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NELSON LEE



BIG GAME "HUNTING"!

A stirring incident from this week's rollicking school yarn featuring the famous Chums of St. Frank's.

New Series No. 58.

OUT ON WEDNESDAY.

February 28th, 1931.

*Kenneth
Brooks*

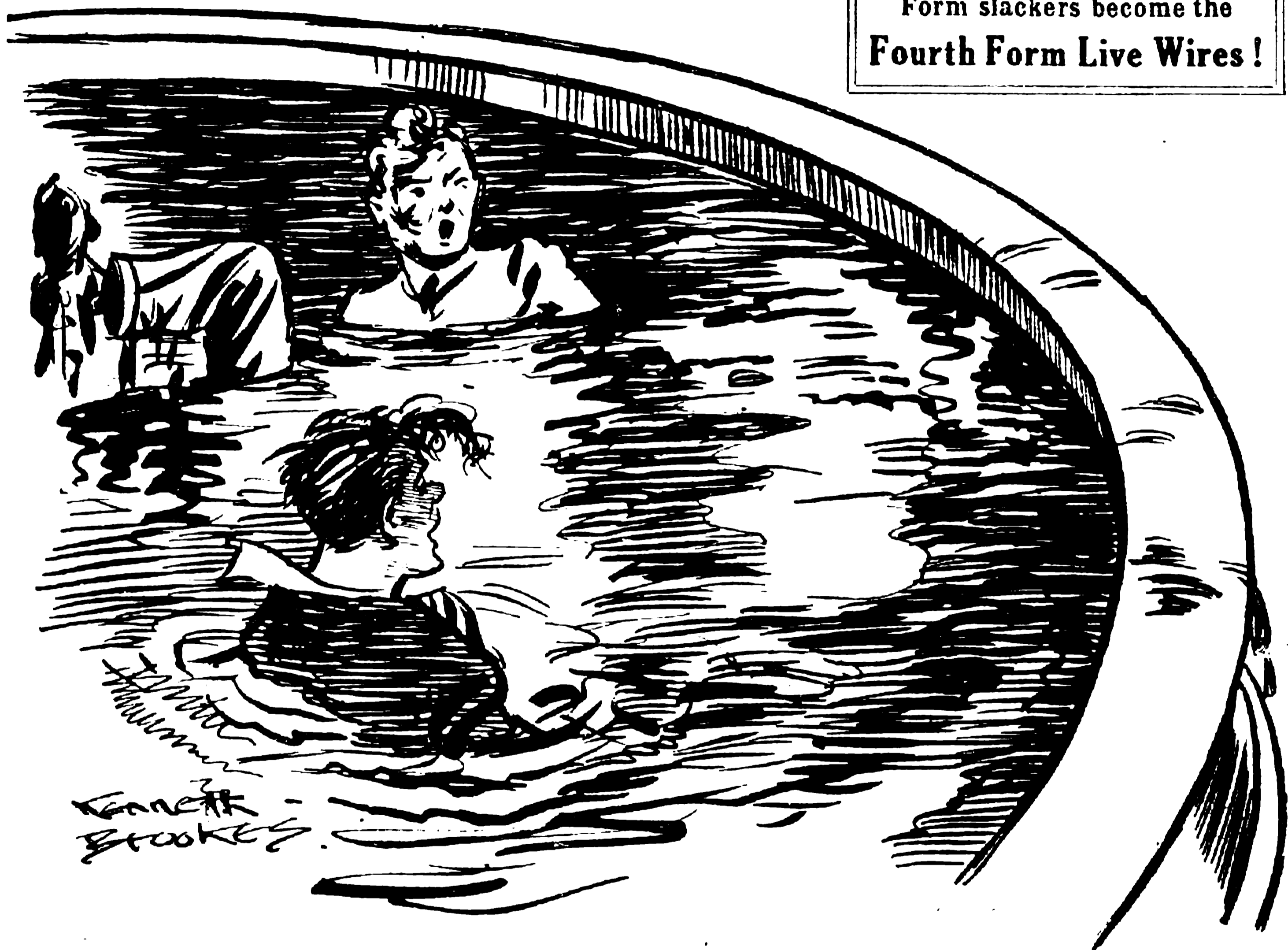
BUCKING UP

By EDWY SEARLES BROOKS.

The Under-Dogs on Top!

Amazing metamorphosis
at St. Frank's—Fourth
Form slackers become the

Fourth Form Live Wires!



CHAPTER 1.

A Football Farce!

“GOAL!”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“Go it, Remove!”

“Make it a round dozen!”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

Nipper, the St. Frank's junior skipper, had just scored for the Remove—an easy goal, headed adroitly into the net whilst the goalkeeper was still trying to make up his mind. It was the tenth goal of the match, and they had all been scored by one side.

Removites and Fourth-Formers, crowding round the ropes, were laughing openly. Even the Fourth-Formers—whose team was being so badly beaten—joined in the general laughter. They had long since got beyond the consternation stage. This game was a farce.

It only wanted about five minutes to the final whistle, and the Fourth-Formers were completely demoralised. Their kicking was wild, their defence was shattered to fragments, and their attack was non-existent.

Things had gone from bad to worse. In the first half, John Busterfield Boots and his men had put up a bit of a show, but the Removites had overrun them practically from the start, and at half-time the score had been four—nil.

After that the Remove team, with the wind behind them, played havoc with the Fourth-Form defence. Ninety per cent of the game had been in the Fourth-Formers' half of the field, and Edward Oswald Handforth, the Remove goalie, had had nothing to do. He was now leaning disconsolately against one of the goalposts, a mere spectator. He had not been called upon to

A Full of Punch and Pep School Yarn—Complete in this Issue.

THE FOURTH!



make one energetic save ever since the game had started.

"Football!" he said scornfully. "Who calls this football? Why, the Third could put up a better show!"

"You might as well go and change, Handy," said one of the spectators, from behind the net. "You're doing nothing on the field."

"Is that my fault?" demanded Handforth. "By George, look at Reggie Pitt! This is going to be another goal!"

Pitt, the Remove winger, was streaking down the touchline. He defeated the opposing back with ridiculous ease, swung in, and let fly with his left foot. It was a good shot—straight, true, and speedy. It would have tested the best of goalkeepers, and the Fourth-Form goalie, all nerves, misjudged by a yard. The hurtling leather eluded his outstretched hand, and bounced into the net.

"Goal!"

"That makes it eleven!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Poor old Fourth!"

It was true that the Fourth-Formers had had the most atrocious luck in this half. It was one of those games in which the weaker team could do nothing right. Many of their movements looked promising, and they were well-planned and thought out; but they came to nothing, simply because the ball wouldn't run right. Thus, with the Fourth-Form forwards losing heart, the half-backs at sixes and sevens, and the backs well nigh dropping with exhaustion, the lively Remove forwards had everything their own way.

With only a minute or two to go, Vivian Travers secured possession of the ball and ran through on his own. He dribbled the leather round two of the Fourth-Form half-backs in succession, raced a desperate back, and headed for goal.

"Go it, Travers!"

"Shoot, you ass!"

"I say, have a heart, Travers!"

Travers was merely piling up the agony for the Fourth-Formers. Perhaps it wasn't exactly sporting of him, and many of the Remove players rather hoped that somebody would succeed in robbing him of the ball before he could shoot.

But it was not to be. Hardly troubling to steady himself, Travers took a pot-shot at goal. It was a real snorter. The ball whizzed straight at the goalie with such force that both were bundled into the back of the net.

"Goal!"

"Oh, well, a dozen's enough!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The whistle blew a moment later, and ironical cheers arose from all sides. The Removites, looking quite fresh, streamed towards the pavilion; the Fourth-Formers, exhausted, tried their hardest to smile without looking sheepish.

"Why don't you cut out these Form matches, Nipper?" asked Fullwood, in the pavilion. "The Fourth haven't won a game this term—they're getting worse and worse!"

"They won't always be as bad as this—that's impossible," replied Nipper. "They had a bad spell this afternoon. They went down with a crash at the beginning of the game, and never recovered."

"A goal or two would have made all the difference to them," agreed Reggie Pitt. "Give them their due, Fully—they did try in the first half."

"Well, I think it's a waste of time playing the Fourth," declared Fullwood.

"The trouble with the Fourth," said Nipper, "is that they're too slack. They don't practise enough, and even when they do practise they don't put their hearts into it."

After he was dressed he strolled across to the Fourth-Form dressing-room, and he found Boots & Co. looking very fed-up with themselves.

"Twelve—nil!" said Boots, with a grimace. "You didn't half put it across us, Nipper!"

"We had all the luck that was going," said Nipper, nodding. "Lots of our passes went astray, but another of our chaps happened to be there at the right minute. Football is like that. Your passes never seemed to get anywhere."

"Except to an opponent," growled Boots. "But what else can you expect? I've no material in the Fourth."

"Material?" repeated Nipper, staring.

"Well, all the best men are in the Remove, aren't they?" asked Buster Boots. "I hate admitting it, but facts are facts. This game proves it. In every Junior School match, the St. Frank's Junior Eleven is composed of Removites, isn't it?"

"And why shouldn't it be?" demanded Nipper. "What have you Fourth-Formers done to win a place in the school eleven?"

"Oh, don't rub it in!" growled Boots. "My men aren't in the same class as yours, so——"

"Rats!"

"What do you mean—rats?"

"Rot!" said Nipper.

"Look here——"

"Your men are as strong, as healthy, and as energetic as mine," continued Nipper. "Plenty of you Fourth-Formers—Christine, Tamadge, Oldfield, Clapson, yourself, Boots—are as good footballers as any of our Remove players. It's not that you haven't the ability or the brawn. You're slack."

"What!" roared Boots.

"Slack," said Nipper, slightly incensed by the Fourth Form skipper's tone. "That's all that's the matter with you and your men. You don't practise enough. You don't take football seriously, or anything else."

"What's this—a lecture?" put in Bob Christine warmly.

"Keep your hair on," said Nipper. "I'm not going to lecture you, my sons. But when you tell me that the Fourth Form doesn't contain any good material, it's my job to point out that you're wrong. You fellows are too modest. You've got the stuff all right, but you don't trouble to use it."

Buster Boots snorted.

"It's easy to talk!" he said bitterly. "If you had my job, you wouldn't be so critical. Don't you think I've tried to get the chaps fit?"

"It isn't only in footer," said Nipper patiently. "It's in everything. All kinds of sports—even japes. You chaps in the Modern House and the East House are as dead as mutton."

"Oh, are we?"

"Slackness—slackness everywhere," said Nipper. "You take things too easily—you drift through life, and you always choose the line of least resistance. The Remove is only ahead of you because the Remove is full of spirit. Once you instil that same spirit into your chaps, you'll work wonders. The Fourth is all right—it only needs handling properly."

"Perhaps you'd care to come and handle it?" asked Boots tartly.

"Don't be an ass! I'm in the Remove."

"And you're safe, of course," retorted Boots. "You can say anything you like, and you know jolly well that we can't make you prove your words. You'll be telling me next that I'm a rotten skipper."

"If I did, I should only be telling you the truth."

"What!"

"Buster, old man, you're one of the best, and I like you immensely," said Nipper. "But, as a sports captain, you're too easy-going. That's just the trouble. A keen sports skipper must be hard at times—yes, and he gets himself thoroughly disliked, too. But he doesn't care about that if he's keen. He knows what's best for his men, and he insists upon it."

"Very clever!" said Buster Boots angrily. "Very easy to stand there and talk! You're not the Fourth captain, and you know you never will be! But if you're so jolly cock-

sure about whipping the Fourth into shape —”

“Cocksure?” asked Nipper grimly.

“That’s what I said—cocksure!” roared Boots. “If you’re so cocksure, why don’t you take my men in hand? You’re Junior skipper, aren’t you?”

“Only a Form captain can spend the necessary time on a job like that,” said Nipper impatiently. “You know that as well as I do, Boots. It takes me all my time to look after the Remove.”

“Why don’t you come into the Fourth, then?” asked Boots sourly. “I’ll resign the captaincy with pleasure if you’ll come over. Then we’ll see what you can do! Huh! A fat lot!”

Nipper was stung by Boots’ tone. And Nipper was a fellow who made up his mind quickly.

“Right!” he said, with scarcely a moment’s hesitation. “That’s a bargain!”

Boots and the other Fourth-Formers stared.

“What’s a bargain?” asked Boots.

“I’ll take you on,” said Nipper, his face rather flushed. “I will come into the Fourth and take on the job as skipper. It’s a bet, Boots.”

“But—but you don’t mean it, do you?” asked Boots, aghast.

“Don’t I?” replied Nipper. “You wait and see!”

Without another word he turned on his heel and strode out of the pavilion.

CHAPTER 2.

Nipper—of the Fourth!

NIPPER went straight to the Head.

John Busterfield Boots had as good as dared him—and Nipper never refused a “dare.” He was absolutely certain in his own mind that the Fourth Form contained plenty of worth-while material. It was all rot to say that the Fourth was weak in football talent. Too long had the juniors of the Modern House and the East House drifted on from bad to worse. They were just about due for a jolt. And Nipper rather relished the idea of providing that jolt.

Arriving at the Head’s house, he sent in an urgent message requesting an immediate interview. And although he was only a junior, the interview was granted. He was ushered by a sedate butler into the presence of the Great Man. The headmaster sat at his desk, and he looked up with inquiring eyes as Nipper entered.

“Well, young man, what do you want?” he asked austerely.

Nipper grinned, and went and perched himself on the arm of the Head’s swivel-chair.

“Cheese it, sir,” he said cheerfully.

“Is this the way to act in the presence of your headmaster, boy?” demanded the Head.

“Of course, there are Heads and Heads,” replied Nipper coolly. “I don’t think I’d

treat any other Head like this. But when we’re alone, gov’nor, we don’t need to keep up appearances, do we?”

The Head’s face broke into a genial smile, and he chuckled.

“You win, young ‘un,” he said, patting Nipper’s arm affectionately. “Well, what is it? Running short of cash? Don’t forget I gave you a couple of pounds only three days ago.”

Mr. Nelson Lee, the headmaster of St. Frank’s, was something more than a headmaster to Nipper. He was Nipper’s guardian—and Nipper looked upon him as a father. These two had been through many a stirring adventure together, whilst engaged in detective work. Nowadays, with the famous crime investigator controlling St. Frank’s, the opportunities of intimacy were few and far between.

“It isn’t money, gov’nor,” said Nipper, suddenly becoming serious. “I want you to do me a favour. I want you to transfer me to the Fourth.”

“Hallo! Hallo!” said Lee interestedly. “Are you serious, young ‘un? You sound serious, I must say.”

“I am, sir!”

“But why on earth do you want to be transferred to the Fourth?”

“Well, at St. Frank’s, sir, the Fourth and the Remove are very much on a par,” said Nipper. “I mean, there’s not much difference—we’re all of about the same age. And it’s very important that I should go into the Fourth—preferably into the East House.”

“The slackers’ House, eh?”

“Then you know it, too, gov’nor?” asked Nipper.

“Know it? What kind of a headmaster do you think I am, young man?” asked Nelson Lee. “Of course I know it. I have long deplored the inequality of the Houses. The Ancient House and the West House are alive, virile. The Modern House is quite a long way behind them—and the East House still further behind. The East House, in fact, is one of my pet worries.”

“They are a lot of slackers, sir,” admitted Nipper. “But I’m not concerned with the seniors—only the juniors. I’ve been—well, I’ve been dared. I want to transfer to the Fourth, so that I can become skipper, and, if possible, instil some enthusiasm into the fellows. I want to take charge of the Fourth Form footer, and make things hum generally.”

“Didn’t you play the Fourth to-day?”

“Yes, sir.”

“What was the result?”

“We won—twelve goals to nil.”

“You shall have that transfer, young man,” said Nelson Lee promptly. “Twelve goals to nil eh? Phew! That’s terrible! It’s high time somebody made things hum!”

“Goodness knows, I don’t want to throw my weight about,” said Nipper, frowning a little. “But after what Boots said to me, I feel rather hot round the neck. I just want to show him! You mean it about the transfer, don’t you, gov’nor?”

"Certainly—you're a Fourth-Former from this minute onwards, if you like."

"You're a brick, sir!" said Nipper, with gratitude.

"I will inform Mr. Goole, and he no doubt will let Mr. Pycraft, your new Form-master, know," said Lee dryly. "I take it, of course, that this change is to be only temporary?"

"That's all, sir—until I've finished my job," replied Nipper. "I'd rather be in the Remove, really——"

"I quite understand," interrupted Lee. "Well, we'll be broad-minded over it and shelve the conventions. Go ahead, Nipper—and good luck to you!"

THE East House Junior Common-room was crowded with Fourth-Formers. Armstrong, Griffiths, Turner, Page, Harron, Freeman, and a number of others were present. They were all mournfully discussing the recent football match.

Suddenly there was an interruption. The door, which was ajar, swung open and in leapt—a tiger!

For a moment there was a stupefied silence; then followed consternation.

"Help!"

"Look out, you fellows!"

"A tiger! Bunk for your lives!"

With terrified shouts the juniors scattered in all directions, and their terror increased when the tiger let out a ferocious growl. From behind chairs and under tables they watched with fear-stricken eyes as the animal crouched just inside the doorway. Another snarling roar, then the tiger stalked into the centre of the room, jaws agape, fangs gleaming.

"Hallo, you chaps!" said the tiger.

There was a number of gasps. Scared juniors blinked at each other incredulously.

"Did—did I hear that tiger speak?" stammered Armstrong.

"S-s-sounded like it!" said Griffiths, with chattering teeth.

"What's the matter with you chaps?" asked the tiger. "What the dickens d'you think I am—a tiger?"

There came a chuckle, and next moment the "tiger" stood on its hind legs. From under the head appeared a grinning face.

"Nipper!" went up an amazed shout.

"It's a jape—a Remove jape!"

"We've been swindled!"

"Grab him!"

In an indignant mob the Fourth-Formers rushed from their places of safety. They surrounded Nipper threateningly as he stepped out of the tiger-skin.

"Keep your hair on!" he said calmly. "I've decided to buck up the Fourth, and I thought this stunt would make rather a good beginning. Not a bad idea, eh?"

Timothy Armstrong eyed the grinning Nipper ferociously.

"It's like your nerve, you mean, you cheeky Removite!" he hooted.

"You're mistaken, Armstrong," retorted Nipper coolly. "I'm the new skipper of the Fourth!"

"What!"

"Boots has resigned in my favour."

"Great Scott!"

"So I'm taking over straight away," said Nipper. "And I might as well tell you that I'm going to make things hum——"

"You silly Remove ass, you're dotty!" spluttered Armstrong. "How can a Remove fellow be skipper of the Fourth?"

"I'm not a Remove fellow—now."

"What the dickens do you mean?" demanded Freeman.

"I mean that about twenty minutes ago the Head officially transferred me into the Fourth. I went straight from his study and bagged this tiger-skin from the Junior Dramatic Society's props, and then came along here."

Nipper went on to explain what had transpired between himself and Boots in the pavilion.

"Boots challenged me," Nipper concluded, "and I've taken up that challenge. The Fourth needs bucking up—and I'm going to do the bucking. That may sound swanky, but it isn't. If I don't prove my words, you can chuck me out of the captaincy."

The East House Fourth-Formers were dumbfounded; indeed, the majority of them took it for granted that Nipper was pulling their legs.

"I suppose you think this is funny?" asked Armstrong tartly. "But we're not such mugs as to believe your rot. It's like your nerve, you Remove bounder, to come japing us like this. What about chucking him out, you chaps?"

"Rather!"

"Down with the Remove!"

"Here, steady!" said Nipper. "You wouldn't chuck out one of your own Form-fellows, would you? I'm telling you, straight from the shoulder, that I'm in the Fourth now."

"And we're telling you to go and eat coke!" retorted Armstrong. "Tell that story to the Marines!"

"But it's true—honest Injun!" said Nipper.

They looked at him open-eyed.

"Honest Injun?" asked several voices in unison.

"Honest Injun, and honour bright!" replied Nipper, his eyes sparkling.

"Well, I'm blowed!"

"He means it!"

"My only sainted aunt!"

The Fourth-Formers gathered round, and they regarded Nipper as though he were some queer zoological specimen.

"Now, look here, you chaps, let's get together in a friendly way," said Nipper enthusiastically. "I've come here in a spirit of goodwill. All I want is your co-operation. Let's make the Fourth sizzle. If we all work with a will, we can do wonders. What do you say?"

"It's like your giddy nerve—that's what I say!" replied Armstrong truculently. "I, for one, don't accept you as a member of this



Travers' shot was a snorter which bundled ball and goalkeeper into the back of the net. The Remove were twelve goals up against the Fourth!

Form. You're a Removite—no matter what the Head has done!"

"Cheese it, Armstrong!" put in Turner. "When you come to think of it, we ought to be pleased. With Nipper amongst us, we can make the fur fly!"

"Are we dependent upon a Removite to make the fur fly?" demanded Armstrong. "Can't we do it on our own?"

