

THE **NELSON LEE**

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TAMED BY THE FAGS!

An amusing incident from the superb extra-long complete school yarn, featuring the Chums of St. Frank's, inside.

New Series No. 117.

OUT ON WEDNESDAY.

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The fact that there was a snake down his back caused Mr. Suncliff to dance about like a dervish. Madly he tore his gown off and his jacket, and then the fags enthusiastically joined in the good work. Off came his waiscoat, followed by his shirt—and with a dull plop the snake fell to the floor !

Chambers is burly and he's rebellious, but he finds himself—

TAMED BY THE FAGS!



By EDWY SEARLES BROOKS

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

First of all relegated from the Fifth Form to the Remove, Cuthbert Chambers now finds himself further humiliated by being sent down into the Third Form! But while he was able to be Somebody in the Remove, he finds himself a Nobody in the Third. And the Third-Formers, having many old scores to settle with the ex-Senior, proceed to lead him a "dog's-life."—Ed.

CHAPTER 1.

The Third's Red Letter Day!

MR. JOSH CUTTLE rubbed his eyes and stared. Then he rubbed his eyes harder, and stared again. But it made no difference. The phenomenon was still in full sight.

"This looks bad!" said Mr. Cuttle gloomily. "Rare bad!"

He smoothed a fold of his green apron, and picked up his broom again. Josh Cuttle was the school porter at St. Frank's, and at the present moment he was sweeping the School House steps. He had a clear view of the wide, sunlit Triangle.

He knew perfectly well that the rising bell for the Third had only sounded five minutes earlier—for the simple reason that he had rung it himself. Yet the Triangle was already beginning to swarm with Third-Formers. Never, in his experience, had Mr. Cuttle known the fags to be down so promptly. And it couldn't be the fine weather which had caused this apparent miracle, for there had been many such glorious mornings lately.

"There's going to be trouble!" declared Mr. Cuttle, in a melancholy voice.

And contenting himself with this thought, he continued sweeping. In the meantime, totally oblivious of Mr. Cuttle's observations, the fags of St. Frank's collected behind the gymnasium.

They came from the Ancient House, from the West House, from the Modern House, and from the East House. The first to arrive were Willy Handforth, Chubby Heath and Juicy Lemon. This was as it should be, for Willy & Co. were the leaders of the Third; and it was the redoubtable Willy who had called this gathering.

The previous evening he had given explicit instructions to everybody in the Third. He had told them to be behind the gym five minutes after rising bell.

And he had threatened such drastic and blood-curdling punishments if they failed to turn up that never before had there been such scramblings in the Third Form dormitories of the old school.

For when Willy said a thing, he meant it. And the Third knew it. In his own way, Willy Handforth was an autocrat; his word was law. He ruled the Third with a rod of iron. Incidentally, the Third needed ruling with a rod of iron.

"Are we all here?" asked Willy briskly, as he looked round the gathering. "Hallo! Where's Parry minor? Where's that young idiot, Hook? And where's that hulking champ, Fullerton? I'll make these East House idiots sit up—"

"Here they come!" said Chubby Heath.

"Oh, all right, then!" said Willy, as he frowned upon the last arrivals. "You're late, my sons!"

"Only a minute!" growled Fullerton, of the East House. "What's the idea of this, Handforth minor? It's a dotty wheeze, dragging us down as early as this!"

"If you're asking for a thick ear, Fullerton, just repeat that remark!" said Willy grimly. "There's nothing dotty about this meeting. To-day is a red letter day in the history of the Third! And we want to start it properly by being fully prepared."

"Yes, rather!" grinned Dicky Jones, of the West House. "We're with you, Willy! You're talking about Chambers, aren't you?"

"Not yet—but I'm going to talk about Chambers!" replied Willy, with a joyous light in his eyes. "There wasn't time for a meeting last night—we didn't hear the news until nearly bed-time. And we've got to prepare. We've got to have our plans all out and dried."

"What plans?" asked Jimmy Hook.

"Strictly speaking, Chambers is a Fifth-Former," said Willy dreamily. "He's a big, burly rotter, nearly old enough to be in the Sixth. He used to be a senior—until he was sent down into the Remove."

"We know all this!" said Tommy Hobbs impatiently.

"And when Chambers was sent down into the Remove, because of his beastly slacking, he thought he was a little tin god, and he threw his weight about everywhere!" proceeded Willy, ignoring the interruption. "What did Chambers do in the Remove? I'm asking you, my sons! What did Chambers do?"

"He made a mess of things generally!" said Chubby Heath.

"Exactly!" agreed Willy. "And those fat-headed Removites allowed him to do so! To-day, Chambers is in the Third! Well, the Third isn't going to give him the same amount of rope that the Remove gave him! In fact, the Third's going to get a bit of its own back!"

"Hear, hear!"

"We'll make the big rotter smart!"

"Rather!"

There were many shouts, and the fags began to grin joyously. Some of them, however, were looking sceptical.

"I can't believe it, you know!" said Owen minor, scratching his head. "It seems—it

seems so jolly impossible! Chambers can't really be in the Third! He's a senior!"

"He was a senior," corrected Willy. "But he's in the Third now!"

"But why?" asked Freddy Mason, looking rather blank. "Why have they sent Chambers right down into the Third? What's he done?"

"Nothing!"

"Then why has he been sent down?"

"That's the reason—because he's done nothing!" replied Willy calmly. "He did nothing in the Fifth, and old Pagett took his books to the Head, and the Head, after having about forty fits, sent Chambers down into the Remove. When Chambers got to the Remove, he still did nothing, and so Mr. Crowell went to the Head, showed him Chambers' books, and the Head had another forty fits."

"He must be subject to them," remarked Owen minor.

"Don't be funny!" frowned Willy. "Last night, the Head interrupted a row that was going on in the Remove common-room, and he told Chambers that for the rest of the term he'd be down in the Third. So this morning, my merry children, we've got Chambers in our midst!"

And the fags grinned with happy anticipation. They had many an old score to wipe off with Cuthbert Chambers!



CHAPTER 2.

Getting Ready for the Fray!

HERE was every reason for the Third Form's satisfaction.

Chambers was a big fellow, and he had always been a boaster and a bragger. What was more to the point, he had made a rule of cuffing every fag that he came across. And, being a senior, the fags had been unable to retaliate. While Chambers had been down in the Remove, they had had few chances of going for him, for Chambers had been kept too busy with the Removites.

But now Chambers was in the Third!

It was an unprecedented business. Never before, in the memory of the juniors, had a Fifth-Former been transferred into the fags. It wouldn't have happened in this case, only the headmaster was thoroughly tired of Chambers' ways.

As a punishment for his slackness and indolence, he had been put into the Remove; but during his sojourn in the Remove he had done less work than ever. He had been made captain of the Form, but had proved a ghastly failure. Then Mr. Crowell had reported him to the Head, and Dr. Stafford had examined Chambers' work, to discover that the boy was appallingly backward. It was an absolute fact that his work was much inferior to the average fags'. For who

terms. Chambers had done absolutely nothing: he had slacked consistently.

The Head felt that there was only one way to cure him—and that was to make him work. A few weeks in the Third would probably do the trick. For Chambers, knowing that work was his only escape, would diligently apply himself to his studies. For the Head had promised him that if he worked hard and showed good progress, he would be reinstated in the Fifth after the holidays.

The sentence had been passed the previous evening, and Chambers had slept in his old dormitory. But to-day he would start work in the Third Form class-room—and from now onwards he would sleep in the Third Form dormitory. He was, in fact, on exactly the same footing as any of the other fags.

"We know exactly why Chambers has been shoved with us!" declared Willy. "At first, we were a bit indignant, but there's no reason for us to be upset. The arrival of Chambers will give us plenty of fun. And we can get our own back on him! While he was a senior we couldn't touch him—and while he was in the Remove we hardly had a chance of touching him. But now he's one of us, and if he starts throwing his weight about he'll be sat on! We've got to help the Head in the good work!"

"Oh, rather!" grinned Chubby Heath. "We'll do all we can to help the Head!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I suppose it'll be helping the Head if we rub Chambers' nose in the gravel now and again?" asked Owen minor.

"Anything of that sort will be useful," agreed Willy calmly. "But look here, my sons! Chambers has made a mess of everything in the Remove—but he's not going to make a mess of everything in the Third!"

"He probably thinks he's going to run the Third!" said Juicy Lemon.

"We can't help what he thinks," replied Willy. "But if he has any of those fantastic ideas, we'll soon knock them out of his big head. That's the very object of this meeting. We've got to pledge ourselves to work might and main to keep Chambers down, and if we start right, we shall go on right!"

"What shall we do as a beginning?" asked Chubby, puckering his brow. "It might be difficult to give him a bumping. He's such a hulking great ass. Two of us aren't as big as he is!"

"We'll start right by making Chambers understand that he's a fag, just the same as the rest of us," replied Willy. "His size doesn't make any difference; he'll have to take his turn at fagging, and if he jibs he must be forced."

"He will jib, too!" said Owen minor.

"Of course he'll jib!" grinned Willy. "That's where the fun will come in. We all know Chambers. He'll jib like the dickens; and the more he jibs, the more we'll squash him."

"And the more he's squashed, the more we shall help the Head!" chuckled Dicky Jones.

Willy glanced round.

"Well, we've got everything clear now," he said. "Understand, you chaps? Everything else must slide until Chambers is subdued. That's going to be our line work from this minute onwards. You've all got to hold yourselves ready to act at a minute's notice. And if any of you fail me——"

He left the finish of his sentence unsaid, and the Third understood.

Not that Willy was frequently called upon to use violence. He was very popular in the Third; the fags rallied to his flag without any application of the whip. For Willy was a leader amongst leaders, and he had a knack of getting things done with extraordinary precision and speed.

While the fags were making their final plans, Cuthbert Chambers had emerged into the Triangle. To his great relief, there was nobody about—for he couldn't see the fags behind the gym.—and he paced up and down, his brow as black as thunder, his eyes filled with consternation, dismay, and fury.

"I'm not going to stand it!" he panted, for the hundredth time. "By glory! I'm not going to put up with this indignity!"

Yet it was difficult to delude himself. What else could he do, but submit? Rebellion against the headmaster's order would mean expulsion. And if Chambers got the sack, his cause would hardly be furthered. Besides, he hadn't the pluck to rebel. He had always been a big bluffer.

He paced about the Triangle, raging with fury. He had written to his parents, complaining bitterly—and now he was sorry that he had done so. For, in all probability, his father would want to know the whys and the wherefores, and Chambers was afraid of giving a full explanation. Deep in his heart, he knew that he had been atrociously lazy—and this was the result.

The future was dark and gloomy in the extreme!



CHAPTER 3.

Willy's Little Way!

IT made things all the worse because Chambers received no sympathy.

He had complained to many of the seniors, but they had only laughed at him. Some, indeed, had coldly informed him that it jolly well served him right. The Remove and the Fourth yelled with laughter at him. Even the Sixth were chuckling, and were saying that it was a great joke. Incidentally, the Sixth meant to make the most of it.

Chambers was a fag now—and there were many Sixth-Formers who would take particular delight in "dropping" on Chambers.

It was time that he was taken down a peg or two! It was time that he was made to realise his insignificance!

The whole affair had the makings of a first-class rag—and the Sixth was just as ready to enter into the fun of the thing as any of the juniors. Cuthbert Chambers' feelings were not taken into account at all.

As Chambers raged up and down the Triangle, his fists clenched, his eyes glittering, a number of Removites appeared from the Ancient House and the West House. They were all looking very contented. It seemed as though they hadn't a care in the world.

They had got rid of Chambers, and the popular Nipper was once again captain. So the Remove felt that the sun was shining with particular brilliance.

Old Josh Cuttle, as he eyed Chambers' perambulations, shook his head in a doleful kind of way.

"There was something wrong," he declared, addressing his remarks to his broom. "And why was there something wrong? Ask me!"

The broom failing to ask him, Mr. Cuttle proceeded.

"There was trouble because of them dratted boys!" he said gloomily. "Where there was boys, there was trouble."

And old Josh cast his eye sadly over the gymnasium. As it happened, the Third Form appeared at that moment, Willy at the head. All the fags came hustling from behind the gym., their faces eager, their eyes alight with enthusiasm.

"Yes," said Mr. Cuttle firmly. "There was something in the hair!"

But although he rubbed his fingers through his scanty locks, he was referring to the atmosphere.

He wasn't far wrong, either.

About nine fags advanced purposefully towards Cuthbert Chambers. The remainder hung about near the gym. And it was noticed that Willy was not included among the nine.

"Just a minute, Chambers!" said Chubby Heath briskly, as he planted himself in front of the ex-senior.

Chambers stared at him.

"Go away!" he said thickly.

"Rats! I've been told——"

"What did you say to me?" roared Chambers.

"I said 'Rats,'—my son—and I'll say it again!" replied Chubby boldly. "You mustn't forget, Chambers, that you're one of us now! So none of your old buck!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

A yell of laughter went up from two or three groups of Removites, who were well within earshot. It was refreshing to hear Chambers being spoken to in this fashion by a mere fag.

"He's in for a bad time now!" remarked Fullwood, of the Ancient House. "Poor old scout! I'm feeling a bit sorry for him."

"Sorry?" repeated Edward Oswald Handforth, of Study D. "Sorry?"

"Well, these fags will lead him a fine dance——"

"I hope so!" interrupted Handforth darkly. "By George! Didn't he cause enough trouble in the Remove? Didn't he dish me out of the captaincy?"

"Ahem! Perhaps so—and perhaps not!" murmured Fullwood.

"He gave us enough trouble, anyhow!" said Church diplomatically. "Personally, I don't care a snap what happens to Chambers. It was a jolly good idea of the Head's to send him down into the Third. It'll take some of the nonsense out of him."

"Well, we've washed our hands of him!" said Handforth, with satisfaction. "I'm going to have a word with my minor—and I'm going to tell him to put Chambers through the mill!"

McClure grinned.

"Why trouble, Handy?" he asked. "Do you think it necessary to tell Willy a thing like that? The mill is probably all ready—waiting for Chambers to be pushed into it!"

While the Removites thus chatted, Chambers continued to stare truculently at Chubby Heath and the other fags. They had collected round him in a menacing kind of way, and Chambers' heart was thudding violently. He didn't like the look of these determined Third-Formers. They were collecting round him too closely.

"Get away from me!" he said hotly. "And if I have any more of your cheek, young Heath, I'll clip you over the ear!"

"Your clipping-over-the-ears days are over, Chambers!" retorted Chubby grimly. "One fag can't clip another fag over the ear. Or if he does, he jolly soon gets flattened out."

"You—you cheeky young sweep!" shouted Chambers, in panic and fury. "Get away from me!"

A hail came from the gym.

"Hurry up, there!" sang out half a dozen impatient voices.

"You heard that, didn't you?" said Chubby Heath, grabbing Chambers' sleeve. "Come on! You're wanted!"

Chambers gasped.

"Wanted!" he ejaculated. "Who wants me?"

"Willy!"

"Confound you!" roared Chambers. "Do you think I'm going to obey orders from young Handforth?"

"I don't think anything about it—I know it!" retorted Chubby. "We don't want to make a scene in the Triangle, Chambers, but we're always ready to oblige if we're forced. Are you coming quietly, or shall we carry you?"

"Why, you—you——"

"Yes, I know!" said Chubby patiently. "It's rather hard to realise, isn't it? But Willy is waiting—and he doesn't like being kept waiting. We'll give you another two

seconds to decide. Are you coming of your own accord, or will you be carried?"

"I'm not coming at all!" hooted Chambers violently.

Chubby looked at the other fags.

"Ready?" he said crisply. "Good! On him!"

And Cuthbert Chambers, much to the delight of everybody else in the Triangle, was yanked off his feet, rolled on his back, and carried off.

The methods of the Third may have been drastic, but they were certainly business-like.



CHAPTER 4.

Laying Down the Law!

HERE he is!" panted Chubby Heath. "Let go, you chaps!"

Thud!

Cuthbert Chambers was dropped to the ground. The fags had retired behind the gym, again, and when Chambers sat up, nearly beside himself with rage, he found a whole concourse of Third-Formers pressing round him. Escape was impossible.

"What—what does this mean?" he panted, leaping to his feet and staring round him like a caged tiger. "You young idiots! I'll make you smart for this! Get out of my way, there! Let me pass!"

"Just a minute, Chambers!" said Willy, with deadly quietness. "Who the dickens do you think you are, to order us about? We're all fags here, don't forget—yourself included."

Chambers' jaw dropped.

"Fags!" he muttered dazedly.

"I expect you're a bit stunned, so we'll excuse you," went on Willy. "You haven't quite got accustomed to it yet. But you're in the Third Form, Chambers, and I'm the leader of the Third Form. And from this minute onwards you've got to obey orders from me."

Chambers was absolutely speechless.

"Everybody in the Third obeys me—or I want to know the reason why!" continued Willy. "And you're going to be no exception, Chambers. We thought we would get you here bright and early, so that we could show you the ropes. We don't want any misunderstandings at the start."

He was so cool and calm that Chambers himself began to lose his anger. He felt suddenly weak. Willy generally had that effect upon everybody; his very self-possession was startling.

The other fags did not fail to appreciate the novelty of this situation.

There was something comic in the sight of Willy Handforth talking to Cuthbert Chambers "like a Dutch uncle." Chambers was nearly double Willy's size, and he was an aggressive, dandified, lumbering sort of

fellow. Indeed, Chambers was bigger than most of the ordinary Fifth-Formers.

"So you see," said Willy smoothly, "there's nothing like being straight at the very start. You're one of us, Chambers, and the sooner you realise it, the better."

"I don't realise it!" exclaimed Chambers, in a forced voice. "And I never shall realise it! You cheeky young blighter!"

Willy sighed.

"We don't want to be hard on you, Chambers," he said patiently. "We'll excuse a few of these outbursts. But you know as well I do that the Head has sent you down into the Third."

"It's an outrage!" shouted Chambers wildly. "It's—it's an insult! I'm a senior—and it's positively disgraceful that the Head should have put me amongst all you kids! I'm not going to stand it, either!" he added savagely. "And, by glory, I'm not going to stand any rot from you!"

"Let's bump him!" suggested Juicy Lemon. "There are plenty of us here to do it!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Throw him over, the rotter!"

"Hurrah!"

"On him!"

Willy glared at the excited fags.

"Dry up, you fatheads!" he said witheringly. "We don't want to start any of those games. Chambers has got to learn that he must obey."

"Oh, have I!" hooted Chambers. "I'll show you whether I'll obey or not!"

He started charging through the fags, hitting out right and left. More than one of the Third-Formers went down, gasping. Chambers was like a scythe going through a grass-field.

"Bring him back!" said Willy curtly.

And Chambers was brought back.

He didn't want to come, but that made no difference. A dozen of the fags clawed him, swung him round, and brought him along. He was nearly foaming at the mouth with rage.

"We don't want to get excited," said Willy evenly. "In the Remove, Chambers, you made a bit of a fuss. You thought that you would be the captain, and you created Old Harry generally. But you're not going to do anything of that sort in the Third."

"You—you—you—"

"Yes, I know!" nodded Willy. "Just at the moment, old man, you're too full for words. But this will soon pass. After you've done a few days' fagging for the Sixth-Formers, you'll be in a different mood."

"Fagging!" panted Chambers, so startled that he forgot his fury. "What do you mean, you silly young fool? You don't think I'm going to do any fagging, do you?"

"Of course I don't think so."

"Then what do you mean?"

"I know it—that's all!" said Willy. "Everybody in the Third does fagging. Some of the rotters try to get out of it, but we have a system here. Every fag takes his

turn Of course, there's a bargain struck now and again. One of the chaps will give another chap a chunk of toffee, or a few caramels, to do his work for him, but that's a detail. Every fag, myself included, has to do his whack."

"But this doesn't apply to me!" howled Chambers.

"Yes, it does," said Willy. "You're a fag, aren't you?"

"No, I'm not!"

"You are, but you don't realise it yet," smiled Willy. "But it makes no difference. From this minute onwards, you'll have to take your turn at fagging, with all the rest of the Third. I'm the skipper, and what I say—goes. And if anybody defies me, I punish them in one of two ways."

The Third listened curiously, for this was something new

"Either I give the chap a good hiding, or I punish him by sentencing him to a day's extra fagging duty."

The Third grinned. They realised that Willy was pulling Chambers' leg. Willy, in fact, was working up to a climax; he wanted to pile a whole lot of fagging duty on to Cuthbert Chambers. And the trick worked perfectly.

It couldn't help doing so, for when Willy Handforth said a thing, he meant it!



CHAPTER 5.

The Sentence!

CUTHBERT CHAMBERS found his voice again.

"You miserable young chimpanzee!" he said thickly. "Do you think I take any notice of your idiotic prattle?"

Willy remained perfectly cool.

"You may not take any notice of it just now—but you will take notice of it later," he said. "Experience is a great teacher, Chambers, and judging by the way you're going on, you'll gain a whole lot of experience during the next few hours. If you defy me—"

"I do defy you!" thundered Chambers. "And I'll keep on defying you! It's like your infernal check to talk to me like this! Don't forget that I'm a senior!"

"Well, of course, I can't fight you," said Willy thoughtfully. "I'm ready to go for any other chap in the Third, and I'll whack him. But you're a bit above my mark, Chambers. I know my limitations, and I should only be a boasting ass if I said that I could give you a good hiding. But there's the other method, don't forget. Every time you defy me, you'll be given an extra day's fagging duty."

