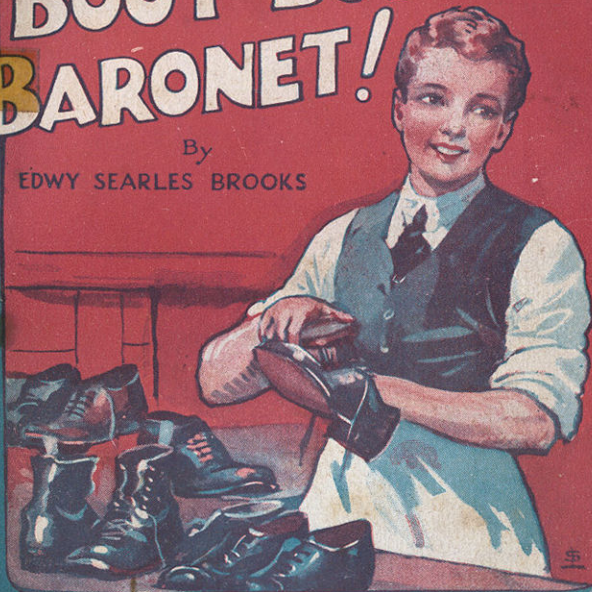


The BOOT-BOY BARONET!

By
EDWY SEARLES BROOKS



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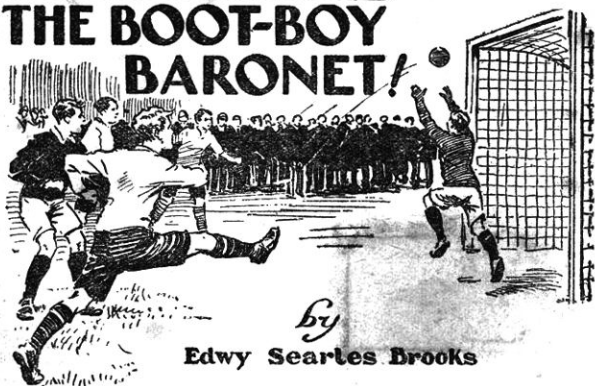
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THE BOOT-BOY BARONET!



by

Edwy Searles Brooks

A couple of newcomers to St. Frank's stir up a lot of thrills and excitement. One's a wealthy junior; the other's a boot-boy. But they're both footer stars, as they prove in this tip-top story of school-life, featuring
NIPPER & Co.

CHAPTER 1.

The New Fellow!

VIVIAN TRAVERS, of the Remove Form at St. Frank's, came to a halt in front of a third-class compartment on the platform of Victoria Station, and glanced through the open window.

"Room for a little one?" he asked amiably.

Ten concentrated stares were bestowed upon him by way of answer. For, as it happened, that compartment held all the leading lights of the Remove.

Edward Oswald Handforth was there, of course—including his faithful chums, Church and McClure, of Study D. Nipper, the popular junior captain, was there, too, with Sir Montie Tregellis-West and Tommy Watson. Archie

Glenthorne occupied a corner seat, and Reggie Pitt and Jack Grey and Ralph Leslie Fullwood were much in evidence.

"What's that?" said Handforth at last.

"I merely asked if there was room for a little one," replied Vivian Travers coolly, as he opened the door. "As I have always heard that silence gives consent, I'll trouble one of you to move up a bit. Thanks awfully!"

He was in the compartment before any of the juniors could try to stop him, and they even shifted up in response to his request. Travers sat down and looked round him indulgently.

"Train's pretty packed," he remarked. "Hardly room anywhere."

"Not even in the first-class compartments?" asked Nipper meaningly.

"Eh?" said Vivian Travers. "Oh! You mean this?" he added, with a laugh, as he flicked the first-class ticket which he held in his hand. "Confound it! Beastly careless of me! I didn't mean you fellows to see it!"

"What's the idea, you cheeky ass?" demanded Handforth. "If you've got a first-class ticket, why don't you travel in a first-class compartment? What's the idea of barging in here?"

"Somebody told me that the famous Handforth was in this compartment," replied Travers smoothly. "I also heard, on the best authority, that the redoubtable Nipper—captain of the Remove—was to be found in this select company. Well, naturally I preferred to travel third."

All those prominent Removites gazed at this stranger as though he were a new kind of novelty. Even Handforth hardly knew what to say. It was impossible for him to take offence, in any case.

"Oh, so you heard that I was in here, eh?" he said gruffly. "Who told you?"

"One of the fellows on the platform," replied Vivian Travers. "Pleased to meet you, Handforth. I imagine that you are Handforth?" he added politely. "I was told to look for a burly fellow with a lot of untidy hair, and with a face that resembled an Alpine view. Put it there, old man!"

He held out his hand, and Handforth turned red—while all the other fellows in the compartment chuckled.

"Oh," roared Handforth at last, "so you were told that I had a face like an Alpine view!"

"Rugged, you know," murmured Travers.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Jolly funny, isn't it?" bellowed Handforth, glaring round at the other juniors. "Who the dickens is this chap, anyhow?"

"That's an easy one!" said Travers. "Allow me to introduce myself. My name is Vivian Travers, and I belong to the Remove at St. Frank's. This is

my first term, and I haven't had the pleasure of visiting the school yet. I've been told that I'm in for a wonderful time. According to all the rumours, St. Frank's is the only Public school in the length and breadth of the land. The others are simply 'also-rans.'"

"Well, that's about right, after all!" chuckled Reggie Pitt.

"Hallo! The train's starting!" said Tommy Watson. "It's too late to chuck this cheeky merchant out now, even if we want to. We don't stop until we get to Bannington—and that's nearly the whole distance."

"That's good!" said Travers. "We shall be able to get nicely acquainted."

"If this were a corridor coach, we'd bung you out into the passage in two ticks!" said Handforth aggressively. "So I've got a face like an Alpine view, have I?"

"My dear fellow, I was quoting the remark of somebody else," said Travers smilingly.

"Who was it?"

"How on earth should I know that?" asked Travers. "I don't know anybody's name yet—I'm merely a little ewe-lamb in the fold."

"Well, you seem to be pretty cool—for a new kid!" said Nipper, with a grin. "Most new kids are as shaky as the dickens for the first day or two. I don't think you'll show any of the recognised symptoms, Travers."

"Why should I?" asked Travers languidly. "What's the good of being nervous? You're only boys—and I'm only a boy. Why have a lot of foolery about getting acquainted? I'm booked to be with you for good now, so we might just as well start in a friendly fashion at the beginning."

In spite of themselves, all those Removites in the compartment felt drawn towards Vivian Travers. There was something refreshingly different about him. He was cool, calm, and yet, in some indefinable way, he was not in the least bit supercilious. And the fact that he had deliberately come into a

crowded third-class compartment, when he could have travelled in luxury on his first-class ticket, was undoubtedly a compliment.

Yes, this new boy was a novelty.

Introductions all round were made, and Vivian Travers solemnly shook hands with every junior in turn. Without any question, this new boy was very, very likeable.

He was rather tall, about the same age as the other juniors, and he was exquisitely dressed—although his attire showed absolutely no sign of sloppiness. Archie Glenthorne, who was the St. Frank's expert in dress, took to the new fellow at once. Anybody who could attract himself with the taste of Vivian Travers was one of the right sort.

"Well, now we're all acquainted," said Travers at length. "I understand that you valiants are the famous leaders of the recent barring-out."

Handforth frowned.

"Don't remind us about the barring-out!" he said gruffly. "We're trying to forget it. We lost most of our Christmas holidays because of that revolt, and we've only been home for just over a week. Still, we won!" he added in a satisfied voice.

"Absolutely!" said Archie Glenthorne. "Of course, I entered into the good old sport with tons of enthusiasm—but now that it's all over, I can't help admitting that I missed Phipps in the most frightful way. Good gad! I don't dashed well know how I lived through that ordeal! Weeks and weeks without Phipps, you know!"

"Horrible!" grinned Reggie Pitt. "Phipps is this chap's valet," he added by way of explanation to Travers.

"Valet!" said Travers. "I didn't know we were allowed to have valets at St. Frank's."

"Well, we're not really," said Nipper. "But Archie is an exception. He's such a helpless sort of fellow——"

"Oh, really!" protested Archie.

"Well, he pretends to be helpless,"

amended Nipper, with a chuckle. "Actually, he's a bag of surprises. When he likes he can be as energetic as any other chap—and a good deal more so! It's just a whim of his to have a valet."

"And a rather good whim, too, I should think!" chuckled Travers.

He felt in his pocket, and produced a gold cigarette case. For a moment the others hardly knew what he was doing, but when he opened the case they were no longer in any doubt. For it was filled with cigarettes, and Travers proceeded to offer the case round.

"No, thanks!" said Nipper briefly.

"No?" said Travers. "Anybody else?"

"No, thanks!" said the others in one voice.

"All the more for me!" said Travers dryly.

He selected a cigarette, closed the case with a snap, and flicked an automatic lighter with his finger. There was a dead silence for a moment as Travers lit his cigarette and puffed away at it.

"By George!" said Handforth at last.

There was such a wealth of indignation and anger in his tone that Travers looked up in astonishment.

"Anything wrong?" he asked.

"Yes—that cigarette!" roared Handforth. "Put it out!"

"Here, steady, Handy!" muttered Church. "If the chap wants to smoke, let him smoke. It's none of our business."

"He's not going to smoke in our compartment!" bellowed Handforth.

The others were silent. They took the view that, while they did not like smoking themselves, it was none of their business if another fellow were ass enough to indulge in it. They did not set themselves up as judges, and there was really no reason why they should force their views upon a stranger. But Handforth, of course, was different.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" he said contemptuously. "And I thought this chap was a decent fellow, too!"

"Is it indecent to smoke?" asked Travers wonderingly.

"It may not be indecent—but it's dotty!" retorted Handforth in a fierce voice. "It's a beastly habit!"

"Well, of course, I agree with you," nodded Vivian Travers.

"What!"

"Smoking is, of course, a beastly habit—and a most pernicious habit, too, especially for boys," said Travers. "I rather admire you fellows for being non-smokers."

"If you admire us so much for it, why don't you become a non-smoker on your own account?" asked Fullwood.

"Haven't got will-power enough, I suppose," replied Travers, as he took a long puff. "Too much fag, too. Not that there's any real harm in it," he added. "Of course, if you fellows really object I'll put the thing out."

"Oh, smoke if you want to!" growled Reggie Pitt. "We don't want to spoil your pleasure!"

"Don't we?" roared Handforth. "Well, I do, anyhow! Smoking isn't a pleasure at all—it's a vice! And I'm jolly well not going to let this fathead smoke in front of our faces like this!"

With one movement he whipped the cigarette out of Vivian Travers' mouth and he flung it upon the floor of the compartment. The next moment his heel ground the cigarette into fragments.

"That's what I do with cigarettes!" he said fiercely.

Travers dabbed his mouth with his handkerchief.

"I don't mind the loss of the cigarette," he said gently, "but if you indulge in that little trick again, Handforth, will you be good enough to leave my lips intact? You may not know it, but you dragged about half an inch of skin off my anatomy just then."

And even Edward Oswald Handforth had nothing to say.

CHAPTER 2.

A Surprise Packet!

FOR a few moments there seemed to be an uncomfortable feeling in the compartment. Not that Vivian Travers showed any sign of sharing it.