The Fourth-Formers were divided. Many of them were openly antagonistic, others, impressed by Nipper's quiet, earnest tone, were eager to accept him as their leader.

"We don't want any misunderstandings," said Nipper. "To begin with, get it out of your heads that I'm butting in. I want to help the Fourth—to put the Fourth on the map. I'm not saying that I can work miracles, but if we all pull together, with a right spirit, we can show the rest of the school a few fireworks. I'm not ordering anybody about; I'm asking for your friendly help. Come on, you chaps—let's get enthusiastic about it. All of us. I'm as keen as mustard on this thing, and I'd like you to be keen, too."

"Good man!" said Freeman heartily. "We're with you, Nipper!"

"Rather!" agreed Turner, his face flushed and his voice eager.

Several others excitedly approved; but Armstrong, Merrell, Marriott, and a few other fellows were openly warlike.

"Nothing doing!" said Armstrong. "You chaps are mad! Nipper's a Removite—a

rival!—and we're not going to put up with him in the Fourth! He can clear out of here as soon as he likes!"

"And the sooner, the better!" said Merrell sourly.

"That's unfortunate," said Nipper. "I can't clear out now. The Head's put me in this House, and I must stay in it."

"We're not going to have you!" said Armstrong grimly.

Armstrong was a big, burly fellow—all muscle and brawn, and no intelligence. At one time, he had fancied himself as the Fourth Form skipper, and the Fourth had sunk to an insignificant place in the school. Ever since then Buster Boots had been trying to make something of the Form, but he was too easy-going—too slack. Armstrong had a great idea of his own importance, and his blustering ways deceived some of his companions. They thought that there was something behind his empty talk—but there wasn't.

Nipper sighed.

"Well, I'm sorry about this," he said patiently. "I came here in a friendly spirit, and I was hoping that you would offer me the glad hand. You don't want me, Armstrong, do you?"

"No!"

"And you don't want me, Merrell—and you, Marriott?" went on Nipper. "Well, we shall have to do something about it. It's pretty rotten, starting my captaincy in this way, but you give me no choice."

He peeled off his jacket and handed it to Freeman. Then he slowly began to roll up his shirt-sleeves. The Fourth-Formers watched him with startled eyes.

"What are you going to do?" asked Turner breathlessly.

"I'm going to fight all these chaps who refuse to accept my leadership in this House," replied Nipper crisply. "I'll take you on first, Armstrong—and any other fellow with you. Ready? Let's get down to it!"

CHAPTER 3.

Making Things Hum!

NIPPER meant it.

He was glad to see that a majority of the fellows were ready to support him—that they regarded his transfer into the Fourth in the right spirit. The rest didn't matter; he would soon settle their hash. There was only one argument they understood—the argument of the bare fist. Well, much as he hated throwing his weight about—literally—it would have to be done. His only chance of success in the Fourth was to fight down the opposition.

Timothy Armstrong was startled at first, then he laughed outright.

"You want to fight me?" he demanded aggressively. "All right, you silly Remove class! I'll fight you—and I'll wipe you up, too!"

"Why fight him?" asked Marriott excitedly. "Why not chuck him out?"

"That's it!" said Merrell. "Come on, you chaps!"

Turner and Page and Freeman barged in.

"Not likely!" said Turner. "Why can't you be fair? Nipper has offered to fight any two of you—and that's sporting enough, isn't it?"

"Besides, he's in the Fourth now—it's official," added Page.

"We've only got his word for it!" sneered Armstrong.

Nipper flushed.

"I said 'honour bright,' didn't I?" he asked. "If you don't like to believe it, Armstrong, you're calling me a liar. And fellows who call me a liar ask for trouble. Put up your hands!"

"I'm hanged if I will!"

"All right, then—take this!"

Crash!

Nipper's right flashed out, and Armstrong took something that he did not want. He yelled noisily as he staggered back, feeling that his nose had been made flat with the rest of his face.

Crash! Biff! Thud!

Like a whirlwind, Nipper went for Armstrong. Marriott came to Armstrong's assistance, and Merrell joined in, too. Nipper was fighting the three of them, and so excited were the other Fourth-Formers that they gathered round in a great circle, watching and making no attempt to interfere.

Nipper was no super-being, and this scrap was a matter of touch and go. Armstrong's

weight helped him considerably, and although Merrell and Marriott were not great fighters, the three combined made Nipper's task a formidable one. If Nipper had not been so determined, he would probably have gone under. He sailed in with tremendous vigour, and he concentrated most of his attack upon Timothy Armstrong.

He had to win—he just had to! If he didn't he would be discredited completely and utterly, and he would have no chance whatever of "pepping up" the Fourth.

Crash!

His fist made contact with Armstrong's right eye, and Armstrong reeled back. At the same instant Merrell got in a vicious jab at Nipper's neck, and Marriott, on the other side, seized his opportunity and rushed in, his fists whirling. Nipper swung round. With one movement he swept the attack aside, and delivered a left-hander which brought forth a yell of consternation and pain.

"By Jingo!" panted Armstrong. "You needn't think you can get away with that, you rotter!"

He fairly hurled himself in, charging like a blundering elephant. His blood was up now, and he was fighting gamely. But his rush was clumsy. He was too excited to guard himself. Nipper dodged aside adroitly, and his bare knuckles, meeting Armstrong's chin, caused Armstrong to sprawl headlong to the floor.

Crash! Thud!

Like lightning, Nipper swept from side to side, and Merrell and Marriott received swinging blows which demoralised them. They staggered back and collapsed on the floor.

"Well, any more?" asked Nipper, breathing hard. "Are you ready to accept me as your skipper, or shall I carry on? Had enough, Armstrong?"

Armstrong picked himself up, his face flushed with anger and resentment. His nose was bleeding, his lower lip was swollen, and his left eye was showing signs of closing. But the look he gave Nipper was not merely one of anger—it contained a wholehearted respect, too.

"All right!" he growled. "I'm satisfied!"

Suddenly he brought a complete change over the situation. In spite of his blustering, bragging methods, he was a decent enough fellow at heart. The anger left his face, and he thrust out his hand.

"Put it there, Nipper!" he said gruffly.

Nipper looked at him with real respect.

"By Jove, Armstrong, I'm glad to," he said, as he clasped. "That's the spirit, old man! Good egg!"

"You've licked me—and these other two fatheads, too," said Armstrong. "Well, I'm not a vindictive chap, and I hate quarrelling, anyhow. I'm with you, Nipper!" He turned and glared at the other Fourth-Formers, then added: "Any chap who doesn't support Nipper will feel the weight of my fist—understand? I'm licked, and I know it. But it took a good man to lick

me. I'm his pal from now onwards, and that's straight from the shoulder!"

He was grinning now, grinning with relief in spite of his pain. Armstrong was a simple enough fellow; there wasn't an ounce of subterfuge or cunning in his nature. And his respect for Nipper was unbounded.

"Good man, Armstrong!" said Freeman heartily. "You're a sport!"

"If Nipper wants to buck up the Fourth, we'll help him!" said Armstrong aggressively. "Isn't it time the Fourth was bucked up, anyhow? Boots is no good—as I've always said. He's first-class at organising things, but he hasn't got the right personality for a skipper. As far as I'm concerned, I'm jolly glad that Nipper has come over. Good luck to him!"

And Armstrong stalked out of the Common-room with an air of defiance. Nipper watched him go with a feeling of newly-born friendship towards him.

"The big coward!" sneered Merrell, after Armstrong had gone. "My only hat! He's licked, and he openly admits it."

Freeman bristled.

"You fool!" he snapped. "That was the pluckiest thing Armstrong ever did!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Good old Armstrong!"

"If Armstrong's ready to support Nipper, so are the rest of us!"

"Rather!"

Merrell and Marriott were elbowed aside. They had practically no supporters now. The rest of the fellows swarmed round Nipper, and they helped him on with his jacket.

"My only hat, we *are* going to make things hum!" said Turner enthusiastically. "With you as our skipper, Nipper, we can do big things. We'll rally round you—we'll do our bit!"

"You're a crowd of sportsmen!" said Nipper heartily. "Well, how about some tea? Who's going to join me in an inaugural feed, so to speak? Don't all speak at once!"

Before anybody could reply, the door opened and Mr. Horace Pycraft entered. There was an immediate hush. Mr. Pycraft, thin and weedy, was the master of the Fourth. He was not popular. He was an interfering, bad-tempered man, and his slack influence, perhaps, was more responsible for the Fourth's lowly position than anything else.

"Ah, here you are, Hamilton," he said, adjusting his glasses and eyeing Nipper in an unfriendly way. "What is this I hear?"

"About me, sir?" asked Nipper.

"Is it a fact that you transferred to the Fourth Form of your own free will?" asked Mr. Pycraft. "Candidly, Hamilton, I cannot understand you. I suppose you realise that your entry into this Form will only create a lot of trouble?"

"I hope not, sir."

"But it will," insisted Mr. Pycraft acidly. "You are a very wilful boy, Hamilton, and your exploits in the Remove must not be

repeated in the Fourth. I will have no disturbances in my Form. I want you to understand that."

"I haven't come here to make disturbances, sir," said Nipper quietly.

"Indeed!" snapped Mr. Pycraft. "Then how is it, may I ask, that you are greatly dishevelled? How is it that I passed Armstrong, not a minute ago, in an even worse condition? You have been fighting, Hamilton!"

Nipper was silent.

"The headmaster informed me that you were now in my Form, and I deplored the fact," continued Mr. Pycraft. "I come here, not twenty minutes later, and I find that you have already been acting like a young hooligan. You will write me five hundred lines."

"That's not fair, sir!" burst out Freeman excitedly.

"Silence!"

"Nipper didn't start anything, sir!" went on Freeman. "At least, he only fought because he had to."

"I do not wish to inquire into the whys and wherefores of the matter. It is sufficient for me to know that Hamilton commenced fighting as soon as he entered this Form," said Mr. Pycraft. "And you will understand, Hamilton, that I will have no more of it. That is final."

Mr. Pycraft turned on his heel and stalked out.

"The—the miserable rotter!" fumed Turner, between his teeth.

"He can't help it—he's built that way," said Nipper. "It seems that I shall have to go easy. But Pycraft doesn't scare me—I'll do my best to get him round to our side, too."

"You've taken on a job," said Freeman, with feeling.

"Rats to old Pycraft!" said Turner. "What about that tea?"

"There's just one thing I want to say before we go," said Nipper. "I'm a Fourth-Former now, and all my interests are in the Fourth. I don't want you to look upon me as an intruder—as a Removeite who is butting in. If the Remove starts any trouble with us, I'm with you heart and soul. Up, the Fourth!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Good old Nipper!"

"Up, the Fourth—down with the Remove!" said Nipper cheerily. "That's our cry from this minute onwards! My sons, we're going to make the Remove sit up and take notice!"

CHAPTER 4.

Handforth Asks for Trouble!

"ANYBODY seen Nipper?" Tommy Watson asked that question as he put his head into Study D, in the Ancient House. Handforth and Church and McClure were having tea; at least, Church and McClure were.

Handforth was standing on the hearthrug, holding an inquest on the recent football match.

"Haven't seen him since the match," said Handforth, looking up. "I want to see him, too. What's the good of playing these silly Fourth-Formers? All Form matches ought to be cancelled. I nearly caught my death of cold, standing in that rotten goal this afternoon. Do you know that I had nothing to lo from the beginning of the game to the end?"

"I can't help your troubles," said Watson. "If you're not satisfied with your place as goalie, why don't you ask to be dropped from the team?"

He went out, leaving Handforth spluttering. But before he could close the door there came the sounds of running footsteps. Sir Montie Tregellis-West came running up, hot, breathless, and excited.

"What's up, Montie?" asked Watson, his hand still on the door-knob.

"It's Nipper, old boy!" panted Montie. "They're saying that he's gone over to the Fourth!"

"I'm not surprise," said Watson. "I suppose he's ticking them off for—"

"No, begad, I don't mean that!" interrupted Tregellis-West. "He's joined the Fourth! He's transferred into the East House!"

"What!"

Handforth strode across the study, flung open the door, and Watson nearly fell into his arms. Tregellis-West came in, and his face was expressive of consternation.

"What's all this rot?" demanded Handforth tartly. "What the dickens do you mean, Montie? Nipper has transferred to the Fourth? You're crazy!"

"He's crazy if he's done that!" said Church, from the tea-table.

"No fellow in his right senses would transfer from a go-ahead Form into a museum of mummies," commented McClure. "And

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the East House, of all Houses! It's always a wonder to me that they don't charge admission into the East House and admit the public at a bob ahead to view the exhibits."

Sir Montie was nearly frantic.

"It's all very well joking, dear boys, but this is serious," he said. "You don't seem to understand that it's official. I'm not joking! Payne, of the East House, has just told me that Nipper's over there already—that he's being cheered by the fellows as the new skipper of the Fourth."

"Rot!" said Handforth. "Sheer, unadulterated drivel!"

"Payne wouldn't tell me a lie, would he?" asked Sir Montie mildly. "I mean, he's a prefect—and the only decent prefect in the East House, begad!"

Handforth looked startled for a moment. It was quite true that Charles Payne, of the East House Sixth, was a thoroughly good sort in every way, and not given to lying. He was the fattest fellow in the Senior School, always happy, always smiling—and, by the same token, always ready to wink his eye at the minor misdemeanours of the juniors.

"We'd better go and inquire into this," said Handforth gruffly. "Nipper—skipper of the Fourth? Whoever heard of such drivel?"

They all went out into the passage, even Church and McClure forsaking their tea in the excitement. In the lobby they found De Valerie, Fullwood, Kirby Keeble Parkington, Travers, Deeks, Goffin, and a crowd of others. Everybody was talking at once.

"Impossible!" Parkington was saying. "Nipper wouldn't do a mad thing like that!"

"So you chaps have heard, too!" asked Handforth, barging up. "It must be a rumour! Nipper's just japing the Fourth!"

"It can't be anything else," said Fullwood. "Anyhow, we'd better go over to the East House, and make inquiries."

"By George, yes!" ejaculated Handforth, with a start. "Those Fourth-Formers are capable of grabbing him and putting him through the mill!"

Not all the Removites went over. Some were more interested in their tea. They did not believe this incredible rumour, anyhow, and a visit to a rival House was always accompanied by certain risks of violence.

Only Handforth & Co., Parkington, Deeks, Goffin, Travers and a few more went marching out into the chilly bleakness of the Triangle. They completely disbelieved the impossible story, but there was a chance that Nipper might need help.

IT had been rather careless of Nipper not to tell any of his Form-fellows of his intentions. He might, at least, have confided in Sir Montie Tregellis-West and Tommy Watson, his own study-mates. But Nipper had been so full of his new idea that he had pushed it along without the waste of an unnecessary moment.

Armstrong had just got downstairs, after cleaning himself up, when the Remove invaders arrived. And Armstrong, hurrying into the Common-room, found Nipper, with a number of other Fourth-Formers, about to go in search of tea.

"Hold on, you chaps!" said Armstrong. "There's some trouble coming. Handforth and a whole crowd of Remove chaps are here!"

All the Fourth-Formers looked eagerly at Nipper.

"So they've heard?" said Nipper, almost with a sigh.

For a moment he had a pang of guilt. He had forsaken his own Form! Then he squared his shoulders, and set his teeth. The Remove could well get along without him—and he had a task to perform in the Fourth.

Handforth was leading the Removites, and he came to a halt in the Common-room doorway, staring in some disappointment.

"Why, there's no trouble here!" he said gruffly. "Nipper isn't being ragged!"

"Were you hoping that he would be?" asked Church, with a grin. "Did you want an excuse to start some fireworks?"

"You chaps had better not start any fireworks here," said Armstrong. "It's like your nerve to come butting in uninvited."

"What's this we've been hearing about you, Nipper?" demanded Parkington, pushing forward. "Some of the chaps are saying that you've transferred into the Fourth! Sheer rot, of course——"

"It doesn't happen to be rot," interrupted Nipper. "It's true."

The Removites were silenced by that quietly-spoken remark. Handforth's jaw sagged, and he was the first to speak.

"True?" he repeated. "True that you've joined the Fourth?"

"Yes," said Nipper.

"Then you're mad!" yelled Tommy Watson indignantly. "What's the idea of joining a mouldy Form like the Fourth?"

"A what Form?" roared Armstrong.

"A mouldy Form—and you know it's mouldy!" retorted Watson hotly. "But I wasn't talking to you, anyhow. Nipper, have you gone crazy?"

"Are you off your rocker, dear old boy?" asked Montie anxiously.

"Why all this fuss?" said Nipper. "What difference does it make, really? We can be friends, just the same, can't we? Rivals, perhaps—but friends. Boots and I had a bit of a chat just after the match, and Boots said something that sent me straight to the Head. Well, the Head has allowed me to transfer into the Fourth—and here I am."

"And here he stays!" declared Armstrong defiantly.

"Well, well!" murmured Travers. "Wonders will never cease!"

Tommy Watson grabbed at Nipper's arm.

"Is this really true—honour bright?" he demanded breathlessly.

"Sorry, old man—yes," said Nipper. "You and Montie will be able to get along all right. You see, I've got work to do over here. Boots practically challenged me—and I had to get busy."

Even now the Removites could hardly believe the evidence of their own ears. Nipper, their own Form captain, had gone over to the Fourth. The weakest, the most futile Form at St. Frank's! And, above all, he had come into the East House! Handforth and Parkington and the others could only stare in growing amazement and indignation.

"And how long do you mean to stay in the Fourth?" asked Handforth, at last.

"Until I've proved to Boots that the Fourth contains as good material as the Remove."

"Then you'll stay in the Fourth for the rest of your days," said Handforth promptly.

"Well, we'll see about that!" grinned Nipper. "Now, you chaps, don't go off the deep end. Don't make a mountain out of a molehill. In the circs., we Fourth-Formers will allow you to leave this House unmolested—if you go at once!"

"What!" gasped the Removites.

"But that's a concession," said Nipper cheerfully. "Don't forget that we Fourth-Formers are hot stuff. We bar Removites at any price. We'll give you just one minute, and if you haven't gone by then we'll run you out."

"Hear, hear!" grinned Armstrong.

Nipper's coolness, his treatment of the whole affair as something trivial, left the Remove fellows somewhat helpless. And Armstrong and the other Fourth-Formers caught Nipper's spirit. Already the ex-Remove captain's personality was having effect. He was instilling—quite unconsciously—a new "pep" into his former rivals.

"My only hat!" said Handforth, taking a deep breath. "So you've descended to that, have you? You actually call yourself a Fourth-Former, and you renounce the Remove?"

"Shocking, isn't it?" asked Nipper blandly.

"You—you lunatic!" roared Handforth. "Why don't you come to your senses? Do you think we take any notice of your fat-headed threats? You—a Fourth-Former! Why, we Remove fellows don't care a snap of the fingers about the Fourth!"

"Small fry like the Fourth don't bother us," said Travers, with a shrug.

Nipper turned to the East House juniors.

"Come along, you chaps!" he said briskly. "We're not going to stand here and listen to this, are we? The Fourth is being insulted! Insulted by a crowd of mouldy Removites! Come on; all hands to the pumps! Chuck 'em out!"

"Good egg!" yelled Armstrong.

And the Fourth-Formers made a determined rush, with Nipper at their head.

"Hi! What the— Mind what you're doing!" bellowed Handforth, in alarm.

"Why, you silly—"

He got no further. Nipper and the others were grabbing, and they were grabbing effectively. The Removites, to their startled consternation, were seized, bowled over, and whirled towards the exit. They were sent hurtling to the outer door, and they were thrown out with violence. They landed in the Triangle with severe bumps, and the crowd of Fourth-Formers stood in the East House doorway in a solid body.

"This is only the beginning," said Nipper genially. "The Fourth's alive from now on, my sons. If you're looking for trouble, come over on this side of the Triangle. Down with the Remove!"

CHAPTER 5.

Handforth On The Warpath!

JOHN BUSTERFIELD BOOTS, coming out of the Modern House with Percy Bray and Walter Denny, his chums of Study No. 6, paused in astonishment. Bob Christine and Roddy Yorke and Charley Talmadge, of Study No. 1, were with him. Oldfield, Clapson, Nation, of Study No. 3, were already on the steps.

"What's happening?" asked Boots.

"Goodness only knows!" replied Oldfield, scratching his head. "But those East House chaps have just thrown out a whole bunch of Removites! What's come over them? I didn't know Armstrong's crowd had it in them!"

"We'd better go and investigate," said Boots firmly.

Buster was still labouring under the impression that he was the skipper of the Fourth. When he came face to face with Nipper, a moment later, he was not so much astounded at Nipper's presence amongst the Fourth-Formers as he was at Nipper's cap. Instead of the familiar red and blue colours, Nipper was wearing the black and orange cap of the East House.

"What's the idea?" demanded Boots bluntly.

"You're too late, old man," said Nipper. "We've chucked them out quite successfully, thank you."