"I'm not going to do any fagging duty, confound you!" yelled Chambers. "I know I'm in the Third—I admit it—but it's an outrage. And the Sixth will respect my dignity."

"My poor innocent!" said Willy, in astonishment. "Do you really believe that the Sixth will spare you?"

"He's an optimist!" grinned Chubby Heath.

"More like a lunatic!" said Juicy Lemon, with a sniff. "My hat! We chaps know what the Sixth-Formers are, don't we? Can you imagine them sparing Chambers?"

"Might as well imagine the moon falling into the middle of the Triangle!" said Owen minor.

But Chambers ignored these hints.

"So I don't care twopence for your rotten threats!" he said savagely. "You're a crowd of cheeky young imps! Are you going to let me go, or shall I wipe you all up?"

"Oh, let's give him a bumping!" said Chubby impatiently.

The other Third-Formers were growing equally restive. Here was their chance to jump on Chambers, and to give him a sound bumping. Yet Willy compelled them to remain inactive. It spoke volumes for Willy's authority, to see these fags standing by idle.

"We'll conduct things properly, or not at all!" said the Third Form skipper coldly. "We're giving Chambers a chance, and if he doesn't take it it'll be his own fault. Now, Chambers, you heard what I said about defiance—"

"Confound your impudence!" raved Chambers. "I'm not taking any notice of you!"

Willy nodded, and held up a finger.

"We'll start counting from now!" he said calmly. "This means an extra day's fagging for you, Chambers. Now, give me your word that you'll obey my orders—"

"You young idiot, I won't!"

"That's another day's extra fagging!" said Willy, putting up another finger.

"You—you babbling young monkey—"

"A third day!"

"You've got me here, and you're surrounding me!" panted Chambers. "I can't do anything against a crowd like this! But wait until I'm free! I'll make you pay!"

"That's four days!" said Willy smoothly. "Go ahead, Chambers! Before long, you'll give yourself a full week of fagging duty. And you can take it from me that we shall make you do it!"

"I won't do a thing!" hooted Chambers, beside himself with helpless fury.

"That makes five days," said Willy relentlessly.

"You—you—"

"Six days—no, not yet!" said Willy. "Go ahead, Chambers. Defy me just once more, please!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'll defy you every day of the week—"



Willy Handforth wanted to see Chambers; Chambers didn't want to see Willy. Chubby Heath looked at his companions. "Ready?" he said crisply. "Good! On him!" And Cuthbert Chambers was yanked off his feet, rolled on his back and carried off.

every day of the month!" panted Chambers passionately. "I'll defy you until the end of the term! Do you understand, you grinning young jackanapes?"

Willy nodded, as icily cool as ever.

"Of course I understand," he replied sweetly. "Thanks, Chambers, old man. You've saved me a whole lot of trouble. I needn't count any more. You're going to do special fagging duty every day."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And you'll keep it up until you're in a different mood," said Willy. "So far, of course, you don't quite realise your position. But a fag is a fag—and you mustn't imagine that you can escape your share of work because you're older and bigger than the rest of us."

Chambers tried to speak, but the words stuck in his throat. Willy's continued self-possession nearly robbed Chambers of his sanity.

There was no sense of humiliation in Chambers yet. He was filled with rebellion—with hot fury against the headmaster, against the Third, and, in fact, against everybody in general.

"Well, you can go now!" added Willy casually.

Chambers gulped.

"What—what did you say?" he panted thickly.

"I said that you can go," replied Willy. "We're not going to jump on you, Chambers. These chaps want to, I know, but the time isn't ripe yet. You can cut."

"Wha-a-at!" gabbled Chambers.

He could hardly believe the evidence of his ears. This fag had told him to "cut"! On many occasions Chambers had compelled a fag to work for him, and then he had told the fag to "cut." Willy was giving him some of his own medicine. And the whole thing was incongruous. He, a big, burly senior, being told to "cut"! Chambers felt that the skies were about to fall.

Then, to his further stupefaction, the fags melted away. A word from Willy had been enough. Thoroughly disgusted, the Third-Formers dispersed and left Chambers severely alone.

He came out from behind the gym in a daze; and many Removites, who had been eagerly waiting his appearance, experienced a pang of keen disappointment.

They had expected to see Chambers torn, tattered and bruised. But he emerged as he had entered—unscathed.

Not that he was to be in this satisfactory condition for long!



CHAPTER 6.

A Laughing Stock!

THE whole of St. Frank's was chuckling over the troubles of Cuthbert Chambers. If he had been any other fellow, the school might have sympathised with him. But everybody had always been more or less fed up with this boasting, bragging senior. In his Fifth Form days Chambers had been an insufferable ass. Everybody in the senior school had, at one time or another, been compelled to give Chambers a snubbing.

Not that it had ever done him any good. He had remained arrogant and boastful—self-important and intolerable.

When he had been sent down into the Remove, the Fifth had heaved a sigh of relief, and the Sixth had looked on with indifference. Everybody had agreed that Chambers had got what he deserved.

Now that he was in the Third, the joke of the thing was obvious. St. Frank's, from end to end, chuckled.

And the Sixth, in particular, knew that its chance had come.

Chambers was a fag—and there were plenty of fellows in the Sixth Form who were quite ready to "take it out" of Chambers. The Head had acted drastically, but his provocation had justified the step. Nothing, it seemed, had any effect on Chambers. Sending him down into the Third, however, might have the desired effect.

At first, of course, he would be rebellious and difficult to deal with. But the Head was convinced that Chambers would soon come to his senses; and then, perhaps, he would work.

All eyes were on him when he took his place at the Third Form table in the dining-hall, and Chambers was painfully aware of those concentrated glances. He felt horribly conspicuous. There he sat, with fags on either side of him, towering above them like a liner among a lot of tugs.

The Fifth was particularly hilarious; whispers were going round; and every now and again the seniors would give vent to outbursts of laughter. Chambers did not need telling that he was the butt of these jokes.

It was a truly awful experience.

"Go on—laugh!" he said thickly. "By glory! You needn't think I'm going to stand this for long! Wait until my people hear about it!"

"Really, Chambers!" protested Mr. Suncliffe mildly.

Chambers glared at the master of the Third.

"Well, what's the matter, sir?" he demanded.

"There is—er—nothing the matter," replied Mr. Suncliffe. "But you must remember, Chambers, that little boys should be seen and not heard!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Third cackled joyously, and Chambers went as red as a beetroot. It wasn't often that Mr. Suncliffe ventured upon a joke. But he, too, shared the general feeling that Chambers deserved all he was getting.

"I'm not a little boy, sir!" fumed Chambers.

"No?" murmured Mr. Suncliffe. "You are, nevertheless, a fag, Chambers. Size, expressed in the terms of *avoirdupois*, is of no account in the Third Form. You must remember that you are, figuratively, now a little boy!"

"Are you playing the same game, sir?" asked Chambers fiercely. "You know jolly well that I'm really a Fifth-Former—"

"I know—ahem—jolly well that you are a Third-Former, Chambers!" interrupted Mr. Suncliffe, with some asperity. "And it would be as well for you to know it, too. You will write me two hundred lines for impudence."

"Eh? Why, what the—"

"Silence, Chambers!"

"W-why should I be sus-silent?" stammered Chambers. "I'm not one of these kids—"

"Another word from you, young man, and I will cane you!" said Mr. Suncliffe angrily. "Your behaviour is intolerable. I can see that I shall have to be very severe."

Chambers subsided, boiling like a geyser. And from all quarters of the great dining-hall came chuckles.

Chambers was exceedingly foolish.

He was alienating every scrap of sympathy that might have been extended towards him. His truculence and his obstinacy caused the school to hold him in contempt. If, on the other hand, he had been quietly dignified and submissive, a great many of the fellows would have got up a petition to the Head, so that Chambers should be spared further humiliation.

But, as it was, St. Frank's stood by, and was ready to see Chambers "getting it in the neck."

As soon as breakfast was over, Chambers strode out of the dining-hall, and it wasn't until he was far down the passage that he found that Willy Handforth and all the Ancient House fags were attending him. He turned on them in a fury.

"What are you following me about for?" he demanded harshly.

"You're on duty now, Chambers," replied Willy.

"What the thunder—"

"You know well enough that two or three fags must always be on duty at the end of the Sixth Form passage, between breakfast and lessons," said Willy. "The seniors are always wanting errands run, and if there isn't a fag or two ready they sally out with their canes."

"What's this got to do with me?"

"Nothing much—only that you've got to be on duty at the end of the Sixth Form passage," replied Willy. "Our system in the Third is simple and business-like. We take it in turns to do the fagging."

"Well, you can get ahead with it—but I'm not concerned in your silly system!" said Chambers, with amazing obtuseness. "Confound you, young Handforth! Can't you realise that I'm not really a fag? I know I'm in the Third, but it's all rot. And I'm hanged if I'll submit to your dictation!"

"It's no good!" said Willy, with a sigh. "We've got to use force, after all. His brain must be about the size of a gnat's hind leg!"

And without further ado the fags made a dive at Chambers' feet and yanked them forward. Chambers went over on his back with a crash which shook the whole passage.

"Hi!" he howled wildly. "Lemme go, you—you young—"

But the rest of his protests were drowned. Coolly, and with business-like precision, Chambers was hustled off to commence his first hour of fagging duty!



CHAPTER 7.

Another Shock!

WILLIAM NAPOLEON BROWNE and Stevens, of the Fifth, paused at the end of the Fifth Form pas-

sage. A most curious sound was coming from round the corner. They investigated.

Chambers, in the middle of a swarm of fags, was being dragged along. The process was very simple. Chambers was on his back; both his legs were in the grasp of three fags, and Chambers was being pulled along the floor in this undignified position.

Nobody was taking the slightest notice of his infuriated shouts.

Browne and Stevens stood back as the fags drew near.

"You will observe, Brother Horace, that the ways of these fags are quaint and curious," said Browne, in an interested voice. "One fag, you will note, is what we might call an outsize."

"I wonder what his name is!" said Stevens.

"Name?" repeated Browne. "Come, come, brother! Fags don't have names! One grubby fag is exactly the same as another grubby fag. Some may be of larger size, but their intelligence is of the lowest."

"Particularly the larger-sized ones," said Stevens, nodding.

The procession passed on, the fags appreciating quite well that Browne and Stevens intended these remarks for Chambers. And Chambers, hearing them, gnashed his teeth with fresh rage.

"Help!" he gurgled. "Browne, you rotter! Stevens! Get me away from these beastly little fags!"

"Alas, Brother Chambers, you ask too much!" replied Browne. "In the Fifth we do not mix in the squabbles of the faggery."

"Rats!" said Stevens. "It's only a game, old man. These fags are just playing about."

"No doubt you are right," agreed Browne gravely. "Little children are sometimes rough and uncouth in their play. Come, Brother Horace. The spectacle pains my cultured susceptibilities!"

And the two Fifth-Formers strolled away, leaving Chambers on the point of expiring from heart failure. They had deliberately left him with these fags—and had, moreover, treated him as one of the "children."

"Here we are!" said Willy crisply. "Now then, Chambers, my lad, you'll be the first! As soon as a prefect opens his door and yells for a fag, you're going!"

"I won't—I won't!" panted Chambers defiantly. "I'm a senior, and—"

"He's still got that silly delusion!" said Chubby Heath gruffly. "What can we do with the fathead?"

"He'll come round in time," said Willy calmly.

Chambers found himself sitting on a long form. Here, at the end of the Sixth Form passage, there was a kind of big recess. It was just at the corner, and in the middle of the recess there was a window overlooking the Triangle. It was the habit of the fags to sit on the form, awaiting whatever duty they might be called for, and in the interim they would gaze longingly out of the window at their more fortunate Form-fellows.

Chambers sat there, glaring about him. Willy and Chubby Heath and Juicy Lemon and Owen minor were chatting together, at the other end of the form. Dexter and Gates and Blythe, another three of the Ancient House fags, were holding a little argument near the window. Usually there were only two or three fags on duty, but this was a special occasion. Cuthbert Chambers needed to be watched.

Suddenly, a door opened up the Sixth Form passage.

"Fag!" said a brisk voice.

Chambers started. He recognised the voice of Wilson, the prefect.

"Your turn, Chambers!" said Willy briefly.

"Confound you! What do you mean?" demanded Chambers. "Do you think I'm going? I'm not a fag!"

Willy sighed.

"How many more times are you going to say that?" he asked. "And let me tell you this, Chambers—it's not a very safe thing to keep a prefect waiting. When he shouts for a fag, he wants a fag. And if a fag doesn't come, he's liable to get a bit shirty."

Before Chambers could reply, an exclamation sounded up the passage.

"Hi!" roared Wilson wrathfully. "Fag! Are you all deaf, down there? Fag!"

"It's your turn, Chambers!" said Willy steadily.

Chambers nearly choked.

"I won't move an inch!" he vowed, in a quivering voice.

A heavy footstep sounded, and there was the ominous swish of a cane. Chambers looked up, and he saw that Wilson was out in the passage, his face black with indignation and anger.

"Can't you young beggars hear me?" he shouted. "How many more times have I got to call for a fag?"

"Sorry, Wilson!" said Willy. "It's Chambers' turn, and he won't go. You know we have a system in the Third. There's never any trouble——"

"That's right enough," admitted Wilson, pausing in his stride. "As a general rule, you fags are pretty good. Now then, Chambers! What's the matter with you? Get a move on!"

Chambers stared at Wilson, his eyes goggling.

"Are—are you talking to me?" he panted.

"Yes, I am!" said Wilson curtly. "I want a fag, and it's your turn. Come into my study!"

And Wilson walked back along the passage as though the matter were settled. Obviously he expected Chambers to follow without question. Chambers gave a gulp.

"All right!" he breathed. "I'll go!"

He hurried up the passage, and broke into the prefect's study. It had occurred to him that this was a way out. Wilson, of course, would treat him with dignity and respect. He was really a senior, and Wilson would realise that. Chambers wondered why he had not thought of this easy method of escape before.

He entered the study, closed the door, and uttered a gasp of relief.

"Thank goodness!" he said fervently. "That was jolly decent of you, Wilson! It was a good wheeze, and you're a sportsman!"



CHAPTER 8.

Carrying on the Good Work!

WILSON of the Sixth stared at Chambers in well-feigned amazement.

"What are you talking about?" he asked.

"Well, you know the position," said Chambers. "Those infernal fags kept me there, and I couldn't get away. But you know that I'm really a senior——"

"I know nothing of the sort!" interrupted Wilson angrily. "You're a fag!"

"Wha-a-at!"

Chambers backed away, freshly startled. And Wilson grinned to himself, although his exterior was stern enough. He saw no reason why he should not help in the good

work of reducing Cuthbert Chambers to a sense of his own insignificance.

"Look here, Chambers, I don't want any nonsense from you!" said Wilson curtly. "Run across to Payne, of the East House, and tell him that I want him to lend me his new atlas. Understand?"

"Yes, but—but——"

"That's all!" said Wilson, turning his back. "Cut!"

Chambers swallowed hard.

"You—you don't mean it?" he panted. "You don't expect me to run your rotten errands, do you, Wilson?"

Wilson swung round.

"You cheeky young fag!" he shouted wrathfully. "How dare you speak to me like that?"

"Good glory!"

"Any more of it, and I'll tan you!" threatened Wilson. "Cut across to the East House, and tell Payne of the Sixth that I want his new atlas. How many more times do you need telling?"

"I—I thought you were only rotting!"

"Then you thought wrong!" snapped Wilson. "When I give orders to a fag, I'm not in the habit of rotting."

"But—but I'm not a fag!" yelled Chambers, suddenly losing control of himself. "You know thundering well that I'm not a fag, Wilson! What's the idea of keeping up this—this farce?"

Wilson frowned.

"I can see that you're asking for a swishing!" he said darkly. "It doesn't interest me what you *used* to be, Chambers. You're a fag now—you're in the Third Form—and every fag is liable to be called upon to run errands. And you're going to run this errand for me—or take the consequences! Are you going, or not?"

Chambers saw red.

"No, I'm hanged if I'll go!" he shouted. "And you can't make me, either!"

The door opened, and Conroy major strolled in.

"Hallo! What's the trouble?" he asked wonderingly.

"Trouble enough!" retorted Wilson. "This infernal young fag has been cheeking me!"

Conroy of the Sixth looked shocked.

"Oh, Chambers!" he said, giving Chambers a cold glance. "You don't mean to say that he's been cheeky?"

"Worse than that!" said Wilson. "He's refused to run an errand."

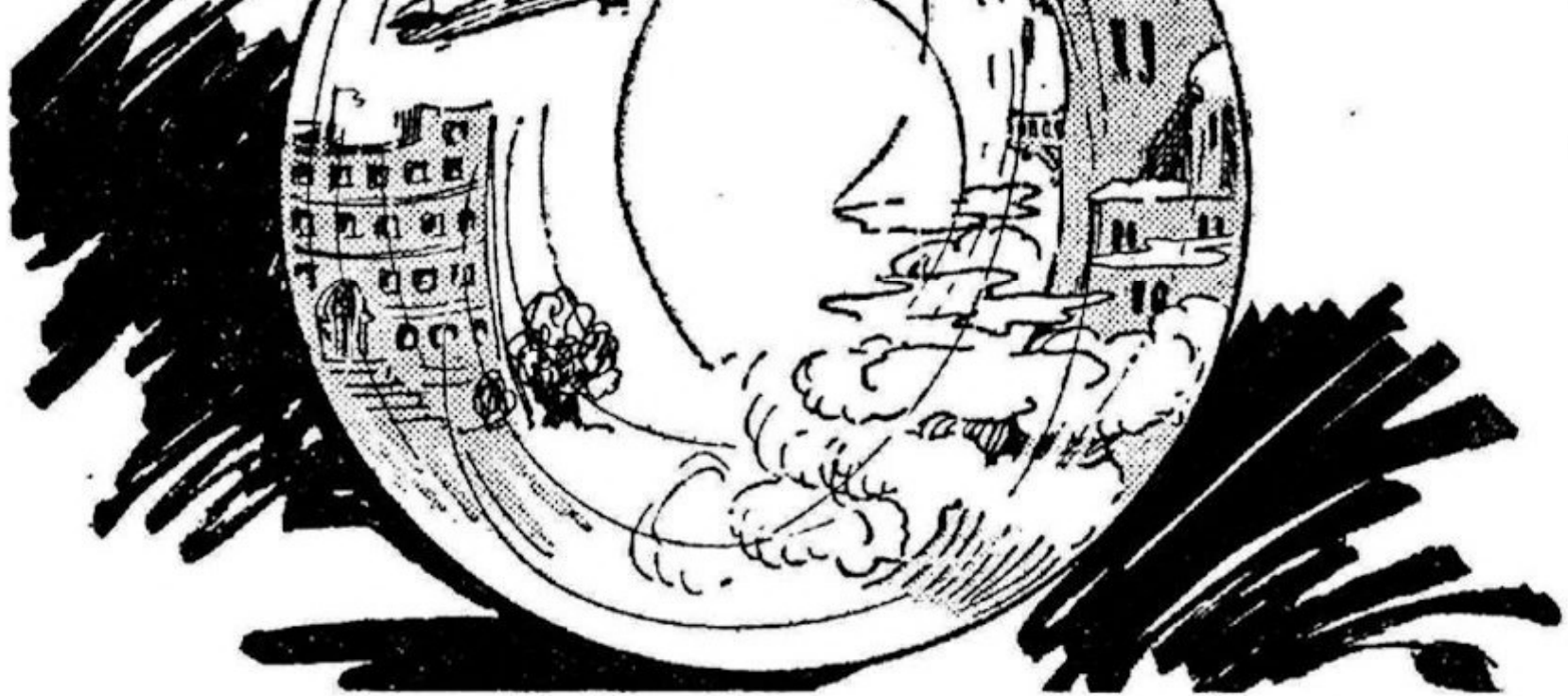
"Oh, well, of course, that's pretty serious," said Conroy major, in a tone of the utmost gravity. "You can't stand insolence from a fag, Wilson. Not likely!"

"But I'm not a fag!" shrieked Chambers.

"Stop that!" said Conroy sharply. "Great Scott! How dare you!"

"There's only one thing to be done," said Wilson. "We've got to tan him! You might call somebody else in, Conroy, old man. This fag looks like being troublesome, and we can't take any chances."

A PEEP INTO THE FUTURE



Thousands of miles divide old England and the boys of St. Frank's from India, the land of romance and mystery, yet Fate decrees that into the schemes and intrigues of a certain Indian potentate, whose one ambition is to wipe out the Western races, Handforth & Co. should be pitched. Not for one moment do the boys of St. Frank's—and the girls from Moor View School—anticipate the dangers and perils ahead. To them a "flip" in Mr. Manners' giant monoplane is a thrill, certainly, but nothing more. Yet this "flip" in the "Wanderer of the Skies" is destined to provide the St. Frank's boys and their girl chums with the greatest adventure of their lives. You'll be enthralled with the first story in this coming series. Look out for "Spirited Away!" which appears next week. It shows Edwy Searles Brooks at the top of his form.

Conroy went to the door, and found that Willy Handforth & Co., at the end of the passage, were waiting very demurely.

"Hi, one of you!" said Conroy. "Fetch Biggleswade in here, will you?"

"Yes, Conroy!" said Willy promptly.

A minute later, Biggleswade, of the Sixth, strolled into Wilson's study.