"Well, that's that!" he remarked by way of breaking the silence. "Anybody care for a chunk of chocolate?"

He produced a slab and handed it round.

"I'm sorry about your lip!" growled Handforth.

"Don't mensh, old man," smiled Travers. "Accidents will happen."

There wasn't the slightest trace of annoyance in the new boy's tone. He accepted the situation good-temperedly. Handforth, who could never quarrel with anybody unless they opposed him, completely melted.

"I suppose it was a bit off-side when I yanked that cigarette out of your mouth," he said uncomfortably. "After all, if you want to smoke, Travers, you can smoke—and blow you!"

"Let's forget about it," said Travers.

The conversation drifted to football, although Travers took no part in it. He sat listening, and after a while he picked up a magazine and became immersed in it. For a time the other fellows, remembering the cigarette incident, treated him rather coolly, but by the time the train was nearing Bannington the ten juniors were inclined to be more friendly with Travers.

They could not help being struck by the fact that he had respected their wishes, and there had been no further sign of cigarettes.

"Well, we shan't be long now," remarked Reggie Pitt, as he reached up for his cap. "Nearly into Bannington, Travers. We change there."

"So I understood," said Travers, nodding. "We take a local train, don't we?"

"Yes," said Reggie. "Sometimes known as 'the Bellton snail.'"

"Ah, well, dear old fellow, we must learn to bear these trials with forti-

lude," said Travers, as he roused himself. "Hallo! We're nearly in the station already!"

He leaned out of the open window and took a look at Bannington as the train slowed down against the platform. It was a clear, crisp January afternoon, and the town was looking at its best.

"Charming!" said Travers, with approval. "In fact, bewitching."

"It's not a bad old town," said Fullwood.

"Well, as a matter of fact, dear old fellow, I wasn't referring to the town just then," said Travers. "I just happened to catch sight of two or three young ladies waiting on the platform, and as they appear to be waving I imagine that there is a certain friendliness. I wonder, by any chance, if the fair Irene is here?"

Handforth started as though he had been stung.

"Irene!" he repeated, staring at Travers. "What do you know about her?"

"Nothing," replied Vivian Travers, as the train jerked to a standstill. "I was merely informed that one young lady, known as Irene, was particularly attractive. In passing, I might also mention that I was warned to look out for something amusing when you met the young lady, Handforth."

"Oh!" said Edward Oswald, breathing hard. "Something amusing, eh?"

"I have been led to believe that you have a particularly soft spot for the damsel, dear old fellow," said Travers mildly.

The juniors were tumbling out upon the platform, and they were grinning. For, sure enough, the young ladies were Irene Manners & Co., of the Moor View School. Their own term had started a day or two earlier, and as they had happened to be in Bannington they were waiting for the local train to Bellton.

Edward Oswald Handforth seized Travers by the shoulder as soon as they reached the platform. Handforth had

seen, during that first glance, that Irene & Co. were some little way up the platform, and there was time to teach this cheeky new fellow a lesson.

"Look here, Travers!" said Handforth thickly. "It's like your blessed nerve to poke fun at me!"

"My dear old chap——"

"I'm going to punch you on the nose!" roared Handforth aggressively. "I'll give you just ten seconds to put up your hands—and then I'll let fly!"

"You mean that?" asked Travers languidly.

"Yes, I do!"

"Then, as I object to having my nose punched, there is only one alternative," said the new boy in a tone of resignation.

Handforth did not exactly know what happened. He had rather an idea that Vivian Travers came close to him. The leader of Study D felt a curious grip on this arm and a sudden pressure in the small of his back.

The next moment Handforth turned a complete somersault, and before he could realise anything else he was lying flat on his back on the platform, staring up at the wintry sky.

"Awfully sorry, Handforth," said Travers cheerfully. "But you asked for it, you know!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The other fellows were almost as surprised as Handforth—for Travers had floored the mighty Removite with the most consummate ease. Handforth sat up dazedly, and his discomfiture was only increased when he saw that Irene & Co. had witnessed the entire incident.

"Great Scott!" panted Handforth, leaping up. "What—what happened?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Quite a simple little trick, I assure you, dear old fellow," said Travers. "Ju-jutsu—that's all!"

"Ju-jutsu!" gasped Handforth in a helpless voice.

"I am considered to be something of an expert," explained Travers indulgently.

Edward Oswald Handforth was fuming.

"Right in front of Irene, too!" he said fiercely. "By George! I'll—I'll—"

"Cheese it, Handy!" grinned Church. "You can't blame the chap. You told him plainly enough that you were going to punch him on the nose, and he only floored you in self-defence."

"How were you to know that he was such an expert in ju-jitsu?" chuckled McClure. "It was just a piece of bad luck for you, old man."

Handforth snorted.

"I'm not sure about that chap!" he said darkly. "He's got a smooth way with him—he's got the gift of the gab all right—but I don't trust a fellow who smokes cigarettes! I believe he's a rotter!"

"Oh, come off it!" protested Church. "You haven't had time to judge him yet—and, as far as we've seen, he's a pretty good-tempered, amiable sort of fellow. He may be a silly ass for smoking, but that doesn't mean to say that he's a rotter."

Handforth grunted again—more expressively than ever.

The famous chums of Study D had escaped from Bannington Station, and Handforth could still hear the shout of laughter that had gone up as he had dragged Church and McClure off the platform. After that humiliating experience, Handforth hadn't even had the nerve to face Irene. He had bolted precipitately.

Now, of course, he was sorry that he had done so—since he had had time to realise that he had only cut a ridiculous figure. Well, he would make matters right later on—when he met Irene & Co. at the school. In the meantime, he was bubbling with indignation.

Handforth had previously arranged that he and his chums should leave the railway at Bannington and complete the rest of the journey to St. Frank's in his Austin Seven. For Handforth's little car was waiting for him at a local

garage, where it had been greased and oiled and one or two minor adjustments had been made.

"I've never known anything like it!" Handy said, as he and his chums were speeding along the road in the little car. "Before I knew what had happened I was on my giddy back!"

"Yes, it was pretty smart!" admitted Church.

The Austin was humming along in its usual valiant way, and the three chums were by no means sorry to be back.

Church and McClure tried to get their leader's attention fixed on footer, but it was an impossible task. Handforth could think of nothing except Vivian Travers and the way in which he—Handforth—had been floored on the Bannington platform.

Even when St. Frank's was reached, Handforth was not allowed to slip into the ordinary run of things.

He was a fellow who disliked changes. He wanted everything to go on normally, and if there was any alteration it upset all his calculations. Thus, he was considerably disturbed when he marched into the Ancient House and found a totally strange boot-boy waiting in the lobby.

"Hallo!" said Handforth, staring. "Who the dickens are you?"

"Potts, sir!" said the boot-boy brightly.

"Potts, eh?" retorted Handforth. "And what are you doing here, you ass?"

"I'm the page, sir," said the stranger. "Boot-boy, or whatever you like to call me."

Handforth didn't seem to be at all pleased. Yet there was nothing whatever in the new boot-boy's appearance to upset him. Potts was resplendent in buttons and a brand-new uniform. He was a curly-headed youngster, with a cheery smile and an infectious twinkle in his eyes. He was sturdy and well-built, and there was an indefinable air of decency about him. He looked so

clean, so fresh, that it was almost impossible not to take to him.

"Oh, so you're Potts, are you?" repeated Handforth. "Any other name?"

"Jimmy sir," said the boot-boy.

"Well, Jimmy Potts, I should like to know why you couldn't have gone into the Modern House?"

"I'm sure I can't tell you that, sir," said Potts. "There was a job vacant here and I applied for it. It was Mr. Lee, the Housemaster, who told me to work in this House."

"Here, cheese it, Handforth," grinned Church. "You don't suppose Potts put himself in this position on his own, do you? Besides, what does it matter, anyhow? If Tubbs is in the Modern House, good luck to him! This chap will be just as good, I expect."

"I'll do my best, young gentlemen," said Potts earnestly. "Shall I carry your bags? If you'll tell me where to take them I'll have them in your studies in a jiffy!"

They surrendered their bags, and Potts made light work of them.

"Just a minute!" said Handforth. "You're not a chap from the village, are you?"

"No, sir," replied Potts. "I'm a stranger here."

"All by yourself, eh?"

"Well, not exactly, sir," replied the new boot-boy. "You see, my mother has got a job as housekeeper up at the Moor View School—and that's really why I'm here at St. Frank's. Mother thought it would be rather nice to have me in a job near by, so to speak."

"Oh!" said Handforth. "All right, kid! Take our bags to Study D. And here's half a crown for yourself."

The boot-boy thanked him with another of his infectious grins. After he had vanished Church and McClure seized Handforth and spun him round.

"Why can't you leave the chap alone?" demanded Church. "What does it matter to you whether his mother lives in the district or whether

she lives in Timbuctoo? Don't be so jolly inquisitive, Handy!"

Handforth frowned.

"Rats!" he said. "The chap may be all right, but what was wrong with Tubbs? Why couldn't we keep Tubbs? I don't believe in all these changes!"

"In that case," said McClure sarcastically, "I should advise you to go and have a word with the Housemaster! Tell him that you don't want Potts here, and Mr. Lee might listen to you. It's far more likely that he'll grab his cane and give you a couple of swipes!"

Edward Oswald Handforth dropped the subject.

CHAPTER 3.

A New Leader for Study A?

JIMMY POTTS was universally liked in the Ancient House. He was proving himself to be extraordinarily willing, and the most remarkable fact about him was that he seemed very reluctant to take any tips. Nearly all the fellows were compelled to force their shillings and half-crowns upon him, and it was clear that his reluctance was not affected, but genuine.

Not many of the fellows were sorry to lose Tubbs. Tubbs was quite all right in the main—a thoroughly decent little chap. But he had his shortcomings. He was apt to shirk his work, and to get out of carrying bags, and it was also one of Tubbs' little habits to attach himself to those juniors who were in the habit of tipping more liberally than the others.

But Jimmy Potts was quite impartial. He made himself useful to one and all.

Not that a new boot-boy caused any comment among the rank and file. Handforth, of course, was different—but even he soon forgot all about Potts, too.

This was the first day of term, and there was much to be done.

It was nearly tea-time now, and the majority of the fellows were bustling round, eager to indulge in an extra-special spread in their studies. Tea on

the first day of term was always a big occasion. There were luxuries galore, and special parties were the order of the hour.

In the Ancient House lobby, Nipper was accosted by Vivian Travers.

"Just a minute, Hamilton, dear old fellow," he said.

"Call me 'Nipper,' the same as the other fellows," smiled the Remove skipper.

"Right you are—Nipper it is!" said Travers, nodding. "I was going to ask you about football."

"Ask anything you like," said Nipper obligingly. "By the way, have you seen the Housemaster yet?"

"Yes—your celebrated guv'nor," nodded Travers. "I must say, dear old fellow, that Mr. Lee is one of the best. I like him tremendously. If it comes to that, I like St Frank's tremendously. A topping place, by what I've seen of it."

"You'll like it better after you've been here awhile," said Nipper. "Well, where's your study? I suppose Mr. Lee—"

"Yes—he's placed me in Study A, with a couple of fellows named Swift and Bell. I haven't met them yet, but I dare say I shall have that pleasure before long."

Nipper smiled.

"I suppose you mean Gulliver and Bell?" he asked.