"Chucked them out!" repeated Boots, staring. "Those Remove chaps?"

"Yes."

"But you're a Remove chap!"

"Haven't you heard?" asked Nipper sweetly. "Poor old Boots, you're very much behind the times, I'm afraid."

"If this is one of your silly Remove japes, you'd better go easy," said Buster Boots suspiciously. "What do you mean by wearing an East House cap, anyhow?"

"It's mine," explained Nipper. "I can wear it if I like, can't I?"

He took it off and displayed his initials inside. Boots and Christine and Bray and the other Modern House Fourth-Formers stared uncomprehendingly. But they were not left long in doubt. There were plenty of East House Fourth-Formers ready to break the news.

"What!" ejaculated Boots, at length. "You've been transferred to the Fourth? I've never heard of such a thing!"

"That doesn't say that it hasn't happened," said Nipper cheerfully.

"But—but—"

"I took you at your word, old man," explained Nipper. "You remember that little discussion we had in the pav.? Well, I went to the Head, I got my transfer—and here I am."

"Well I'm jiggered!"

"As the new skipper of the Fourth—"

"As what?" demanded Boots.

"As the new skipper of the Fourth—"

"Think again!" said Boots. "I'm the skipper of the Fourth!"

"You were," said Nipper gently, "but you're not now."

"Not likely!" said Armstrong. "With Nipper in the Fourth, Boots, there's only one chap for the skipper's job—and that's him."

The Modern House Fourth-Formers were hot with indignation.

"Easy—easy!" said Nipper, before they could burst out into speech. "Let me remind you of something, Buster, old son. Did you, or did you not, say that you would cheerfully resign the captaincy in my favour if I joined the Fourth?"

"I—I—I—" began Boots helplessly.

"You told me that I was cocksure, and you offered me your job—defying me, in fact, to produce material out of the Fourth which could beat the Remove's best," said Nipper. "Well, old chap, I accepted that challenge, and here I am. I hope you Modern House fellows will co-operate, rally round, and do everything you can for the good cause. Up, the Fourth! That's the cry from now onwards! Up, the Fourth—until we've not only equalled the Remove, but gone one better!"

"Well I'm blowed!" said Boots feebly.

Bob Christine, Roddy Yorke and the others were looking excited, and their anger was subsiding.

"This isn't such a bad stunt, you know," said Bob eagerly. "It's high time the Fourth was livened up. And Nipper's the chap to do it. We've been dead for terms under Boots' captaincy—"

"Say that again!" interrupted Boots aggressively.

"Oh, dry up, Buster!" said Christine. "You know jolly well that you're not much of a skipper."

"What!"

"You're one of the best, of course, and we all like you," continued Bob, "but you're not cut out for a skipper's job."

John Busterfield Boots was baffled. It was quite true that he had offered to resign the

Led by Nipper, the Fourth-Formers proceeded to throw the Removites out of the East House. "Down with the Remove!" yelled Nipper enthusiastically.



captaincy in Nipper's favour, but he had never dreamed that he would be called upon actually to resign. Yet he was a fellow of his word, and he accepted the situation.

"There'll be a full Form meeting at seven o'clock," said Nipper briskly. "So I'm taking this opportunity of telling you chaps. You might send the word round among the other Fourth Form studies in the Modern House. Seven o'clock sharp—in the East House Lecture Hall."

"I'm not sure we'll turn up," said Boots coldly.

"You'd better, old man," said Nipper. "Because we're holding the meeting in the Lecture Hall, it doesn't mean to say that I'm going to deliver a lecture. Just a little chat with you all—and, I hope, we'll get out some definite plan of action."

"What do you mean—plan of action?"

"Don't you understand that the Fourth is aiming to make things hum at St. Frank's?" asked Nipper. "Well, the only way to accomplish that is to get a move on—a big push. My sons, we're going to surprise the natives!"

IN the meantime, Edward Oswald Handforth was dashing about the Ancient House in wild excitement.

"Something's got to be done!" he declared. "I'm not criticising Nipper—those Fourth-Formers need bucking up, anyhow—but the Remove needs a new skipper. Well, it's already got one."

"So I understand," said Travers. "K. K. is taking on the job."

"Don't make me laugh!" said Handforth scornfully. "Who the dickens is K. K., anyhow? I'm the new skipper."

"Now you're making me laugh," said Travers, bursting into a roar of hilarity.

He walked on, and Handforth snorted.

"Am I the new skipper of the Remove, or am I not?" he demanded, glaring at Church and McClure.

"Of course you are—I mean, of course you are!" said Church promptly. "Isn't he, Mac?"

"Rather!" said McClure.

Handforth's chums generally took the line of least resistance. They saw no reason why they should disillusion him—and thus get into a mighty *scrap*—when the Remove itself would disillusion him just as quickly.

The Remove, by this time, had got over the surprise of Nipper's transfer. There was only one subject under discussion now—Nipper's successor. A captain was needed for the Remove.

Handforth went round, barging into study after study. In every one, his formula was the same.

"Form meeting—quarter to seven, sharp—in the gym!" he said crisply. "Don't forget to turn up, you chaps—skipper's orders."

"And who's the skipper?" asked somebody.

"I am!" replied Handforth. "Don't forget—gym at six-forty-five!"

"We won't forget."

By the time Handforth had finished, he was flushed and pleased. Practically everybody had taken his orders meekly and there had been no disturbances. He joined Church and McClure in Study D, and he rubbed his hands together with satisfaction.

"That's the way to treat 'em!" he said. "Don't ask any questions—don't mess about. And when I address the meeting in the gym, I shall be just as firm."

"But how do you know there'll be a meeting in the gym?" asked Church mildly.

"How do I know? Didn't I tell everybody to turn up?"

"There's no guarantee that they'll turn up, though," said Church, shaking his head.

"Rot!"

"There's some talk of another meeting, I believe," ventured McClure. "I heard something about a meeting in the Lecture Hall. K. K.'s getting busy——"

"Don't talk to me about K. K.!" interrupted Handforth coldly. "Are we going to be ordered about by those fatheaded Red-Hots? We've always had an Old-Timer as skipper—and we shall still have an Old-Timer! K. K. and his crowd can go and eat coke!"

Church and McClure did not argue. At twenty minutes to seven, Handforth went round the studies to give the chaps a final reminder. He was pleasantly surprised. The Remove passage was entirely deserted. Not a soul remained.

"Well, this is topping!" he declared, his eyes gleaming. "It's personality that counts, my sons! Everybody's gone off to the gym already."

"Looks like it," said Church cautiously. "Still, you'd better not count your chickens——"

"I haven't got any chickens, and wouldn't keep chickens, anyhow," interrupted Handforth, with a sniff. "Come on! Let's get to the gym. We shall be the last to arrive, and that's as it should be. All the chaps are waiting for me."

He dashed out to the gymnasium, burst in with Church and McClure in his rear, and then came to an abrupt halt. The gym was deserted except for William Napoleon Browne and Horace Stevens, of the Fifth, who were indulging in some exercises on the parallel bars.

"Splendid!" said Browne. "Brother Horace, we have an audience. Let me urge you to repeat that remarkable performance——"

"Where's the Remove?" demanded Handforth indignantly.

"The Remove?" asked Browne.

"I ordered a meeting!" roared Handforth. "I told the Remove to collect in the gym!"

"That explains why the Remove hasn't collected," nodded Browne. "My poor fellow, you don't expect the Remove to obey your orders, do you? The trouble with you, Brother Handy, is that——"

"But—but there's not a soul here!" gasped Handforth, in dismay. "I wonder if the chaps could have misunderstood me? I

distinctly said a quarter to seven, in the gym."

"Oh, you're hopeless!" said Church, losing all patience. "Didn't Mac and I try to tell you? K. K. called a meeting, too. The Remove is in the Lecture Hall."

Handforth was startled. He had been kidding himself that the Removites had accepted him as their new skipper. He came to earth with a bump.

"So that red-headed ass, K. K., is trying to rule the roost, is he?" he said ominously. "Come on, you chaps! We'll soon alter this!"

He dashed indoors, and Church and McClure followed. They were as much interested in the captaincy as Handforth—but, somehow, they felt that Handforth would not be the new skipper. Kirby Keeble Parkington was cool-headed, pushful, and he had a "way" with him. Now that Nipper had gone, it was any odds that Parkington would step into his shoes.

But Handforth, who had always fancied himself as captain, regarded this as the identical moment for him to come into his own. He burst into the Lecture Hall, and was startled to find the Remove there in full force. K. K. was on the platform, speaking energetically.

"We've got to show Nipper that we don't care a toss whether he's in the Remove or whether he's in the Fourth!" K. K. was saying. "Nipper's a deserter!"

"Hear, hear!"

"He's left the Remove in the lurch——"

"The rotter!"

"Bogad, I protest!" sang out Sir Montie. "It's frightfully thick of you Red-Hots to run Nipper down like this. Nipper's one of the best!"

"One of the best, is he?" roared Parkington. "Without a word to any of us he transfers to the Fourth! He doesn't even give us warning—he doesn't even consult his old Form-fellows! I say he's a deserter. And it's up to the Remove, as a whole, to make things hot for him!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Good old K. K.!"

Handforth clenched his fists, set his teeth, and charged.

CHAPTER 6.

By Right of Conquest!

WHEN Handforth charged, things generally happened.

They happened now. Removites fell like ninepins to right and to left as Handforth bored his way through the crowd towards the platform. There was a tremendous commotion, but Handforth got there. He leapt upon the platform, pushed Kirby Keeble Parkington aside and faced the Remove.

"What's all this?" he demanded. "What do you Old-Timers mean by listening to this silly Red-Hot? I'm the new captain of the Remove!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Poor old Handy!"

"Why don't you go and address your meeting in the gym?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You're a lot of traitors for not turning up!" bellowed Handforth. "Instead of supporting me, you support this—this carroty fathead! And what do I find when I come here? I find you running Nipper down!"

"Doesn't he deserve to be run down?" yelled Goodwin. "Hasn't he deserted us?"

"He's a backslider!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Down with Nipper!"

"Just what I've been saying!" shouted K. K. "Down with Nipper! Handy, I'll trouble you to get off this platform. This meeting was an orderly one until you arrived—and it's going to be orderly again. Will you go off quietly, or shall we chuck you off?"

Deeks, Goffin, Baines, Haddock and several other Red-Hots advanced ominously upon Edward Oswald. He faced them defiantly.

"Go on—chuck me off!" he said. "If you do, this meeting will end up in a riot! The Old Timers won't stand by and see you knock me about!"

"You make me tired!" said Parkington. "I'm the new skipper of the Remove!"

"Rats! I'm the new skipper!" bawled Handforth.

"Go it!" grinned Travers. "Why not fight it out where you stand—on the platform?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Go it, you two!"

"Fight it out—and the winner becomes skipper," said Travers. "Why have any arguments? Life's too short."

Handforth was flushed.

"I'm ready to fight it out—here and now!" he said, glaring at K. K. "What about it, Parkington?"

"I'll fight you—and lick you!" said Kirby Keeble Parkington promptly.

There was an immediate sensation. Handforth wanted to fight with bare fists, but Travers and Reggie Pitt and several other level-headed fellows intervened.

"Let's have it orderly," said Pitt briskly. "If a prefect or a master comes in and finds you fighting with bare fists we shall all get it in the neck. You'd better have gloves, and do the thing properly. Then, if we're interrupted, we can say that it's just an exhibition of boxing. Come on—let's make it a dignified job!"

WITHIN ten minutes everything was ready.

Handforth and Parkington stood facing one another, minus their coats, waistcoats, collars, and ties. They had donned boxing-gloves, and Reggie Pitt had appointed himself referee. Jack Grey was timekeeper. The rest of the Remove stood in the body of the Lecture Hall, eager for the fight to begin.

Handforth was on his mettle—and so was Kirby Keeble Parkington. They were both aggressive fellows, and they were both determined to win.

"Time!" sang out Reggie Pitt suddenly.

The combatants advanced towards one another. Both were eager for a quick knock-out. They entered into the fight without the slightest animosity, but with a tremendous amount of determination.

Undoubtedly Parkington was the better boxer; Handforth could slog, and he could do great damage. But he hadn't K. K.'s finesse. The Remove, as a whole, was convinced that the Red-Hot leader would win.

Handforth leaped in, his forceful right sweeping K. K.'s guard aside. Crash! Handy's left drove through, and K. K. staggered back, shaken and dazed. Quick as lightning, Handforth followed up his advantage. A roar went up as Parkington retreated, bewildered by the quick series of body blows which Handforth delivered. Then—crash! Another straight left to the face!

"Go it, Handy!" shrieked Church. "You've got him beaten already!"

"Hurrah!"

The Old-Timers shouted excitedly, and the Red-Hots were filled with consternation. But they need not have worried. K. K. was not the kind of fellow to crumple up. He recovered magnificently.

Shaking his head and squaring his burly shoulders, he suddenly assumed the offensive. Driving through, he swept Handforth's defence up, and as Handy retreated he received an upper-cut which jarred him considerably. A moment later the pair were clenching, hammering at one another with short blows. Reggie Pitt was obliged to intervene.

The boxers separated, sparred for an opening for a second or two, and then K. K. went smashing in again, compelling Handforth to retreat steadily. The Old-Timers yelled to Handforth to buck up, and the Red-Hots howled with triumph.

The end came dramatically—unexpectedly. The second round was about half way through, and Handforth was being hard pressed, when he saw an opening: Perhaps K. K. was a trifle too confident.

Crash!

Handforth's right, with mighty force, got home on Parkington's chin. K. K., at the moment, had been lunging forward, and the force of that drive was therefore nearly doubled. The leader of the Red-Hots sagged at the knees, sank to the floor, and subsided into a limp heap.

The referee was counting, and the Red-Hots yelled to their leader to get up. The Old-Timers cheered madly. To the utter consternation of the Red-Hots, K. K. was counted out.

"Hurrah!"

"Handy wins!"

"Well, I'm jiggered!" said Handforth, startled. "I didn't hurt him, did I? Why, we'd hardly started the scrap!"

K. K. opened his eyes and sat up.

"I'm skipper now!" said Handforth, recovering himself.

"You're skipper, sweetheart!" murmured K. K. with a smile. "Good luck to you, Handy! The best man won!"

He was surrounded by Red-Hots and helped to his feet, and within a few minutes he was nearly himself again. Handforth, in the meantime, had hastily donned his collar and tie, waistcoat, and jacket. He advanced to the front of the platform, victorious. He was flushed and excited.

"Now then!" he roared. "I'm your new skipper. And I hope you'll attend to what I've got to say."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Good old Handy!"

"Some captain!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

It annoyed Handforth to find that the Remove still regarded him as a joke. He had won the captaincy by right of conquest, and he was determined that the fellows should listen to him.

"I'm not going to say anything against K. K.!" he shouted. "K. K.'s only mistake was that he completely misunderstood Nipper's motives. Nipper did nothing dirty in deserting the Remove."

"If the Remove's not good enough for him, we don't want him!" shouted somebody.

"You silly ass!" roared Handforth indignantly. "Can't you understand that Nipper is true blue? Good luck to him! Boots practically challenged him—and what sort of a chap should we consider him if he had refused that challenge? Nipper's gone over to those rotten slackers to buck them up!"

"Begad! That's true!" sang out Sir Montie.

"Don't forget that game this afternoon!" went on Handforth excitedly. "Why, it wasn't a game at all! It was a farce! Football in the Fourth is no better than tiddley-winks! Well, Nipper's gone over there to put some pep into those walking corpses! He'll succeed, too! And I'm giving you chaps a word of warning."

"Go ahead!"

"Let's have it, Handy!"

"It's up to the Remove to put in some overtime at footer practice, and everything else!" said Handforth impressively. "Unless we're jolly careful, the Fourth will overtake us."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Poor old Handy!"

"Where does he get those dotty ideas from?"

"Dotty ideas, are they?" bellowed Handforth. "Well, I've more faith in Nipper than you have! And, with Nipper as captain of the Fourth, he'll bring about such a transformation that you'll all be blinking before many days have passed!"

"Rats!" said Fullwood. "Nipper's not a magician. He can't work miracles!"

"No; but he's a born leader," retorted Handforth. "I'm not denying it—and with



K. K. Parkington was counted out and Handforth stood back triumphantly. By right of conquest he was the new skipper of the Remove.

Nipper in the Remove, I wouldn't dream of putting up for the captaincy. But Nipper's captain of the Fourth now, and it's up to us to look alive!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Remove yelled with laughter at Handforth's idiotic suggestion, and the meeting soon broke up. Scarcely one of the juniors took Handforth seriously—or his warning, either.

He was the captain of the Remove, perhaps, but everybody regarded him as a joke. Yet, for once, Edward Oswald Handforth was distinctly on the right track. It certainly did behove the Remove to look to its laurels!

CHAPTER 7.

The Remove Retaliate!

THE Fourth-Formers had an eye-opener the next day—and so had the Removites.

Nipper was doing his job thoroughly. He was on the best of terms with everybody in the Fourth; he made himself pleasant, proving quite clearly that he had joined the

Fourth in a friendly spirit. But at the same time he was firm.

As soon as lessons were over, he had the whole Form out. Those fellows who were not required on the footer-field had to go for a cross-country run. The Fourth, instead of being a slackers' paradise, became a hive of industry. Nipper kept the fellows at it with scarcely a moment's respite. There was no interval for tea. Gym practice followed—hard, gruelling work.

Many of the Fourth-Formers resented all this, and did everything in their power to get out of it. Merrell, Marriott and a few others tried all manner of excuses.

Nipper, singlehanded, could not have won through. But already he had the support of Armstrong & Co., Bob Christine, Oldfield, and others. Even Boots, after his first feeling of resentment, became wholeheartedly enthusiastic. With so many able lieutenants, Nipper's work became easy. The slackers were rounded up, they were compelled to train—to practise footer, to get themselves fit in every possible way.

And not only in sports did Nipper ring the changes.

Prep., that evening, was done thoroughly in the Fourth. As a rule, the Fourth-Formers had skipped their prep., preferring to slack about generally. But Nipper was instilling a new spirit into these juniors, who had for so long been drifting from bad to worse. John Busterfield Boots, brought to his senses with a jerk, was made to realise that he had been the main cause of the "rot." His own easy-going methods had set an example for the others.

Nipper, as the new skipper, was setting quite a different example. He worked harder than anybody else; he set the pace. And he was thoroughly enjoying himself, too.

There was no spirit of cocksureness in Nipper's attitude. He was genuinely keen upon putting the Fourth on the map. It wasn't merely a desire to prove that Boots was wrong. Nipper knew, in his heart, that the Fourth contained plenty of good material. And it was a thoroughly palatable task to bring that material forward, and to train it in the way it should go.

Even Mr. Pycraft, after grumbling up hill and down dale about the commotion that Nipper was causing, began to see that it was all for the good of the Form. Even at lessons the Fourth was different. It had become more alert; it attended to work with a briskness which astonished the mean-spirited Form-master.

After two or three days the change was startling. For the boys themselves had become keen. They were no longer doing it

because they were compelled to. The slackest of the slackers had caught the fever, and fellows were vieing with one another to get ahead the quickest.

THE Removites, being onlookers, were rather dismayed at the change. Handforth, of course, was inclined to crow. He had told that Form meeting, two or three days ago, what to expect. He had anticipated that Nipper's personality would work a transformation in the Fourth. And now the results were being seen.

Hitherto, the Fourth had scarcely entered the heads of the Removites. Rivalry between the two Forms had died down, and japes were more or less non-existent. Such japes as had been planned were between the Red-Hots and the Old-Timers—Removites all. But now the Fourth-Formers were bucking up. Within the space of two days there had been several minor japes, and again and again the Removites were caught napping.

"Well, it's no good grumbling," said Handforth, in the Common-room, one evening. "I told you what to expect, didn't I? Nipper's a live wire—carrying about five hundred volts! When he starts anything, he finishes it!"

"But he wasn't like this in the Remove!" protested somebody.

"He didn't need to be," retorted Handforth. "The Remove wasn't in need of being bucked up. But Nipper's got a new interest in life now—and he's as keen against the



Jokes from readers wanted for this feature! If you know a good rib-tickler send it along now. A handsome watch will be awarded each week to the sender of the best joke; pocket wallets penknives, and bumper books are also offered as prizes. Address your jokes to "Smilers," Nelson Lee Library, 5, Carmelite Street, London, E.C.4.

TROUBLE BREWING!

Father: "My watch won't go. I expect it wants cleaning."

Tommy: "Oh no, daddy it doesn't want cleaning, 'cos I had it in the bath with me yesterday."

(A. Hamling, 65, Meanley Road, Manor Park, E.12, has been awarded a handsome watch.)

A "HIGH" SOAP.

Chemist: "What kind of soap do you want, lad?"

Johnny: "I want some that's got lots of perfume in it so's ma'll know I washed my face and won't make me do it all over again."

(T. Le Gallez, 2, Park Lane, St. Peter Port, Guernsey, C.I., has been awarded a book.)

