now!"

"But you will be before long!" said Church tartly. "He's coming back to St. Frank's soon! He's been away for two or three weeks, but you needn't think that he's left the old school for good!"

But nobody was taking any notice of him.

There was much jubilation among the fellows who had been lucky. Teddy Long was crowing at the top of his voice. He was overwhelmed with excitement, and some of the other fellows were inclined to be bitter.

"How can anybody say that there is justice in this world?" said Potts disgustedly. "Fellows like Russell and Duncan get left out, and that cad, Long, is one of the twelve!"

"Dear old fellow, it's just the way of things," murmured Travers. "Not that Long will go on this trip. I have an impression that he will be quite willing to sell his place."

"By jingo!" shouted Jack Grey. "That's an idea, you know!"

"Rather!" said Russell. "Hi, Long! Just a minute, my son!"

Teddy Long was strutting about, trying to make himself look important. He didn't care a toss about Tom Burton's chances in the Channel swim. He had taken no interest in the affair, ever since the very start. He was, in fact, a nonentity in the Remove, and it was just the "cussedness" of things that led him to draw a paper with a cross upon it.

"Want me?" asked Teddy carelessly, as Russell came up.

"Yes!" said Russell. "You're not keen on going on this trip, are you?"

"Yes, I am!" said Teddy Long promptly.

"Rot!" broke in Jack Grey. "Look here, I'll give you five bob for your place!"

"Ten bob!" said Russell hurriedly.

"Here!" gasped Grey. "That's a bit thick, Russell——"

"And why is it thick?" put in Vivian Travers coolly. "We're all eligible for this game, I fancy. Fifteen bob, Long."

Teddy Long opened his eyes greedily.

"You—you mean that you'll give me fifteen bob if I'll let you go in my place?" he asked breathlessly.

"Exactly!"

"Look here, I'll make it a quid!" chimed in Duncan. "It's the only quid I've got, but——"

"Thirty bob!" beamed Travers.

"Oh, you bounder!" groaned Duncan. "That's wiped me out of it!"

Teddy Long stood there, his face flushed, his little eyes gleaming. Until this minute, he hadn't realised that he was in such a strong position. Money was of far more value to him than the trip on Mr. Fielding's yacht.

"I don't see why I should sell my chance!" he said loftily. "But if any fellow is particularly eager, I don't mind doing him a favour. But it'll cost him five pounds!"

"What!" roared Jack Grey hotly.

"Five quid!" nodded Long.

"Why, you—you young shark!" gasped Russell.

"Five quid!" insisted Teddy Long coolly. "That's my price!"

"In that case, dear old fellow, there's nothing doing!" said Travers, as he put his pocket-book away. "Much as I admire the Bo'sun, and much as I desire to see him conquering the Channel, I rather fancy that five quid is exorbitant."

The other fellows took their tip from Travers, and they all walked away. Teddy Long looked blank.

"Hi!" he howled. "I—I didn't mean it! What's the highest bid?"

"Two pounds—spot cash!" said Jack Grey promptly.

"Sorry, old man—three pounds!" murmured Travers.

"Done!" gasped Teddy Long. "Let's have the money, Travers!"

"With pleasure!" said Vivian Travers smoothly. "It is quite understood that I am to go in your place, and that no further discussion is necessary."

"That's right!" agreed Teddy.

And the three pounds were handed over. The sneak of the Remove grabbed them eagerly, and stuffed them into his pocket.

"Splendid!" beamed Travers. "I was quite ready, of course, to go up to a fiver if the other fellows had pushed me. But why throw money away?"

"You—you rotter!" roared Teddy Long, in dismay.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Jolly good, Travers!" said Nipper, thumping him on the back. "Good luck to you! I'm jolly glad that you're coming with us!"

"Absolutely!" said Archie. "A dashed priceless exchange, what?"

The same game was tried on several of the other lucky juniors. Fatty Little was approached by a whole gang of grim-looking juniors, but he turned a deaf ear to all inducements—at first.

And then, gradually, he was worn down.

Somerton, of the Ancient House, bought Fatty Little's place for three pounds ten. It was a small enough sum for the youthful duke, and he paid up cheerily. Fatty Little was perfectly satisfied, for three pounds ten was a small fortune to him, and he had a fatal weakness for tuck.

Church and Watson were approached in a similar way, but nothing could move them. They had determined to go on this trip, and they turned a deaf ear to every tempter.

So, at last, the whole affair was settled, and the names of the twelve juniors were sent in to their respective Housemasters.

When afternoon lessons started, there were twelve vacant places in the Remove Form-room. And the lucky juniors were cycling cheerfully through the broiling heat towards Caistowe.

They were off on the Great Adventure—off to encourage the Schoolboy Channel Swimmer on his great task—and they were determined to cheer him to victory!



CHAPTER 15.

En Route!

"WAB me for a jelly-fish!" ejaculated the Bo'sun, grinning.

He was standing on the deck of Mr. Fielding's motor-yacht, Endeavour. The owner-captain himself was just within the little chart-house, making an adjustment to one of the instruments.

"Just come and look at this, skipper!" chuckled Tom Burton. "The gang's here!"

"The gang?" repeated Mr. Fielding, coming out on to the deck. "By the Lord Harry! So it is! I'm glad, Bo'sun! It'll do you good to have a St. Frank's crowd near by while you're on the swim!"

"Souso me!" gasped the Bo'sun. "You don't think they're coming all the way, do you, sir?"

"Of course they're coming all the way," smiled Mr. Fielding. "Look at the bags they're carrying. Besides, I've had a talk with your headmaster, and I knew all about it. But I was so busy that I forgot to tell you."

A minute later, the St. Frank's contingent arrived at the gangway. All sorts of envious glances had followed them from the Caistowe populace as they had strode down the quayside. Now they came tumbling on to the Endeavour's deck, shouting cheerily and laughing.

"There he is!" roared Reggie Pitt, making a rush at Tom. "Good old Bo'sun!"

"Hurrah!"

"Good luck, Bo'sun, old son!"

"You'll do it!"

"Sink me for a shark!" panted Tom Burton, as he found himself overwhelmed. "Easy on it, messmates! Easy on it! What do you think I'm made of?"

He was thumped on the back, jabbed in the ribs, and his hands were shaken as though they were pump handles. At the end of it he was gasping for breath.

"Well, well!" smiled Vivian Travers. "So everything's ready for the start, eh? Dear old fellow, we're coming along to give you our moral support. We represent St. Frank's. While you swim the Channel in actual fact, we shall swim the Channel in the armchair

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style. And you can be quite sure that we shall give you plenty of advice!"

"Now then, young men!" said Mr. Fielding good-humouredly. "Don't you think you've battered the poor fellow about enough? Don't forget that he's got a big ordeal in front of him!"

"It's all right, skipper—they haven't hurt me!" grinned the Bo'sun. "Souise me! But I'm glad to see them here! I've just got to win through! I can't fail in front of all these chaps!"

"Fail?" laughed Nipper. "Not likely, Bo'sun! That's a word that we've wiped out of our vocabularies! By the way," he added. "Where's Captain Burton?"

"Oh, the skipper's laid up," replied the Bo'sun, his face clouding momentarily as he thought of his father. "He wanted to come, of course, but the doctor absolutely forbid him to. Said the excitement and all that would do him a tremendous amount of harm. So, much against his will, he's decided to stay in port."

There was plenty of bustling about on board now.

The Endeavour was a smart yacht—not particularly big, but up-to-date in every way. Mr. Fielding had plenty of money to indulge his fancies, and his motor yacht was the last word in comfort and efficiency.

There was plenty of accommodation, too. Not that the St. Frank's fellows required any cabins to themselves. There would be no thought of sleep for any of them—unless they took a nap on one of the saloon lounges prior to the swim.

And this, in fact, is what many of them did.

But just at present there was altogether too much to see—too much to be interested in.

The Endeavour left her moorings twenty minutes after the St. Frank's fellows had gone on board. Hundreds of people had come down to the quayside, and hundreds more were lining the beaches. Rousing cheers went up as the motor-yacht slid gracefully across the harbour. There was much handkerchief waving, and a general air of enthusiastic optimism.

"I've got to do it!" muttered the Bo'sun, as he stood on deck, his face flushed and his eyes gleaming. "By scuppers! I can't let all these people down! They trust me—they have faith in me! Swab me for a lobster! I shan't dare to come back unless I succeed, shipmates!"

"You will succeed, old man," said Reggie Pitt confidently.

"There's one thing, there'll be plenty of witnesses," smiled Nipper. "There can't be any doubts about the authenticity of this swim, Bo'sun."

"Just what I was thinking," nodded Harry Gresham. "There are some strangers on board, too. Keen young fellows, by the look of them, too! Do you know who they are?"

Alan Castleton chuckled.

"Newspaper men, mostly," he replied. "I've just been making inquiries. There's a representative of a topical film company,

too—a camera man. Oh, there's going to be some interesting things to watch later on!"

By the time the yacht was out in the open Channel, a good deal of the excitement had died down. The fellows gloried in the adventure. It certainly was enchanting out there, on the blue, sparkling sea. On such a hot day as this, a sea trip was a real delight.

"Well, young men, there's tea down in the saloon, if you like to go and join in," said Mr. Fielding, as he approached the group of juniors. "And later on we shall serve dinner. We're taking things easily, and we hope to get to Cape Grisnez well before midnight. There's no reason why the thing should be rushed."

"Tea, what?" said Archie Glenthorno happily. "Good gad! I knew there was something wrong, laddies! Absolutely! The good old tummy is positively yelping for a dose of the usual! Kindly lead me to the India and Ceylon!"

"Have you heard anything more about the American chap, sir?" asked Nipper.

"No, nothing further," replied Mr. Fielding thoughtfully. "Stanton and his trainer are very quiet. There is a rumour, however, that the American boy does not intend to start his swim until to-morrow night. If that is the case, we shall have nothing to worry about."

"There's nothing to worry about, in any case, sir," said Reggie Pitt promptly. "I'll back the Bo'sun against all comers!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Absolutely!"

Mr. Fielding smiled.

"That's the spirit, young 'uns!" he said approvingly. "There's nothing like having confidence in your own champion. And this confidence of yours is thoroughly justified. By gad! Young Burton is a wonder! He's got a stroke peculiarly his own, and it takes him through the water at an incredible speed. And his stamina is extraordinary. I believe he'll do it—I believe he'll win!"

This same spirit of optimism was spreading throughout the party. The Bo'sun himself, perhaps, was the coolest individual on board.