"I say," he complained, "how on earth can I work with all this row going on? And what do you want me for?"

"This fag has been cheeky," said Wilson. "We're going to tan him."

Biggleswade grinned.

"It'll do him good!" he said heartily.

Chambers backed away, breathing hard, as the prefects advanced upon him.

"Look here!" he panted. "You're just rotting, aren't you? I know that the Head has sent me down into the Third, but it's all rot to say that I'm a fag. I—I didn't mean to offend you, Wilson."

"Well, that's different!" said Wilson, in a disappointed voice. "This means that you'll run my errand—eh?"

Chambers flushed hotly.

"No, it doesn't!" he said. "I'm hanged if I'll run your rotten errands! You ought

to have sense enough to know that that sort of thing is beneath my dignity!"

"Then it's time that your dignity was touched up!" said Wilson angrily. "You cheeky fag! I've never heard of such impudence!—refusing to obey orders! Hold him, you fellows!"

"Certainly!" said Conroy major.

He and Biggleswade grabbed hold of Chambers, and the next moment Chambers was held face downwards over the desk. He was in this position almost before he realised what his companions were up to, and once he was there, he couldn't get away. For Biggleswade was sitting on his head and shoulders, and Conroy was firmly holding his legs. Wilson, in the meantime, was swishing a cane.

"Let him have it!" said Conroy. "There's only one way to deal with cheeky fags."

Swish!

The cane descended upon Chambers' seat with tremendous force. If Wilson ever had occasion to "tan" a fag, he generally wielded the weapon lightly. But Chambers was a different proposition. And Wilson, with all the enthusiasm in the world, put his whole strength into the task.

Whack! Whack! Whack!

"Oh," screamed Chambers. "You—you rotters! Lemme go!"

Whack! Whack! Whack!

"I'll teach you to answer me back!" panted Wilson. "Are you going on that errand, or not?"

"No!" sobbed Chambers.

Whack! Whack! Whack!

"I—I mean yes!" gabbled Chambers frantically. "Stop! I'll go, Wilson!"

Wilson held his hand.

"You deserve more, but I'll have pity on you!" he said, throwing the cane down.

"Let him get up, you fellows."

Chambers wriggled into an upright position, and he was nearly sobbing with rage. He found the three prefects regarding him with cold glances.

"That's enough!" said Wilson, pointing to the door. "I've given you your instructions. Cut!"

And Cuthbert Chambers "cut." There really wasn't anything else for him to do.



CHAPTER 9.

The Rebel!

CHAMBERS found himself out in the Triangle.

He did not know how he got there; he only had a dim recollection of passing Willy & Co., and then staggering painfully down the corridor. But now he was out in the open, in the July sunshine. And it seemed to him that the world was unreal.

He—Cuthbert Chambers—had been swished like any ordinary fag, and had been sent on an errand to one of the other Houses! It was rather a wonder that the skies did not fall.

"Hey! Get out of the way there, you silly young fag!"

Chambers started. Buster Boots, of the Fourth, was near him, and there were plenty of Removites knocking about, too.

"Did—did you speak to me?" panted Chambers.

"Yes, of course I did!" said Boots sharply. "And move when you're told, Chambers! The Fourth Form doesn't stand any rot from fags!"

"Or the Remove, either!" said Handforth, striding up. "Get a move on, Chambers!"

And he playfully gave Chambers a slap on the seat of his trousers. But then, Handforth's slaps were prodigious.

"Ouch!" howled Chambers, leaping about two feet into the air.

"Hallo! What's wrong?" asked Handforth, in surprise.

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

"Chambers must have been having a swishing, by the look of things!" chuckled Fullwood. "It's the first of a series, I expect!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Chambers bolted. There was nothing else for him to do. He heard the sounds of laughter ringing in his ears as he dodged through the East Arch, and found himself in the East Square.

He wandered round the rear, and went on to Big Side. Quite deliberately, he had ignored Wilson's orders. He was hanged if he was going to take any messages to Payne of the Sixth!

The swishing had done him little or no good.

Indeed, it had only made him more bitter and furious and rebellious than ever. He could not get it out of his head that he was really a senior. On more than one occasion he had indignantly protested because the Fifth Form was not allowed to use fags. And now he was a fag himself!

It was Chambers' spirit that was wrong.

He knew perfectly well that his work for the term was atrocious. He had done nothing, and there were many fags who could give him pointers on all general subjects. And as Chambers had come to St. Frank's for the improvement of his knowledge, it was only fitting that he should be placed in a Form that was suitable. In the Fifth he had been so backward that Mr. Pagett had always despaired of him. In the Remove he hadn't shown the slightest desire for work of any kind.

Now that he was down in the Third, his obstinacy was as rigid as ever. Work? Never! That, in a nutshell, was Chambers' attitude.

And as long as he kept to it, he would be in trouble.

He took a particular delight in defying Wilson of the Sixth. He would show these confounded prefects that he wasn't the kind of fellow to send about on errands! They would soon get tired of it, and would leave him alone!

So he did not return until the bell for lessons began to clang. Chambers was reckless, but he did not possess enough nerve for really open defiance. The shadow of expulsion loomed everlasting over him. He had exasperated the Head and his House-master, and most of the Form-masters. It needed only a little more insubordination on his part, and he would be bundled out of the school.

It was this thought—this dire fear—that caused him to make his way towards the School House. He was burning inwardly, and he wanted to hit at anything and everything. He had the spirit of rebellion, but not the courage to back it up.

He writhed at the thought of going into the Third Form-room, taking his place among the noisy fags. It was too awful for words—too horrible to be contemplated.

A sudden idea occurred to him.

"I know!" he muttered. "I'll get into the Form-room before any of those infernal kids. I'll have a word with Mr. Suncliffe, and ask him if I can do my lessons some-

where else. Sunciffe is a pretty weak sort of chap, and he will agree. In fact, he'll have to. I'll make him!"

Having made up his mind, he hurried into the Triangle, and was just entering the School House when he heard a hail. He halted, his heart jumping.

"Chambers!"

It was the voice of Wilson of the Sixth—and it was a stern, angry voice. Chambers half-turned, and found the prefect striding up to him. Incidentally, a crowd of Removites were on their way to their own Form-room. There were some fags standing by, too.

Chambers set his teeth, and walked on.

"Chambers!" shouted Wilson furiously. "Did you hear me?"

Chambers halted, not having the courage to walk on. He turned, scowling.

"Well, what's the matter?" he growled.

"You know very well what's the matter!" retorted Wilson angrily. "Didn't I tell you to go over to the East House with a message for Payne?"

"I—I forgot!" muttered Chambers.

"Don't tell fibs to me!" shouted Wilson. "You deliberately ignored my orders. And when a fag does that to me, he gets the cane! Hold out your hand!"

Chambers longed for the ground to open and swallow him up.

"I—I won't!" he panted. "Look here, Wilson, you know jolly well that I'm really a Fifth-Former! You can't make me——"

"You're a fag!" interrupted Wilson. "And what's more, you're a cheeky, disobedient fag. Hold out your hand! I shan't tell you a third time!"

The Removites and the other juniors gathered round, greatly interested. And Wilson was glad. It was all the better that Chambers' humiliation should be public. He was so obstinate and self-willed that he deserved to be shown up in front of everybody.

Moreover, Wilson was in the habit of caning fags anywhere and everywhere if they cheeked him.

CHAPTER 10.

Getting Worse!



S

WISH!
— Wilson gave his cane a preliminary swing, and the sound of it was music to

the ears of the surrounding juniors.

But to Chambers it only acted as a stimulus.

"Look here, you're not going to use that cane on me!" he said thickly. "Don't be a confounded fool, Wilson!"

"What?" gasped Wilson. "What did you say?"

"Oh, don't rot!" snapped Chambers. "I'm as big as you are, Wilson—and bigger!"

"More shame to you for being in the Third!" retorted Wilson scathingly. "I'm ready to make allowances, and if you showed the right spirit, Chambers, there would be plenty of sympathy for you. But you've got a rotten spirit, and it's high time that you were made to realise that you can't defy with impunity all the time honoured rules and regulations of this school. You're a fag, and you've refused to obey orders. Hold out your hand!"

"I tell you I won't!" shouted Chambers desperately.

Slash!

The cane swished round, and descended across his back. It was a hard cut, and it stung like a red-hot iron. Chambers gave a wild howl; he leapt into the air.

"Now!" said Wilson sternly. "Are you going to hold out your hand or not?"

Chambers looked round wildly, and his gaze rested upon Mr. Pagett, who had just arrived on the scene, very impressive in his cap and gown. Mr. Pagett was on his way to the Fifth Form-room, and he stood by, looking judicially at the scene.

"Sir!" gasped Chambers. "Mr. Pagett!"

"Well," said Mr. Pagett coldly. "What is it?"

"You're not going to allow this, are you, sir?" asked Chambers, in a wild voice. "Wilson has been slashing me across the back——"

"One moment!" interrupted Mr. Pagett. "Wilson, you are a prefect, and I look to you for an explanation."

Wilson was inclined to be annoyed.

"Is any explanation necessary, sir?" he asked heatedly. "I've never before been questioned for caning a fag!"

Mr. Pagett elevated his eyebrows.

"Oh, I see!" he said. "Exactly! I see!"

"Soon after breakfast, I gave this fag distinct orders to go over to the East House for me, and he deliberately ignored them," said Wilson. "But I caught him a minute or two ago, and now he refuses to hold out his hand. He is insubordinate, sir."

"That won't do!" said Mr. Pagett gravely. "You can't allow any insubordination among the fags, Wilson."

"No, sir."

"It would never do!" continued Mr. Pagett. "You had better give him his caning and get it over."

And Mr. Pagett, with a nod, walked on.

"But—but— Hi!" howled Chambers. "You're not going to let him do it, sir, are you?"

But Mr. Pagett took not the slightest notice. As a matter of fact, he welcomed this little scene. While Chambers had been under his care, he had been exasperated to a point of insanity by Chambers' slackness and indolence. He entirely approved of the headmaster's drastic method of bringing Chambers to his senses. And the more canings Chambers received, the better.

"Now then!" said Wilson, with a happy smile. "You can't get out of it, Chambers! Hold out your hand!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

A roar of laughter went up from all the juniors, and Chambers felt dizzy and faint. Mr. Pagett, his former Form-master, had left him flat!

"Fags should learn to do as they're told!" said Wilson, with relish.

"But I'm not a fag!" said Chambers feebly. "You know I'm not, Wilson! You're only trying to pull my leg——"

"You can call it what you like, but you're going to have this caning!" said Wilson. "And if I have any more of your cheek, I'll give you a double dose!"

Thoroughly exasperated, he delivered a number of stinging cuts across Chambers' back, and then walked away. He couldn't waste any further time.

"What an ass you are, Chambers!" said Fullwood frankly. "Why can't you knuckle under? You're in the Third now—and Third-Formers either do as they're told, or get it in the neck!"

"I fancy Chambers got it somewhere else!" murmured Travers dryly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You're all against me!" raved Chambers, whirling round and facing all those grinning juniors. "You're laughing at my position! You're a crowd of cads!"

"We shouldn't laugh at you, Chambers, if you acted differently," said Nipper quietly. "But while you still consider yourself a senior, and act the giddy ox, you won't get much sympathy!"

"I don't want any sympathy!" roared Chambers. "I want justice!"

"That's exactly what you're getting—justice!" said Handforth. "And you don't like it, do you? You need somebody to tell you the plain, unvarnished truth. You're a dunce, Chambers, and you've got a swelled head. As soon as you realise that, you'll find plenty of fellows who will have a kindly thought for you. I've been through it—and I know! The more obstinate you are, the more you'll have your corns trodden on!"

But Chambers refused to take this tip.

"I'll get my own back one of these days!" he said harshly. "By glory! I'll show you all! They can't fool about with me like this! They've shoved me down into the Third, and they're treating me as a fag! But it won't last for long! I belong to the Fifth, and I'll never submit to this persecution!"

And Cuthbert Chambers, more rebellious than ever, stuck out his chin, and strode away.

Willy Handforth sighed.

"I was expecting it!" he confided to Chubby Heath. "Well, we shall have to continue with the treatment!"

"And it's all in a good cause!" grinned Chubby happily.



CHAPTER 11.

The Seat of Honour!

MR. SUNCLIFFE was uneasy. The headmaster had already had a word with him, and he knew that he would have a new pupil in his Form-room that morning, and Mr. Suncliffe, who was a mild, orderly gentleman, feared that he would have some trouble with his new recruit.

But he was determined that he would stand no nonsense.

Chambers had been causing a lot of trouble lately. He had thrown the Remove into complete disorder during his sojourn in that Form; and, now that he was in the Third, he seemed to be more arrogant and pig-headed than ever.

In some ways, Chambers was rather like Handforth. They were both self-willed—both obstinate. But while Handforth's obstinacy aroused no real resentment, Chambers' had a knack of antagonising everybody. The real difference between the two was that Handforth invariably acted in all innocence, naively unconscious of his folly. Chambers, on the other hand, was wilfully, and indeed, maliciously, perverse. And that made all the difference. It robbed him of any sympathy that might have been extended towards him. Fellows would laugh at Handforth in such circumstances, but they were only contemptuous of Chambers.

Mr. Suncliffe was wearing a worried frown when the Third Form trooped noisily in. Chambers came into the room in their midst. He couldn't help himself. Willy & Co. had surrounded him, and they forced him in.

"Ah, Chambers!" said Mr. Suncliffe hesitantly.

"Look here, sir, I wanted a word with you in private!" said Chambers, breaking away from the fags. "Only these kids grabbed hold of me——"

"You should not refer to your Form-fellows as 'kids,' Chambers," interrupted Mr. Suncliffe tartly. "I will not allow it!"

"It isn't right that I should sit in this Form-room, with all these—these youngsters," said Chambers, controlling himself with an effort. "I want you to let me do my studies somewhere else, sir!"

"Then I am very much afraid, Chambers, that I cannot comply with your request!" said Mr. Suncliffe promptly. "Certainly not! You are now a member of the Third Form, and you must take your place in this room."

"But—but——"

"Silence!" shouted Mr. Suncliffe.

He was talking as much to the Form as to Chambers. The fags settled themselves in their places, and remained moderately silent. Chambers still stood out in front of Mr. Suncliffe's desk.



In front of Palmer, in front of Phyllis, Conroy major seized hold of Chambers by the ear and dragged him, yelling, from the study. It was the most humiliating moment of Chambers' life!

"In the circumstances, Chambers, I will place you at the head of the Form!" said Mr. Suncliff, after a short pause. "You will occupy this first seat in the front row, and I sincerely trust that you will appreciate this act of—"

"But I don't want to sit in the class, sir."

"You will sit where I tell you, Chambers!" snapped Mr. Suncliff, exasperated out of his usual mildness. "If I find, after a day or two, that you are unfit to sit in that particular seat, I shall shift you elsewhere. Now, sir! To your place!"

As Chambers went, inwardly boiling, Willy Handforth solemnly winked to Chubby Heath and Juicy Lemon.

"Told you so!" he murmured. "I knew old Sunny would put him in that seat."

"My only sainted aunt!" said Chubby breathlessly. "It's going to work, then?"

"It can't help working!" nodded Willy.

"Now, now, boys!" exclaimed Mr. Suncliff. "There must be no chattering! We are here to work—not to talk!"

"I see that Sussex did pretty well yesterday, sir!" remarked Willy casually.

Mr. Suncliff's manner changed. The frown vanished from his face, and he completely forgot about Chambers. He smiled contentedly.

"Yes, indeed!" he said. "I have no hesitation in prophesying that Sussex will win this match. Both Bowley and Parks are doing well, and, with Tate's bowling—"

"What about Surrey, sir?" put in Owen minor enthusiastically. "Surrey's not our

own county, I know, but a fellow can't help admiring old Fender."

"Ah, Fender!" said Mr. Suncliff dreamily. "Fender is a wonderful player. Really wonderful! I only wish that I could spare the time to run up to the Oval—ahem! But this won't do!" he added, coming to earth. "Let there be no further discussion of cricket!"

The fags inwardly chuckled. If ever they wanted to neglect work for a bit, it was generally safe to mention cricket, and Mr. Suncliff would talk for five or ten minutes, oblivious to the particular lesson that was supposed to be on the agenda.

But this morning the trick didn't work.

Mr. Suncliff was distracted by Chambers' presence. It was hardly surprising, for Chambers looked like a fish out of water in his seat of honour. He was so much bigger than any of the other fags. He towered above them. He gave Mr. Suncliff a shock every time the Form-master looked up.

As for Chambers himself, he felt horribly conspicuous. It had been bad enough in the Remove, but it was a hundred times worse in the Third. And it nearly drove him into a frenzy when he realised that he was one of these fags. He wasn't there in a position of authority; he was part and parcel of the Third. It was so incongruous that Chambers was more rebellious than ever.

The first lesson that morning was history, and Chambers stared unseeingly at the books in front of him. By a curious coincidence,

history was one of his weakest subjects—and he was weak in everything.

"We will begin," said Mr. Suncliffe, in a businesslike voice. "Now, Chambers, you will stand up. I want you to tell me the exact date when Charles the Second— Did you hear me, Chambers?" added Mr. Suncliffe sharply. "Stand up, sir!"

Chambers stood up. At least, he tried to. Then a startled, dismayed expression came over his flushed features. He had half risen, but he sat down again.

"What is the matter, Chambers?" asked Mr. Suncliffe tartly.

"I'm stuck, sir!" said Chambers savagely, as he half-twisted round. "By glory! Some of these confounded fags have been playing a trick on me! I'm stuck to the seat, sir!"

And the Third broke into a roar of happy laughter.



CHAPTER 12.

Great Snakes!

WILLY HANDFORTH looked very innocent—while being, really, very guilty.

For it was he who had plastered a considerable amount of special liquid glue on Chambers' seat. Or, to be more exact, Willy had plastered the glue on the seat that Chambers had used. Willy had anticipated that Mr. Suncliffe would place the ex-senior in this particular seat, and Willy's shot had been true.

"Silence!" shouted Mr. Suncliffe angrily. "Chambers, stand up at once! Do not be absurd! How can you be stuck to your seat?"

"I don't know how I am, sir—but I am!" shouted Chambers. "It's these beastly fags! They've been playing a trick!"

"Do not refer to your Form-fellows as though you were not one of them, Chambers!" said Mr. Suncliffe impatiently. "When will you realise that you are no longer a senior, but a member of this Form?"

Chambers was silent. He glared ferociously at the fags round him, and they grinned back. They were enjoying themselves immensely. They owed Chambers many an old score, and a few of them were being paid off this morning!

"We cannot have our time wasted like this, Chambers!" said Mr. Suncliffe. "If you are stuck to your seat, make haste and—and—ahem!—unstuck yourself!"

"But I can't, sir! I'm fast to the seat!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Nonsense!" snapped the Form-master. "Make a big effort, Chambers."

"Yes, and tear my trousers!" roared Chambers hotly. "Not likely!"

"Chambers!" stormed Mr. Suncliffe. "How dare you speak to me like that?"

"Oh, don't make a fuss, sir!"

"I shall certainly make a fuss if I wish, Chambers!" said Mr. Suncliffe warmly. "You appear to forget that I am a master. If you do not talk to me in the proper fashion, I shall have to cane you!"

"Cane me!" yelled Chambers.

"Yes, you impertinent young rascal!" exclaimed Mr. Suncliffe. "I do not intend to be defied by you, sir! Upon my word! You are getting worse and worse, Chambers!"

Chambers' brow was damp, and he dived a hand into his coat-pocket in order to get his handkerchief. His fingers encountered something curiously cold. To his consternation, it seemed to move as he touched it.

"Now for the fireworks!" murmured Willy serenely.

He was watching Chambers in a casual kind of way, his expression innocent and serene. He saw Chambers withdraw his hand from his pocket.

"Great Scott!" gurgled Chambers.

He held something in his fingers—something which writhed slowly and deliberately—something black and cold and scaly.

"Well, that's a funny thing to carry about with you, Chambers!" said Chubby Heath, in surprise. "It's a snake, isn't it?"

"A snake!" screamed Chambers wildly.

He leapt to his feet, and there was an ominous rending sound. In his excitement, Chambers had forgotten all about being stuck, and he was stuck no longer.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The fags yelled with merriment, and Mr. Suncliffe stormed about helplessly.

"What are you doing, Chambers?" he demanded. "What is that you have there? A snake? Good heavens, what do you mean by bringing that—that repulsive thing into the Form-room?"

"I didn't, sir!" howled Chambers. "I found it in my pocket!"

"Mind it doesn't bite you!" warned Owen minor.

But Owen minor knew perfectly well that the snake was harmless. It was one of Willy Handforth's numerous little pets—and Willy himself had casually dropped it into Chambers' pocket a few minutes earlier, as he had brushed past him while seeking his own seat.

Of course, Sebastian was Willy's pet snake; this specimen was not Sebastian. It was only a commonplace little specimen that Willy did not value much. Incidentally, it was perfectly harmless.

But Chambers didn't know this. Fascinatedly, he stared at the writhing object, and when the tiny snake gave a sudden jerk, Chambers came to his senses.

"Ugh!" he panted, flinging the thing from him.

It soared through the air, described an arc across the Form-room, and neatly descended down Mr. Suncliffe's neck!

The Third gasped.

This was an entirely unrehearsed effect. It was, indeed, a marvellous piece of luck—

from the Third's point of view. Never had Willy Handforth hoped for anything so rich as this!