WASTED ENERGY.

Rastus: "Ah ain't gwine to run after no mo' trains."

Sambo: "Why ain't yo'?"

Rastus: "'Cause I ran after one de odder day and when Ah caught it, it was two stations past whar Ah wanted to get off."

(T. Merchant, 78, Chapel Street, Swindon has been awarded a pen-knife.)

AN IMPORTANT POINT.

Young Mac: "Is Jock in?"

Jock's mother: "Ay, but he's busy; he's sharpening the gramophone needle! We're having a party to-night."

(T. Kennedy, 6, Mount Adon Park, Dulwich, S.E. 22, has been awarded a pocket wallet.)

TWO IN A TREE.

Angry farmer (to small boy in apple tree): "If you don't come down at once I'll tell your father."

Small boy: "Garn! My father's up here, too!"

(W. Jamieson, 29, Troon Street, Glasgow, has been awarded a pocket wallet.)

DOUBTLESS.

Professor: "What is space?"

Student: "Space is—er—nothing. I can't exactly explain it, but I have it in my head all right."

(R. Woodcock, 58, Fletton Avenue, Peterborough, has been awarded a penknife.)

Remove as he was keen in favour of the Remove before. There's nothing unfriendly about it—he's just a sportsman. Good luck to him!"

"Well, you're the Remove captain," said Travers mildly. "Aren't you going to do something about it?"

"I can't do anything unless you chaps support me," retorted Handforth promptly. "What do you do? Laugh at me! If I make a suggestion for a jape, you cackle like a lot of silly hyenas and walk away. No Form captain can do anything unless he has the support of his Form. That's what Nipper's got now. They're rallying round him to a man."

"Well, we ought to do something—and quick!" said Parkington thoughtfully.

"If we don't, the Fourth will get the lead on us," declared Handforth. "I'm not joking—I'm not talking out of the back of my neck. Some of you chaps thought that it would take weeks—months—for Nipper to make a change. But it's all happening within a few days!"

"Jiggered if I can understand it!" said Deeks, scratching his head.

"It's easy enough to understand—if you've got the brains to think with!" said Handforth tartly. "Those Fourth-Formers have always been fit enough—and game enough, too. They only needed somebody to set them an example."

Even the masters were noticing the big change—and the masters were secretly

pleased. The East House was the biggest surprise of all. The Slackers' House. It was becoming just the opposite—and the seniors, mortified by the example of the juniors, were bucking themselves up, too. Nipper's campaign was having a far-reaching effect.

It was a half-holiday the next day, and directly after dinner the Fourth-Formers set out on a cross-country run. Not all of them were engaged on this, for there was a Fourth-Form practice match on Little Side, under the keen supervision of Wally Freeman, the St. Frank's coach. The boys themselves were tremendously keen on it, and Mr. Freeman was a very happy man these days.

Nipper, with about a dozen of his new Form-fellows, went on the cross-country run. They were the fellows who had been the slackest—fellows who badly needed exercise. Well, they were getting it now. And they were finding, to their surprise, that they liked it. These runs had wearied them at first, but now they were beginning to feel the benefit. They set out with eager faces, and sparkling eyes.

The Remove continued to look on with growing alarm.

AFTER several miles of gruelling trotting, with Nipper setting the pace, the crowd of Fourth-Formers turned homewards. They had been for a circular trip, cutting through Bellton, across the fields towards Caistowe, and were now on their way

EXTRAORDINARY.

"Little boy, what became of that dear little kitten you had?"

"Why, lady, haven't you heard?"

"No. Was the poor thing drowned?"

"No."

"Lost?"

"No."

"Poisoned?"

"No."

"Well, good gracious, whatever did become of it?"

"It has growed up into a cat."

(*L. Wilson, 68, Cooks Road, Walworth, London, S.E. 17, has been awarded a pocket wallet.*)

GEOGRAPHY.

Teacher: "Now, boys, close your geography books. Mickey, can you tell me where Australia is?"

Mickey: "Yes, teacher; on page thirteen."

(*R. Francis, 48, Copnor Road, Copnor, Portsmouth, has been awarded a penknife.*)

QUITE DIFFERENT.

Mother (to Jimmy who is covered with tar): "Jimmy, how many times have I told you not to jump over that tar barrel?"

Jimmy: "I didn't jump over it—I jumped in it."

(*C. Preston, 11, Rob*

Raine, Kirkby Lansdale, Carnforth, has been awarded a pocket wallet.)

CALLING A BLUFF.

"You're scared to fight."

"I ain't; but me mother'll lick me."

"An' how'll she know?"

"She'll see the doctor going to your house."

(*J. Corbishley, 37, St. Igratius Square, Preston, has been awarded a book.*)

WINNERS WANTED.

Diner: "Waiter, this lobster is without a claw."

Waiter (quickly): "You see, sir, them lobsters are so fresh that they fight in the kitchen."

Diner: "Well, take this one away and bring me one of the winners."

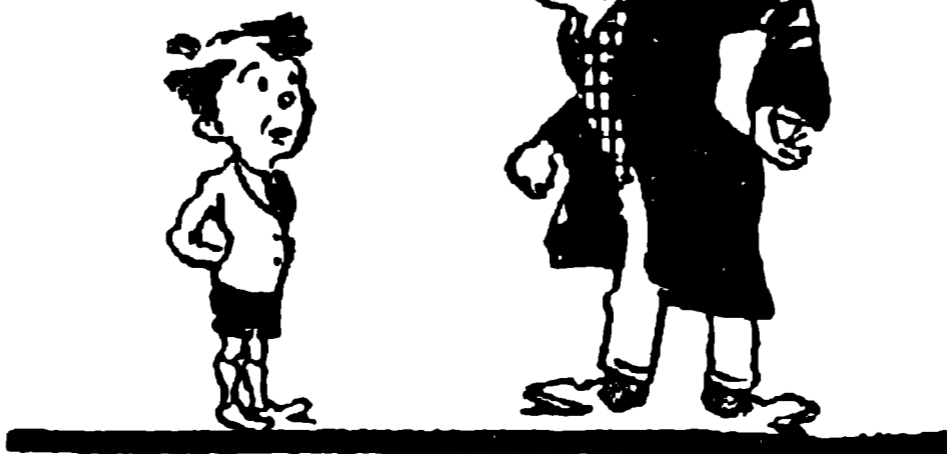
(*A. Oakenfull, 10, Worp'le Road, Wimbledon, S.W. 19, has been awarded a book.*)

SPOTTED!

Teacher: Willie, you have in front of you the north, on your right the east, on your left the west. What have you behind you?"

Willie: "A patch in my trousers—I told mother you'd see it!"

(*H. Hustwit, 133, Stratford Street, Dewsbury Road, Leeds, has been awarded a pocket wallet.*)



back by Holt's Farm. They had got their second wind, and were going well.

"If any of you chaps are getting fed up with this game, say so!" sang out Nipper, as he trotted at the head of the bunch. "We only want enthusiasts, you know."

"Cheese it, Nipper!" said Dallas, who was puffing a bit. "We're as keen as mustard now."

"Rather!" agreed Steele. "And, by Jove, we're going to show those Remove chaps something! I'm keen on getting back to see how the footer match went."

"A few days more hard practice, and the Fourth will be able to put out a first-class team," said Nipper contentedly. "There were always plenty of good footballers in the Fourth—but they never took the trouble to practise and keep fit."

He led the way into a meadow, intending to cross the St. Frank's Golf Links. But just then his attention was attracted by a yokel youth, some distance away, who was shouting and waving his arms.

"Hallo! What's the matter?" asked Nipper, calling a halt.

"Hey, young gents, ye can't go along that there way!" said the youth, running up. "That there lower medder be that marshy that ye'll all sink in. It's a fair bog down there!"

The youth was looking quite concerned. He was a rough customer in corduroys, and with a battered old hat on the back of his head. His ruddy face was almost comical in its look of consternation.

"Thanks for the tip," said Nipper, smiling. "But we shouldn't have come to any harm, should we?"

"An' I ain't so sure o' that, young gent," said the yokel. "One of our men—I works at 'Olt's Farm—was nigh caught there yesterd'y. You're in the bog afore ye know it. Best go round by the Black Spinney, yonder. I reckon ye'll be makin' for the golf links, won't ye?"

"That's right," said Nipper, nodding. "Well, if ye go through the Black Spinney ye'll be on safe ground," said the yokel, pointing. "It don't take ye much further round—an' it's safe."

"Thanks awfully," said Dallas. "That's the Black Spinney over there, I suppose?"

"Can't mistake it, young gents—there's a footpath leadin' right through," said the rustic youth. "Glad to 'ave bin in time to warn ye."

He ambled off, and the Fourth-Formers continued their trot. They found the footpath through the spinney without any trouble. It was a wide path, and they were not even compelled to go in single file. It was dim there, for the February day was drawing in. The gaunt, leafless trees stretched up on either hand, and underfoot there was a dense carpet of dead leaves.

Nipper, who was still in the lead, suddenly felt an extraordinary sensation—as though the ground was sagging and quaking beneath his feet. He let out a yell of warning, but it was too late. The carpet of leaves fell to

pieces beneath his feet, and he plunged through and went down.

With yells of consternation, the other Fourth-Formers followed, running straight into the trap before they could realise what they were doing.

CHAPTER 8.

A Mud Bath for Two!

"HA, HA, HA!"

It was a loud yell of triumphant laughter.

The party of Fourth-Formers, alarmed at first, found that there was no real cause for alarm at all. They were plunging helplessly, waist-high, in black, clinging mud. And they were surrounded by masses of dead leaves, and an endless confusion of twigs and tree branches.

"Gug-gug-gug!" spluttered Clapson, as he wiped a pound of mud from his face. "What's happened? Great Scott! Where are we?"

Nipper was looking round, floundering horribly in the mud. Too late, he realised that he and his companions had been led into a trap—a gigantic booby trap! That carpet of dead leaves, looking so secure in the subdued light of the spinney, had concealed this mud pit! And now, all round, Removites were gathering in gleeful triumph. Handforth & Co. were there—Kirby Keeble Parkington, Deeks, Goffin, Travers, and lots of others. They stood looking on, yelling with laughter.

"Down with the Fourth!" roared Handforth, with a shout of amusement.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Poor old Fourth!"

"I suppose you call this funny?" demanded Nipper coldly.

"Funny isn't the word—it's a scream!" said Parkington. "We thought it about time to show you Fourth-Formers that the Remove is still good at japes! How do you like your mud-bath? I hope you'll find it beneficial to your general health!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Mud-baths are good for the complexion," went on K. K. blandly. "I've read about them in books."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You've been training so hard that we thought we'd help you," said Handforth. "There's nothing like a good mud-bath to revive the flagging circulation!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And it was so easy, too," went on Handforth. "My idea, Nipper. This is what you get for taking charge of the Fourth! There's a hollow just there, filled with mud—as you probably know by this time—and it was quite easy for us to cover it up with twigs and leaves. The way you ran into it was too beautiful for words!"

Nipper and the other Fourth-Formers were nearly speechless, but Nipper, at least, was grinning.

"All right, you bounders!" he said good-naturedly. "You wait! We'll get our own back for this! The Fourth can do as well as the Remove any day!"

"Rats! The Remove is top Form at St. Frank's!"

"Down with the Fourth!"

The Removites were about to depart, but just then the rough-looking yokel came up. He was removing a wig and the battered hat, and at the same time rubbing his face vigorously.

"Allow me to introduce Baines, our tame actor," said K. K. proudly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

It was a fresh shock for the Fourth-Formers. That yokel—who had lured them into this trap—was none other than Conway Baines, of the Red-Hots!

WHEN the Fourth-Formers trailed into the Triangle, looking like so many black, muddy scarecrows, the Remove was out in force to welcome them. Double lines of Removites laughed uproariously as they dodged into the East House. The Remove regarded it as a signal triumph for themselves.

But they were not allowed to crow for long.

Nipper was out for revenge, and he concluded that the only way to retaliate was to retaliate at once. He and his fellow-unfortunates, having converted several bathfuls of perfectly clean water into liquid mud, began to look themselves again. When they came downstairs, normally dressed, other Fourth-Formers were there to greet them, with all sorts of inquiries as to the nature of the jape.

It was tea-time, and the juniors, as hungry as hunters after their afternoon's activities, were eager for the meal. But Nipper would not hear of it.

"There's more work to do," he said briskly. "We've got to show the Remove that we're alive. We'll work a little return jape."

"Won't it do after tea?" asked Armstrong.

"No. They might be getting up another jape of their own directly after tea," replied Nipper. "The sooner we can get to work, the better. We'll catch them on the hop—while they're still laughing and crowing. The two chaps we want to grab are Handforth and K. K. They were the ringleaders in that spinney affair, so they're the ones to punish."

"What do you propose doing?" asked Boots, who had come along from the Modern House. "Dash it, Nipper, we can't get something up within five minutes! A really decent jape needs thinking out."

"This one doesn't need thinking out at all," replied Nipper. "It's ready-made."

There was a good deal of feverish activity during the next fifteen minutes—while the Remove was settling down to an enjoyable tea. Dim, furtive figures might have been seen passing to and fro in the gloomy Triangle. It was nearly dark by now, and

heavy clouds overhead had reduced the twilight to a minimum.

Nipper, at the head of a determined army of raiders, led the way into the Ancient House. There were two armies, in fact—one under Nipper, and one under Buster Boots.

Nipper led his men boldly and openly into the Remove passage, and, with a sudden burst, the door of Study K was flung open. K. K. & Co. were at tea, gleefully discussing the success of their jape. When they looked up and saw the visitors, they sprang to their feet in consternation.

"Look out!" yelled Deeks. "Fourth-Formers!"

"You know what to do," said Nipper crisply. "Grab him!"

Armstrong and Griffith and several others charged straight in with Nipper. They seized Kirby Keeble Parkington with firm hands. Deeks and Goffin were ignored. Parkington was the victim, and he was dragged out like lightning.

Yelling at the top of his voice he was whirled down the passage. At the same moment a motley crowd round the doorway of Study D surged out with Handforth in their midst.

The Removites, crowding out of their studies, were staggered. Boldly and openly the Fourth-Formers had invaded the Ancient House and were forcibly carrying off two of their number—the two leaders.

Attempts were made to stay their progress, but the Fourth-Formers were too quick. They succeeded in getting their victims well out into the Triangle before the Remove could even think of organising.

"Sharp's the word!" sang out Nipper. "In with them!"

The victims were whirled towards the fountain pool. When this object was noted, the Removites were not very impressed. Ducking fellows in the fountain pool was nothing new. It was a sorry thing for the Fourth if it couldn't think of anything more novel than this!

"Hi," bawled Handforth, "you'd better not chuck me into that water, you fatheads!"

"But you need a bath, old man," said Nipper gently. "I'm quite sure you need a bath."

"And so does K. K.," said Boots happily.

Handforth, in the grip of half a dozen fellows, was swung to and fro. Then suddenly he was released. He expected to drop with a splash into the water of the pool. Instead, he landed with a horrible, gurgling splash. He did not sink immediately, but slowly and ominously descended into a sticky mass of black mud. Kirby Keeble Parkington, following him, met with the same fate. Within a minute the pair were up to their necks in the thick mud.

"Mud-baths are good for you," said Nipper calmly. "They're splendid for reviving the circulation, Handy. I read about it in a book."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What's sauce for the goose, is sauce for the gander," grinned Buster Boots. "It took

us a long time to fetch mud from the ditch and fill this pool, but it was worth it!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And the Fourth-Formers, feeling that their honour was fully restored, trailed off to their own House, with hearty appetites for tea.

But the incident was not over yet.

A cry of "Cave!" suddenly went up, and some of the Fourth-Formers, looking back, were rather startled to see the figure of Mr. Alington Wilkes crossing the Triangle. Mr. Wilkes was the Housemaster of the Ancient House, and he had spotted something out of the common. Ready as he was to wink his eye at some things, he could not possibly blind himself to the two luckless figures which squirmed and wriggled in that pool of sticky mud.

"Well, well!" said Mr. Wilkes, adjusting his glasses and peering forward. "What is this? Who are you?"

Handforth and K. K., still trapped in the mud, said nothing. Their faces, so far, had escaped immersion, and although they were badly splashed, their features were still recognisable.

"I see!" said Mr. Wilkes smoothly. "Parkington and Handforth—both of my House. May I—er—inquire, old chaps, exactly what this means?"

The Fourth-Formers, crowding in the Modern House and the East House doorways, held their breath. They were beginning to think that Mr. Wilkes had seen them earlier, but the Housemaster's attitude did not lend colour to this fear.

"We're—we're just having a mud-bath, sir," said Handforth bravely.

"That's it, sir," gurgled K. K. "We—we read about it in a book!"

"I have heard that mud-baths are beneficial," said Mr. Wilkes gravely. "but I always understood that such baths were only fully efficacious when heated to a certain temperature. Again, it is not advisable to indulge in such baths whilst fully clothed."

"That's—that's what we thought, too, sir," said Handforth, trying to get to his feet. "But we couldn't very well come out in the Triangle without any clothes on, could we? So we—we thought we'd try it like this!"

"Just—just an experiment, sir," faltered K. K.



With yells of consternation Nipper and the other Fourth-Formers plunged into the muddy trap, while the Removites looked on in gleeful triumph. "Poor old Fourth!" yelled Handforth.

"And are you enjoying it?" asked Mr. Wilkes, with the utmost gravity.

"Oh, rather, sir!" replied Parkington. "It's ripping! Nothing like a good old mud-bath for the complexion."

"You wouldn't believe how topping it is, sir," said Handforth stoutly.

Nipper and the other Fourth-Formers warmed towards these two juniors—their rivals—who were acting so sportingly. Not a word had they breathed that this was a jape. It was inconceivable that Mr. Alington Wilkes could be fooled—that he could believe that the two juniors were really and truly indulging in this extraordinary bath of their



The two victims were standing up by now, with mud dripping off them in great blobs.

"We can't have the fountain pool in this condition," said Mr. Wilkes, shaking his head. "Before you boys filled it with mud, you should have asked permission."

"But we—we didn't—I mean—" began Handforth.

"You didn't realise that having filled the pool, you would have to empty it?" said Mr. Wilkes gently. "But you will have to empty it, Handforth. This pool is supposed to contain clean water, and all this mud must be removed."

He looked round, and called a number of the other Removites to the spot before they could escape.

"You had all better help," he said cheerfully. "Before you do anything else—before you resume your teas—I shall require you to clean all the mud out of this pool. If you do that satisfactorily, I will say no more about the matter."

And Mr. Wilkes, with a twinkle in his eyes—hidden by the gloom—went indoors. Thus the jape was a double success, for the Fourth-Formers gathered round in cheery, grinning groups, whilst the indignant Removites set to work to clear away all the mud.

Without question, the Fourth had proved itself the equal to the Remove when it came to japes!

CHAPTER 9.

The Fourth to the Fore!

DURING the next three or four days the Fourth continued the good work.

Footer practice, cross-country runs, gym training—all came alike to the enthusiastic juniors. Nipper's influence was working the transformation completely. His good-natured leadership, his ever-ready smile, his helping cheeriness—all contributed to the conquering of the Fourth. No longer was his presence resented. Even the rotters were changing and rallying round their new skipper.

Such fellows as Merrell and Marriott and Snipe dropped smoking completely, since they discovered that their wind was bad. They no longer played cards in a hole-and-corner fashion—they dropped cards altogether. There was too much else to do. And at night, after their heavy labours of the day, they slept like tops—to awaken in the morning as fresh as daisies.

own free wills—but there was nothing in his manner to suggest that he suspected.

"Well, young 'uns, I'm not altogether sure that I approve of this," he said, shaking his head. "Mud-baths are quite all right in their place, but the Triangle is no place for such indulgences. You'd better get out at once."

"Thank—thank you, sir!"

"I shall not punish you for this—er—indiscretion, but I must warn you not to do it again," said Mr. Wilkes solemnly. "This is a perfectly wilful destruction of good clothing. And then there is the matter of this mud."

There was a new cry at St. Frank's now—"Up, the Fourth!" It was heard everywhere, and everybody else in the school could not help noticing the extraordinary change which had come over that hitherto slack Form.

Mr. Horace Pycraft was astounded at the change in his boys. He had always had a certain amount of trouble with them in class; they had been slack, they had skimmed their work, and, to an extent, Mr. Pycraft had allowed it. He was something of a slacker himself.

But he, too, caught the fever. When he found that the boys were becoming as keen on their lessons as they were on their sport, he helped them. He urged them to work their hardest—to prove to the rest of the school that they were the leaders of industry.

"There are many prizes to be won," said Mr. Pycraft, during one heart-to-heart talk with his boys. "In other terms, most of these prizes have gone to the Remove. Why should we not have our share?"

"Yes, rather, sir!" chorused the Fourth-Formers.