He could hardly realise that the great hour was nearly at hand. He knew the nature of the task that was in front of him, but it did not give him a moment's uneasiness. He might fail, but he was determined at least to put up a valiant fight. And if he did fail in this great swim, it would not be for the want of trying!



CHAPTER 16,

The Surprise!

THE Endeavour purred on her way leisurely. The summer's evening was glorious. The sea was astonishingly calm, and as the first stars began to twinkle, it was obvious that the night was going to be as perfect as the day.

The fine weather spell was continuing.

One or two of the St. Frank's fellows were on deck, leaning over the rail, watching the twinkling lights along the coast. For the Endeavour was still hugging the English shore, since, a little later, she would call at Dover.

But most of the juniors were below, taking advantage of this slack period. They were sleeping on the saloon lounges, getting themselves ready for the excitements of the night.

At Dover there was only a short delay.

Certain formalities had to be attended to, and Mr. Fielding was very busy. A burly gentleman with a face like mahogany came on board—evidently a pilot. Mr. Fielding had a brief conversation with some other officials, and finally the Endeavour put out to sea again, and this time she headed across the Straits, in a direct line for Cape Grisnez.

"We shall be at the starting point long

before eleven o'clock," remarked Nipper, as he stood near the chart-room with Reggie Pitt and Travers and Castleton. "Still, that won't be any too soon."

"No fear!" said Reggie. "The Bo'sun has to be greased before he goes into the water, and it's vitally important that he should start his swim at the exact minute. The tides are very favourable just now."

"Where is the Bo'sun?" asked Somerton.

"Below—resting," replied Nipper. "He doesn't want to, but Mr. Fielding insisted."

Mr. Fielding himself came along, and he stood by the rail, watching the receding lights of Dover Harbour.

"Well, young man, there's going to be some excitement," he said amusedly.

"Rather, sir!"

"I mean some special excitement," added Mr. Fielding.

"By Jove! Has anything happened, sir?" asked Nipper eagerly.

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Mr. Fielding's eyes were twinkling.

"It hasn't happened yet," he replied. "But, by all appearances, this swim of the Bo'sun's will resolve itself into a race."

"A race!"

"Earle Stanton and his trainer—to say nothing of a tugload of newspaper men and other sportsmen—have already set off for Cape Grisnez," said Mr. Fielding dryly. "They ought to be there by this time."

"Oh, my goodness!"

"Then—then the American boy is going to make his attempt to-night, too?"

"Exactly!" murmured Mr. Fielding. "He intends to take advantage of the same tide as the Bo'sun."

"Well, I'm blessed!" said Reggie gleefully. "That's fine!"

"I'm not so sure about it being fine!" growled Alan Castleton. "Blow this American boy!"

"Rats!" grinned Pitt. "He's got just as much right to the Channel as the Bo'sun has!"

"Well, of course, if you look at it like that!" said Castleton.

"It's the only way to look at it," nodded Mr. Fielding. "Personally, I'm very glad to hear this piece of news. It will act as a big spur to the Bo'sun. Not that he really needed one."

"All the same, sir, it'll put him on his mettle," said Nipper. "And there's nothing like a race to get the best out of a fellow. Keen as the Bo'sun is, he'll be all the keener when he finds out that he's challenged. Does he know about this yet?"

"Not yet!" said Mr. Fielding. "I thought it better not to tell him until we were nearly at our destination."

Later on, Tom Burton came on deck. He found it impossible to sleep—his inward excitement was too great. He wanted to be in the fresh air, and most of the other fellows came up with him. Even Archie Glenthorne tore himself away from the comfortable lounge, and he sallied on deck with the others. The French coast was now looming up out of the summer's night.

"Heard the latest, you fellows?" sang out Pitt cheerily.

"Yes!" said Fullwood, his voice full of excitement. "Is it true? Is this American boy starting his swim to-night?"

"So we understand, dear old fellow," said Travers. "Pretty good, eh? We shall have something to watch!"

"Souise my scuppers!" said the Bo'sun. "The last I heard was that Stanton was going to try his swim to-morrow. But it's all the better if he enters the water at the same time as me. Swab me! I shall have to be smart if I'm to beat this American wonder!"

Nipper laughed.

"In all probability, he's not such a wonder as rumour has suggested," he remarked. "The Americans have a habit of crowing before the event for publicity's sake. We've never seen this chap, Stanton, and we know practically nothing about him. But I'll guarantee that the Bo'sun is a better man!"

"Hear, hear!"

"St. Frank's for ever!"

"The Bo'sun's going to win!"

Vivian Travers coughed.

"You'll pardon the hint, dear old fellow, but isn't this rather like crowing before the event?" he murmured.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Travers is right!" chuckled Nipper. "We've been criticising the Americans, and we're doing exactly the same thing! It'll be a far better policy to keep quiet—until the Bo'sun has conquered. Then we'll cheer ourselves hoarse!"

After that, there was a good deal of fresh excitement. There was all the business of manœuvring the Endeavour close in to the shore. Boats were put off, and the Bo'sun and Mr. Fielding, accompanied by two gentlemen of pugilistic appearance, went ashore first. The St. Frank's crowd came along in another boat. It had been suggested that they should stay on the yacht, but they scouted the very idea. They wanted to be on French soil when Tom Burton walked into the Channel at the start of his swim.

It was very dark on the beach, but farther along the coast—not more than three or four hundred yards away—brilliant lights were gleaming. And just out from the shore a big tugboat was standing by.

"That's the American crowd!" said Nipper, as he looked in that direction. "They're getting ready. I say, it'll be a bit offside if Stanton sets out before the Bo'sun."

"What difference would it make?" asked Pitt. "Each party has its official timekeeper, and although they swim in a kind of race, it won't much matter if one swimmer gets off before the other. Still, it would be rather rich if they both entered the water at the same moment."

On the beach, the scene was even more impressive. Gleaming searchlights from the yacht swept the shore, and made the sands as light as day in this particular spot.

There were crowds of people in the background, watching eagerly.

There was no delay. Tom Burton was promptly seized by the pugilistic-looking gentlemen, and the business of greasing him commenced. The St. Frank's fellows stood round, talking animatedly, and offering all sorts of advice that was mostly ignored.

And in the middle of it all a stranger arrived.



CHAPTER 17.

The Start!

"WELL, folks, this looks good to me!" The stranger spoke heartily, and his American accent was unmistakable. He was a big, bluff-looking man, dressed in a Palm Beach suit and a straw hat

"Hallo, sir!" shouted the St. Frank's fellows.

"I'm from the Stanton crowd," said the stranger genially. "Goddard's my name—Ed Goddard."

Mr. Fielding came forward with outstretched hand.

"Pleased to meet you, Mr. Goddard!" he said, with genuine delight. "My name's Fielding."

"Well, that's fine!" said Mr. Goddard, as they shook hands. "You're the backer of this British schoolboy, eh? Well, I'm behind young Stanton. And I don't mind telling you that I've wagered five thousand dollars that he'll be having breakfast in Dover before your schoolboy is half-way across!"

"Then you're a very rash man, Mr. Goddard!" said Mr. Fielding dryly.

"Maybe," nodded the American. "But I've got plenty of faith in Earle. You haven't seen him swimming—I have! And that makes a difference. All the same, folks, I wish your man the best of luck. He's got sand, that schoolboy!"

"Hear, hear!" echoed the St. Frank's fellows.

"When is your champion going to take the water, sir?" asked Nipper.

"Say, we'll do the thing properly!" replied Mr. Ed Goddard. "Let them both enter at the same minute, eh? How's that, Mr. Fielding?"

"I'm quite agreeable," smiled Mr. Fielding. "Let them both start off at the same time, and then it will be a real cross-Channel race."

"Hurrah!"

"And may the best man win!"

"Yes, rather!"

Mr. Goddard went over, and he examined Tom Burton critically.

"Fine figure—good muscles—plenty of pep, too, judging by the set of his jaw," he commented. "Yes, he's surely a hefty proposition."

"You said a mouthful, sir!" grinned Reggie Pitt.

"Well, kid, I wish you the best of luck!" said Mr. Goddard, as he smiled at the Bo'sun. "But, say, I'd just like you folks to take a peek at Earle!"

"Why not?" murmured Travers. "There's plenty of time before the kick-off, dear fellows. Let's stroll along."

When Mr. Ed Goddard went back to his own party, most of the St. Frank's fellows accompanied him. They found Earle Stanton on the beach, and like the Bo'sun, he was being greased by his trainers.

And, without doubt, this Boston boy of sixteen was a formidable rival.

He was a fair young giant, and he looked nearer twenty than sixteen. His frame was big and brawny, and his muscles were like masses of coiled rope beneath his sunburned skin.

"Well?" smiled Mr. Goddard.

"He's got the advantage of our man in size, anyhow, sir," said Nipper critically.

"But size doesn't always count, does it?"

"It goes a long way!" retorted Mr. Goddard.

Earle Stanton waved a hand to the visitors.

"Say, when this picnic is over, I'd like to meet you guys!" he said cheerily. "I guess we'll have a little celebration over in Dover in the morning."

"That's fine!" said Travers. "We'll wait for you!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Aw, cut it out!" grinned Stanton. "By the time you folks get to England I shall have had a long nap!"

There was a good deal of chipping of this kind, and much laughter. Everything was very good-natured and friendly.

But it was clear that the Americans regarded the St. Frank's schoolboy as a very unimportant rival. They did not take him seriously. They knew his age—knew that he was a mere junior—and they were inclined to treat him as a joke.

In fact, one of their main reasons for suggesting a simultaneous start was that they could have the laugh over the Bo'sun. It would be rather good fun to see Stanton getting further and further away from his young rival. Earle Stanton, the American Boy Wonder, had crossed the Atlantic in order to conquer the Channel, and he certainly wasn't going to be frightened by a mere schoolboy!

Shortly after midnight everything was ready.

Tom Burton was standing on the sands near the water's edge, looking grotesque in his covering of grease. The whole scene was dazzlingly brilliant in the glare from the searchlights.

Further along the shore Earle Stanton was ready, too. From the American party's tug came the strains of jazz music. A dance band had been engaged especially, and it was already making the night lively with syncopated music.

Stanton himself was wearing a peculiar kind of swimming cap. It looked almost like a helmet. But the Bo'sun disdained any of these "fancy fixings." He was wearing nothing but a single-piece swimming suit, and he was cool and confident.

"All set?" came a hail from along the beach.

"Yes!" shouted Mr. Fielding.

"Good luck, Bo'sun!"