Mr. Suncliffe was a gentleman who wore collars that were two or three sizes too large for him, and at the moment he was bending forward, peering at Chambers. Thus there was a comparatively large space between his neck and his collar. The snake slithered over the top of his head as it fell, and then vanished.

"Help!" screamed Mr. Suncliffe, as he felt the cold object squirm down his back. "Good heavens! Help—help!"

The Third nearly expired.

Everybody was on his feet, rushing about; and Willy Handforth and Chubby Heath dashed at Mr. Suncliffe, and grabbed him.

"It's all right, sir!" said Willy. "Don't worry! I don't suppose it'll bite you."

"You—you don't suppose!" gasped Mr. Suncliffe, in horror.

"It was jolly careless of Chambers to chuck it across the room like that!" said Willy indignantly.

But Mr. Suncliffe was not listening. He was dancing about like a dervish, leaping two or three feet into the air, waving his arms, and whirling round. He could feel the snake somewhere down his back, and he was faint with apprehension.

Madly he tore his gown off, then his jacket, and the fags enthusiastically joined in the good work. They tore Mr. Suncliffe's waistcoat from him, yanked his collar off, and then started work on his shirt.

"It's all right, sir—leave it to us!" sang out Willy. "There's nothing to worry about."

"I'm bitten!" moaned the unhappy Form-master. "I know I'm bitten! Good gracious me! This is terrible—terrible!"

Riiiiipppp!

Mr. Suncliffe was bobbing about amid the sea of fags, and his shirt was literally torn to shreds. In the middle of it all a kind of dull "plop" sounded, and the fags yelled with triumph.

"It's all right, sir—it's fallen on the floor!" said Willy. "We've got it, sir! You're safe now!"

"Safe!" breathed Mr. Suncliffe. "How do I know I'm safe?"

"Because it's a harmless snake, sir," replied Willy. "It wouldn't hurt a fly!"

And the Third, as it gazed upon the wreckage of Mr. Suncliffe, chuckled with pure joy. This was indeed a morning of mornings!



CHAPTER 13.

No Rest for the Wicked!

MR. SUNCLIFFE recovered himself rapidly.

"If you knew that this—this wretched

little snake was harmless, Handforth minor, why did you not tell me before?" he demanded. "Why did you—ahem!—practically undress me in this disgraceful fashion?"

"Well, we thought it was better to be on the safe side, sir," replied Willy. "I'm surprised at Chambers for carrying snakes about in his pocket—"

"I didn't put it in my pocket!" hooted Chambers. "One of you rotten fags put it in there—and you know it! I'm all torn—my trousers are half gone!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Chambers, come with me!" panted Mr. Suncliffe, as he hastily wrapped his gown round his dishevelled person. "Come with me—and change! In the meantime, I will send a prefect into this room to keep order."

And Mr. Suncliffe whisked out of the Form-room, too agitated and worried to give any more explicit instructions.

Chambers went, too—very hurriedly. And the Third settled down to a good laugh. But it didn't last long. Frinton of the Sixth came in, and he was looking grim.

"What's this you kids have been up to?" he asked tartly. "Now then! No noise! Get on with your work!"

"But we were going to tell you what happened to Mr. Suncliffe!" said Willy.

"Never mind!" said Frinton. "I'll hear it from Mr. Suncliffe, when he comes back. If any one of you speaks I'll tan him!"

Frinton meant it, too. There was order in the Third Form-room until Mr. Suncliffe came back. He was dignified again, although it must be confessed that he was hot and flustered.

"Thank you, Frinton!" he said. "I have had a very—er—unhappy experience."

"Yes, sir?" said the prefect inquiringly.

"I would prefer not to discuss the matter, however!" said Mr. Suncliffe. "I am obliged to you, Frinton, for taking charge of my Form during my absence."

"That's all right, sir," said Frinton.

He moved towards the door. As he did so Mr. Suncliffe uttered a sudden exclamation.

"Has Chambers not returned yet?" he asked sharply.

"No, sir!" said the Third in one voice.

"One moment, Frinton!" said the Form-master, turning. "If it is not imposing upon your generosity to too great an extent, will you be good enough to find Chambers and send him back at once to this room?"

"With pleasure, sir!" said Frinton heartily.

And sure enough, three minutes later, Frinton reappeared, triumphantly marshalling Chambers before him. Chambers was looking red and furious. Also, he was looking respectable again.

"In you go!" said Frinton crisply. "No more of your nonsense, my lad! Here's your missing fag, sir," he added to Mr. Suncliffe. "If he gives you any more bother, I should swish him. Don't put up with his nonsense, sir."

And Frinton went off, chuckling.

"You may go to your place, Chambers," said Mr. Suncliffe.

"I'm not going to sit among those kids again!" said Chambers rebelliously. "And, anyway, my seat's all messed up with glue and stuff!"

"Oh, yes, of course," murmured Mr. Suncliffe, his sternness momentarily relaxing into a slight smile. "H'm! You'd better occupy the vacant seat next to Heath." Then, as Chambers still hesitated: "Go to your place I tell you, Chambers! Go to your place, sir!" commanded the Form-master sternly.

Chambers, with a gulp, went.

By the time the morning was over, Mr. Suncliffe was convinced that he had some additional grey hairs. The whole morning had been a nightmare to him. He was thankful, indeed, that it was a half-holiday, and that there would be no further lessons.

Not that there was any freedom for Cuthbert Chambers.

He had a brief respite before dinner, but, as soon as the meal was over, he was startled to find himself surrounded by Willy Handforth & Co.

Chambers had already made up his mind to clear off for the afternoon, so that he could have some peace. Moreover, he wanted to think the whole thing out—to arrive at some solution to this ghastly situation. Apparently the thing couldn't be done.

"What do you kids want?" asked Chambers harshly, as he looked round like a trapped animal.

"We want you, my son!" said Willy coolly.

"You confounded young sweeps——"

"Cheese it!" said Willy. "You haven't forgotten my orders of this morning, have you? You've got to do fagging duty, Chambers."

"I'm hanged if I'll——"

"To-day and to-morrow, and every day for at least a week!" interrupted Willy. "Any member of the Third Form who openly defies me has to pay for it! Come along! You're going to take your place on the seat at the end of the Sixth Form passage. There's always a lot of fagging to be done at about this hour."

Chambers nearly foamed at the mouth.

"Get away!" he shouted violently. "Go away from me! I won't obey your confounded orders!"

"No?" said Willy sweetly. "We'll soon see about that, Chambers!"

And the fags swooped upon Chambers with much gusto. They tripped him up, they turned him over on his face, and they grabbed at his legs and arms.

Kicking, panting and threatening, Chambers was frog's-marched to the Sixth Form passage. Then he was dumped down on the seat and held there. He felt something like Gulliver in the hands of the Lilliputians. Escape for him was impossible.

"Nerve!" said Willy breathlessly. "You'll refuse to obey orders, will you? You'll ignore me, will you? The sooner you come to your senses, Chambers, the better! You're a fag—and a rotten fag at that! But you're going to do your share of the work!"

A door opened somewhere along the Sixth Form passage before Chambers could make any reply.

"Fag!" came an imperious command.

"Your turn, Chambers!" said Willy & Co. in unison.

"I won't go!" exclaimed Chambers thickly.

But he went all the same. He was propelled by half a dozen vigorous fellow fags.



CHAPTER 14.

Chambers' Dilemma!

CONROY MAJOR was standing in his doorway as the fags came swarming up, with Chambers in the forefront.

"What the deuce is all this?" demanded Conroy major curtly.

"You want a fag, don't you?" asked Willy.

"Yes—but I don't want a dozen of you!"

"It's Chambers' turn!" chimed in Chubby Heath.

"Oh!" said the prefect, giving Chambers a cold look. "So you're still rebellious, are you? We're getting almost sick of you, Chambers! And we don't stand any hanky-panky from fags."

"I'm not a fag!" howled Chambers for the fiftieth time.

"You'll go to the village for me!" said Conroy curtly. "I want you to fetch my wireless battery at once. Bring it up yourself. If you do any damage to it, I'll make you pay for it. And look lively!"

Chambers listened in blank astonishment.

"Your—your wireless battery?" he repeated breathlessly.

"Yes!"

"But you've got a whacking great six-valve set!"

"I know I have," nodded Conroy major. "What of it?"

"And it takes a huge, double-sized, six-volt battery!" said Chambers. "You're not proposing that I should fetch that from the village, are you?"

"That's exactly what I am doing, my lad!"

"But—but it's outrageous!" gasped Chambers indignantly. "You know jolly well that that big battery of yours weighs about a ton, Conroy! It's as much as a chap can do to lift it from the floor to the table!"

Conroy major nodded.

"Well, you're going to take some exercise this afternoon!" he said. "And you're going to lift that battery from Bellton to this study! What's the good of a fag if he can't run errands?"

"You—you——"

"Now then—no sauce!" said Conroy sharply. "This is where you'll come in handy, Chambers! If there's anything particularly big to be carried, we'll call on you!"

It's just as well to have an over-sized fag running loose about the place!"

Willy & Co., listening, did not doubt that Conroy major had purposely given Chambers this herculean task. Ordinarily, the wireless batteries were sent up from the village by carrier. In many cases, they were delivered direct by van from the charging station.

It pleased Conroy major to send Chambers on this particular errand. He wanted to give the burly ex-senior some hard work. It was a blazingly hot afternoon, and there was something rather comic in the thought of Chambers struggling up the lane, carrying that over-sized battery.

For Chambers had alienated every atom of sympathy that might have been extended towards him. His conduct had antagonised fags, middle school, and seniors alike.

"Well, cut off!" said Conroy, as he turned back into his study. "And don't be too long, Chambers! There's a programme I want to hear this afternoon, and, if you're not back within half an hour—"

"How can I get back within half an hour?" roared Chambers furiously. "And what do you think I am—a motor lorry?"

"I wouldn't like to tell what I think you are!" retorted Conroy. "All I know is this: If you don't bring that battery here within half an hour, I'll tan your hide so much that you'll look like leather!"

And Conroy major closed his door as an indication that the conversation was ended.

"Better go, Chambers!" advised Willy gravely.

"It's the safest way, in the end!" added Juicy Lemon, shaking his head. "These prefects are as hard as nails. Regular Spanish Inquisitors! If you don't do what they order, down comes the chopper! In two ticks they shove you on the giddy rack! We know 'em!"

"But I can't carry the thing!" protested Chambers hoarsely.

Willy Handforth glanced keenly at the other fags. Chambers had given the first indication that he was prepared to knuckle under.

"You don't need to carry it," said Willy, who was beginning to feel just a little sorry for the obstinate ex-senior. "You've got a bike, haven't you? Well, why not run down on your jigger, and then walk back? You can put the battery on the carrier."

"I hadn't thought of that!" grunted Chambers.

"In fact, if you've got some decent straps, there's no reason why you shouldn't ride back, too," added Willy. "There's no sense in goading these prefects. Take it calmly, Chambers, and you'll soon find that fagging isn't such a nightmare, after all."

Chambers scowled.

"I told you that I won't do fagging—and I meant it!" he said harshly. "Conroy major can go and eat coke!"

He thrust his hands deeply into his trousers pockets, and strode off down the corridor. Chubby Heath and Juicy Lemon

and Owen minor gazed inquiringly at Willy. But Willy shook his head.

"It's all right—he'll go!" he murmured. "This is only bluff!"

And Willy, as usual was right.

Several fags, told off to keep an eye on Chambers, soon came and reported that the ex-senior had taken his bicycle out of the shed, and had gone towards the village.

It was hardly likely that Chambers would ignore Conroy's instructions. He was gradually learning that it was a painful thing to jib against orders.

As Chambers slowly rode towards Bellton, his brow was black and his eyes were gleaming.

"I'll do it this time!" he decided savagely. "I'll fetch Conroy's rotten battery, but it's the last thing I'll do! By glory! They're doing all this deliberately, the cads! But I'll get my own back before I've done!"

He turned a corner in the lane, and was grateful for the shade from Bellton Wood. The heat, that afternoon, was very oppressive. Then, with a start, Chambers automatically applied his brakes. Just ahead of him, walking slowly up the lane, were two figures.

They somehow seemed familiar. One was the figure of a young fellow of about seventeen, wearing a school cap and white flannels. The other was a very charming girl of between fifteen and sixteen, dressed all in flimsy white, with knee-high skirts and silk stockings.

"Great glory!" breathed Chambers, in utter horror.

He recognised the pair now. This fellow was Palmer, of the Fifth Form at Bannington Grammar School, and the girl was his sister!

This, in itself, was not particularly startling. But Palmer and his sister, Phyllis, had always known Chambers as a St. Frank's Fifth-Former—and the chances were that they knew nothing whatever about his downfall.

And here was Chambers, running on an errand to the village—fagging for Conroy major!



CHAPTER 15.

Awkward for Chambers

PHYLLIS PALMER was undeniably a pretty girl.

She was rather dark, with a slim, lithe figure, and her brown eyes were full of fun and mischief. Chambers, on meeting her a few weeks earlier, had been rather "smitten" by her charms.

For this very reason, he had cultivated Palmer's acquaintance. Not that Palmer cared a rap about Chambers, for the Grammarian had seen, very soon, that Chambers was a boaster and a bouncer.

It would have been quite all right if Chambers had merely raised his cap, and had ridden on. But, almost before he knew



Chambers put his hand into his pocket—and then withdrew it quickly. He held something in his fingers; something which writhed slowly and deliberately; something black and gold and scaly! “A snake!” he screamed wildly. And the fags yelled with merriment.

what he was doing, he had applied his brakes and dismounted. In all probability, his confusion and his consternation rendered him incapable of quick thought.

"Oh, hallo, Chambers!" said Palmer cheerfully. "I thought we might see something of you."

"Yes, rather!" said Chambers, as he shook hands with the girl. "Jolly glad you've come over, Miss Palmer. Lovely day, isn't it? I—I'm just going down to the village, you know."

"Yes?" said the girl.

"Just going to fetch my wireless battery!" replied Chambers, trying to speak casually. "Well, how goes it in Bannington?" he added, shaking hands with the Grammarian senior.

"Just about the same as usual," replied Palmer. "If it wasn't for cricket, we'd all be just about dead. You know what it's like during these dog-days."

But Chambers wasn't listening.

"You—you didn't come over especially to see me, did you?" he asked desperately. "I—I—mean

Palmer laughed. It was just like Chambers to jump to an egotistical conclusion like that. "Well, no," replied the Grammarian dryly. "We thought we might see you, Chambers, but we didn't come over especially. As a matter of fact, I'm an escort."

"A what?"

"Don't be silly, Rex," laughed the girl. "I didn't need an escort! I told you not to come!"

"Oh, well. I had to see you safely delivered over to Miss Bond," replied her brother, with a grin. "Fact is, Chambers, Phyllis has joined the Moor View School. I dare say you'll be seeing her pretty often these days!"

Chambers seemed to swallow hard.

"That—that'll be fine!" he gurgled.

They both looked at him with polite interest, for his manner was very strange. While expressing his pleasure at the thought of Phyllis Palmer being at the Moor View School, he was so obviously dismayed that both his companions wondered.

If Chambers had had any sense, he would have explained, then and there, that he was no longer in the Fifth Form. He would have said, quite frankly, that he had been reduced to a fag. They were bound to know, sooner or later, in any case, and if they heard it from his own lips the shock would not be so great. Besides, he would have been able to offer some sort of explanation for his downfall.

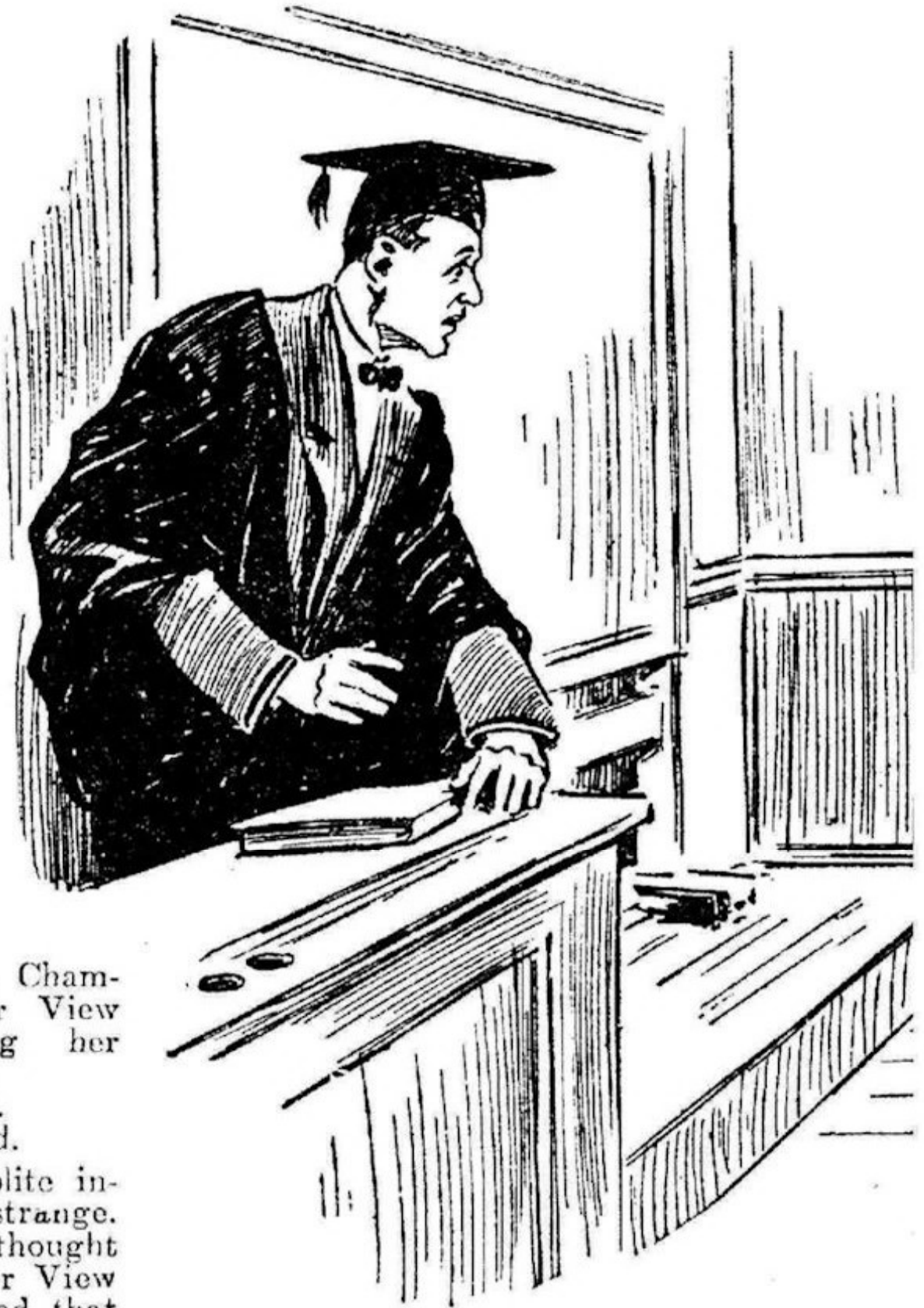
But Chambers, in his self-importance, strove to hide the truth. He was absolutely horror-struck at the idea of this girl knowing that he was in the Third!

Perhaps there was some reason in Chambers' attitude.

On the last occasion when he had talked with Phyllis Palmer, he had boasted as usual. He had bragged about his wonderful study at St. Frank's; he had talked of his superb wireless set—which, as a matter of fact, really belonged to Phillips. He had mentioned, in a casual voice, that he would soon be going up into the Sixth. He had even been rash enough to tell the girl that next term he would probably be a prefect.

It was all bounce—all bluff and swank.

How, then, could he tell her that he had been reduced to the status of a fag? Indeed,



Chambers put his hand into his pocket—and the writhed slowly and deliberately; something bl

how could he prevent her from learning this? That was the one thought in Chambers' mind. At all costs, both Phyllis and her brother must never know the truth! His humiliation would indeed be devastating if they found out!

It was obvious, from their very manner, that they knew nothing as yet. But how long would that state of affairs last?

They had just come from Bannington, it seemed; probably they had come by the afternoon train. And Phyllis was joining the Moor View School as a pupil! In any other circumstances, Chambers would have been overjoyed, for now he would be able to see quite a lot of Phyllis, and he would be able to invite her to tea in his study, and generally swank about the place with her.

But such a thing was now out of the question.

He had no study, and most of his time would be occupied in running errands for seniors! He stood the constant risk of being hooked off somewhere, to say nothing of the added risk—horror of horrors!—of being cuffed over the head by any senior who chose to treat him so.

At all costs, the truth must be kept from this pair!

The trouble was, they seemed in no hurry to depart. Palmer was puzzled, for he could see that Chambers was extraordinarily agi-

"But why don't you have them sent up?" asked Phyllis, in wonder. "Rex's battery is always delivered."

"Ye-e-es, of course!" stammered Chambers. "But—but, you see, the—the van is out of order, or something."

He was getting into a worse muddle than ever.

"Well, as you've got a spare, it doesn't matter much," said Palmer. "Look here, Chambers, you told us a lot about that wonderful six-valve set of yours. You can get Germany and Spain and Sweden on it, can't you?"

"Oh, everything!" replied Chambers, floundering. "It's a pretty wonderful set, you know."