"Ah, yes—that's it!" said Travers. "I knew it was something to do with 'Gulliver's Travels.'"

"Well, I'm not going to say anything, but— Well, you'll find out soon enough," said Nipper. "Anyhow, Study A is just along the passage—the first door, as a matter of fact. I'll show you, if you like."

"Don't trouble," said Travers. "I imagine that Gulliver and Bell are not quite respectable, eh? Sporty lads, no doubt? Well, well! We shall have to see what we can do with them!"

"What were you going to ask me about football?" said Nipper, changing the subject.

"Ah, yes!" said Travers. "Is there any chance for a new fellow?"

"Every chance," said Nipper promptly. "You can report for practice as soon as you like—"

"I'm reporting now," said Travers.

"Good man," said the Junior skipper.

"Are you keen?"

"Most frightfully."

"All right—you can turn out at the first practice, and you'll be judged by your form. If you're no good, you won't have an earthly chance; but if you are good, you'll have just the same chances as any of the other fellows. You probably know that smoking is bad for the wind."

"I've heard a rumour to that effect."

"It's not a rumour," said Nipper bluntly. "I wouldn't have spoken to you ordinarily, Travers; but if you want to go in for football, it's my job as Junior skipper to warn you against smoking. That's all."

"I'll remember!" said Travers, nodding.

He passed on, and made his way to Study A. He walked in, and found Gulliver and Bell wallowing in a haze of blue smoke. In fact, they were both looking rather guilty as Travers stood there in the doorway.

"Don't mind me!" said Travers. "I'm the new fellow. Mr. Lee has put me in this study with you chaps. Gulliver and Bell, eh? Pleased to meet you, dear old fellows. Put it there!"

He shook hands with them both, and although he did not appear to scrutinise them at all, he gave them a very close inspection.

And he was by no means impressed.

He did not care for Gulliver's thin and weedy figure—his skinny legs and arms and narrow shoulders. Still less did he like Gulliver's pointed nose and thin lips. And Bell, with his narrow-chested figure and supercilious expression, aroused a feeling of contempt in Vivian Travers.

But he showed none of these feelings. "Well, I rather hope that we shall get on well together," he said, as he sat

down and opened his cigarette-case. "I'm afraid I caused you to throw away a couple of perfectly good cigarettes, didn't I? Help yourselves, dear old fellows—they're quite good."

"Thanks!" said Gulliver and Bell.

They were relieved and pleased. It seemed to them that Vivian Travers was one of their own breed.

All the same, tea in Study A was a strained kind of meal, on the whole. Gulliver and Bell did not "cotton on" to the new fellow's whimsical ways during that first hour. They hardly knew how to take him. He was amiable, and he was pleasant. But the rascals of the Remove had an idea that he was amusing himself at their expense.

At all events, they escaped as soon as the meal was over, and they made their way to the Common-room.

"A queer sort of blighter!" said Bell. "I don't know what to make of him, quite."

"I'm not sure that I like him," said Gulliver. "He's too jolly smooth-tongued! And he's got too much to say about football, too. He couldn't jaw of anything else during tea. What the deuce do we care about football?"

"Nothing—and we let him know it, too," said Bell. "Yet he smokes, and he knows a lot about card-playing, too, by the way he was talking."

"I dare say he'll be all right," said Gulliver. "It doesn't do to be too friendly with a new fellow all at once. New kids only get swelled head if you start being familiar with them. Our best policy is to be standoffish for a time—just to let him know his place!"

"That's the idea!" said Bell, nodding.

In the meantime, Vivian Travers was lounging in the easy-chair in Study A, musing over the events of the afternoon.

Taking everything into consideration, he was thoroughly enjoying himself. He had only told the perfect truth to Nipper when he had said that he liked St. Frank's immensely. He did like it. But he wasn't sure that he liked Gulliver and Bell. True, it was rather a

relief to know that they did not object to smoking—but, at the same time, Travers was a keen judge of character, and he had read nothing but meanness and snobbish pride in the characters of his two studymates.

"Well, well, why worry?" he murmured languidly. "Are they worth it? Certainly not! My policy is to go my own road—and hang everybody else!"

A tap sounded on the door, and he roused himself.

"Come in!" he called. "I'm going to put a card on this door reading, 'Don't knock—walk in.' It saves such a lot of trouble, you know."

The door had opened, and Potts, the boot boy, stood there smiling. He was carrying Travers' attache-case, and he was looking as bright as ever.

"Master Nipper told me to bring —"

And then Jimmy Potts came to a sudden stop, dropping the bag he was carrying. Every atom of colour fled from his cheeks, and a startled expression sprang into his eyes. He stood there, staring blankly at Vivian Travers. There was something dramatic in his attitude.

And Travers, starting forward in his chair, was staring at the smartly uniformed boot-boy in utter amazement. There was nothing pale about Travers' face. But, undeniably, he was startled.

Yet, after that first moment, he recovered himself. A slow smile came over his features, and he waved a hand.

"Shut the door, Potts, dear old fellow," he said complacently.

The boot-boy shut the door—hastily.

"I—I didn't know you were here—at St. Franks, Travers!" panted Potts huskily.

"No, I don't suppose you did," said Travers. "As a matter of fact, I'm a new fellow—haven't been in the school for more than an hour. Well, a couple of hours, at the most. What, exactly, is the idea?"

Potts said nothing. Having closed

the door, he just continued to stare at Vivian Travers. It almost seemed that he was fascinated by the sight of this new boy. A little colour was returning to his cheeks, but his eyes were still full of anxiety and alarm.

"Well, I'm waiting," said Travers amusedly. "What's the idea?"

"What—what do you mean?" panted Potts, at last.

"Oh, come!" smiled Travers, indicating Potts' uniform with an expressive wave of his hand. "What's all this? What's this fancy-dress idea? A bet, or something?"

"Oh, you—you mean—this uniform?" asked the boot-boy.

"Precisely!"

"No, Travers, it's not a bet!" said Potts desperately. "I am the boot-boy of the Ancient House."

"Rubbish!"

"I tell you——"

"I hate to speak bluntly, dear old fellow, but—piffle!" said Travers. "Great Samson! What next! Why not come out with the yarn, Potts, straight from the shoulder? Who did you have the wager with? And, by the way, how's Beccleston getting on?"

Potts gulped.

"I—I've left Beccleston," he panted. "I—left soon after you went, Travers. I never dreamed that I should ever meet anybody here from Beccleston! Beccleston is right out in the West of England, and—and— Oh, well, it never occurred to me that I should meet anybody that I knew!"

Travers smiled.

"Well, it's not a tragedy, is it?" he inquired. "I don't think we were very close pals at Beccleston, dear old fellow, but at least we were on speaking terms. And it would be the decent thing if you told me the meaning of this masquerade. What on earth are you doing here, dressed up in that fancy costume, like a boot-boy?"

"I tell you I am the boot-boy!" said Potts fiercely. "I am the boot-boy!"

"You mean it?" asked Travers, lean-

ing forward, struck by the earnest tone of the other.

"Yes, I do!" said Potts defiantly.

"Well, I'm hanged!" murmured Vivian Travers, with a whistle. "Well, I'm hanged!"

CHAPTER 4.

Explanations!

JIMMY POTTS seemed to recover some of his composure. Perhaps it was Travers' easy manner that reassured him—perhaps it was Travers' friendliness and quiet tone.

"Excuse me being so sceptical, Potts, dear old fellow, but you have given me a surprise," said Travers coolly. "I'll admit that it takes a great deal to surprise me. I'm a hardened case. Even now, you know, I don't believe it."

"Well, it's true, whether you believe it or not," said Potts.

Vivian Travers pulled out his cigarette-case, selected a cigarette and lit it. Then he leaned back in his chair.

"Go ahead," he invited. "Let's have the yarn. Great Samson! To think that you've come down to this, Potts!"

"I'm not ashamed of it!" said the boot-boy, with sudden fire.

"No, I don't suppose you are," agreed Travers. "You never were a snob, were you? Good man! And here you are—a baronet in your own right, so to speak, filling the position of boot-boy in the Ancient House at St. Frank's! Well, well! There's one thing about life—it's always providing us with variety."

"What a fellow you are, Travers," said Potts.

"Yes, aren't I?" said Travers. "Well, we have our ups and downs, don't we? Sir James Potts, Bart. It sounds a bit different to Jimmy Potts—and yet they're really exactly the same. Well, Sir James, I'm still waiting for the yarn."

The boot-boy glanced hastily at the door.

"Don't!" he muttered, in alarm.
"Don't be an ass, Travers!"

"But you are Sir James!" insisted Travers.

"I'm not—I'm not!" panted Potts.
"How can I be—here?"

"Well, I'll admit it would be rather difficult for a boot-boy to go round with a 'Sir' in front of his name," acknowledged Travers. "I could have sworn that you were doing it just for a joke. I always thought that your people were rather well off."

Potts glanced at the door again.

"Is it safe to talk in here?" he asked cautiously.

"Perfectly safe, dear old fellow," said Travers. "Gulliver and Bell have gone off, and I don't suppose they'll be back for some little time. But you can turn the key in the lock, if you like—and make doubly sure."

Potts did so, then he walked across to the table, and sat on the edge of it.

"Yes, I'm Sir James Potts—Baronet!" he said, with a touch of bitterness in his voice. "When you last saw me, Travers, I was in the Fourth Form at Beccleston."

"Junior skipper!" nodded Travers.
"Good old days!"

"Yes, you were a ripping footballer then, Travers," said Potts.

"And I'm a ripping footballer still," smiled Vivian Travers. "It's not my habit to boast, as you know, but on the subject of football I am liable to get conceited. And I will say, with all modesty, that I'm a pretty hot forward."

"Beccleston!" said Jimmy Potts dreamily. "Yes, Travers, those were the days! But that was before my father died," he added quietly. "That was before the crash came."

"I imagined there had been a crash," said Travers, nodding.

He leaned forward and patted Potts on the knee.

"I'm frightfully sorry, dear old fellow," he continued, speaking earnestly. "I'd no idea that things were so bad. I

heard, of course, that your father had died—and I knew that you were Sir James. But I didn't know that the family fortunes had sunk so low that you could get nothing better than a job as a boot-boy."

Potts flushed somewhat.

"That's not quite true, Travers," he said. "I could get a better job—but I didn't want to."

"Well, we all have our little idiosyncrasies," said Travers smoothly. "Shall I be inquisitive if I ask how it all happened?"

"There's nothing much to tell," said Jimmy. "I only know that my father got into the hands of a man named Mortimer Grayson—a stockbroker in the city. Oh, there was nothing crooked about it—nothing that the law could get hold of. But mother and I both knew that Mr. Grayson fooled poor father right and left, and finally rooked him out of every penny he owned—out of every stick of property! And it was all done 'within the law,' as they put it," he added bitterly. "Yet nothing can alter the fact that Mortimer Grayson robbed—yes, robbed—my father of everything he owned!"

"There are city men and city men," murmured Vivian Travers. "My father is a city man, by the way."

"I'm not saying that all stockbrokers are the same," said Jimmy. "I only know that Mr. Grayson took a mean and contemptible advantage of father's trusting nature. Anyhow, there was a big crash, and the old home was sold up, and mother and I were left penniless."

"No income at all?"