"Hurrah!"

"Absolutely!" said Archie, pushing forward and grasping Tom Burton's hand. "Laddie, you can count on us to cheer you—Odds horrors and foulness! In other words, good gad!"

He released the Bo'sun's hand, and gazed in a fascinated way at his own fingers. They were smothered in grease, and all the other fellows yelled with laughter.

"I mean, all in a good cause, what?" murmured Archie bravely. "Kindly hand



Dazedly Tom Burton walked out of the sea on to the beach, and Nipper and Pitt and others rushed forward with the idea of saving the latest conqueror of the Channel from being mobbed by the enthusiastic crowd.

over the cleaning materials, somebody! I'm in a poisonous mess, dash it!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There was further shouting, and the sounds of the jazz band wafted louder.

"Rather a pity we didn't bring some musical instruments," commented Church.

"Rats!" said Reggie Pitt. "Our man doesn't need any music to urge him on! The Bo'sun doesn't want to swim to the beat of a trap-drum!"

"Hear, hear!" murmured Travers. "Personally, I'm rather sorry for poor Stanton. He'll probably go clean out of his mind before he's covered half the distance! Save us from our friends! They think they're doing their best, but, by Samson, we'd often be better off without them!"

And Tom Burton, at least, agreed.

He looked upon this Channel swim as something important—something earnest. And he needed no jazz band.

had entered the water at the same moment, some three or four hundred yards apart. Now they were both swimming out strongly from the beach—setting off towards that far-distant shore on the other side of the Straits.

Behind each swimmer went a small boat containing the trainers. Mr. Fielding was in the rowing boat that accompanied Tom Burton, but there was no room for any of the St. Frank's fellows.

They were to follow in the yacht, a short distance behind.

Half an hour later the scene was interesting.

Tom Burton was swimming strongly, with the boat just behind him. Further in the rear came the Endeavour, with her decks crowded with the St. Frank's fellows. About half a mile away Earle Stanton was swimming with a similar procession in his rear. Strains of lively music could still be heard, occasionally wafting across the calm water. But, much to the gratification of the Bo'sun's supporters, this music was only borne to them in occasional snatches.

"He's going strong!" said Nipper contentedly.

"Honestly, do you think he'll do it?" asked Casleton.

"That's rather a difficult question to answer, old man," replied Nipper. "The Channel isn't an easy proposition. Let's wait until he's half-way across—and then we shall be in a better position to judge."



CHAPTER 18.

Well Away!

"**T**HEY'RE off!"
 "Hurrah!"
 "Go it, Bo'sun!"
 The beach echoed and re-echoed with the cheering. Burton and Earle Stanton

"Supposing this American fellow gets across first, and does it in under the eleven hours?"

"Well, it won't make any difference to the Bo'sun," replied Pitt. "He's British, and that newspaper offer of a thousand pounds was only open to British competitors."

"But it *will* make a difference," said Nipper quietly.

"How?"

"Because the thousand pounds will only be paid over if the British youth beats the existing record," said Nipper. "And if Stanton sets up a new record, and the Bo'sun fails to do better, there'll be no money."

"That's rotten!" growled Castleton. "And the poor old Bo'sun is counting on that cash like anything! He's keen to help his uncle."

"Why worry, dear old fellows?" drawled Vivian Travers. "All the talk in the world won't make any difference. You'll do far better to keep your eye on our pal, Stanton. Unless I'm much mistaken, he's forging ahead!"

"By jingo!"

"Yes, they're beating us!"

"Oh, my only hat!"

There was no mistake about it. The American was getting further and further ahead. This meant, clearly enough, that Earle Stanton was swimming more rapidly than Tom Burton. He was making much better progress; and it was impossible to say that he was more favourably assisted by the tides. Both swimmers had exactly the same conditions.

An hour later the anxiety on board the Endeavour was intense.

For by now the rival tug was only a little blur in the distance ahead. Her twinkling lights could just be seen. No longer did the sounds of the jazz band come floating across the placid sea.

"This is pretty awful!" groaned Castleton. "Poor old Bo'sun! He's being whacked to a frazzle! That American chap is making him look positively silly!"

"They weren't far wrong when they described him as the 'American Boy Wonder,' were they?" said Church glumly. "He must be a giddy terror! Burton has been swimming strongly, and yet this American chap has got clean ahead! It's—it's uncanny!"

"It's rotten!" said Pitt gruffly.

And so it went on—with the hopes of the St. Frank's party getting lower and lower.

By three o'clock, as dawn was breaking, the rival tug was two or three miles away. Stanton had completely outstripped his British rival.

But if the Removites were torn with anxiety, Mr. Fielding was calmly confident. He was sitting in the bows of the rowing boat, watching the Bo'sun intently and closely. This was the most critical period of the swim.

For three hours Burton had been in the water; and now he was having some trouble with the tide. An awkward cross-current was menacing his progress. Furthermore, it was just the period when he was due to get his

"second wind." If he got it, all well and good—he would be able to swim on confidently and strongly.

"All right, Bo'sun?" called Mr. Fielding at intervals.

"I'm fine, sir!" was Tom's invariable reply.

"Still feeling fit?"

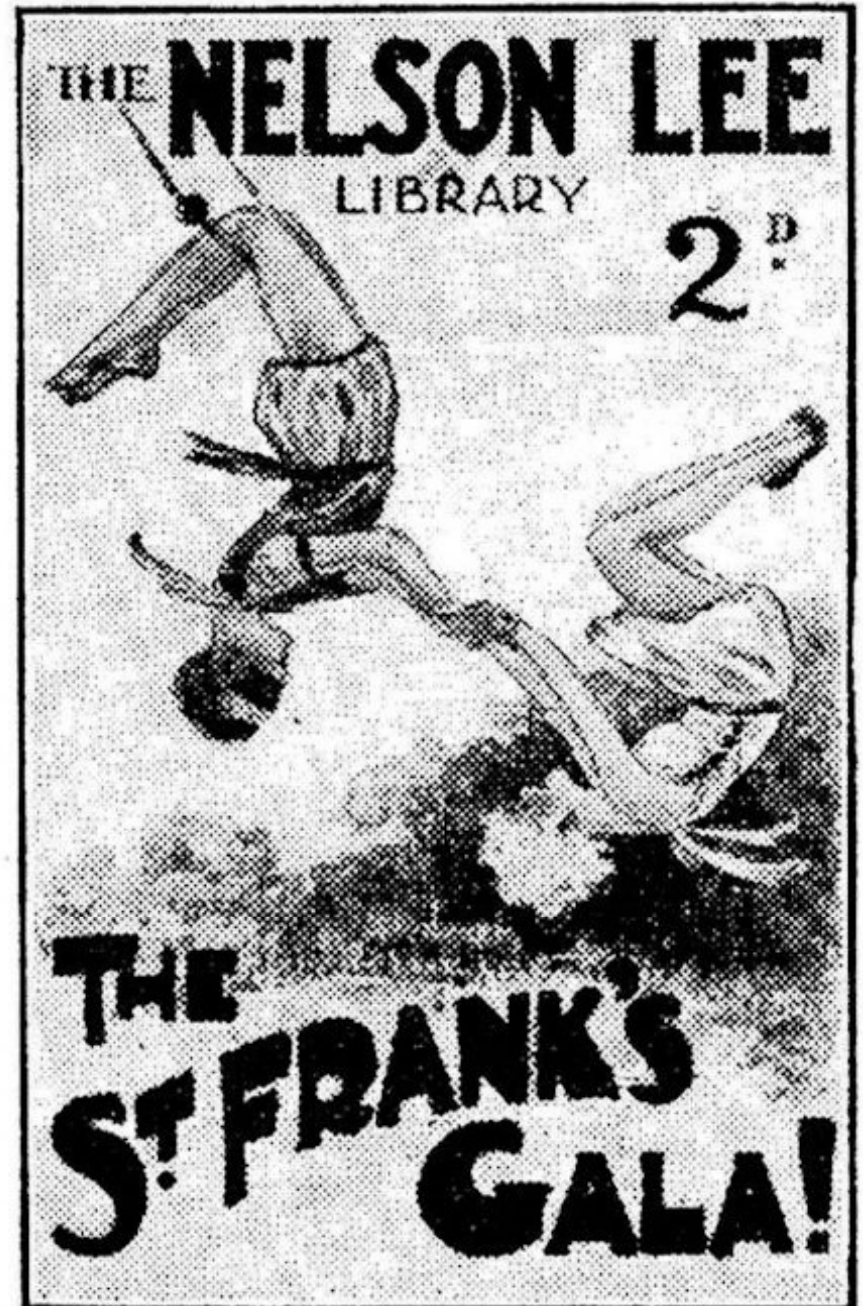
"Souse! I haven't started yet, sir!" sang out the Bo'sun. "That American lubber has got well ahead."

"Don't worry about him, my boy," said Mr. Fielding quickly.

"I'm not!" replied the Bo'sun.

And there was a tone of serene confidence in his voice.

NEXT WEDNESDAY!



"Feel like anything to eat or drink yet?"

"No, thanks, sir—I can carry on for another hour."

And Tom Burton carried on. He was plugging on steadily—swimming with deliberate strokes. There was no fluster about him—no flurry. He just went on, swimming strongly and surely.

But when full daylight came, the rivals were almost out of sight.

"I'm afraid there's not much hope now," said Castleton, in a gloomy voice. "The lead is everything in a swim like this."

"Oh, well, we needn't be downhearted about it," said Nipper. "Even if the Bo'sun doesn't break any records, he will still have put up a jolly fine performance."

"But he'll *make* a record, if he swims the

Channel," said Reggie Pitt. "He'll be the first schoolboy to have done it."

"There's that, of course," agreed Castleton. "But it's a pity he couldn't have shown this American chap a clean pair of heels! That's what's making me so jolly wild!"

"Why get wild, dear old fellow?" smiled Travers. "The race isn't over yet! In fact, it isn't half over. And look what a glorious morning!" he added, waving his hand towards the rising sun. "By Samson! It makes a fellow feel good!"

"Yes, rather!" said Fullwood. "The early morning is the best time of the day. I think I shall always get up at four o'clock after this!"

"THE ST. FRANK'S GALA!"

Lord Edgemore, that genial old earl whom the St. Frank's juniors have assisted so much in the past, organises the gala, and he invites the whole of the school to attend.

Everybody is intensely excited, particularly the juniors. Even Claude Gore-Pearce becomes interested, but only because he sees here an opportunity of getting his own back against the earl, whom he has good reason to dislike.