"It must be!" said Phyllis, nodding. "Ever since you first told me about it, I've been longing to see it."

"Eh?" gasped Chambers.

Dimly, he realised that the girl had given him a hint, and he was dumbfounded. Palmer himself was not quite so diplomatic.

"Well, look here, sis," he said, glancing at his watch. "You're not due at the Moor View School until four o'clock. How about trotting along with Chambers to St. Frank's? It's a wonderful old school, and you'll enjoy it. Besides, we can pop into his study, and have a look at that wireless set of his."

"Yes, that would be lovely," said the girl, nodding.

Cuthbert Chambers prayed that the earth would open and swallow him up. He had done it now! This was a direct result of his boasting and bouncing! He had never possessed a wireless set, and didn't possess one now. The set he had referred to belonged to Phillips of the Fifth—Phillips having formerly shared Chambers' study.

How could he ask this Grammarian and his sister up to the school? The thing was impossible! They would discover the truth as soon as they entered the Triangle, and then his position would be worse than ever.

"I—I— Fact is, I've arranged to meet somebody in the village," he panted desperately. "You—you don't mind, do you?"

"Why, of course we don't!" laughed Phyllis, to his untold relief. "Any other time will do."

"Thanks awfully!" gabbled Chambers.

"We might see something of you later, eh?" suggested Palmer, looking at Chambers very suspiciously. "By the way, you're not ill, are you?"

"Ill!" breathed Chambers.

"Well, you look a bit queer," said Palmer bluntly. "I thought perhaps the heat had affected you, old man. You're simply stream-



ingly. He held something in his fingers; something which was scaly! "A snake!" he screamed wildly. And the fags were in a state of great excitement.

tated, and he couldn't understand why.

"You say you're going to the village for your wireless battery?" he asked casually.

"Yes!"

"Haven't you got a spare?"

"Oh, rather!" replied Chambers promptly. "But—but I usually make sure of things, you know. Always like to have a fully-charged battery handy."

ing with perspiration, and yet you seem to be pale."

Chambers made a curious sound in his throat.

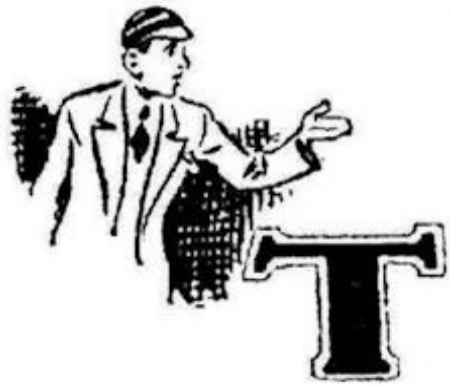
"I—I'm always like this on a hot day!" he replied, trying to laugh. "It's—it's nothing! Well, so long! If I don't see you again to-day—"

He broke off, his voice literally trailing away. For at this moment another disaster had befallen him.

Coming along the lane, from the village, were four or five gaily-coloured figures. They were girls of the Moor View School, dressed in bright summery frocks. Even in that first glance, Chambers recognised Irene Manners and Doris Berkeley and Mary Summers.

And now, indeed, he was caught between the devil and the deep sea!

For it was a moral certainty that Irene & Co. would have heard the news about his downfall. They knew that he was a fag! So if he went on his way down to the village he would have to pass these laughing girls—and undergo the ordeal of meeting their eyes!



CHAPTER 16.

Chancing It!

THE very thought was utterly stupefying.

Chambers did not possess the courage willingly to undergo

such a dreadful adventure. He feared those bright, sparkling eyes far more than he would have feared a charging bull. They would be turned upon him as he passed; they would look at him searchingly—yes, contemptuously. It did not occur to Cuthbert Chambers that the girls might feel sympathetic, and take no notice of the rumours that they had heard.

While Chambers stood there, dumb-founded, the girls grew closer and closer. He could now hear their laughing voices, and he came to himself with a violent start.

"Yes, rather!" he blurted out frantically.

"Beg pardon?" said Palmer. "I don't quite catch on, old man."

"We—we'll go up to St. Frank's, if you like!" said Chambers, with difficulty. "I—I've changed my mind. If—if you want to see my wireless set, we'll go along to my study now."

"Oh, we don't want to take you out of your way," murmured Phyllis.

She had seen the Moor View girls, too, and, being feminine, she was evincing much interest in them. But her brother could see that Chambers was suffering from some sort of acute emotion, and he was curious to discover the cause.

"Right-ho, then!" he said briskly. "Come along, sis. We'll go to St. Frank's with Chambers."

"Hadn't we better wait until these girls come up?" suggested Phyllis. "I believe they are some of my new schoolfellows—"

"They—they aren't of much importance!" ejaculated Chambers hurriedly. "Besides, you'll meet them later on. Come on! Let's go!"

"Yes, but—"

"There's something rather special on this afternoon, I believe!" said Chambers desperately. "And if we don't go at once, we shall miss it."

Phyllis caught her brother's eye, and the lid of that eye flickered slightly.

The girl knew at once that something was 'on.' Rex had winked at her, and, without any further objections, she accompanied her brother and Chambers up towards St. Frank's. Her regard for Chambers was very insignificant; she had sized him up fairly thoroughly at their earlier meeting. She didn't really want to go to his study, and to hear his precious wireless set; but her rother evidently felt that such a visit would be productive of interesting developments.

As for Chambers, for the moment he had triumphed.

He had postponed the fatal disclosure. But he must have known that he had only landed himself out of the frying-pan into the fire. For instead of facing the bitter looks in Irene & Co.'s eyes, he would now be compelled to run the gauntlet of any St. Frank's juniors who happened to be in the Triangle. But of the "two evils," Chambers chose the lesser. Anything to get away from the contemptuous, accusing eyes of those girls!

And he had thought of something else, too.

Phillips was out. He had seen Phillips going out with Bryant, half an hour earlier, and he had heard Phillips telling somebody else that they were going to Bannington. That meant that Phillips' study would be empty! And the big wireless set would, in consequence, be available. If only Chambers could get into that study, he would be able to continue the fiction that the set was his!

It was pure folly, for the exposure, when it did come, would be all the more devastating. But Chambers did not think of this. He only thought of putting off the fatal minute.

In his obtuseness, he did not see that the whole situation was of his own making. Quite gratuitously, he had volunteered the information that he was going to the village for a wireless battery. He need not have said a word about it. And by this time he had totally forgotten that Conroy major, of

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the Sixth, would probably be making some noisy inquiries before long.

Conroy major didn't really want his battery. He was only continuing the rag that other Sixth-Formers had started. The general idea of this rag was to send Chambers on as many errands as possible, and the more difficult the errand, the better. It was time that Chambers was taken down a peg or two, and the Sixth, as well as the Third enthusiastically entered into the task.

As it happened, Handforth & Co. were lounging on the Ancient House steps when the little group appeared in the gateway. Reggie Pitt and Jack Grey and Castleton, of the West House, were near by, too. Cricket was the subject under discussion, and the argument was getting heated.

"Hallo, hallo!" murmured Reggie Pitt, in astonishment. "What do we see, my children? The noble Chambers, accompanied by a fair maiden!"

"She's not fair—she's dark!" said Handforth bluntly.

"And who's the chap?" asked Church. "I seem to have seen him somewhere. Why, yes, of course! He's wearing a Bannington Grammar School cap."

"Palmer, of the Fifth!" nodded Jack Grey. "Don't you remember him? He's the Grammarian First Eleven fast bowler."

"By George, so he is!" said Handforth. "And that girl must be his sister. Great Scott! Just look at Chambers!"

Cuthbert Chambers was certainly acting with farcical grandiloquence. He was strutting along, talking animatedly to the girl, flinging out his arms here and there, pointing out the various objects of interest. His movements were exaggerated because he was in a fever of agitation.

"It's a wonderful old place!" the girl was saying, her eyes alight with interest. "Why didn't you tell me about it, Rex? You've always led me to understand that St. Frank's isn't half so good as the Grammar School!"

"Oh, it's not a bad hole!" said Rex condescendingly.

"Rex!"

"Nothing to be compared to the Grammar School, of course," added Palmer, with a grin. "You must admit that, sis!"

"I don't admit it!" replied Phyllis firmly. "The Grammar School is a fine place, but it isn't anything like so old as St. Frank's. Look at these wonderful buildings, all covered with ivy!"

They had now reached the Ancient House steps, and Chambers, seeing the juniors, was endeavouring to hide his alarm.

"This way!" he said hoarsely.

He roughly seized the girl's arm, and literally hustled her up the Ancient House steps and into the lobby. Handforth & Co. and the West House juniors stood by, open-eyed. Chambers and the girl were indoors before they could even raise their caps.

"Hi, Chambers!" shouted Handforth indignantly. "What's the idea of pushing past

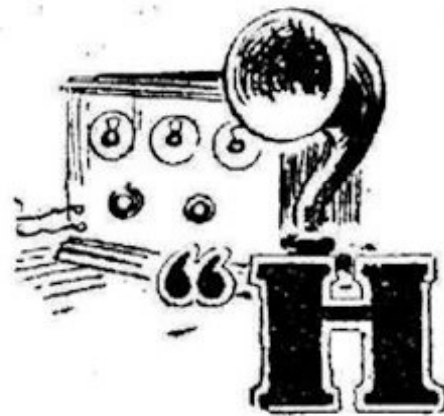
me like this? Come back here, you cheeky bounder!"

Chambers went red to the roots of his hair. He tightened his grip on the girl's arm, and whirled her along the passage.

"Oh, please!" said Phyllis protestingly.

"Those—those chaps are always beastly cheeky!" said Chambers. "Sorry! I—I didn't mean to hustle you, Miss Palmer!"

But he was singing a song of triumph within him. They were indoors—they had run the gauntlet successfully!



CHAPTER 17.

The Impostor!

"HERE we are!" said Chambers breathlessly.

He had flung open the door of Phillips' study, and in that first glance he knew that the coast was clear. The little room was empty, and there was not much fear of an interruption for some time to come.

Rex Palmer and his sister entered, and Chambers quickly closed the door. He could hardly believe that he had been successful. It was too good to be true.

"I say!" said Palmer bluntly. "Why didn't you go back and clip that junior over the ear?"

"Eh?" gasped Chambers.

"I wouldn't let a junior talk to me in that way!" said Palmer firmly. "The fellow was absolutely contemptuous!"

Chambers gave a gulp.

"I—I didn't want to do anything in front of your sister, Palmer!" he said hurriedly. "It was nothing! I'll deal with the cheeky young ass later. Here you are, Miss Palmer—here's the set!"

Neither of his visitors could understand his manner. Certainly, there was something wrong somewhere, but they could not place their finger on the spot, and before they could make any further inquiries—even if they intended doing so—Chambers turned on the wireless set, and the study became flooded with music.

"This is 5GB!" explained Chambers proudly. "Pretty good, eh?"

"It's wonderful!" declared Phyllis, as she watched Chambers fingering the controls. "Don't you wish you had a set like it, Rex?"

"Oh, my home-made three-valver isn't so bad!" said Palmer. "What about some foreign stations, Chambers?"

"Any old thing you like!" said Chambers, grinning. "I can get Germany, Spain, Sweden, Russia, Austria—anywhere! Once, I tuned in Hong Kong!"

"You don't say so!" said Palmer incredulously

"Hong Kong!" insisted Chambers. "Yes, and Melbourne, too! Oh, I've had almost every station in the world on this set! I once picked up a broadcast from an amateur station in the South Sea Islands!"

He did not realise that he was disgusting his visitors, for they could understand that this was only another little example of his bounce. Excellent as the set was, it was incapable of such miracles as this.

"It must be very remarkable!" said Phyllis demurely.

"It's the best set in St. Frank's!" replied Chambers. "Everybody is envious of me! It cost tons of money, too!"

"Was it a present?" asked Palmer.

"Good glory, no!" replied Chambers. "I bought it with my own cash! Of course, I always have pots of money!" he added casually. "We seniors at St. Frank's are pretty well off."

"Lucky beggars!"

"Naturally, I'm richer than most of them!" went on Chambers, getting into his

stride. "There aren't many fellows who can chuck five pound notes about like me! I can tell you candidly that there are lots of fellows in the Sixth who would give their heads for a wireless set like this!"

Phyllis nodded.

"Yes, it is a splendid one," she said coldly.

"Shall we be going, Rex?"

"I think we'd better!" said her brother.

Chambers looked at them in astonishment. He had no idea that he had upset them by his insufferable "bounce." But his bounce was far worse than they ever believed, for they thought that the set really did belong to him, and that this was actually his study.

However, Chambers was not to continue this farce for long.

Unfortunately for him, Phillips of the Fifth had returned, and was on the Ancient House steps. One of the Removites had casually mentioned to him that Chambers had just gone in

"We don't know where he went!" said the Removite. "But he had Palmer, of

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Bannington Grammar School, with him—and Palmer's sister, too. The blighter was swanking about as though he owned the whole giddy show!"

"I'm not interested in Chambers!" said Phillips coldly.

Phillips was rather sensitive on the point. At one time he and Bryant had been Chambers' chums. But they had got fed up with his swank, and they were by no means sorry to witness his downfall. They believed that it would do him a lot of good.

Phillips went to his study without any suspicion of the truth, and he happened to open the door just when the loud-speaker was giving forth a number of ear-splitting squeaks and howls.

"Great Scott!" ejaculated Phillips blankly.

But his voice was drowned by the loud-speaker, and nobody in the study had noticed him. Chambers was bending over the controls, and Palmer and his sister were standing, watching, with their backs to the door. Phillips waited, trying to get the hang of things.

"It's nothing!" said Chambers, as he turned a knob. "Somebody else is causing these rotten interruptions. Some amateur, I suppose, with a wonky set."

"I thought you were causing them, by turning those knobs?" said Phyllis politely.

"Me?" repeated Chambers. "Not likely! I know this set inside out! I know every station by heart!"

Phillips opened his mouth to speak, but his indignation and his amazement held him silent.

"I've had this set for a good while now!" continued Chambers. "As I told you before, it's the best set at St. Frank's, and everybody is envious of me. I'd get one of the big foreign stations for you now, only they're not broadcasting."

"Ahem! Of course not!" murmured Palmer dryly.

Phillips could contain himself no longer. Here was Chambers—the fag—telling these visitors that the set was his! And it belonged to Phillips! The real owner was boiling with rage at Chambers' cool cheek.

Besides, Phyllis was a very pretty girl, and Phillips had an eye for beauty.

"Here, I say!" he ejaculated, walking into the study and closing the door.

Chambers turned his head, and his eyes grew big with consternation and dismay.

"Eh?" he gasped. "Oh! Hallo, Phillips!" he said, fighting down his alarm. "Just—just showing Palmer and his sister my set."

"Your set?" repeated Phillips ominously.

"I mean— Yes, rather!" said Chambers, striding forward and clapping Phillips on the back. "Jolly pleased you've come, old man!"

And while he stared straight into Phillips' face, he winked violently. Palmer and his sister stood looking on, although they hadn't observed the wink, since Chambers' back was towards them at the moment.

"Well, confound it——" began Phillips indignantly.

"I asked them to come to my study specially!" went on Chambers. "Still, I'm glad you've popped in, Phillips."

Phillips was speechless. He didn't know what to say. The effrontery of Chambers had taken his breath away.

It was such a shock that the real owner of the study could only stand there and gape. But as he saw the anguish in Chambers' eyes, and as he noted the drawn, haggard lines of his face, he softened. After all, these two had once been chums, and Phillips was not the kind of fellow to kick a man when he was down. He laughed shortly.

"Thanks!" he said, giving Chambers a straight look. "Sorry if I barged in, Chambers. I didn't know you had visitors, and that you were showing them your set. Don't mind me."

Chambers felt as though a great load had been lifted from his shoulders. Once again the fatal disclosure was averted!

CHAPTER 18.

Letting the Cat Out of the Bag!



PHILLIPS, without doubt, had acted like a sportsman.

In spite of his indignation and anger, he had shielded this insufferable swanker. Chambers didn't deserve it, for his conduct was inexcusable. But Phillips had a kind heart, and he allowed Chambers to run on.

"This is Phillips," said Chambers, by way of introduction. "A friend of mine," he added casually. "Fifth-Former, the same as me."

"How do you do!" said Phillips enthusiastically.

He shook hands with the girl, and then with her brother. It was like Chambers' nerve to call himself a Fifth-Former! But, having gone so far, Phillips could not say anything to undeceive the pair. Privately, however, he called Chambers an arrant fool. Did he really believe that he would be able to keep up this deception for long? The exposure was bound to come soon—and then it would be all the more humiliating because of his pretence.

In fact, it came almost at once.

"You see," said Chambers, turning back to the wireless set, "this master-control is a very special gadget. You just turn this, and it operates all the rheostats."

"Isn't that splendid?" murmured Phyllis.

"And there is no fear of heterodyning, because these controls prevent all statics," continued Chambers, who, without knowing what he was talking about, tried to employ as many wireless terms as he could think of.

"Statics, otherwise known as atmospherics, is one of the commonest causes of trouble—"

"I think somebody is calling you," interrupted Phyllis demurely.

"Calling me?" repeated Chambers, with a start. "That's—that's nothing! Don't take any notice!"

But it was impossible to avoid taking notice. There was a heavy tramp of feet out in the corridor, and then came the voice of Conroy major—not loud, but thunderous.

"Has anybody seen that fathead, Chambers?" he was demanding. "He ought to have been back half-an-hour ago! I'll tan his hide when he turns up!"

"Ahem!" coughed Phillips.

Cuthbert Chambers was as red as a beet-root.

"Of course, there's no fear of heterodyning in a set like this!" he said hastily. "There might be some interruption——"

"Somebody seems to be heterodyning now!" murmured Palmer.

Outside, Conroy major's voice was louder than ever.

"Where's that hulking great fag?" he shouted. "I sent him to the village for my wireless battery, and he hasn't come back yet!"

"He can't be talking about you, can he, Chambers?" asked Palmer, in amazement.

"Nun-no! Of course not!" gasped Chambers.

"But you were going to the village for a wireless battery!"

"It's—it's a coincidence!" panted Chambers, in desperation. "He—he must mean my minor!"

"Oh, have you a minor?" asked Phyllis. "You never told us that you had a brother here!"

"I—I—— Well, you see——"

"He's in Phillips' study, I think, Conroy!" came a new voice from the passage. "Anyhow, he went in there a little time ago."

"Oh, did he?" shouted Conroy major. "Then I'll go in and lug him out! And if he hasn't got that battery, I'll half-skin him!"

Chambers leapt into the air.

"Lock the door!" he babbled wildly.

"But why?" asked Palmer. "If this fellow is looking for your minor——"

"Phillips!" yelled Chambers. "Why don't you lock the door, you rotter? He'll be in here——"

"Confound it, I'm not a magician!" said Phillips indignantly. "I can't get to the door in time——"

He was right, for, before he had finished speaking, the door burst open, and Conroy major of the Sixth stood in the opening. And the prefect's face was expressive of anger.

"Oh, so here you are!" he said curtly.

Chambers made one last effort. He managed to conjure up a sickly smile.

"Come in, Conroy!" he said, with a pretence of geniality. "Just—just entertaining some friends, you know. Showing them my wireless set."

But Conroy major either deliberately refused to understand, or else he deliberately took a delight in showing Chambers up.

"Your wireless set?" he repeated. "What do you mean, you silly great idiot? This set belongs to Phillips!"

"I—I—— It's mine!" gasped Chambers. "Isn't it, Phillips?"

Phillips, thus appealed to, could hardly be expected to tell a direct lie.

"Well, no," he said uncomfortably. "I allowed you to pretend——"

"I'm sorry to interrupt like this," said Conroy major, with a glance at the girl. "But this fag has been disobeying orders."

"Fag!" ejaculated Palmer, in amazement, as he looked round the study. "But there's no fag here!"

"Yes, there is!" said the prefect. "Chambers, come with me!"

"Oh, but I say! You—you don't mean——"

"Come with me!" roared Conroy major. "I'm sick of your insubordination, Chambers! When I give orders, I expect them to be obeyed! Have you been to the village for my wireless battery?"

"I—I—I——"

"No, you haven't!" said Conroy. "I can see that you haven't! Well, come with me to my study!"

Phyllis, looking very embarrassed, turned to the window. Her brother stared from Conroy to Chambers in utter stupefaction.

"But—great Scott!—you don't mean to tell me, Chambers, that you're a fag?" he ejaculated. "What rot! You're in the Fifth——"

"You mean, he *was* in the Fifth!" said Conroy gruffly. "Sorry to give you such a shock, but I can't stick a fellow who pretends to be what he isn't. Chambers was sent down from the Fifth into the Remove, and he was such a nuisance there that the Head shoved him among the fags."

"Well, I'm hanged!" said Palmer blankly.

"You—you rotter, Conroy!" panted Chambers savagely. "You needn't have given me away like this!"

"What did you call me?" shouted Conroy hotly. "You may be a big fellow, Chambers, but you're only a fag, and I don't allow fags to speak to me like that!"

The prefect was very incensed. He, like the other members of the Sixth, was thoroughly fed-up with Chambers' bluster and bluff. Chambers seemed to get worse and worse.

"Come on!" added Conroy curtly. "Out of this, Chambers!"