"Not a cent!" said Jimmy quietly. "Honestly, Travers, there was nothing, absolutely nothing! If you want to know the real truth, quite a lot of money was left owing. Grayson took the lot—and left us paupers."

"Did this crash come after your father died—or before?"

"Before, of course," said Jimmy, his eyes flashing. "It was the crash that caused my father's death. The shock

was such a great one—it knocked him completely over—that he had a kind of stroke, and never recovered. Poor old dad! Such a fine old chap he was, too, Travers—the best in the world!”

Potts paused for a moment, for there was a big lump in his throat. And Vivian Travers said nothing. His cigarette had gone out, and he was not even aware of the fact that it still lay between his fingers.

“That’s about all there is to tell,” said Jimmy Potts, at length. “You realise, don’t you, how impossible it is for me to use my title? What’s the good of it to me? Titles are not much good, anyhow—and they’re an absolute burden to anybody who is broke.”

“I can quite believe it,” said Travers sympathetically. “Poor old Potts! What a dirty trick—you having to leave Beccleston, I mean. You were such a lion there, too—with every fine prospect. Everybody used to say that one day you would be captain of the school.”

The boot-boy smiled, and shook his head.

“It’s no good regretting,” he said quietly. “In this life, Travers, it is better to take things philosophically. I’m happy enough, anyhow—I’m finding plenty of enjoyment in this job of mine. And I’m near mother!” he added softly.

“Ah!” said Travers. “So that’s it, eh?”

“Yes, that’s it,” said Jimmy.

“And where is—Lady Potts?”

“You mustn’t call my mother Lady Potts!” said Jimmy earnestly. “She’s just Mrs. Potts here, Travers—and she would lose her job in a minute if anybody got to know that she was the mother of a baronet.”

“But I can’t for the life of me understand why it was necessary for her to get a job at all,” said Travers wonderingly. “Surely, you had a big circle of friends, Jimmy? I mean, people of social standing—people who would help

“My mother wouldn’t accept any help!” interrupted Jimmy defiantly. “I don’t blame her, either. How do you suppose we could sponge on our friends?”

“No, you couldn’t,” agreed Travers, at once. “You’re quite right, Jimmy—independence is worth everything. I’ve always been an independent beggar myself. Always chose my own road—and always trod it. But couldn’t your mother have got a job as a companion to somebody, or something like that?”

“Yes—tons of them,” replied Jimmy Potts. “But do you think she could stand it? As a companion, everybody would have known that she was Lady Potts, and that sort of thing would have broken her up. No, she preferred to get right away—to start all over afresh, as it were—and she found a position as housekeeper in a big girls’ school. It’s a good position, really—and a lady’s position, too. But it’s far better that she should be known as Mrs. Potts. Her title would only be in the way.”

“A girls’ school, eh?” mused Travers. “Near here?”

“Yes—the Moor View School, just up the road.”

“Ah, where the fair Irene dwells,” said Travers. “I’ve heard of the place—and one day I hope to become better acquainted with it. I have a strange and unaccountable partiality for the fair sex. So your mother is housekeeper at the Moor View School? Well done! I admire her spirit, Jimmy—and I admire yours, too.”

“It was only by chance that I heard that a boot-boy was needed at St. Frank’s,” said Potts. “Of course, I had to leave Beccleston—it’s a big school, Travers.”

“Nearly as big as St. Frank’s,” nodded Travers. “And quite as expensive.”

“I had to leave, and for a time I stayed with an aunt of mine,” went on Jimmy. “But I didn’t like it—I felt that I was living on charity, you know.

And as soon as I heard that there was a job going here I grabbed at it."

"I imagine that your mother issued a few horrified protests?"

"Yes, she did," said Jimmy softly. "I don't mind admitting that she was absolutely against it. She wouldn't hear of me taking a job as a boot-boy. But when I pressed her what could she say? If she was earning her living, why couldn't I earn mine? And as I've never been trained for anything, what else could I do? Besides, by coming to St. Frank's I should be near her—and on my evenings off I can pop along to the Moor View School and spend an hour or two with her. That was the whole idea, you see."

"And she thawed when you explained all that?"

"Yes, of course," smiled Jimmy. "The people at the Moor View School know that I'm her son, but they haven't the faintest inkling that we're—well, that we're different from what we pretend to be. Not that titles really make any difference. We're far better off without them."

"Yes, I can believe it," said Travers dryly. "Well, Potts, I must say that I admire you."

"Hang it, Travers, I don't want your admiration," said Potts awkwardly. "Here was a chance for me to be at a big public school, and I seized it with both hands. If I can't be at a public school as a pupil, then why not as a boot-boy?"

"Why not, indeed?" said Travers.

"Anyhow, here I am—Sir James Potts, Bart—ready to clean your boots and run your errands," said Jimmy, grinning. "I'm not so sure, Travers, that I don't enjoy the life almost as much as I enjoyed the old life. I feel—well, I feel more independent. I'm earning my own living, and that's rather a fine feeling, you know. It gives a chap confidence."

Vivian Travers felt strangely drawn towards this unfortunate youngster—this boy who had been with him at

Beccleston College as a fellow-pupil, but who was now at St. Frank's as a mere boot-boy!

It was, indeed, a strange situation.

CHAPTER 5.

Mum's the Word!

A SUDDEN change came over Jimmy Potts' face. An expression of anxiety crept into his eyes—an expression of suspicion and alarm.

"Travers," he said earnestly, "you won't tell anybody, will you?"

"Tell anybody, dear old fellow?" said Travers. "I suppose I'm very dull, but I don't catch on."

"I mean, you won't tell anybody at St. Frank's that I'm really a—a baronet?" asked the boot-boy. "It would seem so ridiculous—so idiotic! We're both keeping the secret—mother and I—and it would ruin everything if a mere hint of the truth got about. We should both have to go—we should be —"

"Anybody might think that you were a criminal," interrupted Travers whimsically.

"Well, it's almost the same thing, isn't it?" asked Potts. "What's the difference?"

"Well, there's a great deal of difference, I should imagine."

"Oh, you know what I mean," said Jimmy. "It isn't a guilty secret—we've nothing on earth to be ashamed of—but both mother and I would lose our positions if people knew who we really were. You won't tell, Travers, will you?"

Vivian Travers rose to his feet and stretched himself.

"If it comes to that, Jimmy, I might ask you the same question," he said. "You won't tell, will you?"

"Tell what?"

"Ah, there we have it," said Travers. "You're in my hands, in a way of speaking—and I'm in yours. So it will

pay us both to keep quiet. Mum's the word, dear old fellow—mum's the word!"

"But I don't understand!"

"You may be quite sure that I shall say nothing whatever about your true position in life," said Travers. "As far as I'm concerned, you're just the boot-boy. And if you go on an errand for me I shall tip you—whether you like it or not."

"Yes, but——"

"Since you are the boot-boy, you must be the boot-boy," continued Vivian Travers. "There mustn't be any half-and-half business about it. I'll hold my tongue, dear old fellow—on condition that you hold yours."

"What do you mean?"

"Silence for silence!" said the new fellow.

And then suddenly Jimmy Potts started.

"By jingo!" he said sharply. "You— you mean that you were sacked?"

"Exactly," murmured Travers. "A blunt way to put it, Potts—a somewhat crude way to put it. But since it is the truth, who am I to complain? Yes, I was sacked from Beccleston."

"I didn't mean to hurt your feelings——"

"That's all right—my feelings are perfectly intact," said Travers. "At Beccleston I experienced the doubtful honour of being publicly expelled. Now, let me see, what was my sordid crime? There are so many black deeds in my history that I find it difficult to pick out this particular one. Ah, yes, I remember now!"

"You were caught playing cards, weren't you?"

"A most careless affair," said Travers, nodding. "In a moment of sheer absent-mindedness the headmaster of Beccleston wandered into my study. At any ordinary time he could have wandered with impunity. But his wanderings, on that occasion, led him into the middle of a most exciting poker game, and I can still vividly remember

the Head's expression when he saw me scooping in the kitty."

"The kitty?" repeated Potts.

"The pool!" explained Travers indulgently. "Quite a big pool it was, too, dear old fellow—something in the neighbourhood of twenty-five pounds. And as it was my study, and as the other players were my guests, I received it very forcibly in the neck. At certain changes of the weather I can still feel pains in my old wounds," he added reminiscently. "Yes, the headmaster of Beccleston did know how to lay it on thick!"

"Well, Travers, you deserved it," said Potts shortly.

"Perhaps I did—in fact, I'm certain that I did," said Travers. "I deserved it for my carelessness."

"But I can't quite understand how you got here," said Jimmy Potts. "I didn't know that a fellow who had been expelled from one Public school——"

"How he could get into another, eh?" interrupted Travers. "Particularly such a famous and exclusive Public school as St. Frank's? Yes, that's where you've hit it, Jimmy. That's where you've got me on toast. No, you see, if I give your secret away—and compel you to leave St. Frank's—you have a weapon of equal power in your own hands. For you can swiftly and unmercifully have me hounded out of this noble academy."

"You know very well that you can rely upon my silence," said Potts.

"Exactly, dear old fellow," smiled Travers. "As I just said—silence for silence. Mum, in fact, is the word. I don't exactly know how the affair was wangled. But it was wangled, and the wangling was done by my dear old pater. A great wangler is the pater. In some mysterious way he worked the oracle, and the exclusive doors of St. Frank's were opened to me. All the same, I haven't the slightest doubt that if the school governors got to know my real record, they would swiftly and ruthlessly apply the boot. But where there is ignorance there is bliss. Who are we to disturb their innocence?"

CHAPTER 6.
The Challenge!

THE next day provided a rather pleasant surprise for the football enthusiasts of the Remove.

For Vivian Travers, at practice, revealed the most astonishing form.

Handforth, as was only to be expected, had rather turned up his nose at the idea of Travers being any good at football. According to Handforth's idea, if a fellow smoked, it stood to reason that he couldn't possibly be any good at games. But the new fellow in Study A was not only as quick as a flash on the ball, but he revealed unaccustomed braininess in his tactics. And his keenness for the game was refreshing.

Even Handforth was compelled to admit it after Vivian Travers had twice put the leather past the Remove custodian.

In goal, Edward Oswald Handforth was well-nigh invincible. In many ways, Handforth was a blunderer. He was clumsy—he was rash. But in goal he was a tower of strength, and it needed a very brilliant forward to send in a shot that would beat the redoubtable Handforth.

Yet Vivian Travers had Handforth guessing every time he essayed a shot. And when Travers did shoot, the leather sped from his boot like a six-inch shell. On one occasion Handforth didn't even see it; on another occasion he did see it, but it swerved in the most startling manner and eluded Edward Oswald's outstretched hands.

"You'll do, Travers!" said Nipper enthusiastically.

"Good enough for a place in a House match?" asked Travers, with sparkling eyes.

"Good enough for a place in the Junior Eleven," said Nipper. "As I told you, Travers, footballers at St. Frank's are chosen according to their form—not according to the number of terms they've been here. In some schools, perhaps, a new fellow doesn't stand an

earthly chance of getting into the Eleven. But we're not like that at St. Frank's."

"I always maintained that St. Frank's was the best of all schools," said Travers enthusiastically. "And, by the way—look at me."

"I'm looking," said Nipper.

"Listen to my breathing," said Travers.

"All right—I'm listening!"

"Can you hear any wheeziness?" went on the new fellow. "Can you hear any shortness of breath?"