Unexpected things happen owing to Gore-Pearce's caddish actions, and altogether Nipper and Reggie Pitt and all the other prominent Removites find themselves having a lively time. For, in addition, Hal Brewster and his chums of the River House School have also been invited to the gala, and just at the moment there is intense rivalry between the two schools.

This yarn shows Edwy Searles Brooks in good form. Look out for it next Wednesday.

"THE CRUISE OF THE BLUE BIRD!"

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There were many chuckles, and some of the gloomy expressions vanished. For, in spite of themselves, the St. Frank's fellows were bucked up by the glory of the sunrise.

And Tom Burton, in the meantime, kept plugging doggedly on.



CHAPTER 19.

The Sensation!

BREKKER, you fellows!" shouted Harry Gresham.

He had just appeared from the

saloon stairway, and he crossed the deck to

the spot where most of the juniors were crowded.

"Anything fresh?" he asked.

"Nothing!" replied Pitt. "At least, nothing much. Stanton's party have disappeared—that's all!"

"Disappeared!" echoed Gresham, staring.

He looked across the sunlit sea, but there was no sign of the rival party.

"By jingo!" he ejaculated. "They've got well ahead now!"

"For once, the Americans weren't boasting!" said Somerton. "This swimmer of theirs is an absolute marvel! The Bo'sun is swimming pretty wonderfully, and he has already done better than most other Channel swimmers. That just shows you what progress Stanton must have made!"

"Let's all go down to breakfast," said Fullwood gruffly.

"Absolutely!" agreed Archie. "I trust there is tea on the menu, laddies? Coffee, of course, is the correct thing, but there's nothing like a cup of the real juice to make a chappie feel bucked."

They all went down, and partook of an early breakfast. It was not a particularly merry party. Everything seemed to be going wrong.

"If this American merchant had to break all records, why couldn't he have done it to-morrow?" complained Tommy Watson. "Why couldn't he have given us some peace of mind? As it is, instead of cheering the poor old Bo'sun, we feel like kicking something!"

"Oh, well, let's hustle over this grub, and go on deck again," said Reggie Pitt.

"What's the good?" growled Castleton. "We shall only get the pip."

"What you fellows need is faith," murmured Vivian Travers. "The American chap hasn't won yet!"

"Yes, by Jove, you're right, Travers!" said Pitt promptly. "We're a set of rotters for having any doubts about the Bo'sun. Of course he'll win!"

"Hear, hear!" echoed the others.

But it was noticed that Vivian Travers smiled. Perhaps he smiled because those "Hear, hears!" were not very convincing. As soon as the meal was over, they hurried up on deck and crowded in the bows.

"How's everything going, Mr. Fielding?" yelled Nipper.

Some little distance ahead, the rowing-boat was lazily moving on the water. Mr. Fielding turned his head.

"Splendidly!" he replied. "The Bo'sun is doing wonders!"

"Oh, good man!"

"Keep it up, Bo'sun!"

"St. Frank's for ever!"

"And don't worry about that American merchant!" yelled Reggie Pitt. "He may be out of sight, but perhaps he's got into a different current."

Tom Burton raised a cheery arm into the air.

"Hurrah!" roared the juniors.

"He says he's forgotten the American boy!" shouted Mr. Fielding. "Gad, that's the spirit!"

"Yes, rather! Keep it up, Bo'sun!"

They all watched with interest while the schoolboy Channel swimmer was being fed. Hot, nourishing broth was given to him from a vacuum flask. This was followed by chunks of chocolate, and other sustaining condensed foods.

The Press photographers were busy at this period—one of them being in the boat with Mr. Fielding. The reporters were active, too—making notes and writing up the "story" of the swim. They were preparing an hour-by-hour account of the valiant schoolboy's fight.

After this brief pause for food, Tom Burton carried on again—swimming with the same steady stroke. There was nothing hurried in his movements, and he was still calm and unruffled. As Mr. Fielding had said, he had forgotten all about his American rival, and was concentrating his energies on his own swim.

And so another hour slipped by—and still another.

By seven o'clock the sun was high, and the day was beginning to grow warm. Ships of various kinds hove into sight, and some of them came quite close. The sailors lined the decks and waved cheerily. Then, at about half-past seven, Vivian Travers was found staring steadfastly in one direction.

"What are you looking at, old man?" asked Nipper, as he joined Travers.

"Nothing much, dear old fellow," murmured Travers. "Only the American tug."

"What!"

"Strictly speaking, it is a British tug—but I think you know what I mean," said Travers. "Curiously enough, she is in sight again. Significant, what?"

Nipper stared, his heart thumping more rapidly.

"By Jove, I should think it is significant!" he said tensely. "Hi, Reggie! I say, Gresham! Have you seen this?"

"Seen what?" asked half a dozen juniors, running up.

"Look over there!" said Nipper. "Travers spotted it first. It's the tug that's accompanying Earle Stanton!"

"Well, I'm jiggered!"

"We're overhauling it!"

"Good gad!"

A wave of excitement went through the Endeavour. Sailors came up from below, and stared over the sea. The reporters were busy with their notebooks. And in the boat ahead, Mr. Fielding was using his binoculars occasionally. Now and then he spoke some cheering words to Tom Burton.

In this way another hour went by.

For the yacht's progress was, of course, very slow—since it had to accommodate its speed to the swimmer ahead. But there could be no denying that something had gone wrong with the American boy's swim.

For as the minutes passed, the tug grew nearer. At least, the St. Frank's party crept

nearer to the tug. This latter vessel was stationary, her engines stopped, and one or two boats were dotted about near by.

Nipper had secured a pair of binoculars, and he was gazing through them eagerly.

"Yes!" he gasped at last. "I suspected it all along—and now I'm certain!"

"What is it?" demanded Reggie Pitt. "Let's have a look through those glasses, you bounder!"

"All right, then—look!" said Nipper.

"Why bother about the glasses?" yelled Castleton excitedly. "We can see without 'em! Look, you fellows! The American chap is being pulled out of the water! He's failed!"

And Reggie Pitt, through the glasses, saw with crystal clarity what the other fellows could only guess at. He saw a boat bobbing about on the sunlit sea; and he saw the limp figure of the American youth being pulled over the gunwale!

CHAPTER 20.

The White Cliffs of England!



"H

E'S failed—he's failed!"

It was a great shout, and it went up from every throat.

Not only the St. Frank's fellows, but all the other occupants of the Endeavour were excited and tense.

For now the truth was clear to all.

Earle Stanton, the American Boy Wonder, had been pulled out of the water, and was even now being carefully transferred to the tug.

And Tom Burton was still swimming strongly—still plugging on with dogged determination, unworried by the fortunes of his rival.

"Hurrah!" yelled Tommy Watson. "Oh, good egg!"

"Here, steady!" protested Nipper.

"Oh, what's the good of being a hypocrite?" demanded Tommy Watson. "We're glad, aren't we?"

"Yes, I suppose we are," admitted Nipper.

"Of course we're glad," said Tommy. "We all thought that the American chap had beaten the Bo'sun to a frazzle—and now we find that he's failed! We should be born idiots if we pretended to be sorry!"

"Well, we can be sorry, and glad, too," said Reggie Pitt cheerfully. "We can be glad that the Bo'sun has a clear field—but, at the same time, we can't help feeling a little bit sorry for this American fellow. If you ask me, his failure is entirely his own fault."

"How do you make that out?" asked Johnny Onions.

"Why, he expended all his strength in a 'rush' start," replied Pitt. "He thought

he would get ahead—and keep ahead. But that sort of thing can't be done."

Nipper nodded.

"In just the same way, a runner in a long-distance race will get miles ahead of the whole field," he said. "But long before the course is completed he falls out, whacked. It's the man who nurses his strength that wins."

"The hare and the tortoise over again, dear old fellow," said Travers, smilingly. "Aesop was a wise old bird!"

It was, of course, idle for the St. Frank's juniors to pretend that they were anything else but pleased. They were inclined to believe that Reggie Pitt's theory was correct. The American boy had paid the penalty for over confidence; he had used up all his strength in the first half of the swim, instead of reserving his stamina for the more difficult period.

And although the juniors were sorry for him, they were intensely relieved.

Tom Burton, on the other hand, was quite unaffected when Mr. Fielding told him that Earle Stanton had been taken out of the water. Burton had been swimming steadily ever since the start, and he had not been worried by any outside influences. With rare wisdom, he had been swimming in an exasperatingly leisurely way. Yet this policy of his was clever.

He was already well past the half-way mark, and now, just as he had hoped, the tides were all in his favour. The time had come for him to make his big effort.

Earle Stanton had made his own big effort too early—when there was no real reason for it. But the Bo'sun took brainy advantage of the currents. And now, with an energy that astonished even Mr. Fielding, he changed his stroke, and swam on with so much freshness that one might have supposed that he had only now entered the water.

He astonished everybody—particularly the Press representatives.

And now the white cliffs of England were within sight, growing perceptibly clearer and nearer. A kind of tense, bottled-up excitement affected everybody on the yacht.

"That youngster's a deep beggar!" said one of the newspaper men. "By Jove! He was only fooling us at the beginning! He could have kept pace with the American kid as easily as possible, if he had liked!"

"I believe it!" said Nipper, who happened to be near by. "And yet Burton's pace wasn't so slow, either. According to the majority of Channel swims, he has already made history."

The Press man smiled.

"I don't wonder at you boys being excited!" he said. "You'll have a bit of a job to keep Burton at your school after this affair!"

"Oh, don't you worry!" grinned Reggie Pitt. "The Bo'sun won't take any notice of praise, or anything like that. He won't get swelled head. When he gets back to

St. Frank's he'll just drop into the ordinary way of things again."

They felt that they had to talk, in order to pass the time. But their eyes, for the most part, were turned in the direction of that bobbing head, which could always be seen in advance of the rowing boat.

"It would have been better if the American chap had stuck it, instead of petering out," remarked Pitt thoughtfully. "We want the Bo'sun to win, of course—but it'll be a bit tame, his finishing on his own."

"Finishing, did you say?" asked Travers mildly.

"Yes."

"Aren't you an optimist, dear old fellow?"

"What do you mean, you ass?"

"Nothing!" said Travers. "Only that the most difficult part of the swim is ahead of the Bo'sun. The critical part—the part that conquers nine out of every ten Channel aspirants."

"H'm!" grunted Reggie. "I suppose you're right."