"This term we shall surprise everybody," said Mr. Pycraft, rubbing his hands together. "I am more than delighted to see the way in which you boys have buckled to during this last week. And I cannot help thinking, Hamilton, that you are mainly responsible. Splendid, my boy! I am very pleased with you!"

"It's not my doing, sir," said Nipper, shaking his head. "The chaps had it in them—or it could never have come out."

"That is quite true, of course," agreed Mr. Pycraft. "But your example has done everybody good—even myself. Yes, Hamilton, I am admitting it. I am proud of you!"

The Fourth could hardly believe its ears. Mr. Pycraft, the sour-tempered old curmudgeon, was actually blossoming out like a spring flower! His whole character was becoming more human. It was so unusual to see Mr. Pycraft going about with a smiling face, and with an agreeable word for everybody, that Removites and Fifth-Formers and prefects paused to stare.

"There's something uncanny about that chap, Nipper," said Morrow, of the Sixth, one day. "How does he do it?"

"Personality, old man," replied Fenton, the school captain. "Nipper's one of the best. There's not an ounce of priggishness in his whole composition—he's proved that by the way he's handling this present situation. Many another fellow, in his place, would have been insufferable. But he has gained the wholehearted support of the Fourth by his honest, frank methods. He's in earnest—his only thought is for the betterment of the Fourth—and that's why he's a success."

"It was just the same in the Remove," nodded Morrow. "He always kept the Remove together, and there were scarcely any squabbles. I believe the Remove is feeling his loss more than it will admit."

And this was true. The Remove was not going to pieces, but it was certainly getting a bit ragged. Handforth, as captain, was a failure. Everybody liked him, and everybody was amused by him—but he had no control. And a Form captain, to be a success, must be taken seriously.

The Remove tried to kid itself that this change in the Fourth was only bluff. It didn't really amount to anything. So the Removites went about, affecting to be highly amused. There were not so many japes now—since the Removites had discovered that japing the Fourth was a dangerous business.

"This quick-fire business might be all very well in theory, but it doesn't amount to anything, really," said Parkington indulgently. "Wait until the next Form match! That'll be the test."

"Well, we shan't have to wait long," said Deeks. "The match is coming off to-morrow."

"Good thing, too!" said Handforth gruffly. "If those silly Fourth-Formers think that they can score any goals against me, they'll get a shock! I'm not going to let them put the leather past me once!"

"That's the spirit, Handy!" said K.K. "It'll be the big test to-morrow—and we shall come through with flying colours."

Most of the other Removites were of the same opinion. Next week there would be a big match against Bannington Grammar School. It was a very important fixture, for the Grammarians had not yet been beaten this season. Nipper was anxious, as Junior skipper, to select the best available side. Ordinarily, he would have chosen most of his team from the Remove—but he was hoping that he would now be able to include a representative number of Fourth-Formers.

Everything would depend upon the Form match to-morrow.

He had got his men into splendid condition by now. He had weeded out the weaker athletes; he had chosen a good team, including Buster Boots, Christine, Talmadge, Armstrong, and O'Grady. Terence O'Grady, the Irish junior, had come on well as a goalkeeper, and Nipper was expecting him to prove a second Handforth.

When Nipper posted up the team that evening, there was a good deal of surprise. For Nipper himself was not included in it.

"What's the idea?" asked Boots, staring. "Afraid to play against your former Form?"

"It's not that," replied Nipper quietly. "I'm Junior skipper—in addition to being captain of the Fourth—and it's my job to watch. I want to spot the best players out of the twenty-two—so that I can select my team for the big game next week. You fellows have got to go in and win. Think what a victory it will be for the Fourth!"

"We'll win!" said Boots fiercely. "We've got to win."

CHAPTER 10.**The Battle of the Giants!**

HOW long is it going to last, old man?" asked Tommy Watson earnestly.

Nipper looked at him and smiled.

"My being in the Fourth, you mean?" he asked.

"You know what I mean," replied Watson. "Montie and I have been as miserable as the dickens in Study C since you left."

"Frightfully miserable, dear old boy," said Sir Montie Tregellis-West. "Begad! Things have been awful during this last week or so. You're not going to stay in the Fourth for good, are you?"

"It all depends," said Nipper slowly.

"Depends upon what?"

"Upon this match."

"How?" asked Tommy.

"If the Fourth wins, I shall consider that my job is done—and I shall ask for my transfer back into the Remove," said Nipper coolly.

"Begad! That's good hearing!"

"But if the Fourth fails, I shall have to carry on," said Nipper. "Don't forget that I'm a Fourth-Former now—and I'm as keen as mustard on the Fourth winning."

Tommy Watson and Tregellis-West were as much interested in that game as though they had heavy money on the result. It was of more interest to them than to anybody else. For Nipper had been their study-mate, and they had missed him badly. It was about the only time within memory that Watson and Tregellis-West were hoping against hope that the Remove would go under!

When the teams came out, there was an immense crowd round the ropes. The Fourth and the Remove were present to a man. Everybody was enormously interested. The Third had turned up in full force, and a number of Fifth-Formers were dignifying the proceedings with their presence.

Browne, of the Fifth, had agreed to act as referee, and he nodded approvingly as the teams came out onto the field.

"A battle royal, brothers," he said genially. "Not being a betting man, I have refrained

from having a flutter—but I defy the best of tipsters to give the winners."

Seldom had Browne seen two football teams so eager. If anything, the Fourth-Formers were more keen than the Removites; their eyes were sparkling, their faces were flushed, their very actions were spry, as though they were walking on india-rubber. The Removites were more confident—for their long series of successes had given them a feeling of supremacy. Kirby Keeble Parkington was the captain, and he was playing centre-forward, Nipper's usual position.

Boots was leading the Fourth-Formers, with Christine, Yorke, Oldfield, and Nation making up the rest of his forward line. Armstrong and Griffith were the backs, and O'Grady was in goal. The half-back line consisted of Bray, Vandyke, and Turner. Nipper had been at considerable pains to select this team, and quite a few of the Fourth-Formers were feeling unhappy about it; they had worked hard, and they considered that they had earned their places. But Nipper had been firm. A captain's job is never an easy one—and he had been absolutely impartial in his choice. He had selected, in his opinion, the best material.

"Hallo! They're off!" said Watson eagerly.

The whistle had gone, and the game had started. Right from the first the Removites betrayed their intention of scoring early—to show these silly Fourth-Formers what they were up against!

K. K., cool and confident, sent out a glorious long pass to Pitt; and Reggie, with all his old adroitness, sprinted up the touch-line, then centred beautifully to Jimmy Potts.

"Shoot!" went up a wild yell.

Jimmy shot, and the ball whizzed goalwards like a projectile. But O'Grady was there—and O'Grady was sure-fisted. He saved as skilfully as Handforth himself, and punched the ball well back into play. Like a flash Armstrong was upon it, and with a hefty kick he sent the leather far down the field. Christine trapped it neatly, and after cleverly beating McClure, the Remove back, he sent in a magnificent shot which Hand-

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forth only just managed to save at the expense of a corner.

"Phow!"

"By Jove, that was a near shave!"

"Well done, Christine!"

The Remove XI was startled. They were discovering already that there was a tremendous difference in the Fourth-Formers' play. It was virile—it was packed with pep.

The corner kick was taken by Billy Nation, and he sent over a curving shot which dropped accurately in front of the goal. Boots' red head bobbed up, and the leather shot into the corner of the goal whilst Handforth was still a foot away, his valiant effort futile.

"Goal!"

"Hurrah!"

"First blood to the Fourth!"

"Good old Boots!"

Handforth, picking himself up, stared at the leather dazedly.

"They've—they've scored!" he ejaculated in horror.

Pandemonium reigned round the ropes. Fourth-Formers were flinging their caps into the air and cheering frantically. The Removites were standing still, dumb with consternation.

The game restarted, and now the Removites pressed hard—doing everything in their power to equalise. But it was only just before half-time, after a terrific ding-dong struggle, during which each team displayed equal prowess, that Parkington scored.

"Goal!"

"Well done, the Remove!"

"Hurrah!"

The fellows were cheering as though the Removites had achieved a triumph. Yet they had merely equalised! Thus had the character of the game altered. The Remove fellows were realising to the full now that the Fourth was a team to respect.

"Well done, the Fourth!"

The cry went up when the whistle blew for half-time. Even the Removites were eloquent in their praise. Buster Boots and his men had been performing wonders—and they were getting full recognition.

WITH the score one-all the teams lined up for the second half, and when the whistle blew they went off at high speed.

The second half resolved itself into a terrific battle. There wasn't anything to choose between the two elevens. The Removites, now that they were thoroughly on their mettle, were playing splendidly. But the Fourth-Formers, confident in their new prowess, were playing splendidly, too.

Thus it was a battle of the giants.

After twelve minutes the Remove went wild with delight when Vivian Travers scored a glorious goal. Running in from the wing, he sent in a first-time shot which travelled right across the goal-mouth—and which deceived O'Grady completely. The Irish junior thought that the leather was going right past

—but it just touched the corner of the post, curled in, and then it was too late.

"Goal!"

"Keep it up, Remove!"

Grimly the Fourth battled after that. Eight minutes later came the equaliser—a perfectly-timed shot from Buster Boots. He had made an individual run through, and after defeating Church and McClure, he took a hard drive. Handforth succeeded in getting to it; he punched out—but only succeeded in placing it at Boots' foot. Like a flash Boots sent it back, this time well clear of Edward Oswald.

With five minutes to go the score still remained two-all. Tommy Watson and Sir Montie Tregellis-West, feverish with anxiety, watched. Was it going to be a drawn game, after all? If so, it would just about represent the strength of the two teams. But it would mean that Nipper would still remain in the Fourth.

"Look!" gasped Watson suddenly. "Look at Bob Christine!"

Sir Montie looked. Bob Christine was dangerous. There was only one minute to go now, and Bob was making a terrific effort for his side. He was running through, and he seemed to bear a charmed life. Nobody could stop him. Then, at the last minute, he adroitly sent a short pass to Yorke. Handforth, expecting a shot from Christine, was unprepared. Yorke slammed in a first-timer which was as brilliant as any piece of work on a First Division football ground.

"Goal!"

"Hurrah!"

"Well done, the Fourth!"

And then the whistle blew—and the Fourth Form left the field the winners. If it had been pandemonium before, it was bedlam now.

Tommy Watson and Tregellis-West, rushing up, grabbed hold of Nipper as he was surrounded by a mob of other footballers.

"Well?" gasped Watson. "What about it?"

"Yes, I think my job's done," said Nipper cheerfully. "To-day I'm going to the Head, and I'm going to ask for my transfer back to the Remove."

"I say, is that honour bright?" asked Handforth happily. "You mean it, Nipper?"

"Yes, rather!" said Nipper. "I fancy my task in the Fourth is done. These chaps are as hot as they can be."

"Thanks to you!" said Buster Boots joyously.

And so Nipper went back into the Remove—much to the Remove's joy; and from that day onwards the Fourth was really and truly "on the map."

THE END.

(Next week's rollicking St. Frank's yarn is entitled, "Capper's Captured Caps!" in which popular Edward Oswald Handforth is prominently featured. Don't miss reading this corking story, chums.)

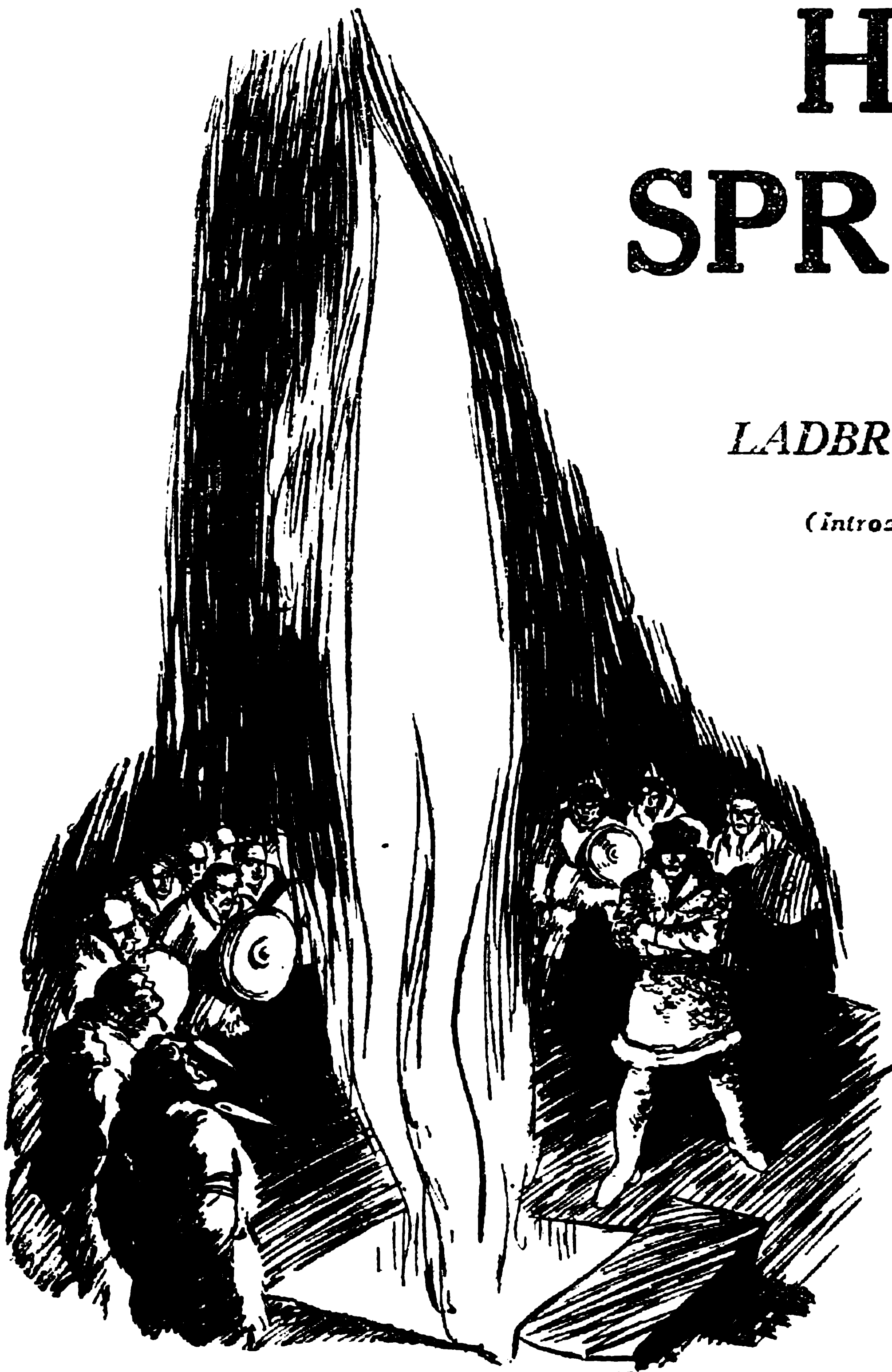
Treasure-Seeking Adventure in the Arctic—Amazing Developments this Week!

The VALLEY of HOT SPRINGS!

By

LADBROKE BLACK

(Introduction on page 23.)



Trapped!

ERIC was not very certain what the food consisted of, but he thought he recognised here and various kinds of fish. The water which they drank from golden cups had an odd, sulphurous taste. Once or twice, in reply to a signal from the Angekok, who took no part in the meal, the female servants entered noiselessly and disappeared again. But

haustive measurements of the heads of the inhabitants."

But Eric was not listening. He had seen the curtain of skins that covered the inner door move slightly. He caught a glint of gold, and then in that little gap the face of the girl who had made such an impression upon him appeared for a moment.

Doomed To Be Burnt Alive!

Her cheeks were very pale, and her blue eyes were full of fear. The

Eric looked in vain for the girl with the golden hair who had thrown him that warning glance.

The professor, who had been eating ravenously, presently drew back from the table with a sigh of satisfaction.

"I confess that I was hungry. A most excellent meal." He looked round beamingly on his companions. "Well, here we are," he went on. "Now, there only remains for us to make full use of our unique opportunities. Our host is friendly disposed, and will, I am sure, allow us ample opportunities to carry out our necessary investigations. They will be partly topographical, partly geological, and partly anthropological.

I intend to make ex-

boy saw her lips move for a moment as if silently repeating some words which she wished him to understand. Then the curtain had dropped again, and the face had gone.

Eric's uncle was still talking, warmed to enthusiasm by the meal he had just eaten. The youngster felt strangely uneasy. Again that beautiful girl, whom the professor would have brutally classified as a throw-back to those Norse ancestors who had been carried away by the People of the Valley in their fifteenth century raid upon Dronvik, had meant to convey some message to him. He had no idea what the message was, except that it was a warning. There had been fear in her eyes and in her bloodless cheeks.

He turned slowly on his stool and glanced at the Angekok, who all this time had been seated apart. There was something baneful in those luminous blue eyes which looked into his with an almost hypnotic intensity. There was something tigerish about the mouth, the lips of which were drawn back from the white teeth. Instinctively he was about to rise when the professor, carrying his stool, coolly planked himself down by the side of the Angekok, and began to engage him in conversation.

For a moment the boy watched the two men, fascinated—the professor, with his ragged red beard and his hunger for knowledge; the Angekok, mysterious, sinister, aloof. And then he felt a hand press his knee. He looked round into Danny's battered old face. Without moving his head, Danny's eyes directed themselves to the place against the wall where the guns had been piled. Their weapons were no longer there. Hardly had Eric made that discovery when Danny's gaze called his attention to something else. The seat which had been occupied by Jackson was empty. The man had vanished.

"Some dirty work here," Danny whispered. "Watch out for his nibs, and stand ready for a rough house. It's my belief Jackson's sold us so as to get his hands on the gold for himself."

Behind him the conversation in Esquimaux between the Angekok and his uncle seemed to have taken on a contentious tone. Eric glanced over his shoulder. The professor,

his eyes blazing, his fists clenched, was protesting vigorously. The Angekok, with a cold, cruel smile upon his lips, was regarding him contemptuously. Suddenly the professor sprang to his feet.

"This treacherous heathen informs me that we are to be sacrificed! He seeks to give a semblance of justice to such procedure by charging us with the murder of one of his men. He appears to possess some curious telepathic instinct which made him aware of our journey. That man, whom the Esquimaux took for a Kevitok, was sent by him to prevent our expedition by killing us. He now lays this man's death at our door."

He sprang across the room.

"Our guns Danny!" he shouted.

"They've been pinched, guv'nor!"

Danny had jumped to his feet as he was speaking. Pushing past the professor, he made a rush at the Angekok, his big fists clenched. As he did so that resplendent figure calmly raised his hand. Instantly there was a rush of feet, and from both doorways a file of armed men appeared at the double. Before Danny could reach the Angekok three spears had driven him back against the wall.

"Sock 'em, Mr. Eric! Sock 'em good and hard!" he shouted. "Don't let them get at the guv'nor!"

Seeing the soldiers charging down on him from both sides, Eric did the only thing he could think of. Diving under the table, he overturned it and dragged it like a shield into one corner of the room. Then, picking up the golden stool on which he had been seated, he sent one of his assailants to the ground.

The professor, he saw, had ducked under the approaching spear, and, seizing one of the men, had flung him bodily across the floor. Now, with glaring eyes and bristling beard, he was struggling with three others. Recovering his stool, Eric dashed from the cover of the overturned table and rushed to his uncle's assistance. As he did so a spear was neatly slipped between his legs, and he tripped and fell. Before he could attempt to rise he was seized, and his arms bound behind his back!

HOW THE STORY BEGAN.

ERIC DENNING, a cheery, adventure-loving youngster, lives with his uncle.

PROFESSOR DENNING. The professor, absent-minded and interested in nothing save his studies, is expecting a visit from John Peters, an Arctic explorer who has discovered a narwhal's horn, on which is written in Runic writing the key to tremendous treasure, in Greenland. The horn arrives, but not Peters. For Peters is dead—murdered by one of a gang of scoundrels, the leader of which is

BOSS MAUNSELL. Maunsell attempts to capture the narwhal's horn, but is frustrated, largely owing to the activities of

DANNY, the professor's man-of-all-work and an ex-pugilist. The professor deciphers the writing on the horn, and he and Eric and Danny travel to Greenland, and start out for the Valley of Hot Springs. They capture Maunsell, who has been trailing them; he gives his name as Jackson. Passing through a tunnel in the glaciers, they arrive at the mysterious valley. The Angekok, or ruler of this wonder world, receives them as friends and invites them to a feast. The food is brought in by a number of girls, one of whom flashes Eric a warning glance—a warning of impending danger!

(Now read on.)

The Pit of Fire!

IT was soon all over. Bruised and breathless, Eric found himself standing against the wall, with the professor on one side of him and Danny on the other. Their guards in the golden mail were drawn up at attention on either side of them. Immediately in front was the Angekok, staring at them with glittering eyes.