"I won't!" shouted Chambers hoarsely. "You're not going to make me look small——"

But he broke off as Conroy major strode forward, and the next moment his humilia-



With a shout of triumph, Chambers plunged Willy Handforth's head downwards into the thick, black, treacly-like mud of the ditch. Plop! "Glug glug glurr!" mumbled Willy.

tion was complete and utter. For the prefect grasped him by the ear, and triumphantly lugged him out of the study.

It was the very worst thing that could have happened to Chambers. In front of Palmer—in front of Phyllis—he had been dragged, yelling, from the study that he had pretended was his own! And he had been dragged out by his ear!

faction in swishing a fellow who tamely submitted to it.

"Let me go!" muttered Chambers brokenly.

"All right, you can go!" growled Conroy. "But don't forget my orders. I told you to go to the village and get my battery—and I meant it. I'll give you just one more chance."

Chambers went, without another word. Until now, he had remained stubborn and obstinate. But his swift downfall, in the eyes of Phyllis, had probably worked this miracle. He was like a pricked bladder—listless, flabby, and limp.

As soon as he had gone, Conroy major went along to the Fifth Form passage, tapped on the door of Phillips' study, and entered. He found Phillips talking with Rex Palmer and his sister.

"All sorts of apologies for what just happened," said Conroy major bluntly. "I didn't quite like dragging that fellow out in the presence of a young lady, but if we prefects didn't maintain authority, then there's no telling what these fags would do."

"That's all right!" said Palmer, with a smile. "We understand perfectly, old man."

"That's all right, then," said Conroy, with relief. "I don't want you to think that I'm several kinds of a cad."

"Don't worry!" grinned Phillips. "I've just been telling them how much trouble Chambers has given. If you ask me, he deserves a lot more!"

While Conroy major remained chatting with the visitors, Chambers found himself

CHAPTER 19.

Willy Relents!



ONCE outside in the passage, Cuthbert Chambers collapsed.

All his arrogance went; all his defiance vanished. The blow had fallen; and his humiliation was so devastating that he was numbed and dizzy.

Nothing mattered now!

In fact, he submitted to the promised "tanning" without uttering a protest. Conroy major caned him, and the prefect was rather surprised at his meekness.

"Now look here, Chambers, I don't want to be hard on you!" said Conroy. "As soon as you realise that you're a person of no importance, you'll be all right."

Conroy was feeling rather uncomfortable. If Chambers protested, and remained defiant, he could have swished him with some enthusiasm. But there was not much satis-

out in the Triangle. He walked blindly across towards the gates. He was so oblivious of his surroundings that he hardly noticed a swarm of fags crowding round him.

"Let's rag him!" Owen minor was saying.

"Hear, hear!"

"Don't forget you're one of us now, Chambers!"

"Yes, rather!"

"He's only a fag, and——"

"Hold on!" interrupted Willy Handforth, barging in amongst the crowd. "There's no need to crow over the chap. What's wrong, Chambers?"

Chambers looked at him dully.

"Go away!" he muttered. "Everything's wrong! That—that cad, Conroy, has shown me up in front of Palmer and his sister! They know everything! So nothing matters now!"

Willy's soft heart was touched.

"Leave him alone, you fellows," he said quietly. "Going to the village, Chambers?"

"I don't know."

"But aren't you going to fetch Conroy's wireless battery?"

"Yes!"

"All right, then—I'll come with you," said Willy cheerily. "And we don't want anybody else," he added, his manner changing, as he looked at the other fags. "So you can all clear off!"

"But I thought you said that we were going to squash Chambers completely?" asked Dicky Jones indignantly.

"He's squashed!" murmured Willy.

And, Chambers being squashed, Willy took pity on him. The big, blustering ex-senior looked so thoroughly despondent that Willy hadn't the heart to keep the game up.

A few moments later, he and Chambers walked through the gateway and went on their way, alone, towards the village.

"Never mind about that beastly battery," said Willy. "I'll have a word with Conroy major, and explain things to him. I don't think he really wants it. You've had a pretty rough time, Chambers, although, mind you, you deserved it."

"You'd better dry up!" said Chambers thickly. "I don't want any lectures from a kid like you——"

"For goodness' sake, don't think that I'm going to lecture you!" said Willy, in alarm. "But, dash it, there's nothing wrong in a word of advice, is there?"

"I don't want any advice!"

"My dear chap, you're making a mountain out of a molehill!" said Willy frankly. "You've brought all this trouble on your own shoulders, and if you had any sense you'd get rid of the burden."

"Look here——"

"Do you think for a minute that we fags would bother you if you were different?" went on Willy. "We know that you're really a senior, Chambers, and that you're not one of us. But as long as you try to lord it over us, we're inclined to be dangerous."

Chambers only grunted.

"Why were you sent down into the Third?" continued Willy. "You know jolly well why! The Head found out that you hadn't been doing any work, and he got wild. So the remedy is simple enough, isn't it? You've only got to work like the dickens, and you'll soon be back in the Fifth again!"

"I'm not going to work because I'm told to work, confound you!"

"Then you'll continue to lead a dog's life," said Willy frankly. "All the prefects will be down on you like tons of bricks, and your existence will be horrible. But if you

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work, they'll leave you alone. The Head will see that everything is all right, too, and he'll soon give you an advance. Why not give it a trial?"

Chambers did not appreciate this heart-to-heart talk. Willy himself disliked it—he loathed and detested anything that savoured of lecturing or preaching—for it was most incongruous for him to be saying such things to a fellow of Chambers' size. Yet Willy was only doing it in the goodness of his heart, to save Chambers from further persecution.

The only thanks he got was for Chambers suddenly to come to a halt in the middle of the road, and to turn on him with a fierce, angered face.

"Shut up!" panted the ex-Fifth-Former. "By glory! If you say another word to me, you confounded fag, I'll slaughter you!"

Willy smiled.

"Good!" he said, nodding. "I'm glad you're angry, Chambers. It shows that you appreciate what I've been saying——"

"I don't appreciate it!" roared Chambers, as he took a hurried glance up and down the empty lane. "And, what's more, I'm going to have some of my own back now!"

Willy backed away.

"Steady on!" he said. "You'd better not try any——"

But at that moment Chambers leapt forward and seized the agile Willy before the latter could jump clear. The next second

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Chambers' superior weight had told, and Willy was flat on his back in the lane, with Chambers floundering over him.

"Now!" panted the enraged Chambers. "Now, my cheeky little blighter, you're going to get exactly what you deserve!"



CHAPTER 20.

The Limit!

WILLY HANDFORTH boiled with indignation.

He had made a miscalculation, and he was furious with himself. He had imagined that Cuthbert Chambers was in exactly the

right mood to listen to reason. But Willy's judgment was wrong!

For Chambers was evidently worse than ever. His face was aflame with rage as he bent down closely over his victim.

"You cheeky young rotter!" he breathed. "By glory! I'm going to show you something now!"

Strong and agile as Willy was, he could not escape from his burly enemy. Given a second's warning, Willy would never have been caught. But Chambers had taken him by surprise.

"Look here, you big rotter, you'd better go easy!" panted Willy. "I was only giving you the straight tip——"

"I don't want any tips from a young whipper-snapper like you!" grated Chambers. "By the time I've finished with you, you'll smart for a fortnight!"

"You've taken advantage of me!" said Willy darkly. "I came with you because I wanted to help you, Chambers——"

"I don't need your rotten help!"

"And you're returning evil for good!" went on Willy. "You great idiot! Haven't you any sense? You may have got me now, but you'll regret it if you do anything violent!"

"Shall I?" said Chambers, laughing with triumph. "I'm just going to show you, my lad, that I don't allow cheeky fags to lecture to me! And I've got one or two old scores to pay off, too! I'm going to make you smart for the way you've been treating me ever since this morning!"

"Go ahead, then!" said Willy steadily. "Do your worst, Chambers! But just remember this! If you attack your captain——"

"My grandmother!" broke in Chambers savagely.

"I'm your captain—and you can ignore the fact, or admit it, as you like!" said Willy. "You're in the Third Form, and I'm the skipper of the Third Form! And any of the fags who defy me are put through the mill. Boiling oil and molten lead aren't in it with the agonies that you'll go through if you try any of your tricks!"

Chambers had lost control of himself by now. For a brief period he had been subdued, but, finding himself alone with Willy, he was taking a mean, contemptible advantage of the position. Yet, after all, it was quite characteristic of him.

In his arrogance, he believed that he was still far superior to Willy. Even now, after all his trials and tribulations, he refused to admit that he was on the same level as his younger companions. In a calmer moment, perhaps, he would have hesitated before attacking Willy. But just now Chambers was far from calm. He was beside himself with rage.

"I've got you where I want you!" he panted. "I've got you alone! Until now, you've had a crowd of other fags round you to help you—to jump on me! But this time we're alone, young Handforth!"

"Oh, we're alone all right!" agreed Willy calmly. "And I'm not going to pretend

that I can best you, Chambers. I'm only giving you to understand that there'll be a terrible price to pay if you don't let me go!"

"Hang the price!" roared Chambers.

With a sudden movement he dragged Willy across the grass at the side of the lane. Then, with a shout of triumph, he plunged his victim's head downwards into the ditch.

Plop!

"Now then!" thundered Chambers.

"Glug-glug-glurrrrr!"

The unfortunate Willy's head completely vanished. The ditch was a shallow one, and the bottom of it was filled with a black, murky mud. It was really atrocious mud—inky in hue, and of the consistency of treacle.

"Ha, ha, ha!" howled Chambers hysterically.

Willy was sitting up now—sitting on the grass. Not that he could see anything, or hear anything. His head had, for the time being, vanished. Instead, on his shoulders was a huge black, sticky globe. There were no features to be distinguished.

"That'll teach you something, eh?" gloated Chambers. "Yes, and you can take this, too, you young demon!"

Acting upon a sudden impulse, he reached forward, pulled Willy towards him, and dragged him over his knee. Then he raised his hand.

Whack! Whack! Whack!

With all his strength, Chambers brought his hand down again and again, and delivered a tremendous spanking. Willy was helpless, for he couldn't see, and he was well-nigh suffocated by the sticky, clinging mud. But, inwardly, he seethed. He was being spanked—like any infant of five years of age!

Then, suddenly, he was dropped into the grass, and Chambers rose to his feet. The ex-senior was feeling excited and triumphant. His face was glowing and his eyes sparkled.

"There!" he breathed. "Perhaps that'll teach you a lesson!"

He turned aside and strode off towards the village, his heart lighter, his step brisker. That little episode had done him good. He felt that he had recovered his self-respect.

And for at least five minutes Cuthbert Chambers remained in this glowing, exhilarated condition. He was so pleased with himself that he actually went to the village, obtained Conroy major's battery, and started off home with it. He had exhibited his superiority over his Form captain, and nothing else mattered.

But as Chambers grew nearer to St. Frank's, wearied by the weight of the big battery, a few doubts began to creep into his mind.

He remembered Willy's supreme power in the Third, and he vaguely began to wonder if he had been wise. Willy was all-powerful—and he had proved, quite conclusively, that he was not the kind of junior to provoke.

Yes, Cuthbert Chambers felt many, many doubts as he grew nearer to St. Frank's. And the satisfaction of that triumph over Willy lost a good deal of its relish.



CHAPTER 21.

The End of an Awful Day

NOTHING wrong, Willy?"

Chubby Heath asked that question as he encountered Willy

in the Triangle. Not that there was any noticeable difference in Handforth minor's appearance. His collar, perhaps, was unusually clean, and his hair was exceptionally well brushed. Otherwise, he was quite himself.

"Wrong?" he repeated. "Why should there be anything wrong?"

"Well, you were looking jolly thoughtful," said Chubby critically.

"Well, perhaps I was," admitted Willy. "But it doesn't matter. I can be thoughtful, can't I, without asking your permission?"

"All right; keep your hair on!" said Chubby Heath, strolling away.

Willy pursed his lips. He was rather annoyed that even his own special chum had noticed anything different in him. As a matter of fact, he had only just come downstairs, after putting on a fresh collar and brushing his hair.

But nobody knew of the ordeal that he had been through.

After Chambers had left him, he had cleared some of the mud out of his eyes, and had managed to get through the hedge into the meadow. Here, handfuls of grass had helped him to clear away that foul, evil-smelling mud. Then a visit to a little, running stream had finished the trick. Willy, calm outwardly but boiling inwardly, had managed to get into the Ancient House by the back door, without attracting any attention.

After a thorough wash and brush up, he felt himself again. Not a word had he spoken to any of the other fags. He was keeping that dramatic episode quite to himself.

Chambers came in through the gateway just then, and it must be admitted that Chambers was thoroughly nervous. His sense of exhilaration had gone, and nothing remained but apprehension. When he saw Willy, however, his fears were somewhat modified. Willy did not look dangerous.

Moreover, Chambers had passed two or three other fags, and they had only stared at him, or chipped him. There had been nothing in their manner to indicate anger or indignation. It was obvious, even to Chambers' obtuse brain, that they knew nothing.

And here was Willy, calm and collected.

"Well, I hope it did you good!" said Chambers, his confidence returning.

"You hope what did me good?" asked Willy politely.

"You know what I mean!"

"Not being a thought-reader, how can I know what you mean?"

"You young ass! What about what happened in the lane?"

"Did something happen in the lane?" asked Willy, still more politely.

Chambers laughed.

"Well, perhaps not!" he said, grinning.

And he passed on, and he delivered the wireless battery to Conroy major—who was duly surprised.

Chambers went away, his confidence thoroughly restored. He had found out that Willy was nothing more nor less than a fraud. His autocracy was all pretence.

For was it not obvious that he had refrained from telling the fags anything about that incident because he was afraid to do so? Willy had kept it to himself! He was ashamed of it—he was afraid to confess to his "subjects" that he had been dipped into the mud, and spanked, by the latest recruit to the Third!

And Chambers was as arrogant as ever again.

He had proved his superiority—he had triumphed.

Not that his satisfaction was long-lived. Before long he was collared by another prefect and made to run an errand; and when he had finished this, he was seized by somebody else, and he was forced to wash up a lot of dishes.

In fact, throughout the evening Cuthbert Chambers was kept on the go. He couldn't call a minute his own. Hour succeeded hour, and there was absolutely no rest for him. Certainly, in the whole history of St. Frank's, no fag had been compelled to do so much in one day as Chambers was compelled to do.

His spirit, towards bed-time, was crumbling under the strain. The only one spark of satisfaction was his triumph over Willy. He had given Willy a good spanking, and Willy had been afraid to speak of it! In the midst of Chambers' troubles, he took comfort in this thought.

He did not know of the preparations that the Third Form skipper was making!

Three times did Willy go up to the Third Form dormitory in the Ancient House, and every time he was loaded with various impedimenta. Yet, when he had finished, there was no sign of his activities. The dormitory looked just exactly the same as usual.

But on his last visit, Willy grinned a slow grin.

"Well, I think that'll do!" he murmured. "Chambers believes that I'm ashamed to tell the other chaps of that affair this afternoon. The hopeless idiot! He doesn't realise that he'll have to pay a stiff price!"

Just before bed-time, Willy ran into his major, who was with Nipper, Fullwood, and one or two other Removites.

"How's Chambers getting on?" inquired Nipper, with a smile. "We haven't seen much of him this evening, Willy?"

"He'll be all right by to-morrow," said Willy confidently. "We've been breaking him in all day, and the seniors have helped. By to-morrow, Chambers will be as meek as a lamb!"

"Well, it's about time that he was meek!" said Edward Oswald grimly. "He caused enough trouble while he was in the Remove."

"But we know how to do things properly in the Third!" said Willy cheerfully. "You had to stick Chambers for a week or two. But the Third isn't so soft!"

"You cheeky young ass——"

"The Third will have him eating out of its hand practically within twenty-four hours," said Willy calmly. "There's only one thing to do with a swelled-headed lunatic like Chambers."

"And what is that one thing?" inquired Nipper, with interest.

"Make him thoroughly realise his own insignificance!" replied Willy. "Make him understand that he's of less importance than an earwig! When we've finished with Chambers, he'll feel about as big as a microbe! And then, after that, he'll probably come to his senses, and do some work."

The Removites ran across Chambers once or twice more before bed-time. They could easily tell the difference in him. He was weary and tired.

Throughout the evening he had been running errands for anybody and everybody. He had had an awful time, for, in between his errands, he had undergone numerous swishings. The prefects were merciless, knowing, as they did, that Chambers was benefiting. It was a painful process, but it was necessary.

When at last the bell rang for the Third Form to go to bed, Chambers breathed a long sigh of untold relief. Rest at last! Peace—in bed! He overlooked, for the moment, that his bed would be in the Third Form dormitory!



CHAPTER 22.

The Reckoning!

WILSON, of the Sixth, put his head into the Third Form dormitory.

"Everything quiet in here?" he asked briskly.

It was an unnecessary question, for the din that was proceeding from the Third Form dormitory was deafening. Some of the fags were playing leap-frog, others were wrestling on their beds, and still more were listening to a solo, given by somebody on a comb, with a piece of paper over it.

Chambers took no part in these recreations. He sat up in his own bed, reading—oblivious of all the noise.

At least, he was pretending to be oblivious. Nobody, unless stone-deaf, could have been quite indifferent to it. But as the fags had not bothered him, Chambers kept to himself. He was only too glad of five minutes' rest, after a day of unremitting toil.

"That's enough of it!" said Wilson sharply. "Into bed, all of you! And look lively!"

It was time for lights-out—although, actually, there were no lights to be extinguished. Owing to the Daylight Saving Act, the Third Form, at this time of the year, went to bed by daylight.

"All right, Wilson; give us a chance!" said Chubby Heath. "Let's finish this wrestling match."

"You'll finish nothing!" said Wilson. "If you're not in bed within five seconds, I'll give you a couple of hundred lines each all round!"

As though by magic, the fags leapt into bed. Within about three seconds, the Third Form dormitory was silent and peaceful.

"If I have to come in again, I'll bring a cane with me!" said Wilson pleasantly. "Good-night, everybody!"

He went out and closed the door. And, just as though a button had been pressed, the din recommenced. But Willy Handforth soon stopped it. He jumped out of bed, held up his hand, and frowned.

"That's about enough of this!" he said crisply. "There's work to be done to-night, my sons! Grim, relentless work!"

"Are we going to rob a bank?" asked Owen minor, with interest.

"No; we're going to punish a fellow in this dormitory who has outraged all the traditions of the Third!" said Willy sternly. "Cuthbert Chambers, get out of bed!"

Chambers started.

"Eh?" he gasped. "Look here, you confounded young——"

"Cuthbert Chambers, get out of bed!" repeated Willy.

"Hang you, I won't!"

"Get out of bed, or be pulled out of bed by force!" said Willy relentlessly. "You can have your own way. I don't care a snap. But if you make us pull you out, Chambers, we shan't be particularly gentle."

About seven or eight fags began to advance towards Chambers' bed. He took one look at them; then he pushed the sheets and blankets aside, and got out.

"Well, what do you want?" he asked thickly. "Haven't you finished with me yet? Haven't you done enough to me to-day?"

"What has happened to-day is nothing to what is now going to happen!" replied Willy. "Before you go to sleep to-night, you'll be made to understand that when I say a thing, I mean a thing!"

"What's the giddy idea, Willy?" asked

Juicy Lemon, in wonder. "What's Chambers been up to now? He hasn't done anything special, has he?"

"I'll let you judge for yourselves," replied Willy. "I've said nothing until now, because I've been reserving it. Chambers believes that I'm afraid to tell you about the affair. But this is where he finds out what he's wrong."

Chambers changed colour. His satisfaction of the evening deserted him. He looked at Willy with very real apprehension.

"There's no need to tell them!" he said hastily.

"This afternoon," said Willy, ignoring Chambers, "I went to the village with this—this whacking great rotter. I went with him because I wanted to give him a hand——"

"Rot!" shouted Chambers. "You went with me so that you could lecture me. You! A miserable little fag! Do you think I'm going to stand preaching from a kid?"

"I was mistaken!" said Willy calmly. "I ought to have known better than to offer you any advice. But that's not the point. I went with you, alone, and you played a dirty trick on me."

"What did he do?" asked half a dozen eager voices.

"It isn't the nature of what he did, but the fact that he did it!" said Willy. "He knows that I'm his captain, yet he treated me with contempt and violence. And any form skipper who allows that from one of his crowd isn't fit to keep the leadership."

"Yes, but what did he do?" demanded Chubby.

"He grabbed hold of me suddenly, and he dipped me in the ditch!" replied Willy.

"The ditch, as you may know, is nearly half-filled with thick, sticky, horrible mud. Chambers dipped me in until my head was absolutely covered."

"Oh, my hat!"

"The awful rotter!"

"The hulking great bully!"

"I'm not ashamed of it, as he thinks I am," continued Willy smoothly. "He's older than I am, and a dashed lot bigger. He's stronger, too, and once he had a firm grip on me, I couldn't get away. So I am not pretending to make any excuses for myself. I'm not fool enough to think that I can wrestle with a chap like Chambers, and beat him."

"Well, I showed you that I meant business, didn't I?" said Chambers harshly. "I've told you before, Handforth minor, that I'm not going to stand any of your silly nonsense! I'm really a senior——"

"Rats!" shouted the Third. "You're a fag!"

"Yes, you're one of us, Chambers," said Willy. "And after you had dipped my head into the ditch this afternoon, you shoved me across your knee and you spanked me!"

"Wha-a-at!" gasped Chubby Heath.

"Oh, corks!"

"He—he spanked you!"

"Cheese it, Willy!"