"What the dickens——"

"I'm just trying to show you, dear old fellow, that the cigarettes have done me no harm," said Travers blandly.

"You silly ass!"

"Of course, it may be the cigarettes," went on Travers. "They're a special brand—guaranteed not to injure the throat! The tobacco is so treated that——"

"I don't want to hear about your beastly cigarettes!" smiled Nipper. "If you're ass enough to smoke, that's your trouble. But as soon as you show any signs of short wind, it'll be my trouble. And then you'll hear all about it from me. Well, Travers, I shall put your name down for the House match on Saturday."

"That's jolly decent of you," said Travers. "Thanks, dear old fellow. I may have all sorts of horrid vices, but football is one of my virtues."

He strolled away, highly pleased with everything in general.

"Rummy sort of beggar!" said Handforth, frowning.

"He's not so bad," said Nipper. "I can't quite understand him, but he can play football all right. What's all the excitement over on Big Side?" he added, staring across the field. "What are all those seniors gathered in groups for?"

"There's no accounting for the seniors!" said Handforth, with a grunt.

All the same, he strolled over towards

Big Side, and it was not long before the juniors discovered the reason for the flutterings that were disturbing the usual peace and equanimity of the Senior Eleven.

Fenton and his men were out for practice, but the seniors, instead of practising, were standing about, talking—and they were all looking rather excited.

"What's it all about?" asked Handforth, as he approached Browne and Stevens of the Fifth.

William Napoleon Browne turned.

"Ah, Brother Handforth, I was rather expecting such an inquiry!" he said benevolently. "It seems that the worthy villagers have honoured us with a challenge."

"A challenge?" said Handforth, staring. "The villagers?"

"Your capacity for grasping a fact is remarkable, brother," said Browne. "You may, or may not, have heard of one, Brother Catchpole. It is he who has exploded this bombshell."

"Old Joe Catchpole, who works on Holt's Farm?" asked Handforth.

"I am referring to Brother Bob," said Browne. "Brother Bob, I believe, is a nephew of the esteemed Brother Joe. And Brother Bob is the captain of the Bellton Rovers. The team is, I believe, high up in the Bellton and Edgemore District League. In the goodness of his heart, Brother Catchpole has invited the St. Frank's Senior Eleven to a match on Saturday afternoon. I must say that I am all in favour of this spirit of good will."

"There's no reason why we shouldn't accept," said Stevens. "Some of the fellows seem to be a bit sceptical about it."

"They, of course, are the snobs, Brother Horace," said Browne. "I trust that we are not snobbish at St. Frank's? Let us not dwell upon such a horrifying possibility."

Handforth scratched his chin.

"Well, there's something in the idea,"

he said. "Why shouldn't the St. Frank's Senior Eleven give these villagers a game?"

"Why not?" repeated Browne. "And echo, like the St. Frank's Senior Eleven, will probably answer 'not'!"

CHAPTER 7.

A Word from the Head!

SIMON KENMORE, of the Sixth, sniffed contemptuously.

"It's like the infernal nerve of those village louts!" he said, with a sneer. "Do they expect the St. Frank's First Eleven to play them on their rotten ground? I don't know what these common brutes are coming to nowadays!"

"Disgusting!" said Sinclair.

But then, of course, Kenmore and Sinclair were not only snobbish to a degree, but they were two of the worst rotters in the Senior School. Fortunately, there were not many like them at St. Frank's.

Such seniors as Reynolds, Carlile, Stanhope and Biggleswade were more or less amused. Fenton, as captain of the school, found it necessary to be serious. He had to consider the question whether the challenge should be accepted or not.

"Well, of course, it's up to Fenton," said Reynolds. "But, personally, I don't see any reason why we shouldn't play the villagers, for they're pretty sure to give us a decent game."

"No reason at all," said Morrow, the head prefect of the West House. "Bellton Rovers have done very well in the district league, and they are considered to be hot stuff. Of course, I dare say we should easily wipe them up, but they'd give us a good game all right."

As it happened, the seniors were strolling within the precincts of Inner Court. This section of the school grounds was out of bounds for the juniors, but the men of the Sixth were at liberty to walk there.

And as the headmaster came striding by, with his gown flowing in the wind, all the seniors raised their caps. Dr. Stafford acknowledged the salute, and then paused.

"I have heard a rumour, Morrow, that the—er—village team has challenged us to a match," he said hesitatingly. "Do you know anything about it?"

"Why, yes, sir," said Morrow.

"And has any decision been reached?"

"Not yet, sir," said Morrow. "Fenton is thinking about it, of course—and I rather think that he will accept the challenge."

"H'm!" said the Head, frowning. "Well, of course, it is entirely up to Fenton. I should not dream of advising him one way or the other. But if I were in Fenton's shoes I should hesitate."

"Why, sir?" asked Reynolds. "What's wrong with it? We're not snobbish."

"Dear me, no!" said the Head hastily. "Good gracious, certainly not! It would be a very bad day for St. Frank's if we became snobbish. I detest snobbery in all its forms—and nothing pleases me better than to see St. Frank's on the best of terms with the village folk of the district. But there are certain reasons— Well, there is one certain reason why it may be advisable to delay this proposed match."

"I'm afraid I don't understand, sir," said Morrow.

"I am really referring to this youth, Catchpole," said the Head gravely. "He is, I understand, the captain of the—er—Bellton Rovers?"

"Yes, sir."

"Yes, exactly," said the Head. "Well, I have been given to understand that Catchpole is under a cloud at the moment. The vicar, indeed, is quite upset about it. He will not hear a word against Catchpole, but the fact remains."

"What fact, sir?" asked Reynolds, staring.

"Of course, you will not have heard

of it, since the school only reassembled yesterday," said the Head. "But Catchpole has been accused of some very serious fouling tactics in a game that took place at Midshott last week. According to several witnesses, Catchpole was guilty of some very questionable conduct."

"We knew nothing about it, sir," said Morrow, looking concerned.

"I thought not," nodded the Head. "Well, of course, it's not my business, and I shall not presume to interfere. But Catchpole is, nevertheless, under a cloud, and I rather thought— Well, until the matter is cleared up, it might be better to postpone this match. I cannot really believe that Catchpole is guilty, for I have always understood that he is a very admirable football captain. However, the district league has taken the matter up, and is holding an inquiry. Until that inquiry has delivered its verdict, it might be advisable— Still, go ahead, if you want to," added the Head. "It is not for us to judge this youth. As I have said, I am all in favour of friendly relations between the school and the young people of the neighbourhood."

The Head walked on, leaving the seniors somewhat uncertain.

"Of course, the old boy didn't like to commit himself," said Morrow thoughtfully. "He hates any idea of snobbishness, and yet, at the same time, he's got the good name of St. Frank's at heart. He doesn't want us to play a game against a side that has a reputation for fouling. I wonder what Fenton will do about it?"

But it wasn't really a question for Edgar Fenton at all. The rumour about Bob Catchpole was soon being talked of freely throughout the length and breadth of the Senior School, and a feeling was rapidly growing that the challenge should be refused. It was felt that Catchpole should have waited until after the inquiry—until he had been exonerated.

All unconsciously, Dr. Stafford had caused a mild sensation.

Left entirely to themselves, the seniors would undoubtedly have accepted that challenge from Bob Catchpole, of the Belton Rovers. Some of the seniors might have been snobbish about it, but the majority would have approved the acceptance.

But the Head's little talk to Morrow and Reynolds and the other seniors had made all the difference.

Indeed, that afternoon there was a meeting of the Senior Eleven to go thoroughly into the matter. Fenton had heard so many comments that he decided to leave the matter to a vote.

"The position is quite clear, you fellows," said the school captain, as he faced the meeting in the senior day-room of the Ancient House. "There's no need to make a mystery about it. The Rovers have challenged us to a match on Saturday, and, personally, I am inclined to accept."

"Stout words, Brother Fenton," said Browne approvingly. "I, too, am in favour of this policy. Let us not imagine for a moment that we are any better than our fellow-beings. Who are we, indeed, to judge?"

"If you don't mind, Browne, you'll kindly refrain from being an ass," said Fenton. "We've got to come to some decision about this challenge. As you all know, Catchpole has been accused of some pretty dirty play."

"Does that make any difference?" asked Morrow.

"As far as I'm concerned, it doesn't," replied Fenton. "I understand that Midshott was soundly thrashed during that match and that a nasty spirit was displayed by the home supporters. Fortunately, incidents of that sort don't occur very often—but when they do occur there are all sorts of misunderstandings. Perhaps there was a lot of bad feeling, and some of these Midshott fellows have accused Catchpole of foul play when he didn't foul at all."

"Well, they're holding an inquiry of some sort, aren't they?" asked Reynolds. "Don't you think it would be

better if we held the match over until some sort of decision has been reached?"

"Yes, that's the best idea," said Stanhope.

"Hear, hear!"

"I deplore this spirit of procrastination," said Brown regretfully. "Can we not, in the generosity of our hearts, give Brother Catchpole the benefit of the doubt? From our own personal experience of the man, we know that he is an excellent footballer, and a sportsman. Why should we heed these Midshottian scandal-mongers? In these modern days it is just as well to be broad-minded. Let there be good will all round."

"That's all very well," said Reynolds. "But we've got to think of the good name of St. Frank's. We don't want to go about playing village teams that are in bad odour for foul play."

"Hear, hear!"

"I'll tell you one thing," said Parkin aggressively. "If you fix this match up, Fenton, I shan't play in it! You can cut my name out of the eleven!"

Fenton glared.

"We don't want any of that spirit, Parkin," he said sharply. "And you won't do yourself any good by threatening me."

"I didn't mean to threaten you," growled Parkin. "But there are lots of other fellows who will back me up. We don't want this match—and you can't force us to play in it."

"I'm going to put the matter to the vote," said Fenton curtly. "We're all here—including the reserves. Those in favour of accepting Catchpole's challenge, hands up."

Fenton raised his own hand, and Browne's was in evidence, too—also Morrow's, and a good many others. But it was seen at a glance, that the "ayes" were in the minority. The voting, as Fenton had expected, went against Catchpole.

"That's settled then," said Fenton

briefly. "I shall drop Catchpole a line, and tell him that we can't play."

"I trust, Brother Fenton, that you won't definitely close the door?" asked William Napoleon Browne, pained. "Surely you will intimate that the challenge can be repeated after the Wise Men of the Village have passed judgment?"

"I shall leave it open to Catchpole to do just as he likes," replied Fenton. "If you want to know the truth, I'm rather sick of the whole thing. I think we ought to have shown a friendly spirit, and accepted the challenge. But as the majority of you fellows don't want it—well, I'm not going to force you to play a team that meets with your disfavour."

The captain of St. Frank's went out of the senior day-room in a bit of a huff, and the other seniors dispersed, feeling uncomfortable.

When the Junior School got to hear of the decision, there was much excitement. Unfortunately the Junior School did not know the exact details.

Nobody had heard of the accusations against Catchpole, and it was assumed, at once, that the seniors had refused the challenge out of a spirit of snobbishness. And as none of the Sixth Formers felt inclined to explain matters to the juniors, a delicate situation arose.

"The stuck-up snobs!" said Handforth indignantly as he stood in the Triangle with a number of juniors round him. "They've refused to play Bellton Rovers! What do you think of it?"