"Unhappily, there is no supposing about it," said Travers. "Goodness knows, I don't want to be a Jonah—and, in fact, I personally believe that the Bo'sun will do it. But we've got to be prepared for the other thing. And I think you'll grant that the dear old fellow has already put up a magnificent show."

"Hear, hear!"

Vivian Travers was undoubtedly correct. It wouldn't do to take anything for granted. The cliffs of England were within sight—but many a Channel swimmer has been taken, exhausted, from the water when only a bare mile or so from the beach.

These last hours were the crucial ones.

"So near, and yet so far!" murmured Reggie, as he stood staring at the coast-line. "By Jove! I wonder! He's going ahead like a Trojan now. But can he stick it? That's the great question. Can he stick it?"

But nobody—not even the Bo'sun himself—could answer that question.



CHAPTER 21.

The Conqueror!

EXCITEMENT ran high. "A mile—only another mile!" said Reggie Pitt breath-

lessly. "Oh, good old Bo'sun!"

"Bravo, old man!"

"Hurrah!"

"Go it, St. Frank's—stick it, Bo'sun!"

The Removites raised their voices, cheering and shouting encouragement. They were no longer on board the Endeavour, but were in one of the vessel's boats.

As the shore was so near, Nipper had persuaded one of the officers to lower the

boat, and the juniors had crowded into it; now they were some little distance in advance of the swimmer, and to his left.

As the Bo'sun swam, he could see them—although only occasionally. For he kept his head down, and he was using an over-arm stroke. With rhythmic, mechanical regularity, he lifted his head in order to take in a breath of air, and then down it went again.

"Nine hours and fifteen minutes!" said Nipper tensely, as he looked at his watch. "By Jove! If he keeps on like this, he'll break the record! He'll do the trick!"

"Come on, Bo'sun—just a last spurt, old son!"

"Think of your Uncle Steve!"

"Hurrah!"

It is doubtful if Tom Burton heard any of these shouts clearly. At the best, he must only have been aware of a blur of sound. The truth was, he was now in a condition of semi-exhaustion. He was swimming mechanically—yet, at the same time, all his faculties were with him.

And he knew, grimly, that he had to keep on. Nothing must interfere with that! He had to keep on! The beach was comparatively close—tantalisingly close—and already there were crowds of people lining the shingle, standing there shouting, waving, and getting more and more excited.

Actually, the spot was somewhere between Dover and Folkestone, and usually this part of the coast was more or less quiet.

But it wasn't quiet on this eventful morning!

Hundreds of people had collected, and hundreds more were coming—from Folkestone and from Dover, and from other places. The news had spread round that the British schoolboy had nearly completed his Channel swim, and that he was on the point of coming ashore.

The buses that plied along the coast roads were filled to overflowing. Private motor-cars were humming to the scene. Cyclists were arriving every minute. For it was in the height of the holiday season, and there were many thousands of people along this coast who had nothing to do. They were down here for pleasure, and this was a real bit of excitement.

Mr. Fielding sat in the boat, just behind the swimmer, his face set and his eyes troubled.

The St. Frank's fellows had noticed nothing particular, mainly because they had been at a distance. But Mr. Fielding knew that the valiant schoolboy was nearly at the end of his endurance. He had made a tremendous spurt, and he had accomplished marvels. But it had been impossible to keep this up. The tides, too, had helped him, and he had taken every advantage of them.

Nothing could alter the fact that he was "all in."

There was every reason for Mr. Fielding's anxiety. Had Burton come thus far, only to see victory snatched away from him during

the last half mile? This, indeed, would have been a cruel blow. For if he succeeded now, he would beat the record—and thus he would win the thousand-pound prize that he had so set his heart on.

"Bo'sun, lad!" shouted Mr. Fielding, leaning over the bows of the boat and staring anxiously at the Removite. "Easy, Bo'sun—easy! Perhaps you'd like a little stimulant?"

But no sign came from Tom Burton. He kept swimming on—blindly, and with machine-like precision.

"Upon my word!" muttered Mr. Fielding. "The boy's will-power is uncanny! He's beaten—absolutely worn out. And yet he keeps on!"

He glanced across the sparkling waters to the sandy beach, and he saw the thousands of people collecting there. They seemed very, very near! And then another series of shouts came from the boat over to the left. The St. Frank's fellows were giving their champion further encouragement.

"Come on, Bo'sun!"

"West House for ever!"

"Hurrah!"

"Bo'sun—Bo'sun!" yelled Reggie Pitt. "Keep it up, old fellow! You're nearly there!"

But Tom Burton showed no sign of hearing even these encouraging shouts. Gradually his stroke was getting slower, and it was only occasionally that he lifted his head out of the water. Mr. Fielding was watching with greater anxiety than ever.

"Good gad!" came an exclamation from Archie Glenthorne. "Look at him, laddies! I believe he's whacked!"

"Never!" shouted Reggie Pitt. "Bo'sun!"

Mr. Fielding was standing up now, and he gave a muttered command to the oarsmen. The boat slewed slightly, for it was in danger of overtaking the swimmer.

"He's done—he's finished!" muttered Mr. Fielding, in anguish.

For Tom Burton had now ceased swimming, and he was just wallowing in the sea. His face looked bluish, his eyes were closed, and his whole countenance was haggard and drawn.

"Come along, you boys!" shouted Mr. Fielding urgently. "Lend a hand here! He's done! We've got to take him in!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"And it's only a half a mile to the shore, sir!"

"Never mind that!" snapped Mr. Fielding. "It would be all the same if it were only half a yard! We're not going to let this boy sacrifice his life! Quick! He'll sink!"

The two boats converged, and at last Tom Burton seemed to realise what was happening. Perhaps this brief rest had restored his wits. He gave one or two feeble strokes, and he opened his eyes. He stared blankly, dazedly. He saw Mr. Fielding leaning out of the boat towards him.

"A little nearer," said the Caistowe sports-

man. "That's better. Come, Bo'sun, my boy! You must let me help you out."

Tom shook the water out of his eyes.

"Help—help me out?" he muttered, half-incoherently. "Swab me! Why, what— But—but I'm still swimming, sir! I haven't done it yet!"

"Never mind that!" said Mr. Fielding. "You've got to come out."

The words seemed to awaken the swimmer completely.

"Come out!" he ejaculated hoarsely, as he stared round. "Why, souse me for a landlubber! Is that the beach over there, "Yes, it is, but—"

"How far, sir?" panted the Bo'sun. "How far?"

"About half a mile," said Mr. Fielding, in agony. "But you can't do it—"

"Can't do it!" interrupted the Bo'sun. "By scuppers! Watch me, sir!"

And he put his head down, and a roar went up from the St. Frank's juniors when they saw that Tom was settling down to a final spurt.

"Hurrah!"

"He's going to do it, after all!"

"Good man, Bo'sun—only another few minutes, and you'll do it!"

Tom Burton heard—and he swam with a kind of frenzied strength. On—on towards that tantalisingly near beach!

And a rolling cheer went up from the thousands of spectators as they saw that the schoolboy swimmer was still sticking it.



CHAPTER 22.

Good Old Bo'sun!

MR. FIELDING'S words had acted as a fiery stimulant.

Never for a moment would Tom Burton consent to be taken out of the water! He wasn't beaten yet! His legs were so numb that he could hardly tell whether he had any limbs or not. He just swam on mechanically—but his brain was now active enough.

He just had to keep on—he had to win!

And nearer and nearer grew the shore—with those throngs of holiday makers, all waving and shouting and cheering.

The St. Frank's boat had grounded now, and the juniors were wading in the surf and dancing about, watching the Bo'sun's head, out there, so comparatively near. It would be bitterly cruel if he collapsed now—with only a few hundred yards to finish.

The excitement was particularly intense, for everybody on the beach knew that the

TWO GRAND FEATURES THAT WILL INTEREST 'NELSON LEE' READERS!



THIS WEEK'S STORY

When Reggie Pitt first came to St. Frank's he was called the Serpent. He well deserved this name, for in those days he was an out-and-out young rascal, full of vicious cunning, and ever-ready to do his school-mates a bad turn. Read about him in the splendid series of long complete stories, dealing with the early adventures of the Boys of St. Frank's, now appearing every week in "The Popular."

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"American Boy Wonder" had failed. That piece of news had swept through Dover and Folkestone, and along the other coast towns, with the speed of lightning. The people knew, too, that the St. Frank's junior was still carrying on—and, furthermore, that he stood an excellent chance of breaking all the records!

"He's here—he's here!"

"Bravo!"

"Come on, Bo'sun—another twenty yards!" yelled Reggie Pitt frantically. "You've done it, old man!"

"Oh, Bo'sun—don't let the Channel beat you during the last minute!"

Mr. Fielding's heart was in his mouth. He could see clearly enough that the youngster was being kept up by a false strength now. At any moment he might collapse. Within the next twenty seconds it was possible that he would crumple up and sink like a stone. In that case, the only thing would be to haul him into the boat when he rose to the surface.

But no—he still kept on.

And then the Bo'sun was seen to stop swimming. His head and shoulders came out of the water; he staggered; then he blundered on blindly, holding his hands level with his shoulders.

"He's touched the bottom!"

"He's landed—he's done the trick!"

"Hurrah!"

"Oh, well swum, young 'un!"

It was true! The Bo'sun was on the sands, walking blunderingly forward—unable to see, unable to feel. Twice he stumbled, but something seemed to keep him up. Mr. Fielding was now standing up in the boat, his face flushed, his eyes aglow.

"Well done, Bo'sun!" he said breathlessly. "Good boy—splendid fellow!"

There was no holding the crowds now. In their hundreds they came dashing out into the surf, careless of getting wet. They surrounded the schoolboy swimmer, and many hands helped him out of the water. At least, they tried to help him. But the Bo'sun, with a last effort, waved them back.

"No, no!" he whispered. "Let me come right out—yes, right out!"

Nipper and Pitt and the others pressed round, with the idea of saving their school-fellow from the enthusiastic exuberance of the crowd. Tom Burton walked on dazedly—until he was on the dry sand, beyond the last lap of the waves. Then suddenly, dramatically, he collapsed in a heap.

"Gangway, there!" roared Nipper. "Lend a hand, you fellows! Sharp's the word! We've got to rush him out of this crowd!"

The Removites gathered round in a kind of bodyguard. Four of them lifted the exhausted Bo'sun, and the others forced a way through the throngs.

They didn't rest until they were off the beach, until they had carried their burden into a nearby dwelling, the owner of which was only too ready to provide the accommodation.

Mr. Fielding came hurrying up, and he was aglow with satisfaction.