"He spanked me!" continued Willy deliberately. "He shoved me across his knee, and he spanked me so hard that I'm still sore. Don't forget that I was half blinded by that rotten mud, so it was impossible for me to get away."

"But how is it we didn't spot you?" asked Owen minor, in surprise.

"I got the mud off in the stream, and then I crept indoors by the back way," explained Willy. "And during the evening I've made a few preparations. There's a good deal of truth in the old saying that what is sauce for the goose is also sauce for the gander!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Give him some of his own medicine!"

"Let's drag him out, and shove him head-first into the ditch!"

"Hurrah!"

Chambers listened to this hubbub in acute agitation.

"Don't be such silly young asses!" he panted. "If you go out of this dormitory now, you'll all be collared—and punished. You can't touch me——"

"If Mahomet won't go to the mountain, we must bring the mountain to Mahomet," said Willy serenely. "Chubby! Juicy! Have a look under my bed, and see what you can find!"

Chubby Heath, Juicy Lemon, Bobby Dexter and one or two other fags made a dive at Willy's bed, and a moment later they triumphantly drew forth a big zinc bath. It was filled to the brim with a horrid, black-looking mass of semi-liquid substance.

"The mud from the ditch!" gasped Owen minor.

"I told you that I had been busy!" said Willy.

Chambers stared at the bath in a kind of fascinated horror.

"What—what are you going to do?" he panted. "Great Scott! You don't mean that—that——"

"Come on! Let's dip him in!" yelled Chubby Heath. "He had the nerve to do it to Willy, so we'll give him some of his own rotten medicine!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Now then—not so much excitement!" said Willy sternly. "We're going to do this thing properly—or not at all!"

And there was something in his tone which made Chambers' blood run cold.

CHAPTER 23.

A Black Outlook!

WILLY HANDFORTH had never before been so grim.

Throughout the evening, he had been

preparing for this moment. He was the skipper of the Third, and he was not going

to allow Chambers to triumph over him. And grumble, not that anybody took the slightest the punishment fit the crime?

It must be admitted that Chambers did grumble, not that anybody took the slightest notice of him. The Third-Formers enthusiastically entered into the spirit of the punishment. It suited them down to the ground. The idea of dipping Chambers' head into that bath full of concentrated horror was simply gorgeous. These fags hadn't enjoyed themselves so much for ages!

"First of all," said Willy, "the prisoner will be roped up and tightly bound. You'll find the necessary rope under my mattress."

It was whisked out, and Chambers stared at it with ever-increasing apprehension.

"Look here!" he gasped. "I—I'll admit that I was wrong! But if you touch me, I'll yell at the top of my voice and bring the prefects——"

"Yah! Sneak!"

"Rotter!"

Chambers started.

It was something new for him to be called a sneak. Yet, with a gulp of realisation, he knew that the fags were right. If he shouted for help, and brought the prefects into this dormitory, he would be for ever labelled a sneak. And, then and there, he knew that any such move was impossible.

"All right!" he panted. "You can do what you like—but I shan't make any outcry. Good glory! I'm not going to have you kids calling me a sneak! Do your confounded worst!"

In less than five minutes, he was securely roped. His arms were bound tightly to his sides, and then two pillows were placed on his legs, just above the ankles—in front and behind. Then another stout rope was bound tightly round these pillows, with a long end left over.

"That'll do!" said Willy, who had been giving instructions. "He won't come to any harm like that. We can dangle him up, and the rope won't hurt his precious legs. But that's as it should be. This is a punishment—not a torture. We don't want really to hurt the beggar."

"You're very kind!" sneered Chambers helplessly.

Willy gazed aloft.

"Now chuck the loose end of that rope over the beam, just above us!!" he said calmly. "I think you see the idea now, don't you?"

"Yes, rather!" grinned Chubby Heath.

"It's a corker!"

"A top-notch!" chuckled Dexter.

The rope was flung over the beam, and then practically every fag in the dormitory grasped the end of it, and pulled. The unfortunate Chambers rose feet foremost from the floor, and very soon he was dangling in mid-air, held helplessly in an inverted position, but feeling no pain. Many fags would have been utterly ruthless in their methods; but Willy was exceptional.



WILLY HANDFORTH had never before been so grim. Throughout the evening, he had been preparing for this moment. He was the skipper of the Third, and he was not going

"Now for the bath!" he said. "Shove it right under Chambers' head. Good egg! That's the stuff!"

The bath was duly dragged along the floor, and placed immediately beneath Chambers. He could stare down into the black depths of its contents, and his eyes were alight with fear.

"Look here!" he gasped. "You can't do this, Handforth minor!"

"Can't I?" said Willy. "Just you wait and see!"

"But—but that mud is vile!"

"I know it!" agreed Willy feelingly. "I've had some!"

"It's—it's dangerous!" panted Chambers. "It—it might half-blind me!"

"Did you think of that when you shoved my head into the ditch?"

"I—I——"

"Did you consider my feelings?" went on Willy. "Oh, no! You just shoved my head in, and you gloated over it. But two can play at this game, Chambers!"

"It's probably full of crawly things!" said Chambers desperately. "I might be poisoned——"

"Lower him six inches!" ordered Willy coolly.

Chambers went down with a run, until his head was only an inch or two above the surface of the sticky black mass.

"Stop!" he gurgled. "I'll—I'll do anything you like, young Handforth! I'll obey all your orders in future! I'll do as much fagging as you want me to do!"

"Good!" said Willy, nodding. "But not good enough! You won't have learned your lesson, old man, until you've had your dip. Lower him another six inches!"

The rope grated on the beam, and it seemed as if Chambers' head must be submerged in the contents of the bath. But, by a great effort, he managed to half-lift himself, and thus he hung, the back of his head touching the surface of the stuff.

"That'll do fine!" said Willy complacently. "I don't think you'll be able to hold that position for long, Chambers! And when you get tired of it, your head will go under."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"See how long you can keep it up, Chambers!"

"Stick it, you rotter!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Third-Formers were quite amused. Chambers had given so much trouble that they had no sympathy for him. Besides, hadn't he shoved Willy's head into the ditch?

"Look here!" gulped Chambers. "If—if you'll let me go, I'll give you five bob each, all round!"

"Five bob each, eh?" said Bobby Dexter, with a whistle. "That's not so bad—I—I mean——"

He had caught Willy's eye, and he froze up.

"Bribery won't help you, Chambers!" said Willy coldly. "Your head's going into that

stuff, so you needn't think anything else! And if you make a lot of noise, the prefects will be here—and it'll be just the same as sneaking."

Chambers gulped, and remained silent. Then, gradually, he found that it was impossible for him to maintain that unnatural attitude. Inch by inch, he was getting lower. His muscles were losing their power; and finally, with a jerk, he lost control altogether.

Plop!

His head dived stickily into the bathful of black stuff. A few gurgling "glubs" sounded, and then all was silent. Chambers wriggled convulsively.

"That'll do!" said Willy. "Up with him!"

They hauled on the rope, and Cuthbert Chambers came up with a run. He dangled there, head downwards, glutinous drops plopping back into the bath. His head had completely vanished, and it was now as black and as shapeless as Willy's had been.

Chambers spluttered wildly, and then his voice sounded from out of the blackness.

"I'm poisoned!" he shrieked. "This—this stuff is full of germs! I expect I shall die after it!"

"You're bound to!" agreed Willy, nodding. "You may not die until you're a ripe old age, but it's a certainty that you'll die after it!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Pah! I tell you, I'm poisoned!" screamed Chambers. "I—I can feel wriggly things all over my head! I'm blinded—I'm suffocated!"

Willy chuckled with sheer joy.

"Isn't the imagination a wonderful thing?" he said blandly. "Chambers, my lad, I hadn't the heart to treat you as you treated me. Two wrongs don't make a right. The stuff in that bath isn't ditch mud at all."

"What!" shouted half a dozen voices.

"Of course it isn't!" said Willy. "You don't think I'd play a filthy trick like that, do you? Chambers may be capable of it—but not me."

"If it isn't mud, then what is it?" asked Chubby Heath, staring wonderingly at the bath.

"Paste!" yelled Willy. "Just common or garden paste, made with flour and water."

"But it's as black as your hat!"

"Oh, that!" said Willy carelessly. "That's nothing—only a little soot I mixed with it."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And soot, as everybody knows, is good for the complexion!" said Willy cheerily.

"So now, Chambers, what about your crawling things? What about your poison? Still, I think it's done you a bit of good! And I'm jolly certain that we've enjoyed the entertainment!"

And everybody else in the Third Form dormitory heartily agreed.

Chambers was lowered, his bonds were removed, and then he was allowed to go and

have a thorough wash. It took him about an hour, and when he came back all the fags were sound asleep. Chambers crept into his own bed, subdued and weary.

He was a very different Chambers now. The end of that awful day had come, and there is much truth in the axiom that experience is a great teacher!



CHAPTER 24.

The Only Way!

IN the morning, Cuthbert Chambers was a changed personality still. A night's sleep had not given him renewed strength.

He had resolved that he could never go through another such day as yesterday, and there was only one possible solution to his problem. Defiance did not pay. Therefore, there was nothing else for it but submission.

Now that Chambers had decided upon this course, his surrender was absolute.

It was not necessary to take him by force to the Sixth Form passage, there to await any fagging duty that had to be done. He went there of his own accord, fully alive to the fact that he was a fag, and that there was no getting out of his share of the work.

In a word, Chambers had come to his senses.

And he found, before long, that he had solved his problem. If he had had wit enough earlier to accept his position, he would have had no suffering. For now that he was so ready and willing, nobody had the slightest desire to order him about.

"It's no good, you chaps!" said Willy Handforth, after breakfast. "There's no fun in ragging Chambers now."

"Then what are we going to do?" asked Chubby Heath.

"Leave him alone, of course," replied Willy. "There's no sense in rubbing it in. He's had his gruel, and there's nothing else to be said—or done."

In the meantime, Chambers had made a resolve. He was in Mr. Suncliffe's study, standing meekly before his Form-master.

"You say that you want me to do you a favour, Chambers?" asked Mr. Suncliffe.

"I've been thinking, sir," replied Chambers, "and I've come to the conclusion that I've been lazy."

"Indeed!" said Mr. Suncliffe. "That is a very sensible conclusion to come to, Chambers. The fact that you are in the Third Form proves quite conclusively that you have been indolent. Do you mean that you are anxious to remedy this state of affairs?"

"Yes, sir."

"And how do you propose to do it?"

"I want to work all the time, sir!" said Chambers desperately as he leaned over the Form-master's desk. "Not only in class, but

all the time. I want to swot, sir—morning, noon and night!"

"Well, upon my word!"

"I want to work so hard that the Head will see that I'm in earnest!" declared Chambers fiercely. "And then, perhaps, he'll put me up into the Fifth again. But whether he does or not, I mean to work!"

"Well, Chambers, I must confess that you have surprised me," said Mr. Suncliffe quietly. "And I need not add that it is a pleasant surprise."

"And may I work like this, sir?"

"Certainly, if you wish."

"Thanks awfully, sir," said Chambers, in a grateful voice.

And he went off, feeling lighter-hearted than he had felt for many a week. But the following day, he was so thoroughly into his work that he actually began to enjoy it. Furthermore, by working like this, he escaped all fagging duties.

Within a week he was positively light-hearted and gay. Mr. Suncliffe was pleased with him, and had complimented him again and again on his progress.

Mr. Suncliffe happened to meet the headmaster in Inner Court one evening, and the subject of Chambers cropped up. The master of the Third gave a glowing account of Chambers' activities.

"During this one week he has advanced so far that he is almost beyond my other pupils," Mr. Suncliffe concluded. "After all, he is so much older that he can take more difficult subjects."

"I wonder?" said the Head, stroking his chin. "You are quite sure, Mr. Suncliffe, that Chambers is in earnest?"

"Quite sure!" replied Mr. Suncliffe, smiling. "I have never seen a boy so much in earnest. He does nothing else but work."

"Then there is one step that I must take," said Dr. Stafford. "Chambers has shown us that he is repentant. His lesson has been well learned. To-morrow he will be placed back in the Fifth Form."

And the Head was as good as his word.

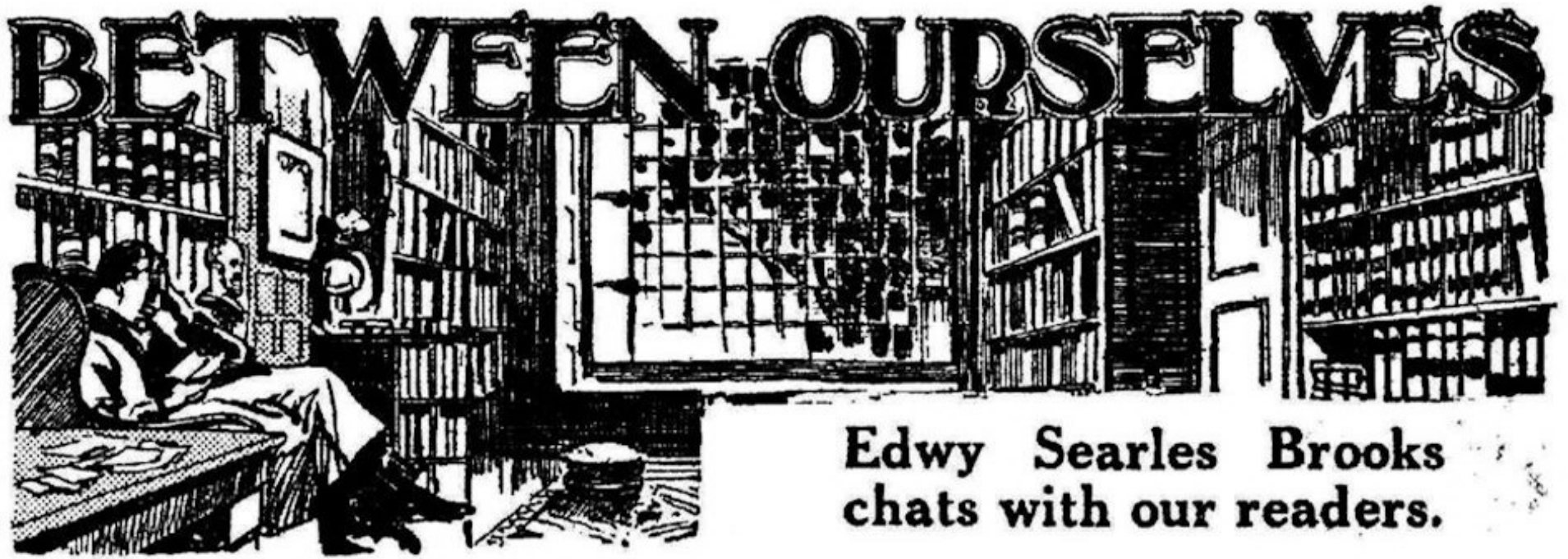
Chambers, to his unbelievable delight, was called into the headmaster's presence, and there he was told that he could once again take his place in the Fifth.

But the Chambers who had been sent down into the Third was a totally different Chambers from the one who came up into the Fifth. He was a wiser and less egotistical fellow. A good deal of the swank and bluster had been taken out of him.

And so Chambers, the fag, passed into oblivion.

THE END.

(Next week's issue will contain the first story in an amazing new series of holiday adventure yarns. The Boys of St. Frank's are off to India this year, and a right exciting time they're going to have, too! Look out for the opening story, entitled "SPIRITED AWAY!" next Wednesday.)



Edwy Searles Brooks chats with our readers.

NOTE.—If any reader writes to me, I shall be pleased to comment upon such remarks as are likely to interest the majority. All letters should be addressed: EDWY SEARLES BROOKS, c/o The Editor, THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY, The Fleetway House, Farringdon St., LONDON, E.C.4.

THERE'S no need to tell me that you are a very old reader—J. Herman (Tarkastad, Cape Province). I'm not implying that you are an elderly gentleman with whiskers, or anything like that. But the "List of St. Frank's Characters" you sent me proves that you have not only been reading my stories for a good many years, but that you have also made a diligent study of them. Your list is amazingly comprehensive and accurate. In fact, I'm not so sure that it's not better than mine! I appreciate all the work you put into this task, and I want you to accept my very best thanks.

I quite agree with you—"Advocate of Christine" (Durban)—that Bob Christine is a jolly good leader. How about transferring him to the East House? He could then knock Armstrong into the middle of next week, and reconstruct the East House Junior sports, etc. In fact, he and Buster Boots, together, might easily bring about a revival of the Fourth, until it becomes a serious menace to the supremacy of the Remove. By jingo! I shall have to think some more about this!

None of your letters are a disturbance to me—P. Raghavendra Bhat (Calicut, India)—and I only wish that a lot more of your fellow-countrymen would write to me as you do. However, you are setting them a good example, and there may be some excellent results later on. With regard to your St. Frank's League notice, the Chief Officer, of course, will deal with this.

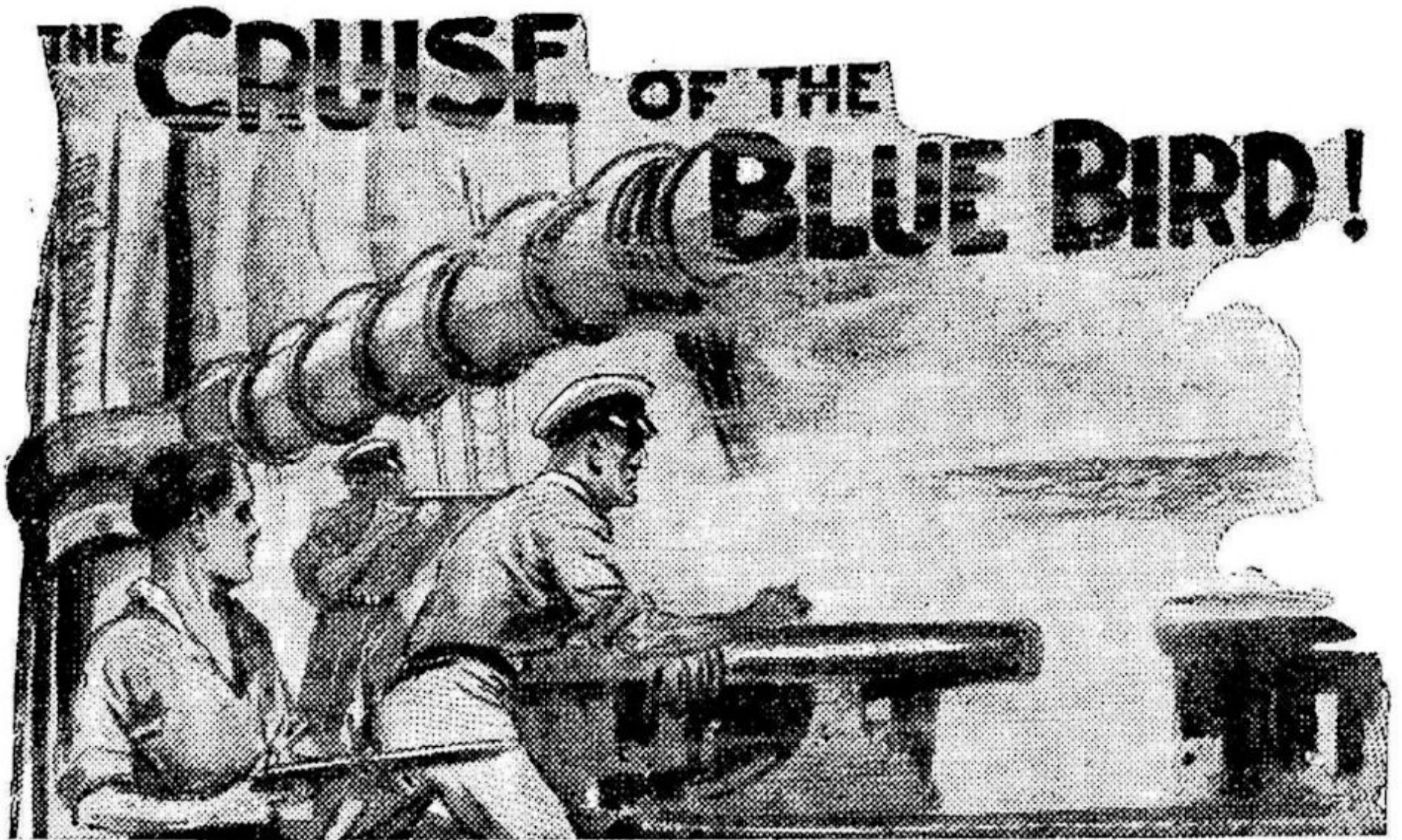
Glad to hear that your Dad is now a regular reader of the Old Paper—K. Peacock (Brighton, East Victoria). Without being unduly boastful, I think a good many other Dads would become regular readers if they

would only go through one or two of the St. Frank's yarns.

I like reading your weekly letters—Maurice Garrett (East Geelong, Victoria)—just as much as I like reading the weekly letters from numerous other readers. And I certainly do not regard you as "a young ass who is keen on seeing his name in print"! I can generally sift the wheat from the chaff. And when you tell me that you enjoy *writing* your letters, then it stands to reason that my enjoyment in reading them is doubled. Your wish that I shall send you a personal letter has now, of course, been gratified. But I think that you and all the other readers know that I only have time for writing personal letters to a comparative few. Yes: that's not a bad wheeze of yours regarding Willy Handforth. I'll turn it over in my mind and see what can be done.