"They ought to be boiled!" said Fullwood hotly. "The sort of thing that gives us a bad name, you know! People will say that we're a lot of stuck-up rotters!"

"Too proud to play against working boys!" shouted Handforth. "I call it rotten—and something ought to be done! This is a fine way to begin the new term, isn't it?"

And the feeling in the Junior School grew intensely.

CHAPTER 8.

The Rag in the Triangle:

"SNOBS!"

"Too proud to play!"

"Yah, rotters!"

Chambers and Phillips and Bryant, of the Fifth, came to a halt as they were half-way across the Triangle. They were all looking rather startled. In fact, the three West House seniors were inclined to be anxious, too.

"Are those kids bawling at us?" asked Chambers uneasily.

"Sounds like it!" said Phillips. "Cheeky young bounders!"

A crowd of nondescript juniors were collected near West Arch. Such fellows as Hubbard and Long were prominent, and they were all looking excited.

"Snobs!" went up the yell again.

"Down with the seniors!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Let's rag these three Fifth Form fat-heads!"

"Hurrah!"

There was a sudden rush, and before Chambers & Co. could escape, they were surrounded by the yelling horde of Removites and Fourth Formers.

"Here, steady!" roared Chambers. "Keep back, you young idiots! What the dickens——"

Splash!

The unfortunate Bryant had been pitched backwards into the fountain pool, and a yell of laughter went up. Other indignant juniors were swarming round by now, and the excitement grew.

"That's the style!" shouted somebody. "Let's duck them all!"

"Down with the snobs!"

Jimmy Potts, coming out of the Ancient House on an errand, gazed at the scene in surprise. He didn't know anything about that challenge from the Bellton Rovers, and he wondered why these juniors were shouting in such high tones. So Jimmy stood looking on, puzzled.

"Pretty, isn't it?" asked an amused voice behind him.

The boot-boy turned, and found Vivian Travers by his side.

"What does it mean—sir?" he asked.

"Cut out the 'sir,' my dear old fellow," murmured Travers.

"No; any of the other fellows mustn't see that we know one another," said Jimmy hastily.

"Perhaps you're right," nodded Travers. "Only it seems all wrong to me, Jimmy. Well, well! They seem to be having quite a lot of trouble out here," he added, as he glanced across the Triangle. "Not that the seniors don't deserve it."

"But what have they done?" asked Jimmy.

"Haven't you heard about the challenge?" said Vivian Travers. "Bellton Rovers challenged the First Eleven to a game on Saturday, and the First Eleven refused. Too snobbish, I suppose. Pity, of course."

"I didn't know there were any local teams," said the boot-boy.

"Then your ignorance must be colossal," said Travers. "There is not only a senior local team, dear old fellow, but a junior local team. I have been hearing all about it from Handforth, who is a perfect mine of information. Bellton may be a small village but, in the matter of football, it is a centre of much importance."

"A junior team, eh!" said Jimmy musingly. "Do you know who the captain is?"

"A worthy youth of the name of Joe Spence, I understand," said Travers lightly. "Unless my information is wrong, he is the son of the station-master, and a rising young star in the Bellton firmament. But what have we here!"

Travers looked on with interest as two or three prefects appeared. Incidentally, the prefects carried canes, and the way in which they went through the ranks of the juniors was enlightening. The Triangle was cleared in no time, and Chambers and Phillips and Bryant were rescued.

"Young sweeps!" said one of the prefects angrily.

"It's not safe to go across the Triangle," roared Chambers. "These kids are calling us snobs, and——"

"Well, there's a certain amount of justification for 'em!" said Biggleswade, who was one of the prefects. "I dare say there'll be a lot of ragging for a day or two. The whole Junior School is inflamed because we refused to play the Rovers."

"They'd better mind their own business!" said one of the other prefects, in a gruff voice. "What has it got to do with the Junior School, anyhow?"

"Nothing—but the Junior School has a habit of interesting itself in our affairs," said Biggleswade. "We prefects are safe enough, I dare say—but the other seniors will have to be jolly careful!"

There was every indication that Biggleswade was right.

No sooner had the prefects disappeared than the juniors emerged once more, and more than one unwary Fifth-Former discovered that it was a precarious thing to cross the Triangle alone.

It was simply an indication of the feeling that had been aroused in the Junior School. The majority of the fellows considered that the seniors were snobbish and caddish. They had refused to accept Bob Catchpole's challenge, and therefore they were a lot of outsiders.

Jimmy Potts went on his errand, and after he had returned to the Ancient House he continued with his work eagerly. He knew that he had an hour off duty at tea-time. His eyes were sparkling, and a new kind of flush had appeared in his cheeks.

"Footer!" he murmured, as he carried on with his job. "By jingo! I wonder—— But I mustn't count my chickens before they're hatched!" he added cautiously. "Still, there can't be any harm in hoping."

When Jimmy's hour of liberty came he slipped on his overcoat, and emerged

from the servants' door of the Ancient House. With quick footsteps, he made his way round to the back of the West House, and started off for the village.

Football!

At Beccleston, Jimmy Potts had been the Junior Captain, and he had been as keen as mustard on the great winter game. Here, at St. Frank's, he was only the boot-boy—and he had taken it for granted that he would have no opportunity of playing the great game. But Vivian Travers' words had put an idea into his head, and he was filled with a great optimism.

Just as he was passing out of the side gate he heard a hail. He looked round, and in the gathering dusk he saw a burly figure. The fellow was a senior—a stranger to Jimmy Potts.

"Were you calling me, sir?" he asked.

"Yes, I was!" said the senior, in an unpleasant voice. "Come here!"

Jimmy Potts went—his independent spirit rebelling against the bullying, authoritative tone of the other.

CHAPTER 9.

A Shock for Jimmy!

HAROLD GRAYSON, of the Fifth, was a most unpleasant specimen of humanity.

He belonged to the East House, and in that establishment he had the reputation of being the worst bully of all. Incidentally, Grayson was unscrupulous, too, and he was the leader of the Fifth Form "smart set."

"I want you!" said Grayson curtly.

It was Jimmy's hour of liberty, but he did not tell Grayson of this fact. He merely looked straight into Grayson's eyes, and hoped for the best.

"Yes, sir," he said.

"Come with me to my study!" went on Grayson. "You're Potts, aren't you? Potts, the Ancient House page-boy?"

"Yes, sir."

"What's your other name?"

"Jimmy, sir."

"Gad!" muttered Grayson. "I can hardly believe—All right—come along!" he added suddenly.

Jimmy Potts wondered what was in the wind—particularly when this senior led him into the East House. The East House had a boot-boy of its own, and Grayson had absolutely no right to give Jimmy any orders, or to expect him to run any errands for him.

Grayson led the way straight to his study, and after Jimmy had entered, the door was closed. Grayson stood for a few moments before the fireplace, his hands clasped behind his back, his gaze fixed on the stalwart figure of the overcoated boot-boy.

"So your name is Jimmy Potts?" said Grayson, at last.

"Yes, sir," said Jimmy. "But I'm attached to the Ancient House, and —"

"I don't care what you're attached to!" interrupted Grayson unpleasantly. "I've brought you here because I want to have a talk with you. Somebody told me that there was a new boot-boy in the Ancient House, and that his name was James Potts. It's not a particularly common name—although it sounds common—and I wanted to have a close look at you."

There was something in Grayson's manner which caused Jimmy to feel slightly uncomfortable. He had set this fellow down at once as an unpleasant character. But he always remembered that he was only the boot-boy, and that it was his place to obey orders.

"Yes, sir," he said quietly.

"James Potts!" repeated Grayson, a contemptuous note creeping into his voice. "I had my suspicions when I first heard the name—and now I'm certain of it. You may try to hide it, kid, but you can't fool me. You were never brought up to be a boot-boy. Come on—out with it! Your full name is Sir James Potts, isn't it?"

Jimmy started—and Grayson leered.

"I—I don't know—" began Jimmy.

"Not good enough!" interrupted Grayson. "That's start of yours

has given you away, Potts! You're Sir James Potts, Bart! Ye gods and little fishes! What a come down—what a fall was there, my countrymen, as they say in 'Julius Caesar'!"

There was such a note of mockery in Grayson's tone that Jimmy Potts flushed to the roots of his hair. He started forward, his eyes blazing.

"How did you know this?" he asked hoarsely.

"Then you don't deny it?" jeered Grayson.

"I—I——"

"That'll do!" said the bully of the Fifth. "And your mother is at the Moor View School as a housekeeper, eh? Mrs. Potts!"

"Don't—don't speak about my mother in that tone!" shouted Jimmy fiercely.

"That's enough!" snapped Grayson, with a sudden frown. "Infernal impudence! Don't forget who you are, Potts! You're only the boot-boy! You're a servant, you understand? And when I give you orders——"

"I don't belong to this House!" muttered Jimmy thickly.

"Silence!" roared Grayson. "You'll take orders from me—and you'll obey them, too! Perhaps you wonder how I knew about this?"

Jimmy was, indeed, filled with sudden apprehension. For a second he half feared that Vivian Travers had been talking, but he dismissed this idea almost before it had formed itself. Travers wasn't that kind of fellow.

"Well, when I tell you my name, perhaps you'll understand," went on Grayson, in that same mocking tone. "My name is Grayson."

Jimmy started back.

"Grayson!" he said hoarsely. "You—you mean that your father——"

"My father is Mr. Mortimer Grayson!" nodded Grayson coolly. "Do you see? Naturally, as soon as I heard that your name was James Potts, I put two and two together. Oh, yes, young

un! I know all about it—I heard all about the crash. I knew that you were a pauper, and——"

"Then it was your father who ruined us?" panted Jimmy Potts fiercely. "It was your father who took advantage of my dad! He was killed through that, and——"

"Hold your confounded tongue!" snarled Grayson, with sudden fury. "What the deuce do you mean? Are you trying to make out that my father swindled your family out of the money? If your father was fool enough to invest his capital in rotten stocks, it was his own fault——"

"You'd better not say too much!" panted Jimmy, turning white.

"I'll say just what I like!" jeered Grayson. "And, what's more, you'll obey all my orders, or I shall tell the whole school who you really are! Then you'll get kicked out of your job—and you'll no longer be near to your doting mother! I'm not quite a fool, young Potts! I know where I stand—and you ought to know where you stand!"

Jimmy clenched his fists, and his breathing was hard.

"You'll be very useful to me," went on Grayson, with a leer. "In fact, Potts, you might as well look upon yourself as my slave. How does that sound, eh? The first time you refuse to obey any of my orders, out comes the cat out of the bag—and crash goes your job!"

Just for a moment it seemed that Jimmy Potts would hurl himself at his tormentor. But in the nick of time he remembered his position. He was down—he was the under-dog! By a supreme effort of will, he controlled himself, and stood there with down-cast eyes.

"Can I go now?" he asked huskily.

"Yes, you might as well clear off," replied Grayson. "I am glad to see that you have accepted the position in the right spirit, kid! I don't want you just at the moment—but when I do want you, you'd better be ready to serve

me! Understand—always do as you're told, and your little secret will be safe. But if you don't—"

Harold Grayson broke off, and he shrugged his shoulders. Without a word, Potts turned on his heel and strode out of the study. As he closed the door he heard a faint echo of malicious laughter.

CHAPTER 10.

Like Father, Like Son!