"He's done it, boys!" he said delightedly. "The Bo'sun has swum the Channel in record time! Thirty-seven minutes quicker than any other swimmer!"

"Hurrah!"

The house was positively besieged. But for two or three hours nobody was allowed to enter. Tom Burton was resting, and then, after that, he went through intense massage, and he had a hot bath and food.

He was bewildered, dazed. But by this time all his wits had returned, and his recovery was rapid.

"Here, swab me!" he said protestingly. "There's no need to make such a fuss, ship-mates! I'm all right now! And the fact that I've done it is enough to make me shout with joy. Great marlinspikes! I'm thinking of Uncle Steve and that thousand quid! It was worth it all—worth every bit of it! But I don't seem to remember much of the swim towards the end."

"But you did it, old man!"

"I wasn't helped, was I?" asked Burton anxiously.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"My dear ass, you wouldn't allow anybody to touch you!" grinned Reggie Pitt. "Now, come along—the photographers are waiting for you!"

"Oh, help!" groaned the Bo'sun.

But there was no getting out of it. He was obliged to go outside, and his astonishment was great, for there were thousands of people waiting to cheer him. Film cameras clicked, and the whole scene was destined to remain long in Tom Burton's mind.

And after that came the triumphant motor drive home along the coast towards Caistow and St. Frank's.

The school welcomed him with a thunder of cheering. For Tom Burton, of the Remove, had made history.

Not that the Bo'sun cared much for the honour and the glory. He had succeeded in what he had set out to do! He had won that thousand pound newspaper prize, and he would be able to invest the money in his uncle's business. And that, so far as the Bo'sun was concerned, was the main issue.

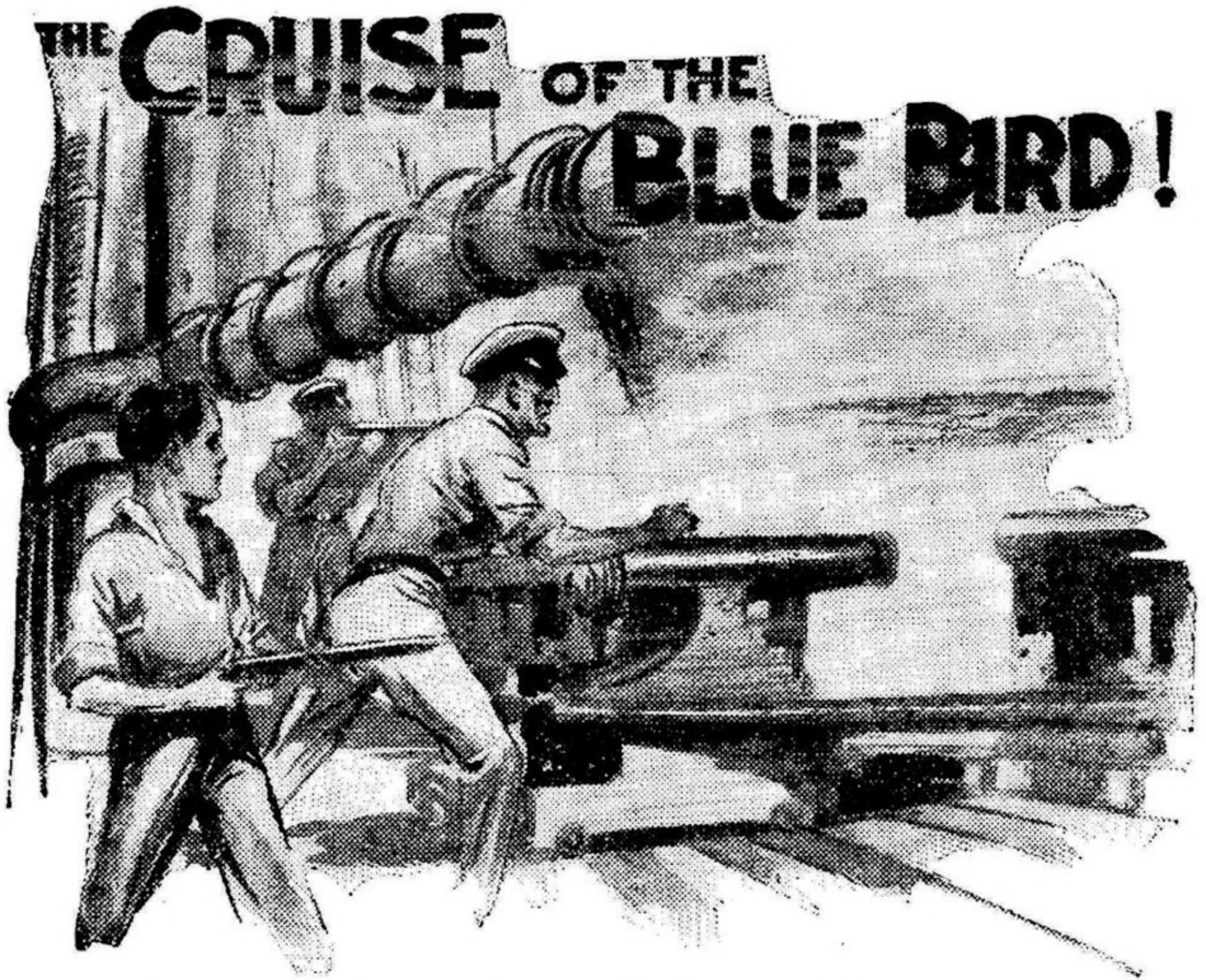
But, much to his embarrassment, the school continued to congratulate him, and fête him and honour him.

He was thankful enough when St. Frank's simmered down—when he was allowed to take his ordinary place in the Remove and to become a normal schoolboy once again!

THE END.

(Next week's yarn—you'll be pleased to hear it's an extra-long one—is entitled: "The St. Frank's Gala!" Nipper and his cheery chums are well to the fore, and they have a wonderfully exciting time. And don't forget, too, that the early adventures of the St. Frank's boys are now appearing in "The Popular," published every Tuesday.)

YOU CAN START THIS GRAND SERIAL TO-DAY, BOYS!



By COUTTS BRISBANE

Opposed to a seething mob of frenzied Solomon Islanders, Jack Manby, Ned Sutton, Captain Manby, and the other members of the schooner Blue Bird find themselves in desperate straits. But they are all of that "never-say-die" type, and they mean to come through smiling!

The Seaplane!

CAPTAIN MANBY emptied his rifle, dashed a man to the ground with the butt, tripped as someone grabbed his legs, and went down under the rush of a dozen shrieking savages. Big Timo, the bo'sun, whirling an axe, k.o.-ed a man, and then was felled himself, clubbed from behind. Ned Sutton's smoking rifle was grabbed as he strove to reload. He closed, desperately hitting out with his fists, then had the wind knocked out of him as the fellow fell on top of him, shot by Hutton.

Another few seconds, and the whole party would be overwhelmed, another story added to the long chapter of Pacific massacres, but—

With a deafening roar that set the very earth vibrating, something vast, and swifter than an eagle, fell swooping from the skies.

It swept at the raving, blood-maddened mob, skimming just above the heads of the close-packed throng, all striving to get at the last defenders of the bungalow doorway, sending them flying to earth as though a thunderbolt had smitten them. Then spinning steeply round, it came thundering back.

Jack, still giddy from the blow on the head, leaning against the veranda rail as he worked his rifle with the fury of despair, paused to gape in utter astonishment, while his reeling brain strove to believe that what he saw was no hallucination, but the real truth.

"S-seaplane!" he gasped. "W what's it doing here?"

Obviously it was doing its bit for the cause of the white man. Motor roaring, the air whistling as it came, it drove at the attacking

mob. its floats but a few feet from the ground. A shriek of horror rose from a couple of hundred throats, down fell the savages as death swooped upon them. Roaring, it passed, rose to turn again for another dash—and with that the savage nerves gave way. Howling for mercy, they rose and bolted for the trees, reached them, and dashed madly away, their demented screeching drowned by the thunder of the 'plane.

It rose above the lagoon, dipped, slid down and down, and took the water, slowing as it came. Then, gliding towards the shore, sagging to port as one of the floats filled, it finally came to rest a few feet from the beach.

Captain Manby, bleeding from several flesh wounds, rose slowly and painfully, for he was bruised all over, brushed the battle sweat from his eyes, and hobbled across to where Ned writhed under the body of the man who had fallen on him. He hauled him up, and grinned as the boy blinked uncertainly.

"We're saved by the skin of our teeth," he chuckled. "Look there! It was touch and go, though. That 'plane touched up a few of the gang, and they went, eh?" Steadying the lad, he looked around him. "Mustering the men, Timo!" he called hoarsely.

"Timo gone dead, Jim Tincan gone dead, me near gone dead," responded Tom Cheese from the ground in a weak voice. Hampered by his wound, he had been bowled over and trampled upon.

Supporting Ned, who was rapidly recovering, Manby moved across to the veranda and deposited him beside his son.

"Timo isn't dead. I saw him move," said Jack shakily. "But all our fellows are knocked about, and I'm afraid poor Tincan's settled. The airmen are coming ashore, dad. How did they happen along here?"

"I suppose they belong to the new Hydrographic Survey. I heard about it before we left Brisbane. Are you much hurt, Hutton?" Manby called.

"Better than might have been expected," replied the planter, knotting a handkerchief about his head. "Only a scalp wound. But what a bit of luck! We'd have been all scuppered in half a minute if these chaps hadn't come. Glad to see you—never more glad to see anyone!" he added, as the two young airmen came up at a run.

"Jolly glad to be on hand," responded the foremost, stared at Captain Manby for a moment, then thrust out his hand. "I might have guessed you'd be where the scrapping was going on, captain!" he exclaimed. "It's a long way from the North Sea, but perhaps you remember me, sir?"

"Young Trotter! You're doubly welcome!" cried Manby, and shook the hand heartily. "A thousand thanks! We were having hard times when you turned up. How do you come to be here so opportunely?"

"I've got a survey job, sir. The charts want revising rather badly, and someone had the sense to see that a 'plane was the ideal thing for the work. We can spot a reef twenty fathoms under from aloft, y'know. But this is my pal, Coombe. He came out of Dartmouth a day too late for the Big Show, took to wings, and here he is."

"Hard luck, missing the circus, Mr. Coombe," said Manby. "Trotter was my signal midshipman for a while up in the Bight, and we saw some liveliness."

"You seem to have been keeping it up here, sir," replied Coombe, looking round at the Solomon men stretched motionless or dragging themselves to the cover of the grove.