That's the way—Ivy Swailes (Heckmondwike). You really are one of my star readers—always doing something in the interests of the Old Paper. I am going to repeat a few words of your letter: "By the way, a new girl came a few weeks since to work in our department, and she professed contempt for all those 'silly boys' tales.' That was until she talked to me. Yesterday I asked her to go for a walk during dinner-hour. Her reply was: 'I'd rather stay here and read about old Handy'! Another convert!" Which implies, naturally, that you are always doing this sort of thing. Good for you, Ivy!

ALL THE ATMOSPHERE AND GLAMOUR OF THE SOUTHERN SEAS!



By COUTTS BRISBANE

WHAT'S ALREADY HAPPENED:

CAPTAIN MANBY is skipper of the schooner Blue Bird, which is bound for the Malea atolls, in the Southern Pacific. He is accompanied by his son

JACK MANBY, and his nephew

NED SUTTON, two adventure-loving boys. From a native Captain Manby has learned that in these atolls is an uncharted island—supposed to be practically inaccessible—the lagoon of which is full of pearl shell. The captain is successful in finding this unknown island; and to his surprise discovers that it is inhabited by a number

of French castaways. They appear to be very friendly, but later the captain is not too sure about them. Meanwhile, the native's story proves to be correct. The lagoon is full of pearl shell; and later, when Sinclair, the Blue Bird's mate, examines some of the oysters, he discovers a valuable pearl. The boys particularly are intensely excited, but the captain tells them to turn in for the night. "We're going to get up early and explore the lagoon systematically to-morrow," he says.

(Now read on.)

"Your Luck Has Turned!"

"BUT what if the Frenchies want their share of the shell, sir?" suggested Sinclair. "They look to me to be a rather tough lot, and I saw some rifles in that big hut of theirs, though they'd shoved 'em in a dark corner."

Manby looked thoughtful for a moment, then he smiled.

"Oh, we'll come to some arrangement. We can let them dredge and dive a bit. If the place is anything up to sample there'll be plenty to spare for them. We won't want to hog everything. But, anyhow, I'm going to call it a day. Set an anchor watch. I don't think there's much need for it, but we may as well be careful. Good-night!"

Jack and Ned, still excited by the prospect of a treasure hunt with a possible fortune at the end of it, took a turn about the deck before making for their bunks.

The ship was silent, for the crew, wearied by the vigils of the past days, had turned in. But from the huts of the castaways floated sounds of revelry.

"They're celebrating our arrival," said Ned. "Of course, their being here and knowing the passage and meeting us saved us a lot of time and trouble, but I wish they had not been here. Somehow I don't like 'em."

"I'm not keen on them myself," agreed Jack. "Still, if we'd been stuck here for eighteen months, with precious little hope of getting away, I guess we shouldn't show at our best. Hallo, here comes one fellow!"

A flare of candlelight showed across the white beach as the door of the largest hut, where the revelry was going on, opened. A man reeled down the beach and waved his hands at the anchored schooner, bawling something that sounded derisive. A couple of others followed him and dragged

him back. The door shut, and the noise began to die down.

"What did he say, Ned?" asked Jack.

"Death to the slops!" replied Ned. "He must be pretty well mixed up to think that we're police. But it's funny that he should be thinking of police at all, isn't it?"

"Oh, he doesn't know what he's talking about!" said Jack easily. "They're all right in their way. A bit rough, but decent enough. Come along below. I'm sleepy."

Next morning Ah Moy had worked on the preparation of a fine breakfast, but none of the four really did it justice. They were all too anxious to explore the lagoon. The dinghy was lowered, and the boys took the oars. Sinclair got into the bows, while Captain Manby followed and sat in the stern.

"This is where I dredged last night," said Sinclair, pointing overside. "And it seems to be the edge of the oyster bed. It's all coral and clear water towards the mouth of the lagoon, I think. We'll go up, eh, sir?"

"Paddle slowly," directed Manby.

The boys glanced down into the translucent water. They lay above a patch of white sand, across which a big shell was slowly moving towards a shelf of coral, all gay with brilliantly coloured weed and clustered with anemones more brilliant than any flowers. Fish that looked like small slices of rainbow darted to and fro, crabs clambered over the coral. Big jellyfish floated amidst tendrils of the weed, small fry streamed past like showers of silver darts.

But on the further side of the ship, as they moved slowly up the lagoon, the scene was entirely changed. The whole of the lagoon was covered with the dull, dirty layer of huge oyster shells. By pure chance the schooner had been anchored on the extreme edge of the bed.

After the boat had been all over the lagoon, Captain Manby and the mate looked at each other.

"Right-about turn," said Manby. "Well, what d'you think, Sinclair? You know more about this sort of thing than I. What do you say?"

"There are acres of shell, sir. It's a fortune, even if we don't find another pearl. I was right. Your luck has turned."

"I really think it has," agreed Manby. "Now, I propose to bring the Blue Bird up the lagoon a bit. There is plenty of water over yonder, opposite that bit of beach on the reef. We'll be well away from the Frenchmen's camp there, and the beach will do excellently for rotting the oysters. No one can get near the place in a boat without being seen from the ship, and it isn't likely anyone will try to walk along the reef from the shore end. The going's too rough."

"That almost sounds as though you distrusted our French friends," said Sinclair, with a smile.

"No. They are welcome to potter about if they like. But I won't have any outsiders on our beach. It would only lead to trouble. Get back now, boys. We'll have out those

diving suits and test them. Then we'll start operations at once!"

Preparations!

THEY rowed back, and now saw that their doings had not passed unobserved.

The castaways had come out upon the beach before their huts. Sprawled on the warm sand, they eyed the boat as it went alongside the schooner. Presently Benoist and two other men shoved off in a small, clumsily-built canoe made of a hollowed tree with an outrigger, and came aboard the Blue Bird. Benoist arrived on deck just as the bo'sun, Big Timo, brought up the two diving suits which had been in his charge, and laid them on the hatch top for inspection.

"You go to make a fishing at the bottom, eh, my captain?" asked Benoist. "What is it you shall look for?"

"Shell. Mother-o'-pearl," replied Manby crisply. "That is why I came here. You owe your chance of getting away from here to my having heard that the lagoon was full of shell."

"Ah, yes! That was most fortunate for us. And is this the sort of shell that holds the pearl?"

"Yes. Though, of course, it is a toss up whether there are pearls or not. If the oysters are healthy, there are none."

Benoist threw up his hands, while a look of chagrin crossed his face.

"Mon Dieu! And we did not know this!" he exclaimed. "We might have spent much time that has been idled away, in looking for them."

"Yes. But you can do a bit of dredging down here if you like," said Captain Manby. "You may find a few pearls. Lay your shell to rot on that beach there. When the oysters are rotten, then you will be able to see if you are lucky. And I will buy the shell you gather at a fair rate. Thus you will not be penniless when you reach Australia."

"You are very generous, my captain," replied Benoist. "I will hasten to give the news to my fellows. They are lazy, but they will work, I think. I thank you again."

He went back gingerly into the cranky craft and was paddled ashore, talking rapidly to the others in an undertone. Shortly afterwards he was back again, asking about the form of dredge to be used.

"Is it not a fact that men dive for them, my captain?" he asked, when Manby had given him the small dredge that Sinclair had used.

"Yes. You can try that way. Only——" The captain shrugged and pointed to a big triangular fin cruising slowly about the lower part of the lagoon. As at Graden Island, the lagoon of Malea had a keeper. "Look out for that fellow. If you make plenty of noise and splashing, you'll keep him off. But be careful."

"Oh, assuredly my fellows can make much noise, if they can do nothing else," replied Benoist with a grin, and, with more thanks, departed.

The Blue Bird's motor was started, and slowly the schooner moved up the lagoon till she was close to the bit of beach on the reef, where she anchored in eight fathoms.

Meanwhile Big Timo had overhauled the diving suits, which were of the compressed-air type. They needed no apparatus of air-pump and tubes, being furnished with a metal air-chamber. This was pumped full of air with a sort of glorified bicycle pump, and would serve for over an hour at one filling. For use in the shallow water of the lagoon, these suits were a great deal handier than the other type.

"I'll go down, Sinclair, to make a beginning," said Captain Manby. "We'll have the cutter out with four men aboard her to haul up the shell and take it ashore. Now"—he paused doubtfully—"one of us will have to remain aboard the schooner."

"Let me go, father," said Jack.



Madly Jack and Ned slashed at the tentacles of the octopus which held them in its relentless grip.

"Please let me go, uncle," said Ned.

"There's no reason why you shouldn't. You'd better take turn and turn about. Toss for first go."

The two boys tossed. Ned won. Jack looked disappointed.

"Oh, you'll have your turn soon enough," said Manby. "Ned will find half an hour of it quite sufficient. Now, Ned, listen! Once we're under water, the only way we can talk is by putting our helmets together. There's no particular danger if you watch your step. Look out for big clams. They lie tilted on the sea-bed with their shells open. If you should happen to step into one, it will close and hold you fast, and probably damage your ankle rather badly.

"As for the shark, if he ventures to come along, remember that you can always scare him by letting some air out of your sleeve at the wrist. Just pluck at it like this, and out will come a stream of bubbles. If a big crab comes at you—and they will sometimes—don't try to use your harpoon. Kick at him with your lead-soled shoe. As for an octopus, if one should happen along, jab into him at once between the eyes, but it isn't likely one

of a size to be dangerous will be anywhere round in shallow water. Now, into your togs."

With Sinclair and Timo to assist, the captain and Ned were soon accoutred. The air tanks, pumped full, were connected with the helmets. Ned was given a few last bits of advice, then the pair got into the cutter.

"We'll be lowered slowly down!" said the captain to Ned. "Breathe easily and slowly. I'll go first. When we are down, then the men will lower those net bags. We fill them, tug twice on the rope and they'll be hauled up. If we should want to come up ourselves, we tug three times on the life lines, and up

we go. Now then, close your helmet, turn on the air and we'll start!"

Under-Sea Adventures!

HAVING seen that Ned's apparatus was working properly, Captain Manby lowered himself down the short step-ladder rigged over the cutter's stern, and was quickly at the bottom. Ned, feeling as though he weighed a couple of tons, for the helmet, breast and back-plates and lead-soled shoes bore him down, followed awkwardly.

But once under water the feeling vanished. Indeed, he seemed to grow lighter as he was lowered through the clear water, and to his surprise touched the bottom as gently as though he stepped upon a feather bed.

Captain Manby loomed up beside him in the wavering, bluish-green light, steadied him, and leaned forward till their helmets touched.

"Go slow at first. Don't try to overdo it. When you begin to feel tired, go up," he said.

"Right you are, sir," replied Ned, and as the nets came floating down, weighted with

a stone, began to imitate Manby's example by filling the nearest with oysters.

Mostly the oysters were easy to handle, though some were held by matted weed and had to be hacked clear with the stout knife that was part of the diving equipment. The nets were quickly filled, hauled up, emptied and lowered again.

Then, suddenly, a shadow passed almost overhead, and Ned saw Manby straighten up and look round. Again the shadow floated towards them; a long dark shape, with glints of silver on it, floated nearer, and with a thrill of apprehension Ned recognised the keeper of the lagoon—the twenty-foot long tiger shark!

The men above had seen the creature, and began to beat the water with oars to drive it away. It disappeared, but not for long. In a couple of minutes the ominous shadow appeared again. The shark came gliding closer—so close that Ned could see its eyes. He had ceased working, watching Manby for a signal. The captain stood waiting.

Evidently the shark was puzzled. These two odd creatures, with the huge round heads and goggling eyes, were quite strange to it. They did not attempt to fly from it, neither did they make any movement to attack, so it came closer still, turning slowly over on its side.

And with that Captain Manby plucked at his sleeve. Out gushed a stream of silvery air bubbles, rising in a line towards the surface. The shark seemed to hesitate, then turned about with a swish of its tail and disappeared, while Ned's laughter echoed in his helmet, for there was something ludicrous in so formidable a creature being scared off by such entirely harmless means.

He resumed work. For over half an hour the nets went up full and were let down again. Then Captain Manby, who had been working hard, came over to Ned and signed to him to stop. Then he tugged both life lines three times, and they were hauled up and into the boat, which was now loaded down with the slimy oysters.

"You've done enough for one spell, Ned," said the captain, when the helmets had been taken off. "It's Jack's turn now. When you're both broken in a bit, you can stay longer and work together. I'll put you aboard now first, empty this load on the beach, and come back for Jack."

"What's it like below? Did that shark come near you?" were Jack's first words to Ned, when the latter climbed on to the Blue Bird.

"It's all right," Ned assured him. "Like walking about in a dream. The shark was scared of the air bubbles and scooted off. Here, catch hold of these boots. They're awfully heavy up here, though you don't feel the weight below."

The oysters were laid on the beach in rows, the boat returned. Jack took his turn at diving. His experiences were much the same as Ned's, except that the shark did not pay the divers a visit. A second boat was put in the water, and half a dozen of the crew who

were expert divers went down with sacks, which they contrived to fill during the minute or so that they could stay under water. Ned took another turn, then Jack had a second, and by then it was time to knock off for dinner.

In the afternoon Mr. Sinclair took the captain's place, and the boys alternated, as before. They found that they could stay below longer without discomfort, but both were glad when, towards evening, the captain gave the word to knock off for the day, since, as the sun declined, it grew dusky under water.

"We've got a good showing for the day's work," said Manby, as he looked across at the beach of the reef. "We'll give that lot three days to decay, and then will come the excitement of seeing if there are many pearls or only a few, or perhaps none at all. Our French friends don't seem to have been killing themselves. They were doing a little, but they don't appear to have much to show."

He scanned the beach before the huts through his glasses. A few rows of shells showed dark against the white sand.

"They were skylarking in the water most of the morning when you were down, sir," said Sinclair.

"And loafing most of the afternoon, when I was on deck," agreed Manby. "Still, men get out of the way of working when they've been doing nothing much for eighteen months on end. Probably they'll do better when they have found a pearl or two. I'll go ashore presently."

When he did, with the boys for company, he found the Frenchman squabbling among themselves. Apparently one of their number—a man named Pascal—had suggested putting the oysters upon a fire to make them open more quickly. This had been done. Later, when opening the shells, the men had discovered that one of them contained a valuable pearl—but it had been ruined owing to the fire. The Frenchmen had been so enraged that they had attacked the man Pascal, and things would have gone badly with him had not Captain Manby interfered.

The captain was frankly disgusted at their behaviour, and he expressed himself in no uncertain terms. The Frenchmen were very apologetic afterwards, but, nevertheless, Manby could not forget the incident.

"I'm sorry I'm pledged to take that crowd back aboard the Blue Bird," he said to Jack and Ned, as they rowed back to the schooner. "However, I've promised, and now I shall have to keep my word. I don't mind telling you they're very different Frenchmen from any I've met before. D'you know, they'd have killed that fellow, Pascal, if I hadn't interfered."

"Well, dad, he's grateful at least," said Jack, with a grin. "I thought he was going to eat your hand."

"Oh, be hanged to him!" growled Manby. "To-morrow I'm going to send you two down together for a spell while I prospect the upper end of the lagoon. With the men diving as well, you should be all right."

"We can manage, sir," said Ned, and fell asleep that night to dream that he found an open oyster with a pearl as big as his head in its mouth.

The Octopus!

BY morning the Frenchman had evidently recovered their good temper, for they were early astir and were already diving when the boys got into their suits and prepared to begin the day's work.

"I'll go down first," said Ned. "Where you go, Timo?"

"Cap'n say move bit along. Heap big shell up a bit," replied Big Timo, who was to-day in charge of the boat. "Long here, 'Vast there!"

The men stopped rowing, and dropped the boat's grapnel.

"I say, this is a bit deeper, isn't it?" exclaimed Ned, as he watched the cable run out.

Timo glanced overboard, and grinned reassuringly.

"L'il bit. Mebbe twel' fadom," he said. "Not too deep, Mistaire Neddee boss."

"Well, here goes," grunted Ned, and lowered himself overboard after his helmet front had been secured.

Down he went. Assuredly the water was deeper, for there was less light, and the water was a deeper bluish-green when he reached the bottom and stood looking about. There were plenty of oysters underfoot, larger ones than those collected the day before.

Captain Manby had been right in his guess that the shell ran larger here, but he couldn't have guessed that the water was so much deeper. In fact, so far as Ned could make out, he was on the side of a pit in the lagoon bed, and a little way ahead the water was deeper still. A few moments afterwards Ned was joined by Jack.

The nets came down, and they began to fill them. A few seconds later, down came one of the men, to alight on the slope of the pit, a score feet away from the boys. He began to grab at the big oysters—and with that something happened.

A long cable that looked exactly like one of the branches of brown seaweed growing on the chunks of coral, snaked up from the bottom of the pit. For an instant it wavered above the naked diver, then darted forward and wound itself about his body.

Jack saw it, saw the man's face of horror as he tugged at the line attached to the sack which he held in one hand, saw the line tauten as the men above began to haul on it, saw another of the brown cables come shooting snake-like out of the obscurity of the pit and lay hold. And then he realised what was happening. The thing which of all underseas' dangers is most dreaded by divers, had occurred. The unfortunate man was in the grip of an octopus!

Not a huge one perhaps, not one of those monsters which haunt the deeps and battle with the sperm whales which seek them for food—immense brutes with tentacles sixty or eighty feet in length—but, nevertheless, a most formidable antagonist.

Jack shouted, then, knife in hand, he sprang forward to the rescue, followed by Ned.

Their knives slashed on the tentacles. It was like hacking at rubber ropes, but, none the less, the edges, sharpened that morning, shore into them. One gave way, cut through, but in a flash three more came darting up. One fastened on Ned's legs, the two others took hold of Jack about the body, fortunately where the copper back and breastplates protected him from their pressure.

It was slippery underfoot, for they stood amongst the slimy oyster shells, and they slithered about, maintaining their foothold with difficulty, while the tentacles hauled at them steadily. Yet the two boys kept their heads. To save the naked diver they had to cut him free from the tentacle that held him.

They hacked madly with their knives, and after what seemed an eternity, though in reality it was but a few seconds, the tentacles gave way. Up shot the diver, hauled up by the men above—for he had managed to retain hold of the life-line—and the pair now had an opportunity to loose themselves.

But now Ned saw something moving in the dusk of the pit below him. Two great eyes appeared in the midst of a dark blur. They were the eyes of the octopus. Maddened by the pain of its severed tentacles, infuriated by the resistance it had encountered, it was hauling itself up the slope to come to close quarters with its enemies. It flung forth its remaining cables, lacing them about the boys. Jack's knife arm was gripped and held by one. Another wrapped itself about Ned's helmet, tugging with awful strength, cutting off his view. Blindly he strove to cut it away, feeling the knife grate upon the metal of the helmet. A trickle of water began to run in through a joint that had been loosened by the strain, and he knew that the air must be streaming out. Another wrench or two and the helmet would be torn loose. The end was very near!

(In the grip of an octopus! Will Jack and Ned be rescued in time, or will they have to suffer a ghastly fate? Next week's stunning instalment tells you—so don't miss it!)



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OUR WEEKLY POW-WOW!

By THE EDITOR.

The Holiday Series!

HALLO, chums! How are you? All as cheery and smiling as usual? That's the jolly old stuff to give 'em. And you're all looking forward to next week—Bank Holiday week? So am I!

It's about the August holidays that I want to speak to you now, as it happens. The Boys of St. Frank's, of course, will be "breaking" up for the long vacation, and, as you probably already know—a glance through this issue will have told you—they're going to India.

India: the land of mystery and intrigue.

And they're going on the world's largest and fastest monoplane—the invention of Mr. Manners, Irene's father.

I can guess that you're all intensely interested in this latest holiday series, but I know also that you wouldn't like me to tell you too much about it beforehand. A glance at pages 13 and 31 will give you an idea of what the first yarn is about, and so I am going to content myself with merely asking you to make sure of reading the opening story by ordering **NEXT WEEK'S COPY NOW!**

The Rascal of St. Frank's!

Who is he?

Kenmore? Grayson? Sinclair? No. Not any of those, but—Reggie Pitt!

But calm your fears, lads. Smooth away those ruffled brows. Cease those indignant epithets. Of course Reggie Pitt is a sportsman; one of the best—now. In his early days at St. Frank's, however, he was a rotter; an out-and-out rotter, and he earned for himself an unenviable reputation. He thoroughly deserved it, too, for he played Old Harry with the school.

You're interested, intrigued, eh? I thought you would be.

Well, you can find out all about Reggie's adventures—or, rather, misadventures—during his early days at St. Frank's by reading the story, written by Edwy Searles Brooks, which appears in this week's issue of "The Popular." This topping companion paper comes out on Tuesday, and only costs twopence.

And there's another reason, too, why you should all buy "The Popular." A stupendous reason! Let me whisper it. Every week six-shilling 1928 "Holiday" and "Hobby" Annuals are given away—free!

How's that? Yes, you'd better run round to your newsagent now, before he sells out!

Going To Sea.

"Faithful Reader" (Birkenhead) asks me whether he stands a chance of a job under the cook or carpenter on a ship, despite the fact that he wears glasses. He can see all right with them, but he is half afraid that the fact that he wears them might stand in his way. That does not follow at all. Plenty of people who have had successful careers on the rolling deep have worn glasses. I hope my chum will manage to find the sort of job he wants.

AUSTRALIA. 150 Boys wanted to sail on White Star s.s. Vedic 6th October, Salvation Army auspices. Enter for preliminary farm training during August. Outfits provided. Assisted passages.

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