OUTSIDE, in the dusk, Jimmy Potts walked like a boy in a daze. Mechanically, he made his way towards the main gates—forgetting that he was not allowed to use them. As a servant, it was his place to use the small side gate.

"Mortimer Grayson's son—here!" muttered Jimmy tensely. "And he knows!"

For the time being, Jimmy was almost stunned. He wasn't surprised to find that Harold Grayson was a rotter. It was only to be expected. Yet Jimmy had never dreamed that one of Mortimer Grayson's sons would be here, at St. Frank's, as a pupil.

It had been a shock for Jimmy to find Vivian Travers here. But Grayson was different—more of a menace. At any moment, the bully of the Fifth might take it into his head to give Jimmy away, and then it would mean dismissal.

For if that story got broadcast throughout the school, the authorities would be compelled to give Jimmy the sack. They couldn't have a baronet in the Ancient House as a boot-boy. It would be too incongruous—too fantastic. In all probability, the authorities would get Jimmy another post, but what would be the good of that? Jimmy wanted to be here—at this famous old school—within half a mile of the place where his mother had employment.

"Steady!" said Vivian Travers.

Jimmy had almost blundered into the new boy of the Remove. He came to

a halt, and started. Travers looked at him closely.

"What's the matter, dear old fellow?" asked Travers. "You're as pale as a sheet! Anything wrong?"

"I would like to speak to you for a minute, Travers, if you don't mind!" said Jimmy tensely. "Can—can you come out into the lane for a bit?"

"The pleasure is mine," said Travers obligingly.

They went out, and in the dusk, Travers caught hold of Jimmy's arm and gave it an affectionate pressure.

"Don't!" muttered Jimmy. "Somebody might see!"

"Let them!" replied Travers, with a laugh. "Who cares? If we're spotted, I can easily say I am taking a course of anti-snobbish medicine. Hobnobbing with the boot-boy, eh? Rather a joke, Jimmy!"

"Travers, Mortimer Grayson's son is here—in St. Frank's!" said Jimmy fiercely. "I've just come from his study, and he knows!"

Travers pursed his lips.

"Great Samson!" he ejaculated. "You don't mean it?"

"I do!" panted Jimmy. "He said that he had heard my name from somebody, and he knew that we were paupers, and he put two-and-two together. When he asked me if I were Sir James Potts, I couldn't deny it. I had to admit it!"

"Pity!" said Travers, frowning. "And what sort of fellow is this Grayson? What is he, a senior or a junior? Don't forget that I am a stranger within the gates, practically, and I don't know a tenth of the fellows yet."

"He's in the Fifth Form, I think—and he boards in the East House," replied Jimmy. "He's a senior, anyway. A bullying, mocking, contemptible hound!"

"Like father, like son!" murmured Travers.

"Oh, I felt like knocking him down!" panted Jimmy fiercely. "I don't know how I restrained myself!"

"Well, it's all to the good," said

Travers. "If you had knocked him down it would have meant the sack. And you mustn't leave St. Frank's, Jimmy—I want somebody to come to when I'm feeling blue. You always were a good tonic."

"Oh, don't rot, Travers!" said Jimmy Potts. "Grayson says that I've got to be his slave! Yes, he actually said that word—slave! I've got to take his orders, and I've got to obey them! If I don't, he'll give the game away, and have me dismissed!"

"There's absolutely nothing to worry about, dear old fellow," said Vivian Travers smoothly. "Don't take any notice of this Grayson fellow—leave him to me."

"To you?"

"Exactly!" nodded Travers. "Beyond football, I had no interest in life. But now the omission is filled. This fellow, Grayson, interests me. He is the son of the man who swindled your family out of their fortune—and he is a chip of the old block, according to what you tell me. There ought to be quite a lot of entertainment obtained out of Grayson."

"But—but I don't understand!" said Jimmy, staring.

"No, I don't suppose you do," replied Vivian Travers. "But that doesn't matter—that doesn't make any difference. Just carry on, dear old fellow, and let your mind be at rest. I'll see that Grayson doesn't persecute you. Don't you worry yourself in the slightest degree."

"But—but——"

"I shall take an early opportunity of introducing myself to Grayson," continued Travers. "He is probably one of the Bad Lads of the Fifth, and it ought to be easy for me to get an intro. I always get on well with the bad lads!"

"What a queer fellow you are," said Jimmy.

"So I've been told before, dear old fellow," nodded Vivian Travers coolly. "Deep, eh? Yes, I very much doubt if you'll ever get to the bottom of me. Anyhow, don't worry. Don't let this

blighter give you any uneasiness. In fact, leave him to me."

"But what can you do?" asked Jimmy, in wonder.

"Well, as a matter of fact, I don't know yet," replied Travers. "But that's an unimportant detail. Brilliant ideas will rapidly come to me. I'm celebrated for my brilliant ideas, you know. You'll promise not to worry?"

"It's awfully decent of you, Travers, but you shouldn't do this," said Jimmy Potts earnestly. "I'm only the boot-boy, and——"

"Nonsense!" said Travers. "I don't regard you as the boot-boy. We were both at Beccleston together—both in the Fourth. To everybody else in St. Frank's you may be the boot-boy, but to me you're Potts, of Beccleston. And I'm telling you quite frankly that if I help you it will be for my own amusement. You see, I'm selfish."

"Yes, but——"

"That's all right, then," said Travers, nodding. "Going to the village, eh? Good enough! I'll buzz along indoors and join Gulliver and Bell at tea. They're waiting for me. I believe. Well, so long, Jimmy!"

Vivian Travers strolled off, leaving Sir James Potts feeling much more comfortable in mind. Somehow there was something reassuring in Travers' manner. Jimmy no longer regarded Harold Grayson as a menace, and he went on his way to the village with a lighter heart, and with his thoughts reverting once again to football.

By the time Jimmy got to the village, his high spirits had returned.

After all, why should he worry about Grayson.

Quite apart from Travers' promise, everything would probably be all right. Grayson had talked very big—he had acted like a cad and a blackguard—but when it came to the actual test, he would not be able to do much. Perhaps he would force Jimmy to run a few errands for him, but there the thing would end. Jimmy's post was in the

Ancient House, and it was quite likely that he would see nothing of Grayson for days on end.

With these thoughts, Jimmy dismissed the unpleasant subject from his mind. His expression was eager as he remembered the real nature of his errand.

Jimmy had always been a very keen footballer, and at Beccleston College he had not only been captain of junior football, but he had more than once played for the seniors. His record there was one to be proud of.

For a youngster of Jimmy's stamp, this sudden and dramatic downfall in the social scale had not been so devastating as one might suppose. Jimmy was full of a natural pluck—full of determination—and he was by nature optimistic and sunny.

He possessed a wonderful faculty for making the best of a bad job.

Grumbling was no good, anyhow. Beccleston was a memory, and now he was the boot-boy of the Ancient House at St. Frank's. Jimmy Potts was practical, and he wasted no time on idle regrets. His mother was in a good position at the Moor View School, and so Jimmy was determined to get as much out of his new life as he possibly could.

Never for an instant had he believed that he would have any chance at football. And football, with Jimmy, was very much like an obsession.

There was a village team here—in Bellton—a junior team. Well, why shouldn't he try and join that team? Perhaps he would be rejected—but he would at least have the satisfaction of knowing that he had tried. Jimmy was always a trier. His Saturday afternoon were free, so there was nothing whatever to prevent him playing for the village team—if the village team would have him.

According to Travers, the captain was named Joe Spence, and he was the stationmaster's son. So Jimmy walked straight through the village high street,

and did not pause until he arrived at Bellton Station.

Here, attached to the booking-office and cloak-room, was a modest dwelling-house. He found a side-door, and after a moment's hesitation, he knocked upon it. After a brief delay, the door was opened by a comely woman of about forty, with an apron round her waist. She looked at Jimmy inquiringly.

"Mrs. Spence?" asked Jimmy, raising his hat.

"Yes," said the lady. "I suppose you'll be wanting to see young Joe?"

"If you don't mind, ma'am, please," said Jimmy Potts. "It's—well, it's about the football."

Mrs. Spence nodded, and turned her head.

"Joe!" she called. "Here's one of your friends called for you."

"Shan't be a minute, mother," came a cheery voice from within the house.

A moment later, a tall, lanky, freckled youth of about sixteen put in his appearance. One cheek was bulging, and he held half a slab of bread-and-butter in his hand. He looked at Jimmy in surprise.

"Hallo!" he said. "I don't know you!"

Mrs. Spence withdrew, and Joe leaned against the doorpost and inspected Jimmy Potts with interest.

"No," said Jimmy. "I'm—I'm from St. Franks, you know. I'm the boot-boy in the Ancient House."

"Oh!" said Joe. "What's become of Tubbs, then? And what's your name?"

"My name's Potts," replied Jimmy. "Tubbs has been transferred to the Modern House. I—I was wondering if there'd be any chance for me in your team," he added diffidently. "I'm pretty keen on football, and as I'm living at St. Frank's, I thought—Well, if there's a vacancy—"

"What position?" interrupted Joe Spence practically.

"Forward—as a rule—inside-right's my favourite position," said Jimmy.

"We're short of forwards," said Joe Spence. "If you're any good, Potts, we

shall welcome you. Anyhow, you can practically call yourself a Bellton chap, can't you?"

"That's what I thought," said Jimmy eagerly.

"All right, then," said Joe, taking another bite at his slab of bread-and-butter. "Could you manage to nip down to-morrow afternoon, for about half an hour. Just before tea, you know?"

"I'll try," said Jimmy.

"That's all right, then—we'll give you a trial," said the captain of the Bellton Junior eleven. "And if you're all right, I'll put you in the match for Saturday. We haven't fixed up a game yet, but I dare say we shall be lucky."

"Thanks awfully," said Jimmy, with real gratitude. "I'll do my best for you, Spence. I'm awfully keen on football, and—"

"Oh, by the way," interrupted Joe, with his mouth full, "do you know anything about the Rovers? Have those St. Frank's seniors taken their challenge? The Rovers are a jolly good team, you know, and they could give those school chaps a smart game."

Jimmy's face became rather serious.

"I believe the 'St. Frank's fellows have turned the challenge down," he said slowly.

Joe Spence looked indignant.

"Well, that's a bit thick!" he protested angrily. "What's the matter with the Rovers, anyhow? Are those St. Frank's fellows too jolly proud and stuck-up to play?"

Jimmy, who believed that this was the cause of the non-acceptance of the challenge, remained silent.

"Thought so!" grunted Joe Spence. "My! There'll be a regular row in the village when this gets about! Them school chaps might have the decency to accept, you know!"

"Yes," said Jimmy, "but—but that doesn't make any difference to me playing, does it? I mean, the Rovers aren't connected with your team, are they?"

"Not likely?" said Joe, with a grin.

"Our team! Why, our lot is only a kind of rag-time affair compared with the Rovers! The Rovers are in the League, and they're all jolly good players. Most of our chaps are only kids. Still, we do try!"

This wasn't very encouraging, but Jimmy Potts was philosophical. At all events, he was certain of some football—although there was no guarantee as to the quality.

CHAPTER 11.

The Big Idea!

"SNOBS!" said Handforth angrily. "That's what they are—snobs!"

"Oh, rather!" said Church, in a mechanical sort of way.

"You bet they are!" declared McClure stoutly.