"Mr Eric!" Danny's voice came in a hoarse whisper. "Don't get the wind up. The fight ain't lost till the last round. I've got something up my sleeve. Once when I was travelling with a booth there was a bloke in the show what used to do the Houdini stunt—let himself be tied up hand and foot, have a curtain thrown over him, and then in a minute come out free of the ropes. He told me a thing or two which I'm going to work off on 'em. Wait a bit and you'll see. I ain't going to let the gov'nor down."

Having already had an example of the Angekok's powers of thought-reading, Eric had no wish to betray whatever plan for their escape Danny might be devising. Intensely curious though he was, he turned to the professor.

"What are they going to do with us, Uncle?"

"I gather that we are to be offered as a sacrifice to Tormansuk. It should prove interesting, because these heathenish customs are very important in the study of Comparative Religion."

Eric didn't think it necessary to make the obvious remark that interesting as the rite might be, it was hardly likely to prove of use to the professor's hunger for knowledge, seeing that he was to be one of the victims.

"What I can't make out is where the man Jackson has gone," the professor went on.

"Sold us, I expect, uncle," replied the boy. "I shouldn't be surprised if he helped to get our guns away."

But further speculations as to their own fates or Jackson's conduct were abruptly cut short. The Angekok had risen, and instantly the glittering mail-clad guards stiffened. Without a word, the Angekok strode slowly towards the door through which they had entered. Forming up behind, the guard shepherded the prisoners forward.

The passage was so narrow that the three men had to walk in single file, and so it came about that Eric found himself immediately behind Danny. In the dim light he could see the old pugilist's arms, bound like his own with leather thongs at the wrists and above the elbows. They were half-way down the passage, when he noticed that Danny's arms were moving convulsively. To his intense astonishment he saw them come together closer. Then the thongs began to work slowly down the sleeve of the other's fur coat; were looped about his hands. A final wriggle, and they dropped on the floor.

And now Eric understood the meaning of what Danny had said to him. This was the trick he had learned in the fair, which he had once followed with a boxing-booth. The

boy watched with growing excitement. Evidently, Danny was finding the leather thongs that bound his wrists a more difficult problem. He could see him opening and closing his hands, contracting and relaxing his muscles. Eric felt a longing to cheer as he saw those bonds shift. Danny at least would be free to make a fight for it. The boy's spirits soared for a moment, only to sink again as he realised that, great fighting man though Danny was, the odds were overwhelmingly against them.

At that moment they reached the end of the passage. The curtains of skin were flung back, and they were in the great hall, with its golden lamps and its brooding shadows and its strange, creepy sense of mystery.

It was no longer almost empty. Collected in the middle, forming a circle round the centre of the floor, was a crowd of some three or four thousand people—men, women and children, and reproducing in their faces the Scandinavian race, the Eskimaux, and even the Red Indian.

As the Angekok stepped through the drawn-back curtains, all that huge concourse of people raised their hands above their heads and then bowed low, as if hiding their faces. A cry went up which was like the sound of the wind in the trees, multiplied a hundred-fold. And then from the whole circle of the hall, with a clatter of arms, the guards ran forward at the double. The three white men found themselves in the centre of a solid phalanx, at the apex of which marched the Angekok,

"Get up right close behind me, Mr. Eric, so that none of these mutts can see what I'm doing."

Danny's voice came to the youngster in a strangled whisper. By way of reply, Eric edged up closer to the old pugilist, so that his loose-fitting fur coat hid the convulsive movements of the other's arms.

A silence like death fell upon the hall. There must have been close on four thousand people there in all. And yet Eric could not hear even a sound of breathing. Slowly the Angekok raised his arms above his head. From behind Eric came the professor's voice, translating what was being said, and adding a running commentary.

"Oh children of Tormansuk! You know the ancient prophecy that with the coming of the white men from over the seas our land will vanish and the great cold will close down.' An obvious reference to the quite natural phenomena by which the geysers will cease to play. 'Once before a white man set foot here, and we went out from our valley into the cold, strange outer world and slew the man and took the women prisoners.' Extraordinary the accuracy of verbal records.

"Now these other white men have come. I have let them come. I have watched their every step from afar. I have brought them here that they may be delivered up to Tormansuk and the evil doom set aside."

The resplendent figure grew rigid. His

(Continued on page 44.)

The NIGHT HAWK'S

**The Kittens
Saved by
Elephants!**

CHAPTER 1.

Good-bye to Bhuristan!

THURSTON KYLE, the Night Hawk, blowing a cloud of smoke into the hot, still air, smiled quietly.

"We came to Bhuristan secretly, my friends. We must return to England more secretly still, I fear. And for two ugly reasons, at least!"

His dark eyes, alight with keen humour, studied each of his companions in turn. The thorny problem under discussion was one that bristled with perils, and doubts, and as such appealed to his adventurous spirit immensely. But the others frowned.

For the problem was no less than how to get that cheery squad, Thurston Kyle's Kittens, back across Persia and eventually to England, after their stirring and determined invasion of Bhuristan.

In the great council chamber of the Palace of Jhadore, the leaders of the Kittens had met to consider ways and means. His Highness Budrudin Ananda, Rajah of Bhuristan, youthful, brown face supported by one slim hand, gazed sadly from his chair of state upon the keen-witted, resolute white men who had restored him to the throne of his ancestors after years of exile.

Already the cares of office had stamped "Buddy's" usually happy face with faint lines, although little more than a fortnight had passed since, backed by the Kittens and the fanatical hillmen of old Lala Bagheera, the Panther of the Mountains, the boy had



literally fought his way into Jhadore and the palace.

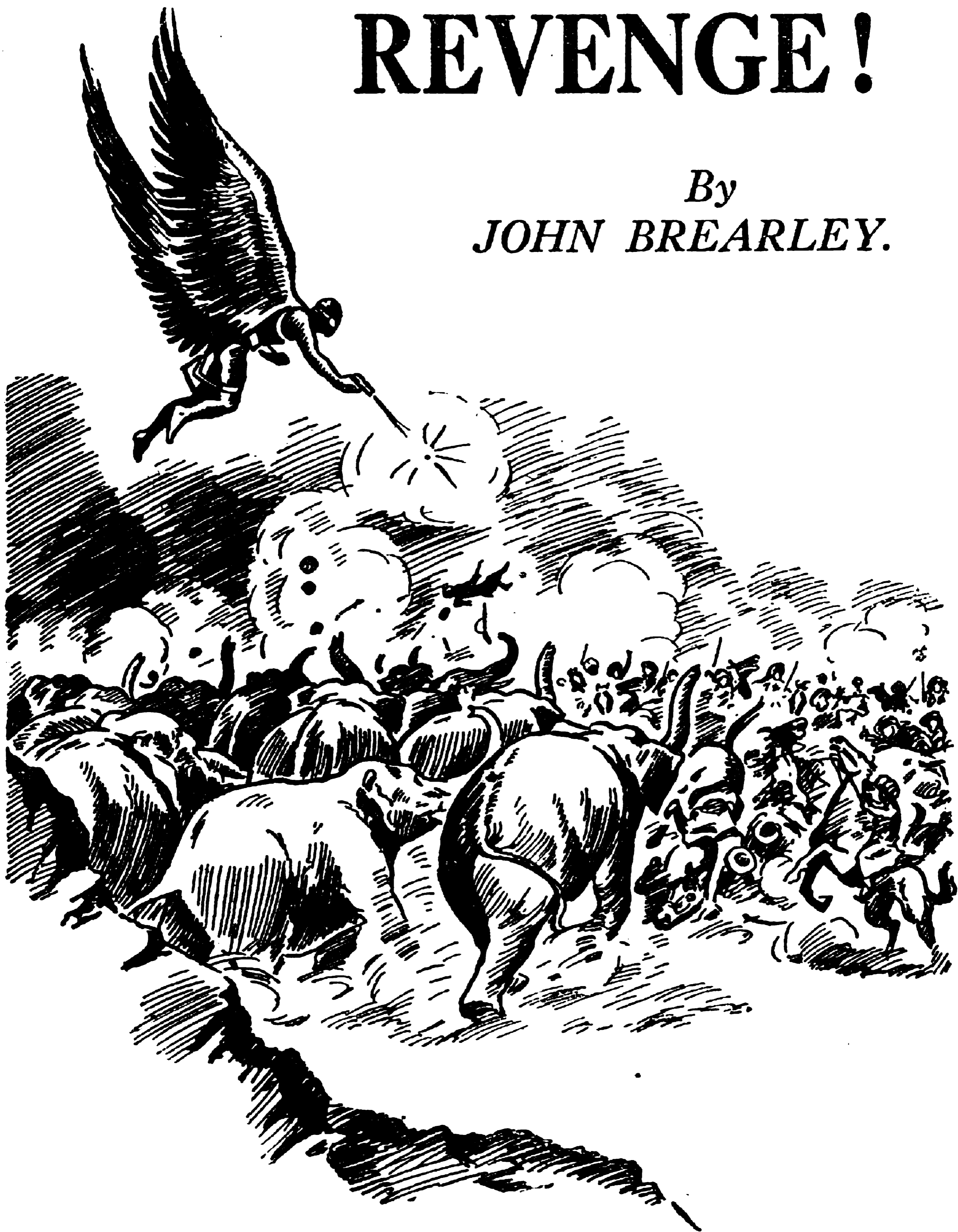
The revolution had been sweepingly successful; but all trouble had not ended with the death of his uncle, the late rajah, and Ram Tagoro, his cousin, for, although the townsfolk and peaceful plainmen of Bhuristan had bowed in submission to their new ruler, some of the usurper's soldiers who guarded the eastern passes had made a bold effort to revenge his death, and for the whole of one stirring night the Kittens' machine-guns had been forced to teach the rebels a stern lesson.

Peace had come at last, however; the Bhuristan ship of State was in a fair way to reaching calm waters after the struggle. But now, to Buddy's sorrow, Nelson Lee and the Night Hawk, busy men of affairs in Britain, were preparing to leave for home.

—Smashing, Complete Night Hawk Adventure Yarn!

REVENGE!

By
JOHN BREARLEY.



Indeed, but for stern necessity, they would have done so before; only the after-effects of that stern battle for the palace had kept them tied to Bhuristan. The Kittens' steel-lined sun helmets and general ability to take care of themselves in any sort of scrap had saved them from really serious wounds, it was true, but few of them had come through the fight entirely unhurt, so that rest and

recovery were essential before they could march again.

Now, however, they were fit and eager to hit the trail for home once more. And the little Rajah of Bhuristan was frankly heart-broken at the prospect, valiantly though he tried to disguise the fact.

But his companions in the council chamber were pondering the Night Hawk's cryptic

remarks; all save Nelson Lee, who was nodding slowly to himself.

"What are those ugly reasons, Mr. Kyle?" asked Nipper respectfully at last.

A soft chuckle answered him.

"The airplane I—er—borrowed from the Egyptian Government for one, my boy. And the tribes in the deserts outside, for another!" The Night Hawk tapped the table with a pensive hand. "We have had no news from the outside world for some time, as you know, but it is safe to assume, I think, that the stir caused by that missing airplane has not died down yet. I will wager that a good many people all over this part of the world are eager to pick up traces of that machine, wrecked and useless as it is. The news of a party of armed white men footing it across wild parts, as we shall have to do now, will interest those gentlemen keenly. There will be trouble in store for us if we are caught anywhere in civilisation."

His friends nodded with many irrepressible chuckles. At which he laughed again.

"That, however, does not worry me so much as the second problem—the desert tribes. We are not back in civilisation yet by long chalks." Kyle leaned back in his chair, eyes on the ceiling. "You remember Ram Tagore's last words to me—that we were trapped—we should never cross the deserts alive?" he asked quietly. "Well, to me they raise a problem. And that problem is: What steps has he taken to trap us outside and"—his fist crashed on the table—"where is that treacherous snake, Jonathan Silk, who was Buddy's guardian in England?"

"Vanished!" growled Snub Hawkins promptly. "Hooked it, the sandy-whiskered skunk. I've ransacked this city for him, gov'nor, just to get another lick at the brute. But as far as I can find out, he left Bhuristan the day we crashed on the Afghan plain, and hasn't been seen here since!"

"Precisely!" The Night Hawk nodded, his handsome face cold and shrewd. "And this is my opinion. Silk, who, as we know, has lived long in the East and speaks Bhuristani and probably other Oriental languages as well, has been sent out by Ram Tagore to stir up the desert tribes against us. Ram Tagore was a clever rogue; perhaps he foresaw that we might gain the victory here in Jhadore and took this precaution by way of revenge!"

"But how could Jonathan Silk do that?" objected Nelson Lee.

"Who knows? By gold, perhaps. Or hints of vengeance. Remember the fight you had with some tribesmen the night you landed on El Tahkel? News travels fast and mysteriously in these strange, desolate lands, where nomads are here one day and miles away the next!"

He leaned forward tensely.

"My friends, I think—I am sure, rather—that the moment the Kittens set foot outside this country, every tribesman and desert robber betwixt here and Palestine will be waiting to bar our way!"

CLEARING his throat hoarsely, Scrapper Huggins cut in, huge fists clenched.

"Then the desert robbers'll be unlucky, sir!" he boomed.

Thurston Kyle smiled at his big fighting man.

"Unlucky in many ways, Scrapper," he answered coolly. "Because Ram Tagore and Silk have made one big mistake. We're not going to cross the deserts again. We're going south—along the edges!"

Instantly the others sat up alertly, unspoken questions by the score on their lips, while the Night Hawk rose quietly from his seat. Spread out before Nelson Lee was a folding map, and Thurston Kyle pulled it towards him as he spoke again.

"I have a plan—a plan entailing at least a week's rough journeying, it is true, but which may bring us home safely!"

Six pairs of attentive eyes followed his long forefinger down the map.

"Here is Bhuristan. Here, over Kanjunga, is the Afghan border—and the beginnings of the Persian. Now, my plan is to scale the mountains once more the way we came, and follow them south to the Gulf of Persia. As you see, it will be like following a great long wall, dividing Afghanistan and India from Persia. It is also the shortest way to the sea—and our yacht, the Firefly!"

Nelson Lee looked up in sharp surprise.

"But we left the yacht off Palestine. How can we find it in the Persian Gulf?"

A grave smile flickered across the Night Hawk's face.

"Because that is where I told Captain Gregory to wait for us!" he answered quietly. "You see, I had considered this question of getting home before leaving England; for it struck me as probable that, by the time we had—er—finished, we should badly need a different route back—and a bee-line to the nearest coast. Palestine suited us in the first place because it was nearest to Egypt and a great airdrome, but now it is different; we have made that route too hot for us. We must take the shortest road back—and the quietest. And by now, the Firefly will have got round to the Persian Gulf. You see?"

They saw, and amazement at their brilliant, far-sighted leader increased. It was typical of the Night Hawk to have every move in the game plotted out far in advance—and typical, too, that he had said nothing of this till the time came for action. Nelson Lee, accustomed to his secretive friend, bent his brows over the map again.

"I see. It's a good plan, Kyle. Yet it is plain from this map that we still have a great stretch of desert and no-man's-land to travel, if only along the Afghan-Persian borders. Surely there may be tribesmen there, too, on the alert for white men, as you say?"

"Possibly. Possibly not!" shrugged Thurston Kyle. "We cannot tell how busy our friend, Jonathan Silk, has been. But, in any case, I had thought of that. And to pass

through the border-tribesmen we may meet—I have another plan."

In the fresh hush that fell at the last words, he turned to Old Lala Bagheera, squatting amid cushions at the feet of his young ruler.

"But for this we shall require thy skilful aid, O Panther of Bhuristan!"

Lithe as a boy, the veteran warrior rose to his feet, salaaming low.

"It is thine, lord, without question. Speak!"

"This, then, Bagheera. Will you and two of your young men lead us along the edge of the deserts, even to the sea where our ship awaits us?"

Bagheera tugged at his beard, and his eyes flashed proudly.

"It is a long road, lord, but I would accompany thee to the ends of the earth if need be!"

"Thank you; that is good. Now, my friends all, come close and listen to my plan!"

With one accord they came nearer, and the Night Hawk's voice sank low while he talked rapidly for some minutes. When he had finished, the faces around him were keen and smiling, and old Bagheera flung back his head in a roaring laugh.

"Ho, great lord, thou hast the wisdom of an owl and the cunning of a snake! Leave this to Bagheera, warrior from the skies. I will depart with my best men at once, and we shall not fail thee. The things you desire we will procure."

He sank on to the cushions again, chuckling deep in his fierce beard. The Scrapper ventured a timid remark.

"Are we crossin' that hawful Leap of Death agin, sir?" he asked huskily, and gulped as the Night Hawk smiled.

"Sorry, Scrapper, but—yes."

"Strewth!" muttered the giant in forlorn resignation. "All right, sir; when do we start?"

"To-morrow."

And on the morrow the long homeward trek began.

It started from Jhadore in the cool of the afternoon, a long procession of shrill-voiced townsfolk, the boy rajah's new guards, and the stalwart Kittens winding out of the western gate across the plain towards the mountains. A squad of Bagheera's brown hillmen brought up the rear, but their warlike leader was missing. The Panther and a picked body of his best men had flitted off into mystery the night before on a mission for Thurston Kyle.

Across the plain and into the foothills of Kanjunga marched the procession, the followers from Jhadore dropping off gradually with long-drawn cries of "Farewell, white lords!" until on the ghastly brink of the Leap of Death once more only the hillmen and Buddy, with his guards, remained. And once more the uncanny Night Hawk glided silently down from the blue to perform his miracle.

One after the other, while the hillmen crossed the swaying rope-bridge with the

gear, Thurston Kyle picked up his Kittens and fought his way across that bottomless, swirling chasm until the watchers behind fell on their faces in awe. Nelson Lee was the last to be carried through wind-lashed space to safety, and, with the Kittens lined up at attention on the opposite ridge, he and the boys turned for a last farewell to the young rajah.

"Good-bye, Buddy!"

"So-long, old hoss! Keep smilin', kid!"

Their voices rang out cheerily, joined by a clear voice from the sky. Facing them across the hideous Leap, the Rajah of Bhuristan, a slim, fragile figure against his tall guardsmen, raised his hands slowly, biting his lips fiercely to keep back his grief.

"Good-bye, sahibs! A long farewell—friends I cannot forget!"

His guards crashed into the royal salute; the Kittens' hands flashed to their helmets in answer.

When the last of the reckless adventurers has disappeared round the jagged buttress and out of sight, the boy rajah of Bhuristan turned away without a word—back to Jhadore and the throne they had won for him. But his loyal young heart was following his friends down the further mountain slope.

The Kittens marched on—faces set towards home at last.

CHAPTER 2.

The Hold-Up!

ACROSS the dusty strip of desert—a rock-ribbed, desolate wasteland dividing the towering Afghan crags from the sun-blistered plains of Persia—rode a body of tribesmen, dark-faced, well-armed, alert.

They made a grim picture as they trotted cautiously through the noon-day heat, avoiding sky-lines, hugging the shelter of kotals and shallow ravines, spurring their mules hard when open country lay between them and the next stretch of cover. The sun, as occasionally the band emerged from the violet shadows, glittered with hard brilliance on the scabbards of curved swords and the efficient rifles slung on the riders' backs. Their long, black cloaks, reaching down to the hooked Persian shoes in the heavy stirrups, were dust-begrimed with long, hard travel, yet unwearied eyes, shadowed by great, round turbans, gleamed watchfully over all points of the scene. They were a typical desert band, ruthless and resolute, riding warily through dangerous country.

Presently a mountain spur jutted out to block their way. The bearded leader, trotting ahead, pulled a savage underlip for a moment, then, shrugging, signalled his men to follow. Mule-hoofs clattering, the armed band left the brooding desert and swung up into the rocky incline, single-footing along a track until it widened into a round, walled space, a natural camping-ground for the mid-day meal—or hide-away. The leader swung loosely from his saddle.

After him, in file, came the rest, tethering their mules against the inner wall, con-

gregating themselves in the middle with bags of cold food, dates, and horns of goat's milk, which they fell upon eagerly without waste of words. Last of all came the rearguard, the hugest man in the troop, fighting his vicious-eyed mule stubbornly up the path.

He dismounted, forced the animal roughly among its companions, and stood eyeing it grimly for a second. Then the busy silence was shattered by a hearty bellow:

"There, you long-eared, wall-eyed blighter! By gosh, but I'll teach yer manners yet!" Stiffly the giant lumbered over to his friends, yawning as he came. "Lumme, but I'm sore, me lads! An' ain't it blinkin' 'ot?"

A cheerful chorus answered him.

"Just foun' that out, Scrapper—after five scorchin' days?"

Snub Hawkins, a villainous figure in cloak and turban, grinned up at the giant.

"Never mind, Scrapper; 'nother day and a half, an' we'll be at the sea. But you'll never be a circus queen, old bean!"

The Scrapper grunted sheepishly and fell upon his meal. He certainly was no horseman.

Indeed, not many of the Kittens were, and the way they had buckled down to this gruelling ride under a hot and heavy disguise spoke volumes for their toughness. For five long days they had been trotting down the Afghan-Persian border, frowned upon by great mountains to one side and bored by ugly, monotonous plains on the other. Nothing had happened; not even a skirmish with other bands to "put some pep into it," as the Scrapper said sadly.