"A rising of labourers imported from the Solomons. This is the manager of the plantation." Manby introduced Hutton. "But we're not out of the soup yet," he added. "We seem to have lost only one man killed, and for the moment these fellows are scared out of their senses, but I'm afraid they'll start again when you go off, Trotter."

"If we could only get Rua-Rua, the leader, they'd settle down," put in Hutton. "I couldn't get a shot at him. He kept in the rear, and scooted among the first flight. If we could only follow him up and pot him, there'd be no more bother."

"I propose that you should send a message to the others, telling them to come in and deliver up their weapons and hand over Rua-Rua, or else we'll turn the big bird loose on them," suggested Manby. Then, turning at that moment, added, in a shout: "Hi, don't kill him! There's your messenger, Hutton!"

Mitchie, his face swollen out of recognition, and two of the Blue Bird's native crew, had been moving about among the fallen. They had carried the body of Jim Tincan to the veranda, had helped Big Timo, who had

WHAT HAPPENED IN THE FIRST INSTALMENT:

CAPTAIN MANBY is skipper of the schooner Blue Bird, which is approaching Graden Island, in the Southern Pacific. He is accompanied by his son

JACK MANBY, and Jack's cousin

NED SUTTON, two adventure-loving boys, although the former lacks the cautious nature of Ned. From the deck of the Blue Bird they see that the bungalow wherein resides Hutton, manager for the man who owns the copra crops on the island, is surrounded by a seething mob of mutinous Solomon Islanders. The

captain, with the two boys and a party from the schooner, go to the rescue and succeed in driving off the savages for a time. Hutton explains that a native named Rua-Rua is the cause of the trouble; Manby decides to give chase and try and capture Rua-Rua. His party set out, but, meeting the savages, they are forced to retreat towards the bungalow, and soon the mere handful of whites find themselves in a perilous position.

(Now read on.)

been stunned by the blow of a club, to his feet. As they did so a Solomon Islander, who had suffered in the same fashion from a gun-butt, and had been waiting a chance to belt, had leapt to his feet, only to be grabbed and thrown down. Manby's shout came only in time to save his life. He was now dragged up and lugged forward before Hutton.

"So far, so good!" said Manby. "But you're the boss of the situation, Trotter. How long can you stay?"

"We're under orders to report as soon as possible at Bauro, but we'll see you through

had touched Ned's arm and drawn him away round the end of the bungalow, out of sight of the others.

Running Down Rua-Rua!

"**D**'YOU feel beter now, Ned?" Jack demanded. "I'm quite fit again. And have you plenty of cartridges?"

"I'm all right," replied Ned. "I was sickish for a little, but it's gone. And I've got about twenty cartridges left. Why?"

"Look out!" yelled Ned suddenly, but his warning came too late. Next moment the two British boys found their rifles tossed aside and they were in the grip of the Solomon Islanders.



this. Our port float is damaged, and we must take time to repair that. But if you can get those fellows up here peacably, I think we have the makings that'll put the finishing touch to their scare."

"Good lad!" exclaimed Manby. "Give your message to this beggar and send him off, Hutton. Make it hot and strong, and tell him if he wants to avoid a horrid death he must return with word of what the others intend to do. And now I vote that we all spend a little time patching ourselves. Where are my boys? Hi, Jack—Ned!"

There was no reply. The boys had disappeared, though they had been close by only a minute or two before—close enough to hear what Hutton had said about the necessity of catching or killing Rua-Rua if the rising was to be quelled. At that Jack

"Because now's our chance," said Jack excitedly. "I happened to see the way Rua-Rua went off, over there to the left. He was all by himself, for the rest went the other way. Now's the time to catch him. Hurry up, and we'll get him before he can join the others."

"Oh, rot!" exclaimed Ned. "If we ran into a bunch of them, they'd scupper us! Come and tell uncle, and see what he says!"

"I tell you, Rua-Rua went off the opposite way, and he hasn't had time to join the others yet. If we buck up, we'll catch him. Besides, dad is wounded and tired. He ought to have a rest," urged Jack. "It's a matter of minutes. If we don't go now, it'll be too late."

Ned hesitated, then, against his better judgment, yielded.

"Very well, on condition that we only go as far as that path," he said, "and that we scoot back at the least sign of danger."

They hurried across the strip of turf behind the bungalow and plunged into the deep, greenish shadow of the grove, making towards the path that cut across it. Presently they reached it and halted, listening. Nothing stirred, there was no sound save the muffled murmur of the surf on the reef.

"Let's go back," said Ned. "We haven't a chance of finding the brute. He's had time to get clear."

"Has he? Look over there. There's something moving," whispered Jack excitedly. "There!"

Something had flashed in one of the few rays of sunshine that penetrated the thick foliage overhead. It disappeared, came again, and this time there was no mistaking it. It was a knife lashed on the end of a pole, the weapon that had distinguished Rua-Rua. And then, below it, peering round the trunk of a palm, appeared the shock head, dark face and gleaming eyes of the man himself. He glared at the two boys for an instant, then slid out of sight before they could raise their rifles.

"We've got him! Come on!" breathed Jack exultantly, and began to run, Ned, who had forgotten caution, hard on his heels. If they could only get the man, the island would be at peace.

But Rua-Rua gave them no chance for a shot at him. He kept well ahead, and though the spearhead glinted in plain sight the man contrived to keep himself almost invisible as he glided on at a pace that maintained his lead despite all the boys could do.

If the boys had but had some experience in the wiles of savages, they might have hesitated, but the excitement of the hunt put an end to thought. They dashed recklessly on, confident in the power of their rifles.

The ground rose gradually, then fell away in an abrupt slope. The coconut palms gave place to scrub, and suddenly they were in the open on the rim of a wide, grass-grown bowl—the crater of the ancient volcano that, ages before, had created the island. Long ago volcanic action had ceased, soil had gradually gathered on the barren rocks, coconuts brought by currents from other isles had sprouted, while the coral insects built the reefs.

Then man had come to the island, an ancient race of whom nothing is known, whose name and history remains a mystery, but who left their strange gods carved out of hard stone in many an island to puzzle learned men.

One of these huge idols lay in the midst of a clump of brushwood in the middle of the bowl. Once it had towered thirty feet from base to crown, but time or an earthquake had overthrown it and in falling its head had broken off and rebounded so that it stood upright, looking as though a giant peered up through the ground.

The boys paused, staring, and for the first time doubts of the wisdom of their pursuit assailed them. Then they saw that though Rua-Rua had disappeared, his spearhead showed behind the giant head of the idol. He had hidden himself behind it, forgetting through panic or stupidity that the weapon betrayed his lurking place.

"We've got him!" exclaimed Jack triumphantly. "If you go to one side and I take the other, one of us will get a fair shot at him as he bolts. Better pot him in the legs, and then we can go and get help and make him prisoner."

"Hold on a moment. Let's make sure," said Ned and, kneeling, took careful aim at the broad blade of the spearhead.

Crack! The bullet sped true, the knife, fairly hit, flew into a dozen pieces.

"Jolly good shot!" applauded Jack. "Perhaps he'll surrender now that he's disarmed. Come on!"

Trapped!

RIFLES at the ready, the two boys descended the steep slope, alert for a sudden dash. But there was never a movement, not a whisper of sound, not a rustle amongst the bushes. Rua-Rua must be crouching terror-stricken behind the idol's head, ready to make a last spring for life. At any moment he might come leaping out against the very muzzles of the rifles.

Now they were almost within touching distance of the head, now they circled about it on either side—to meet face to face behind it. No Rua-Rua! There lay the spear shaft and the fragments of the knife head, but their owner seemed to have melted into thin air.

Yet even as they discovered that he was gone, they saw the explanation. Beside the headless shoulders of the fallen idol was the dark mouth of a cave running into the side of the crater, which once perhaps had been the entrance to a temple. Since Rua-Rua could be nowhere else, he had certainly dived into it.

"Now we've got him for certain!" exclaimed Jack, stooping to peer into the darkness. "Hi, Rua-Rua! Come out! Walkee-walkee, no killee!" he added, with some dim notion that the man might understand pidgin. "Comee walkee topside!"

No answer. Never a sound from within. Jack fired. The report boomed back to their ears, the bullet brought down a shower of fragments from the rock roof, but no human voice responded.

"It doesn't seem deep. Let's go in," suggested Jack.

"No fear!" said Ned quickly. "He's tucked away in some hole, and he'd jump out and smash one of us before we saw him. One of us had better stay on guard while the other— Look out!"

Ned's voice rose to a yell as a shadow fell on them from behind, and they whirled about

—too late! Hard hands gripped them, throwing aside their rifles, so that Ned's shot flew skyward. They were held, thrown down, kicked. A dozen of the Solomon men were about them, making them fast with tough fishing-line, while Rua-Rua, grinning evilly, looked on.

In a trice the two boys were securely bound hand and foot and lugged into the cave. A few seconds later the mystery of Rua-Rua's reappearance was explained, for the cave ended in a circular chamber roofed with slabs of stone. On one side the roof had fallen away allowing exit into the clump of brush.

"Golly, what asses we've been!" groaned Jack, as they were dropped on the rock floor. "Rua-Rua simply led us into a trap. He had those fellows hiding up in the bushes. He popped through here and came round behind us with 'em. We're properly diddled!"

"But what will they do with us?" asked Ned.

"I don't know. Kill us most likely, for I don't suppose they'll think of trying to get a ransom for us. It's all my fault, old man.

"Oh, I was keen enough to come, too!" Ned said. "But can't you talk to them? Perhaps they could be bribed with the promise of baccy and trade stuff."

One man had squatted beside them, while the others went out chattering. Jack tried his few words of the Fijian tongue picked up from the crew, but either the man didn't understand or was indifferent. He merely kicked Jack in the ribs, and, stretching himself, pretended to go to sleep.

"Nobody saw us go. Perhaps one of the men may be able to track us through the woods, but I'm afraid—" Jack's voice trailed to silence.

A wisp of smoke wafted through the cave.

"They've lighted a fire. Perhaps someone will see the smoke," suggested Ned.

"Perhaps! It'll be dark in another couple of hours, and after that there'll be no tracing us. Poor old dad! He'll be frightfully cut up," murmured Jack mournfully. "Try and get your wrists loose."

Ned tried, but all in vain. The men who had tied them were masters of the art of making a prisoner secure. Time passed. They saw the ray of sunlight that fell through the hole in the roof move upwards and at last disappear. Night was coming. Their ankles and wrists were growing numb when at last Rua-Rua and a couple of men appeared.