But if the Kittens were fed up, Nelson Lee was not. Of his winged ally he had seen no sign for days, but at least the Night Hawk's plan was working well. Under cover of that dark night on which they had left Bhuristan, old Bagheera and his men had met the Kittens at the foot of Kanjunga with mules for the party, and, hung loosely over each high saddle, a black cloak, turban and sword for each man. The adventurers had ridden endlessly ever since.

Bagheera, the fierce and cunning veteran, had carried out his part splendidly. But Nelson Lee had not asked for details. In most of the cloaks the Kittens wore were jagged, blood-stained rents, and some of the Panther's men looked as though they had been in a fight, while the Panther himself was chuckling contentedly. From these signs it was easy for Nelson Lee to picture what had happened.

The detective stood now by Bagheera's side, following the old man's outstretched hand as it pointed towards a distant, violet-hued ridge of hills, and listened to his deep, eager voice.

"See, sahib, yonder is our resting place for to-night. We leave these crags of Afghanistan now and follow the forest borders of British Baluchistan. At dawn we cross those hills. And after that it is a fast day's ride to the sea. There, as the winged lord says, you shall find your fine ship at last!"

Swinging up his glasses, the detective studied the line of country. The distant hills

were low and smooth, jutting out at right angles to a great blurred mass of Indian forests. Bagheera's comforting words seemed to bring the Firefly and safety very near.

"Good. You have led us splendidly, Panther of Bhuristan!" he said, after a while. "I'm beginning to hope that we've really dodged trouble and our desert foes are tricked!"

The Bhuristan chieftain plucked at his beard and nodded slowly.

"So I trust, lord. And yet—I am old in frontier-lore, and something—a voice within me—tells me that many sharp eyes have marked our passing. News travels fast out here, lord. Let us not rejoice until——"

A thunderous order, crashing out from the top of the rocky rim, paralysed the Kittens' hum of talk and made Bagheera finish with a snarl of dismay. None there understood the tongue in which the harsh words were shouted, but the meaning was plain. From half-a-dozen points overhead sleek rifle barrels covered the gang squarely.

It was an ambush; a complete trap.

Even at that, however, the Kittens were tensing themselves to take a chance; but at that moment the riflemen stood up, revealing themselves plainly. Then hands that had flashed swiftly to weapons relaxed and reached promptly for the sky. For behind those levelled rifles were the tanned faces of determined white men—and they were dressed in the uniform of the British Frontier Force!

Their officer dropped coolly to his feet among the statuesque Kittens.

IN the tense electric hush that fell upon the little camp, the Kittens stood motionless, faces blank as the rocks around them, while the khaki-clad figure strolled leisurely towards Nelson Lee and Bagheera.

He was a tall, fit-looking man with stern, clear-cut features and eyes like gimlets beneath his dusty helmet. Halting a few feet in front of Nelson Lee, he snapped out a question in the same staccato language as before, and frowned severely when still no answer came.

Hands raised to his turban, Nelson Lee stared back at him woodenly, his brain working fast. Every hour during the past five days the famous detective had been expecting attacks from desert marauders or Afghan robbers, but to be cornered like this—by white soldiers—was a stunning surprise.

Was it that affair of the Egyptian airplane? Had the widespread official net of civilisation fallen on the venturers at last, when safety was almost in sight? Nelson Lee dismissed the thought the moment it was born, for quite plainly this officer took the Kittens for natives and not storm-raising white men.

And then, even as the detective cudgelled his wits desperately and looked at the resolute face before him, his brows came down abruptly in a keen, piercing stare. The ghost of a mischievous smile dawned slowly on his lips.



Surrounded by tribesmen, Nelson Lee and the Kittens were in a tight corner, but desperately they fought back the attacking hordes.

Catching the grin, the British officer's frown grew blacker. He was angered already by the stolid silence of his captives; now his voice crackled like a whiplash as he rapped out a further order. Whereupon Nelson Lee burst into a hearty, delighted laugh.

"And what on earth does that gibberish mean—'Jacky' Cowan?" he drawled, and lowered his hands composedly as the officer staggered back.

For a full minute not a sound was heard. If Nelson Lee had dropped a bomb, the effect could not have been greater. The Kittens turned their heads jerkily, hope and wonder in their eyes, while the British officer's jaw dropped ludicrously.

"You—you're English? You know me?" he gasped at last. "Who the——" Pulling himself together vigorously, he stepped closer, searching the upturned, smiling face under the big Persian turban with a startled glare. His expression was more bewildered still when he found his tongue again. "My sainted aunt! It—it's Nelson Lee!"

"Good shot!" Laughing with quiet enjoyment, the detective put out a hand and seized that of Lieutenant Sir John Cowan in a hearty grip. "It's a long time since we were at Oxford together, young feller, what? Fancy meeting you in this wilderness. But I couldn't forget that ugly face of yours—thank goodness!" he finished with a chuckle.

"But, Lee"—Cowan swept the camp with a dazed look—"this—this is amazing. What are you doing among these—desert thieves, man?"

Nelson Lee took out his cigarette-case thoughtfully. He did not want to lie to his old friend—and, in any case, the Kittens might soon betray themselves once they began talking—but if he told the full story of Bhuristan, Cowan might think it his bounded duty, as an officer, to report. The detective decided to feel his way along cautiously, giving the information he thought fit and bluffing his way out of the rest.

"Well, let's say I'm—er—working on a case!" he smiled easily. "These chaps are

helping me. And they're English—not Persian bandits."

"Phew!" Off came Cowan's helmet and he mopped his steaming brow. "This is a flattener. I took you for Persian thugs, and came down to chase you back to the desert, because you're just inside the Indian border, and I don't encourage armed visitors over the line."

"Well, we're not bandits. Now order your men to retire, Jacky, like a stout fellow, and come over here and talk quietly!"

Nelson Lee flicked his match away with the words, and his manner changed, the laughter fading abruptly from his face. And after a quick glance his friend obeyed. An order sent the soldiers back under cover, the Kittens relaxed into grins of puzzled relief, and in a few seconds Nelson Lee and the baronet were seated on a rock in a far corner of the camp, out of earshot. There the detective laid a firm hand on the other's arm.

"Now, look here, old man, I can't explain fully, but I give you my solemn word of honour we're not out for trouble. We're heading across those hills for the Persian Gulf—quietly. Are you going to shut your head and let us go on? Or not?"

Lieutenant Cowan eyed him curiously for some minutes without speaking. The officer was beginning to get over the first shock of surprise and had had time to pull his thoughts together. Nelson Lee, who knew him for a shrewd man, could tell from his friend's expression that some mighty awkward questions were coming. He braced himself to meet them.

"A body of white men—well armed—flitting through the deserts," Cowan mused deliberately, eyes on Nelson Lee's stony face. "H'm! I've heard some queer things lately, Lee—official and otherwise. They're just beginning to fit together—now!"

He leaned forward quietly.

"Rather more than a fortnight back, according to official despatches, an airplane was stolen over Port Said—a huge troop-carrier, big enough to hold"—his eyes turned slowly to the watching Kittens—"a lot of men. The 'plane was stolen in mid-air. The pilot was so scared that he babbled some story of a man with wings who forced him to make a parachute jump—which was all rot, of course. But a stowaway must have been aboard the 'plane when it started, and did the trick. The same night there was a row on the El Tahkel beach between some white men and tribesmen. After the fight, the white men vanished. But a big airplane was heard to come down and pick them up." Cowan's eyebrows cocked up inquiringly. "Know anything about all that, Nelson Lee?"

The detective glanced up at the speckless blue sky.

"Lovely weather, isn't it, Jacky?" he murmured calmly.

At which Cowan grinned, then pursed his lips pensively.

"I see—you don't know. Well, here's another one. We've heard rumours of fight-

ing inside the Bhuristan mountains. It's a lonely independent State, and we don't interfere—ever. But I believe there's been a change in rajahship there. Know anything about that, you blighter?"

"I do hope it doesn't rain, though!" purred Nelson Lee, his eyes still on the sky.

And Cowan, shrugging, laughed impatiently.

"All right, you oyster—keep your mouth shut! By rights, I should arrest you all, but"—as the detective's glance narrowed—"I'm not going to. If it was your men who helped the late Rajah of Bhuristan to a better land, then you've done us a good turn, because he was becoming troublesome. As for the Egyptian airplane—well, we'll forget that. But—"

He half-tilted his helmet forward, and a little silence fell while he looked out across the desert.

"Well? But what?" asked Lee.

"If you're going down to the Persian Gulf—let me tell you something important. Look out for Mirza Khan—that's all!"

Nelson Lee studied his friend keenly.

"And who is Mirza Khan?" he drawled at length.

"You'll know if you ever meet him, my lad!" Cowan grunted. "Mirza Khan is a Persian—and he's everything in these deserts. The big noise; the bandit boss. He's a giddy Napoleon of the tribesmen. And if he catches you, shoot yourselves first. If you can't—Heaven help you!" He kicked aimlessly at the rock. "And you must be the birds he's after!" he said softly.

"Ah!" Nelson Lee's eyes grew hard. "How do you know that, Jacky?"

"I don't—officially. But, as I said, lots of things I've heard are beginning to fit in. Desert news—border rumours, you know." Suddenly his iron grip tightened on Nelson Lee's arm. "And one of the rumours is this: That Mirza Khan and his bands—which means every thug between here and Palestine—are looking for a bunch of white men—to kill them!"

"And is there another white man mixed up with Mirza Khan?" asked Nelson Lee quietly.

"There is. A mysterious chap, too. I see you do know something about it. Well, Lee, I'm warning you. Chuck it!"

Again the two were silent for a while. So Thurston Kyle had been right in his surmise. The desert bands were out, and Jonathan Silk was behind them. Yet the Kittens had dodged them—up to now. Nelson Lee drew a deep breath.

"I see. Very interesting. And where do you stand, Jacky?"

"Up in the mountains," retorted Cowan coolly. "Sorry, Lee, but if Mirza catches you, don't rely on me. I'm not going to stop you—you did me a great turn once at Oxford, old thing, and I'm glad to return the compliment. But we're at peace with Persia, and if I sallied forth and shot up Mirza's men—there'd be big trouble. It's up to you—alone!" He turned to face the

detective fully. "Well? Are you still going?"

Lee nodded curtly.

"We are still going!"

"Then so am I—up yonder!" Cowan stood up and held out his hand. "Officially, Lee, I've never seen you—savvy? My men are decent chaps, and I'll ask them to hold their tongues. So I'll leave you now in case anything else turus up I can't control!"

Without a word, Lee also rose, and they sauntered back towards Cowan's men. The detective wrung his friend's hand tightly at parting.

"So-long, Jacky. You're a sportsman—and thanks for the warning!"

From the top of the rim rock, Cowan looked down at him for a moment, then grinned.

"So-long, my bold bandit! Good luck!"

There came the sound of an order, the scrape of boots, and presently the soldiers had melted into the rocky fastness whence they had come. Nelson Lee turned to the Kittens with a brief, significant nod.

That night they made camp in the low Persian hills, with the forests of Baluchistan to their left.

And that night, too, Mirza Khan struck!

CHAPTER 3.

Captured!

SNUB HAWKINS, on sentry-go for the Kittens, tucked his rifle in the crook of his arm, leaned back against a rock, and yawned.

"Gosh! This is a slow game!" he grunted wearily. "Wish something'd cut loose!"

For the one-thousandth time that night his eyes roamed over the scene before him; big splotches of moonlight, with the inky shadows of rocks and gullies, with nothing moving, no sound save the faint sigh of forest trees a mile away. It wanted a good hour or more to dawn, and the hills and desert below were at their loneliest—great, aching spaces, wild as when time began. Pushing his helmet back so that the breeze could fan his red head, Snub grunted again.

He fell to wondering what his master, the Night Hawk, was doing. And who was this blighter, Mirza Khan, whom that little skunk, Jonathan Silk, had stirred up against the Kittens. Snub had a great admiration for Nelson Lee, and, from the strict precautions the detective had taken to guard the camp that night, it was clear he was expecting trouble from this mysterious Persian bandit—big trouble. But what—or when it would come—

Thud! It came then.

To Snub Hawkins, the next few seconds were a dizzy whirl of action. Over the edge of the rock on which he leaned slid suddenly a lean pair of arms, and two sinewy hands clamped round his throat, stifled him instantly. Before his bulging eyes, the patches of blackness he had thought so still and innocent became alive with lithe, prowling

figures—the moonlight glistened on their half-naked, oiled bodies. Skilful tribesmen, equal to Red Indians in their clever powers of stalking.

All this was registered on the lad's brain in one automatic half-second; consciousness began to fade in a flash as those throttling hands tightened. Yet victory was not entirely with the silent, stealthy raiders, for as Snub's knees buckled, instinct made his finger jerk inside the trigger guard of his rifle and squeeze. A spiteful flash lit the gloom, followed by a shattering report that echoed madly among the rocks; one of the crawling men went down on his face and stayed there. Then, to the roar of pounding blood in his ears, blackness rolled down on Snub, and he collapsed.

Whisking him lightly from the ground, his captor glided away with him into the open desert. But the Kittens, at that thunderous shot, had leapt to arms.

Full well did Nelson Lee's precautions take effect then. Out of their blankets shot the experienced fighting-men, rifles leaping instinctively to their clutching hands as they jumped to their feet. In a flash they were down again at full length, every point of attack covered. "Sailor" Peters hurled himself at a machine-gun, already mounted and loaded. Next instant the Kittens were fighting for their lives.

"Hussein! Hassan! Kill, kill, kill!"

All caution had gone; the half-naked raiders, letting out a yell of rage and blood-lust, poured down into the camp in a rushing wave. Their surprise attack had failed in part, but they came on, nevertheless, the cold moonlight glittering on their swords and knives. The Kittens, shooting fast and viciously, met them with a volley that tore the first bunch to rags.

Yet others hurtled through the fallen even faster, leaping down into the camp with reckless, fanatical courage. In the tricky light their dark bodies and whirlwind agility made it an even match against the white men's rifles. Within a few seconds the Kittens, in that rock-strewn pocket, found themselves in the tightest corner of their stormy careers.

Tat-tat-tat-tat-tat! Cra-a-ck!

Rifles spat like serpents' tongues, Colts thundered and the machine-gun drowned all in its venomous long-drawn snarl. Bodies, like great dark boulders, toppled down into the camp, but still the raiders came on, wicked blades flashing.

"Lights! Lights!" bellowed the Kittens hoarsely, as their bullets spread out in a screen of death. An answer came swiftly from Nelson Lee, who, at the first alarm, had plunged coolly among the supplies.

"Shut your eyes, Kittens!" he roared, and jumped into the fight, flare-pistols in both hands. Tock, tock! they went, and in a moment the rocky dingle was filled with dazzling light that destroyed the moonlight shadows, making a brilliant target of a fresh rush of half-blinded tribesmen, who surged down from the rear. Round swung Peters'

machine-gun in a crescendo scream of flying lead—the charge melted like mist before a breeze. And as two more flares hissed their dazzling path across the clearing, the Kittens leapt up and charged also.

The tables were turned—turned with the uncanny speed for which the disciplined Kittens were noted. It was the lightly-armed, lightly-clad marauders who cringed now before the blast, shrieking their battle-cry vainly as they were rolled back out of the camp. Another crashing volley from point-blank range fairly hurled them down the hill, the Kittens' own blades began to sing and slash.

Gradually the firing dropped away as the tribesmen dodged frantically over a long, low ridge on the desert or else lay still on their faces; silence came back once more, and the cold moonlight, as the flares died away, poured down its silver rays on boulders, rocks and humped forms that looked like rocks but were not.

"Cease fire!" Nelson Lee glanced at his watch. The whirlwind raid seemed to have lasted for many hectic hours—actually, from first shot to last, only twelve minutes had elapsed. The Kittens' breathless cheer rolled out into the desert.

"Hurray! Hurray!"

But Nipper's sharp, angry cry cut bitterly through the roar.

"Shut up, you chumps! Guv'nor, those fiends have captured Snub!"

BESIDE himself with anxiety, Nipper came running down from the rocks above, a spare rifle and helmet held wildly aloft. A roar of dismay followed his outcry.

"Wha-a-at!" Clattering towards him in a body, their jubilation changed in a second to dangerous ugliness, the Kittens surrounded the lad; fierce voices asked questions in furious haste; a score of savage words rang out. Snub, cheery and plucky always, was a general favourite with the rugged fighting-men, beside being the Night Hawk's assistant.

Not until Nelson Lee pushed through the throng was order restored.

"Silence—everyone! Now, Nipper, out with it, quick!"

"Just found this rifle and hat on yonder ledge, sir!" panted the youngster. "Snub was standing sentry there, I know, because he relieved me. The moment we cleared the camp, I ran to find him, not seeing him in the scrap. And this—this is all I found!"

"No other signs?"

"No, sir. But he must have got a man with the shot that roused us, because there's one up there alone, dead. That's all!"

Nelson Lee swung on the snarling Kittens. "Scatter—search—all of you!"

The late battlefield became dotted with running, bending figures in no time, slinging the dead tribesmen fiercely aside, combing every nook and cranny for the missing lad. For thirty breathless minutes the search con-

tinued until all hope was gone. Snub had been captured. When the Kittens toiled drearily back into camp at last, all their usual cheeriness had gone. A hefty gang of tight-lipped, cold-eyed men gathered round Nelson Lee for orders.

Scrappier Huggins hefted his rifle significantly.

"The kid's gone, Mr. Lee. An' now we'll go, too. We'll follow those kikes if it takes us back to Bhuristan."

"You've said it, Scrappier!" A growl as of wild beasts answered him. But Nelson Lee, his face a mask of anxiety, stopped them short.

"Keep your heads, men. I know how you feel, but if we leave these rocks for a moonlight march into the desert, we'll be overwhelmed and butchered within an hour. There's only one man who can help Snub now—if the boy still lives. Pray Heaven Thurston Kyle is near enough to see—these!"

Like lightning the flare-pistols spouted above his head, sending hissing red glares high into the air. Reckless of whatever outsiders saw the flaming signals, the detective fired again and again.

"Fresh clip, Nipper!" he jerked, when the last shot soared aloft. But more flares were not necessary. A piercing whistle from above shrilled through the night, and, at breakneck speed, a great winged shape streaked into the crimson glare on high, a terrible, uncanny figure bathed in weird light.

It was the Night Hawk, dropping out of space. In a moment he was among the Kittens once more, eyes darting from one troubled face to the other.

"I've been to the coast, Lee—the Firefly will be ready for us. But what has happened? You've been fighting!"

"You're right!" snapped Nelson Lee curtly. "And the raiders have captured Snub!"

Rapidly he jerked out the story of the surprise raid, following it with the few facts Lieutenant Cowan had given him earlier on. When he had finished, even the tough, reckless Kittens quailed before the blazing fury in the Night Hawk's face. In a thick, husky voice he asked:

"And which way did the natives run?"

Nelson Lee pointed silently towards the desert ridge. His ally, a driving figure of vengeance, was aloft in a flash!

CHAPTER 4.

Snub Meets an old "Friend."

SICK and dazed, a vague, nauseating drumming sound in his ears, young Snub Hawkins opened a pair of dull eyes and slowly frowned in an effort to muster his wits.

At first he thought he had been asleep, then, by slow degrees, it dawned on him that his throat and neck ached horribly, and that the world was rocking beneath him in a smooth, rapid rhythm. From somewhere

close to his nostrils came the odour of sweating horseflesh, mingling with a cool, sweet breeze; the drumming noise continued, and he suddenly realised he was hanging face down over something, and the ground, faintly visible, was slipping swiftly past. He closed his eyes again wearily, only to jerk them open again as realisation burst over him.

The camp—hands throttling him from behind—the shadows swarming all at once with noiseless foes! A shot—his own shot! And afterwards a strident, confused racket and—nothing more!

"I'm nabbed; but did I rouse the Kittens?" was his first agonised thought. "Gosh, I hope so! What a fool I was!"

His position had grown only too plain now. He was lying limp and helpless across the shoulders of a wiry horse, whose flying hoofs were throwing the plain behind him in beautiful dashing strides, never faltering for an instant. How far from the camp were they already? Snub twisted his neck to look at the sky, noting that the stars were beginning to wane. And when the raid had broken on the camp, he remembered it still wanted over an hour to daybreak.

"Mus' be miles—mus' be miles!" he droned dizzily to the beat of the horse's hoofs until his head began to swim again. Desperately he roused himself and tried clumsily to fall off the horse, vain though he knew the effort would be. A savage blow came from above on to the back of his neck, and he sagged into oblivion once more.

When he came round again, the motion of the horse had ceased, solid ground was beneath him. He raised his heavy head groggily from his chest to look around, growling in thick disgust to find himself in what appeared to be a distinctly stuffy tent, with his legs tightly bound and arms wrenched cruelly behind him.

At first the pain of his cramped position stifled all other thoughts, but presently, when his aching head began to clear a little and the coolness of returning courage



Snub drooped in his bonds as the heat and suffocation overcame him. He did not see the Night Hawk crashing his way through the flames to the rescue.

steadied his nerves, he began taking cautious stock of the position. Why was he captured—why hadn't he been killed at once? From the feeling of rigidity at his back, he gathered he was lashed to the tent-pole, and after a minute spent in flexing his muscles for a sharp effort, he lurched forward, straining at the thongs that bound him.

"Oh!" A red-hot surge of pain swamped him instantly throughout his imprisoned limbs and he sank back gasping. Not until the agony had subsided at last did he realise for the first time that he was not alone, as he had thought. Two quiet, mirthless laughs sounded above and behind him. He jerked his head round to see two men regarding him mockingly.

His eyes, bleared with pain though they were, narrowed immediately, focusing on the nearer of his captors. The man was

dark and very tall, a Persian from his dress, and flamboyantly handsome; while not even the long, black cloak he wore could hide the tigerish suggestion of swift, dynamic power contained in the steel-muscled body beneath.

Nor could the great round turban completely shadow his cruel, arrogant face, clean-shaven and young, the full, red lips adorned with a thin moustache that enhanced their inhuman ferocity. Two hard, bright eyes gleamed down on the boy, with a sneering enjoyment in their depths that brought Snub's teeth together with a little sharp click.

Slowly the sturdy lad dragged his eyes away from that smiling face, transferring his steady gaze to the second man. This one, too, was dressed in black cloak and turban, but he was smaller, more shrunken and older. Somehow he did not appear to be a Persian, despite his dress; indeed, there was something in his stooped shoulders and the gratified way he rubbed his hands that made him oddly familiar. A vague suspicion was forming in the captive's still dizzy brain when the man shifted irritably under his level stare, and the shadow lightened on the turbaned face.

Snub broke into a hard, dry smile.

The man was not a Persian. That mean, yellowish face, framed by sparse side whiskers that poked below the edge of the turban, made a strange contrast to that of the upright desert aristocrat; and Snub's smile grew grimmer. He had placed his second captor now.

The last time Snub had seen this man was in a respectable Hyde Park flat in London, wriggling and weeping at the wrong end of the boy's own gun while he passed over that dazzling ruby, the Dagger of Death. The man was Jonathan Silk—ex-solicitor and treacherous guardian to the young rajah of Bhuristan. Snub shifted in his bonds.

"What cheer, Silky, old darlin'." he drawled. "Robbed any more orphans lately?"

Silk's answer was swift.

Smash!

Leaping in, his clenched fist smashed viciously down on Snub's upturned face, crashing the lad's head against the tent pole with stunning force. Another blow followed and another, until they rained down on the captive's bent head and shoulders in a frenzied cascade of spite as Silk lost himself in his first gust of vengeance.

It was to the freckled youngster's resource in the first place that the snarling lawyer owed all his misfortunes and, worst of all, the loss of the glorious Dagger; all the seething hatred in his warped nature gave his mad blows an added sting. Not until Snub was lolling limpy forward and Silk's knuckles were numb and bleeding did the venomous punishment cease.

At last the crook straightened and drew back, panting and gibbering with rage while the tall Persian, after a look at the bruised and battered face of the boy, threw back his head and laughed heartily. In a

curiously soft, sweet voice that made him seem more evil still, he flung a word or two to Silk in his own tongue, at which the solicitor stepped in again and planted a sharply-curved toe in Snub's quivering ribs.

Slowly the boy lifted his streaming face, staring with eyes that smouldered with deadly light; his smashed lips curled painfully in a deadly grin.

"You crawlin' polecat—you dirty scum!" he gritted. "If ever I get free again, Silky—say your prayers, you scut!"

Sucking his aching knuckles, Jonathan Silk burst into shrill laughter.

"You? You get free? You pup, we're in Persia now, not London. Among Persian tribesmen who are my friends—not London police!" He booted Snub in the ribs again, following the kick by an obsequious wave of the hand towards the stately Persian. "Allow me to introduce you, gentlemen. Mr. Snub Hawkins and"—he bowed—"the lord of the deserts—Mirza Khan!"

Snub's stare shifted at once. So this was the Napoleon of the deserts, as Nelson Lee's officer friend had called him. The youth had almost guessed as much from the man's dominating personality.

Lifting his hand in mock salutation, the handsome chieftain smiled suavely.

"Greeting, Meester—what-you-say. Thees sees pleasure, so? I gif you good time soon—you see, eh?"

"Yes, you'll see, Hawkins," grated Silk, licking his lips. The man was almost crazy with spite. "You'll see, you interfering thief. Mirza Khan has some entertaining treat in store for you, my lad, slow but spectacular. I hope you'll enjoy it, you little rat!"

Snub managed a crooked laugh.

"That's right, Silky," he jeered. "Have a good time. I should worry; we've licked you hands up. Your rajah pal's dead, Ram Tagore's dead, and little Buddy's safe on his throne. So laugh that off!"

"I know!" The lawyer's yellow face was very evil. "I know of your foul deeds in Bhuristan. But you were doomed the moment you left there; the desert net has been closing in. And Mirza Khan's men will sweep over the mountains into Bhuristan, killing and destroying. But you won't be there to see that day—neither you nor your friends! The boy rajah will be swept from his throne."

A snort answered him.

"You're a fool, Silky! Don't you realise—can't you realise—that when you grabbed me, you committed suicide; you and your flash pal, too? You'll never invade Bhuristan. You're as good as dead right now!"

"Yes?" purred Silk. "Your bandit friends will kill me, I suppose. Don't worry, Hawkins; they'll never even reach the coast. We know all about you—have done for days. That surprise raid a while ago—pah! We sent the men to capture you, especially you, and meant getting you all along. It didn't matter whether they were beaten off or not—in fact, I'm glad your men won. Because,

soon, the real attack commences in earnest!" He swung his arm passionately towards the tent door. "Outside there, my friend, are five hundred tribesmen, the pick of the desert bands—ready and waiting for the signal to advance and sweep your precious thugs into eternity. And you'll be the signal. How d'you like that?"

"You make me tired!" growled Snub; but his heart sank. Five hundred fends swarming down on the Kittens. And they still a day's ride from the Firefly. But the lad's hardihood returned as—comforting thought—he remembered the Night Hawk. "Still, there's a bet you've overlooked, Silky, old dear!" he giped.

Mirza Khan began to speak then, the sweetness of his voice marred by impatient curttness. He looked several times towards the entrance as he spoke, slapping his sword hilt loudly. Jonathan Silk cut short his words with a low bow and turned again to his captive.

"His Excellency Mirza Khan grows impatient, my young friend; the time for your—er—entertainment has come!" He bent lower, thrusting a hate-distorted face close to Snub's. "You young hound! You're going to scream your life away very soon. And I'll be watching you. Wait!"

He nodded to Mirza Khan, who clapped his hands sharply. At once the tent door swung open and two stalwart men glided in, grim in their black cloaks, and, without a word, they untied the boy and dragged him to his feet. One of them slung him over his shoulder as easily as a limp sack, and they went out. Snub heard the Persian bandit and Jonathan Silk laughing eagerly as they followed.

CHAPTER 5.

Burnt at the Stake!

OUTSIDE an amazing sight met the youngster's weary eyes. Jonathan Silk had not lied—he was in the midst of a great armed camp. In every direction Snub looked he saw lines of horses, with long carbines across the saddles, and hosts of lean, fierce men strolling about or standing beside their steeds, each dark face alight with constant expectancy. A murmur went up when the little party emerged from their leader's tent, and they thronged eagerly forward, only to be sent back by a sharp command from the Khan.

Snub's heart grew heavier still. Against this well-armed, disciplined mob, not even the fast-shooting Kittens, backed by two machine-guns, could stand for long.

He stared about him. Dawn had already broken—the eastern sky was aflame with crude reds and violets. But the sun had not yet risen to its fullest power, and the desert floor was still half-shrouded in soft gloom. It seemed impossible that scarcely two hours had elapsed since he was standing guard for the Kittens, safe as yet among their camp, all ignorant of the tidal wave gathering here to flood them in an avalanche of lead and steel.

Across the camp he was taken, wondering dully what his fate was to be. Whatever they were going to do to him, he was determined to die rather than give Jonathan Silk the satisfaction of hearing him yell. For all his pluck, however, his rugged face blanched a little when the man who carried him halted and he saw what was in store for him.

Driven firmly into the plain a short distance from the camp was a tall, stout wooden stake, stark and ugly in the half-light. Raw-hide thongs hung down from spikes driven into it. And, in a wide ring around the pole were piles of faggots and brushwood, dry, brittle—ready to burn. Snub shut his eyes for a moment, and his jaw hardened.

No time was wasted. A fresh command rapped out from Mirza Khan, and the tribesman stepped into the fatal ring, tossing Snub heavily to the ground. With brutal force the lad was hauled up again and rammed against the post, the thongs being strained in position round his ankles and wrists. In a few short seconds he was standing upright, glaring with indomitable eyes at Silk and the Khan, who stood stroking their chins and smiling at him across the brushwood circle.

By the side of the lawyer, the second Persian was busy with flint and steel on a resinous torch. Sparks flew, caught, smouldered, and flared, the firebrand began to burn in yellow fluttering flame. With a humble salute, the man knelt before Jonathan Silk and placed it in his hand, just as a groom trotted up briskly, leading a splendid black charger for Mirza Khan.

Holding the torch aloft, the renegade Englishman stepped forward, his little, red-rimmed eyes devouring the captive.

"No need to explain what is going to happen, eh, Hawkins?" he mouthed. "As I said, spectacular, but slow. You are to be the signal for Mirza Khan's advance—the single shattering blow that will destroy your friends before the hour is out. Look around you!"

Turning his eyes to the camp, Snub saw that all the tribesmen were mounted and staring towards the brushwood ring. In a single lithe bound, the desert Khan also leapt to the saddle, winding round his neck and shoulders a magnificent scarf of purple silk—his badge of leadership. His cruel, full lips parted in a brilliant smile of sweet enjoyment, and the great, curved blade at his side flashed as he drew it from the scabbard. Jonathan Silk half turned towards him.

A moment of ghastly stillness followed. Then, in a voice that thundered over the plain, Mirza Khan whipped his blade aloft in a glittering circle, and five hundred horses broke into a trot.

Jonathan Silk plunged the torch into the dry brush.

IN a moment little flames leapt up, dancing and twinkling in the early light. They spread, gathering strength as the parched wood crackled like tinder. Mirza Khan, with a last soft, mirthless smile, whirled his horse away. Whoosh!—the whole funeral-pyre exploded into fiercest fire.

There came the rapid drum of hoofs, the sparkle of upflung steel. Shouting and jeering as they passed, the desert horsemen swept past the doomed lad, on across the plain towards the Kittens' camp.

From the burning circle gushed a cloud of smoke—sharp, pungent, torturing Snub's eyes and lungs with its rasping tang. Half-blinded and faint, already scorching with the heat around him, he flung up his head to glower back at Jonathan Silk—the only man of the Persian host who remained, standing in safety and laughing in mad delight and hatred at the boy who had thwarted him in the past.

As yet the flames had not reached the boy. The pyre had been laid with diabolical cunning, so that death, either by suffocation or heat, would be very slow. But Snub was already drooping in the thongs that held him, his brain swimming with horror and the fumes of smoke. His legs were in agony from the slow-creeping blaze.

Yet, in the midst of his pain, he bit his lips till the blood came rather than cry out for the enjoyment of the lone ghoul who was watching him. His heart was pounding horribly; mists of torture and despair almost numbed him. He thought dimly that he heard the sound of a shot, and that Silk's maniacal laughter had changed oddly to a hideous scream of pain, but the facts failed to register on his whirling mind.

And then suddenly blazing faggots began to fly in all directions as a frantic figure in glittering silk crashed blindly through the fire to the stake.

Snub opened his burning eyes dully. A strong arm was round him, holding him up, something was slashing and hacking at the thongs around his wrists and ankles until, after an eternity, they were free. The steel grip on his body tightened and lifted him; next moment he was carried high above the flames and out of the death circle once more, sobbing with great shuddering gulps.

"I knew you'd come, guv'nor! I knew you'd come!"

The terrible face above him, the face of a man in the throes of cold, murderous rage, softened just for a second, and Snub was laid gently on the sand.

Whirling like a tiger, the Night Hawk glared round. A few feet away, howling with pain and trying feebly to claw himself away, lay Jonathan Silk. His cries rose to a pitch that cracked his throat as the tall, savage man with the brilliant wings hurtled towards him.

"Mercy! Mercy!" he babbled.

The icy laugh that answered him flayed him to the soul.

"Mercy, you dog, you beast, you fiendish snake? Yes, by Heaven, the mercy you've just shown to the boy!"

Two steel hands flashed down, the fingers closing on Silk's body in a grip that almost numbed him. Like a feather he was swung high above the Night Hawk's head, kicking and foaming in terror; held there for a moment to taste the pangs of coming death. And with that and another laugh, he was

flung through the air, to fall in a whirling curve straight into the heart of the fire he had lit for Snub Hawkins.

A scream that was unearthly in its pain and dread tore the silence to shreds; hung quivering on the desert air. After that, a horrible quiet descended, broken only by the hiss of the flames. The Night Hawk turned to the crumpled boy.

"Snub, my dear, dear lad!" The fury had ebbed from Thurston Kyle's face, leaving it gentle and sad. "Will you ever forgive me? I could not trail you until sufficient light came, for these curs of the desert had covered their tracks like the devils they are. I have been quartering the country from high above until I saw this fire, and—and——"

It was the first time Snub had ever seen his cold, self-contained master display such emotion. Setting his teeth against the pain of his scorched limbs, he gave a feeble grin.

"You got here—I knew you would!" he mumbled. "But, guv'nor—the Kittens. There's five hundred men charging——"

"I know; I saw them go!" snapped the Night Hawk. "Don't worry; we'll beat them to the camp and dress your burns there. We cannot spare time now, boy, if you can stick it!"

With tender care he lifted the youngster in his arms and spread his huge wings, spiraling swiftly aloft. In a few minutes he had overtaken the Persian robbers under Mirza Khan as they trotted steadily towards the Kittens' camp. His eyes, cold as dagger-points, studied their numbers carefully, noting the new carbines they carried and especially the purple scarf of their leader. His lips tightened to a bloodless line.

Truly this was a formidable band—far different from the men of Bhuristan with their antique armour and guns. The Night Hawk's thoughts flew on the wings of desperation, and his keen glance flashed over the country above which he was speeding as though in search of inspiration. And it was as he neared the Kittens' camp among the hills, with the Baluchistan forest on their flank, that his glasses picked up a movement among the trees—a swaying and swishing as though from a small gale.

"Ha!" His eyes narrowed to slits as, suddenly, a wild thrill of hope went surging through his heart.

Five minutes later he was safe among the Kittens, and Nipper was bathing Snub's burns with oil while Nelson Lee listened grimly to his ally's tidings.

"Five hundred, eh? How far away, Kyle?"

"Not far—they're trotting steadily towards you. You'll see them when they top yonder ridge. Now, you cannot escape, Lee; you must stay and fight. But——"

"Yes?"

"I've just seen something among the forest trees that gives us a slender chance—if it comes off. If it doesn't, it's fight to a finish. Don't move from this camp, but saddle the mules and be ready to ride for life to the

coast when I signal. The rest you must leave to me!"

"Good enough!" said Nelson Lee simply. They shook hands. "Anything else?"

"Yes. Give me your flare pistols and all the ammunition left!"

CHAPTER 6.

Vengeance!

ONCE again the Night Hawk launched himself into the air, mighty wings slashing until he was far above the undulating plain, glasses glued to the oncoming foe. The Persians were still trotting steadily, taking their time, saving the horses for a final surprise charge. A dangerous smile of satisfaction broke over the Night Hawk's set face and he was off again in an instant, streaking towards the border forest.

The nearer he approached, the fiercer grew his smile, for that on which he based his hopes and ruthless plan was still there—a great herd of wild elephants, awakened by the dawn and placidly tearing down the tender tops of young trees for their morning feed. There must have been scores of them judging by the widespread crackling of branches and the frequent glimpses of huge grey backs. They had probably fled from some hunters in the interior to this quiet border strip.

The Night Hawk swooped.

In a straight dive he dropped to the rear

of the feeding giants, flare pistols thudding. Tock, tock, tock! At once the forest was alight with a lurid glare. Mighty head and trunks were flung up in alarm, long tusks gleamed in the light. There came a ponderous trampling and crashing.

Above, the Night Hawk held his breath. Would the elephants stampede? And in which direction? With a venomous glance at the distant bandits, now almost at the foot of the ridge, he fired and fired again into the midst of the herd.

They broke there and then. Dazzled, bewildered, frightened, they smashed through the fringe of trees—straight for the open plain and the cantering Persians.

Shrieks of alarm ripped from five hundred throats when—a nightmare spectacle—the maddened stampede burst suddenly upon them. Too late for most to whirl their palsied chargers—the elephant, at full speed, is almost as fast as a horse. The Night Hawk, whooped in boisterous triumph as the rush poured over the ridge.

In a moment the orderly ranks of the horsemen were a chaotic shambles, as the frenzied tuskers tore through them, smashing, trampling, heaving, their piercing bellows mingling with the screams of men and horses. He saw the Persian vanguard vanish in a flash; saw Mirza Khan, the desert Napoleon, with his purple scarf, go down, to be blotted out of existence as the earth-shaking wave poured on and on, hurtling blindly in pursuit

(Continued on page 44.)

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The Night Hawk's Revenge!

(Continued from previous page.)

of the rear rank men, who were savagely spurring their horses to safety.

Kyle's cold eyes brooded down for a while on the mangled havoc below; the destruction he had brought about by wit and pitiless resource to save his comrades. With a whirl of his wings he turned and streaked back to Nelson Lee and the Kittens, who received him in rigid, silent stupefaction. His words lashed them into activity.

"Go, Lee; away with you! Ride for the coast! Don't stop; spur for your lives and you're safe!"

Whereupon the Kittens rode—rode hard and fiercely through the scorching day, away from the pain of death, away from Bhuristan, Persia, and the far-flung net that Jonathan Silk and Mirza Khan had flung out to ensnare them, and earned death for their pains.

Their last memory of that wild land and long, reckless adventures was the Firefly fading quietly from a lonely shore at sunset. And the great Panther of the Mountains, hands aloft and tears in his eyes for the first time in his harsh life, calling to them across the waves:

"Farewell, great warriors. Lala Bagheera salutes thee!"

Then he turned away for his journey back to his young rajah, while Firefly ploughed its way through the ocean, bearing the Night Hawk and his gallant allies back to England once more.

THE END.

(Another super-thriller yarn featuring the Night Hawk next Wednesday. Entitled "The Radium Robbers!"—it's one of the most exciting popular John Brewley has yet written.)

The Valley of Hot Springs!

(Continued from page 29.)

face was turned upwards to the vast shadowy dome. His lips moved as if he were praying. For the space of several minutes he seemed lost in some strange invocation. Then his arms dropped to his side. From the belt of golden chain that he wore about his waist he took a wand nearly four foot long. Through the stillness his voice rang out.

"Oh, Tormansuk, God of our fathers," he exclaimed, the professor translating from behind, "show to us thy habitation! Open to us the glory and terror of thy abode! The sacrifice is prepared. Receive it, we pray thee, oh, Tormansuk."

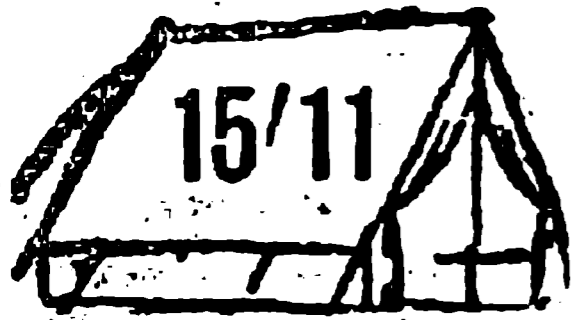
As he spoke, Eric heard something drop to the stone floor at his feet. In that eerie stillness the cause of the sound must have been instantly detected, had not the Angekok at that very instant struck the pavement at his feet.

From hundreds of throats came a moan of terror. Eric could feel the emotional force that was now gripping every one of the spectators. His own blood seemed to freeze in his veins, though the temperature of the hall began to increase rapidly.

The boy glanced fascinatedly at the pavement which the Angekok had struck with the end of his wand. It was moving. A vast stone was slowly revolving on its axis. Now a foot of its thickness was above the level of the floor. The moaning of the people rose to a shriek of terror. Then with horrifying suddenness a great tongue of red and blue flame rose with a roar into the gloom, turning all the massed faces into fantastic masks!

(Doomed to be sacrificed by fire! Will Eric and his companions escape the hideous fate in store for them? Look out for next week's enthralling chapters, lads.)

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