They lifted the boys, carried them through the cave and dumped them down on their feet, leaning against the great stone head.

Before it two fires were dying down to red coals in two trenches lined with stones which were red-hot, and at the sight Jack groaned.

"Ned, old chap, I'm afraid we're done for," he said in a low voice. "These Solomon Islanders are cannibals when they get the chance, and those trenches are ovens! They're going to make long pig of us. It's

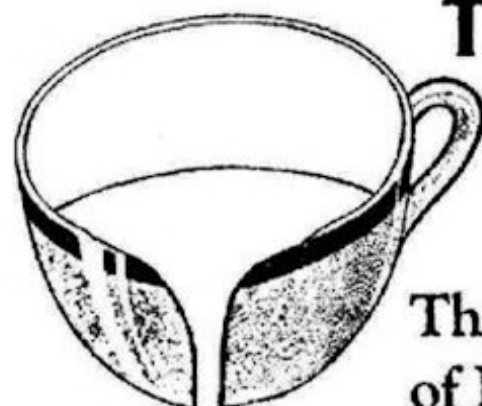
the end, old man. Forgive me for bringing you to it. Good-bye!"

And as he spoke Rua-Rua grabbed Ned's shoulder and flung back his right hand. In it gleamed a short, broad-bladed knife!

(Ned and Jack are "up to their necks" in trouble all right, and things look pretty rocky for them. There's Captain Manby, of course, and you can bet he's not standing still. But will he be in time to rescue the intrepid youngsters? Next week's gripping instalment will tell you. By the way, lads, have you told your chums about this corking serial? You musn't let them miss a good thing like this, you know.)

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Our Weekly Pow-Wow!

By
The Editor.

Your Editor welcomes letters from all his readers; send him one now. Address it to: The Editor, "Nelson Lee Library," Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

Our Magnificent Programme.

THIS time the cheery old N.L.L. has notched up a finer record than ever. The splendid serial of the South Seas has fairly knocked spots off all competitors. Once again Coutts Brisbane, with his wonderful sense of drama and sensation, is on the target. Come to think of it, I had been asked over and over again for a rousing yarn of the mystic South. Now it has come, and, combined with the splendid St. Frank's stories, forms a programme of reading matter that can't be beaten anywhere. In a fortnight's time, too, that popular feature, "Between Ourselves," will reappear.

Butterflies.

A correspondent who lives right in the midst of bricks and mortar asks how he is to be a butterfly collector. If he writes to Messrs. Watkins & Doncaster, the famous naturalists, of 36, Strand, London, he can get a practical book on the subject, but he will have to do his collecting right away in the country, where at this time of year the stately Brimstone, the vivid Orange Tip, and the brilliant butterflies of the Vanessa group are to be found.

Should He Join The Scouts?

A reader up north asks me whether he should join the Scouts. I think most certainly he should, for one learns a crowd of useful things in that great organisation. Scouts mean business all the time, and one way and another they get more out of life than others. The training helps a fellow in lots of directions.

What About Sussex?

Here's a kettle of fish! Someone who ought to have known better has been saying that Sussex is no great shakes. Just a few uninteresting coast towns, and for the rest commonplace. A Sussexite writes me an indignant letter about this criticism. It is all fudge. Sussex is one of the finest counties

in the old land. The critic was talking out of the back of his neck. What about the glories of Ashdown Forest? What of the rolling Downs and the Weald? Sussex takes a lot of beating.

Motor Cycling.

William Downs, 152, Shirley Road, Southampton, asks who won the motor-cycle speed record. This went to O. E. C. Temple on a machine of his own design. This correspondent would like to hear from keen motor-cyclists.

The Report.

This has gone off with a bang, as becomes its title. For this special Report is the title of a smart little magazine run by Harold G. Dell, Field View, Parsonage Lane, Ringwood, Hants. Hobbyists, story writers, and sportsmen of all kinds will be interested in this dashing little enterprise.

From Far and Near!

Albert Cruickshanks, Annandale, Sydney, asks for a St. Frank's Annual. I. S. Talbot, Melbourne, wants to know if Willard is still at St. Frank's. He is, he am. F. Davis, St. Pirie, wants to make invisible ink. He must cut an onion in half, dip his pen in it, and write. The writing will become distinct when warmed at the fire. Miss Dora Brigham, Norwich, hates changes in the N.L.L. But one has to have these from time to time. Ellis Gregg, Swansea, might put the name of the League on his writing-paper with pleasure. Thomas Kirk, Sutton-in-Ashfield, sends a good joke, but I've no room to publish it here. Much obliged to Percy Young, Edge Hill. I will also quote Dickens to him: "Thank you, Mr. Copperfield, for those few kind words." P. Y. writes a good letter, and he knows what ought to be. See this:

"Be kind to little animals
Wherever you may be,
And give the stranded jellyfish
A push into the sea."

OUR WEEKLY POW-WOW!

(Continued from previous page.)

That's a straight tip for summer seashiders. Cecil Recken, Belfast, thinks the paper is improving every week. Clarence Prince, Cleethorpes, is tremendously interested in our serial. A. R. Winkle, Stoke-on-Trent, wants another St. Frank's paper as well, because he has finished with N.L.L. in a winking. Harold Lewis, Hammersmith, is keen on a St. Frank's Magazine. A. D. Luke, Plymouth, says his favourite character is Archie—and no bad judge, either! H. M. Petersen, Cape Province, thinks the same way.

League Members Please Note!

From now onwards all correspondence appertaining to the St. Frank's League should be addressed to:

St. Frank's League,
5, Tallis House,
Carmelite Street,
London, E.C.4.

CORRESPONDENTS WANTED.

F. W. Stone, 13, Somerset Street, Church Road, Battersea, London, S.W.11, wishes to correspond with readers (ages about 14) in Australia; interested in driving, riding, and keeping horses.

D. H. C. Evans, 27, Hubert Grove, Stockwell, London, S.W.9, wishes to correspond with an American chum.

Wilfred G. Wardle, 44, King Street, Maidenhead, Berks., wants back numbers of N.L.L., old series, Nos. 1-227, 230-40, 250, 258, 266, 272, 275, 282, 287, 291-304, 308, 312, 324, 327, 360, 364, 380, 383, 408, 412, 416, 439, 444, 446, 455, 463, 472, 474. Please state numbers and price.

B. J. Rixon, 91, Alexandra Road, Newport, Mon., wants to correspond with readers interested in the films.

Roland C. Beacham, 67, Edgewood Avenue, Toronto 8, Canada, wishes to hear from readers in Bedford, Redditch, and Barnet Green, also with a High School reader in Australia.

H. Clark, 15, Harrison Street, Carlisle, England, wishes to hear from readers in the British Empire who are willing to join his Hobbies Correspondence Club; also from stamp collectors in Canada, Straits Settlements, Northern Africa. He also asks J. White, Bloemfontein, to write to him.

Reg. W. Thoreau, Moreland House, Craig Street, Jersey, Channel Islands, would like to hear from stamp collectors anywhere, especially Canada, U.S.A., Johore, Holland,

France, Belgium, Italy, and New Zealand. He can correspond in English and French.

Fred Grove, 14, New Street, Wilton Road, Victoria, London, S.W.1, wishes to correspond with readers in South America, India, South Africa, and China. All letters answered.

Cecil Riecken, 6, Annandale Street, Belfast, wishes to hear from readers with back numbers of the N.L.L. for disposal.

Arnold Melville, 3, Duncan Road, Vincent, East London, South Africa, would like to correspond with readers who are interested in books, music, Rugger and swimming. All letters answered.

Ernest M. Looch, c/o Brent Boarding House, Knysna, Cape Province, South Africa, wishes to hear from readers on the subject of organised outdoor games and sports in general.

George Huish, 9, Harvey Street, Canton, Cardiff, wants new series "N.L.L." 1-70; also wishes to correspond with readers.



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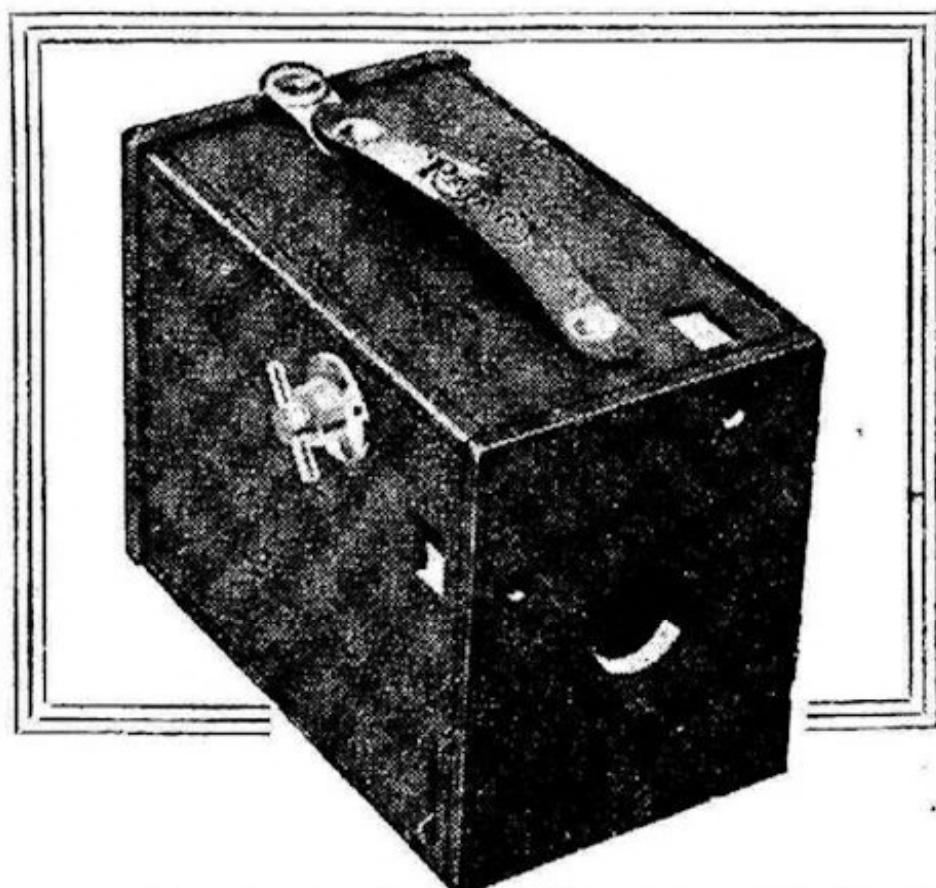
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