Handforth & Co were at tea in Study D of the Ancient House, and Handforth, as usual, was laying down the law. But as he had already told Church and McClure at least fifty times that the seniors were snobs, the statement was beginning to lose its novelty.

"And something's got to be done!" said Handforth darkly.

"Yes, old man," agreed Church, nodding.

"Naturally!" said McClure.

It was far safer to agree with Edward Oswald Handforth when he was in one of these moods. Neither Church nor McClure knew exactly what could be done, and they held the private opinion that nothing would be done. At the same time, it was just as well to let Handforth have his say.

It was much easier than arguing, and this policy also had the advantage of keeping Handforth in good temper.

"I'm jolly glad that you chaps are willing to support me," he said, thumping the tea-table. "The Senior School has disgraced St. Frank's. That's what it comes to, in blunt language. The Bellton Rovers, in the best of good spirits, have challenged the school to

a match—and the seniors turned it down! Why?"

"Eh?" gasped Church, who had allowed his thoughts to wander.

"Why?" thundered Handforth. "Because they're a lot of snobs!"

"Oh!" said Church, with relief. "Snobs, eh? You mean the seniors? Oh, rather, Handy! What a chap you are! Always saying something new and novel!"

Handforth gave his chum a suspicious glance.

"I don't want any sarcasm, either!" he snapped. "We've got to decide—"

A tap sounded on the door, and the next moment Nipper projected his head into the room.

"Meeting called in the Common-room—within five minutes," he said briskly. "Important, you chaps!"

Handforth spun round.

"A meeting?" he repeated. "What about?"

"Well, as a matter of fact, I've got a little idea that I want to put before the Form," said Nipper. "It's about the seniors—about that challenge from the Belton Rovers."

"By George!" said Handforth. "I'm thinking of an idea—"

"Don't trouble, old man," interrupted Nipper hastily. "I've thought of one or two already—and you don't want to put your brain to a greater strain than is necessary."

Nipper vanished, and Church and McClure grinned with appreciation. But those grins had vanished from their faces by the time Handforth looked round at them. They were both as solemn as owls.

"Cheeky ass!" said Handforth gruffly. "Does he think his idea is better than mine?"

"But you haven't got an idea, old man," said McClure gently.

"Eh? Well, perhaps I haven't—yet!" admitted Handforth. "But I shall soon get one."

However, much to the relief of his chums, he didn't try. He was far too

curious to know what Nipper's plan would be. So the chums of Study D hurried out and made their way to the Common-room.

They found a full gathering of all the Remove footballers. There were quite a number of other juniors there, too—fellows who seldom appeared in the Junior elevens. Naturally, a strong force had come over from the West House, headed by Reggie Pitt.

"Speak, O Oracle, for we await thy words of wisdom," said Reggie cheerfully. "In other words, Nipper, old man—spill it!"

"Yes, I think we're all here," said Nipper, nodding. "Well, the idea isn't much—"

"We didn't expect it to be!" interrupted Handforth. "You wait until you hear my idea—"

"Dry up, Handy!"

A storm of protest arose, and Handforth was obliged to subside.

"Well, in a nutshell, it's this," said Nipper, when quietness had been restored. "I think that these snobbish seniors need a lesson. I'm ashamed of them—although I don't believe for a moment, that Fenton could help himself."

"He's the Senior captain—and he ought to have helped himself!" said Handforth sternly.

"There's something pretty rummy about the whole affair," went on Nipper. "Anyhow, we needn't bother ourselves with it. They've refused to play Belton Rovers, and my idea is just this. Why not invite the Belton Junior team to play a match here—on our own ground—on Saturday afternoon?"

There was an immediate buzz.

"The junior team?" said Handforth, staring. "Never heard of it!"

"Neither have I!" said Tommy Watson.

"Well, it's not exactly a team," amended Nipper, with a grin. "According to all I've heard, it's rather a rag-time affair—it was only formed this season, you know, and didn't really get going until after Christmas."

"Are there eleven men in it?" asked Reggie Pitt dubiously.

"I think so," chuckled Nipper. "Anyhow, Joe Spence, the stationmaster's son, is the skipper—and we know he's a decent sort of fellow."

"Well, it would be a bit of a lark!" said Reggie Pitt, smiling. "And, by Jove, wouldn't it teach those seniors a lesson, too! They're too snobbish to play the Rovers—and yet we have these village kids up here, and give them a match on our own ground!"

"That's just the idea!" nodded Nipper. "We haven't any fixture for Saturday, so why not have some sport?"

Handforth pursed his lips.

"It's a rummy thing," he said slowly, "a jolly rummy thing. I'm jiggered if that's not the idea that I was going to get!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"How-do we know you were going to get it?" grinned Pitt. "Good old Handy—always late for the fair!"

"You silly fathead!"

"But you approve of it, don't you?" asked Reggie, with mock anxiety.

"Well, not exactly," said Handforth. "It's a pretty rotten idea—"

"And yet it's the one you were going to think of yourself!" murmured De Valerie.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Eh!" gasped Handforth. "I—I mean, it's a jolly good idea, really—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And it'll teach those seniors a lesson!" roared Handforth, as the whole Common-room yelled. "Why shouldn't we play these village chaps?"

"If you ask me, it's a crazy idea!" said Hubbard.

"We didn't ask you—so that's that!" replied Nipper promptly.

"I agree with Hubbard!" said Gulliver sourly. "By gad, it's come to a pretty pass when we've got to play against a crowd of village urchins!"

"Too jolly thick!" said Teddy Long, with a sniff.

But these dissenters were in a

minority. They were, after all, the nonentities. Vivian Travers was enthusiastic in his approval of the plan. Rather to the surprise of everybody, he heartily endorsed it.

"The very scheme!" he declared. "Goodwill all round. That's the idea! After all, isn't the son of a stationmaster just as good as the son of an earl? And isn't a boot-boy as good as a baronet?"

He chuckled heartily at that last remark of his—but nobody else in the room knew its true significance.

Handforth was essentially a "do it now" fellow.

"Dry up, Travers!" he said, frowning upon the new boy. "You're not in this act, anyhow—and it's like your nerve to put in your spoke! You're only a new kid!"

"Sorry!" said Vivian Travers languidly. "But I rather thought I was interested. As a member of the team for Saturday—"

"Oh, yes—I'd forgotten!" interrupted Handforth. "Nipper's been ass enough to give you a place in the team, hasn't he? You're jolly lucky—considering that you're a new kid! Well, come on!"

"Are we going somewhere?" asked Travers politely.

"Yes."

"Then I'm with you, dear old fellow," said Travers. "I'm always ready for an evening out. The village? Is there any chance of a cheery game of billiards? Do we indulge in a little flutter—"

"No, we don't!" roared Handforth. "You howling ass! We're going down to the village to see Joe Spence!"

"Ah, better still!" nodded Travers coolly. "I don't mind admitting that it is one of the passions of my young life to meet Joe Spence. Away with all thoughts of revelry and dissipation! Let us now wallow in football!"

"You're mad!" said Handforth pityingly. "As mad as a hatter!"

"So I have been told before," nodded

Travers. "Well, well! Are we all ready, dear old fellows? Good!"

"Yes, we might as well go down, I suppose," said Nipper, nodding. "There's nothing like getting the thing fixed up straight away. We'll see Joe Spence, make the match an official fixture, and then we'll come back and broadcast it throughout the school. My hat! That'll make the seniors sit up and take notice!"

"Rather!"

"Good old Nipper!"

"We'll show the village chaps that we're not all snobs."

"Absolutely!" said Archie Glen-thorne. "I must be allowed to remark, dear old fruits, that the scheme is jewelled in every hole. I'm dashed if I won't drag myself out, and stagger down to the village with you."

Quite a party of Removites set off five minutes later. They were led by Nipper & Co. and the chums of Study D. All the members of the Eleven were included in the party, and quite a few non-players came, too.

It was dark by this time—not that the juniors cared. For Nipper had been to the Housemaster, and had obtained a special pass for the whole crowd of them. Nipper had promised, however, to be responsible for them all, and to see that they were back within gates before the end of an hour.

"We'll go straight to Joe Spence's house," said Nipper. "He may not be there, but if he isn't his mother will probably be able to tell us where to find him. He's one of the village boy scouts, anyhow, so he might be——"

Nipper broke off, for his attention had been distracted by a concerted yell from a number of village youths who were just within sight.

The St. Frank's party had crossed the bridge which spanned the River Stowe at the end of the village. They were now in the High Street, and the gleaming lights from one or two village shops glowed ahead, on either side of the picturesque little thoroughfare.

"What's the row about?" asked Reggie Pitt wonderingly.

"Yah! St. Frank's chaps!"

"Snobs—snobs!"

"Pelt 'em, you fellows!"

"Not arf, we won't!"

"Snobs!"

The Removite footballers came to a halt uncertainly. Altogether there were sixteen or seventeen of them. But this crowd of village boys numbered anything from twenty-five to thirty. It was quite obvious that a meeting had been in progress in the village street—and it was equally obvious that the subject of that meeting had been the non-acceptance of the Bellton Rovers' challenge.

"I say, we'd better explain things—quickly!" said Nipper. "These chaps will get rough, and——"

"Let 'em!" said Handforth aggressively. "If they want a fight, we'll give 'em one."

"You silly ass," said Church, "we don't want to fight!"

"Good gad!" said Archie. "The lads of the village are absolutely whizzing to the attack! Tally-ho, and all that sort of thing!"

"Hi!" yelled Nipper, charging forward. "Just a minute, you fellows! You don't understand! You don't——"

But the rest of Nipper's words were drowned in the yell of rage that went up. The crowds of village boys were charging down, and they were intent upon mischief.

The excitement had grown with extraordinary rapidity. For the St. Frank's footballers had arrived at the crucial moment—just when the village meeting had passed a resolution of condemnation against St. Frank's.

"Steady, you idiots!" panted Nipper, as he struggled. "We've come down especially to——"

"Let him have it, Bill!" shouted Jenn Potter.

And Lumpy Bill, the bully of the village, prepared to "let Nipper have it." But Nipper, who was never reluctant to

get in a punch at Lumpy Bill, acted first.

Crash!

He delivered a beautiful right-hander, which sent Lumpy Bill reeling back. It was the signal for a roar of rage from the other villagers. They all came crowding round, and it really seemed that the affair would work up into a first-class riot.

Lumpy Bill was obviously the instigator of all the trouble. He and Jem Potter had been egging the village boys on.

At the moment Handforth was busily engaged with Ernie Sprigg, the cobbler's son, and Alf Catchpole—the brother of the Belton Rovers' skipper—was going hammer and tongs for Reggie Pitt.

Harry Belcher and Tom Biggins were prominent among the village boys, too. Quite a number of these fellows were respectable youths—who ordinarily had nothing whatever to do with Lumpy Bill. Then, too, there were a choice number of real village louts.

Nipper looked round desperately. He did not want this fight to develop. It was such an idiotic thing—so unnecessary.

"Wait a minute!" bellowed Nipper, at the top of his voice. "We've come down here to see Joe Spence—"

But again Nipper was interrupted by a prolonged yell, and the next moment the two parties were going at it hammer and tongs!

CHAPTER 12.

Harmony Restored:

JOE SPENCE came out of Binks', the confectioner's, and stared down the street in wonder.

"Crikey!" he ejaculated. "What's all that noise about?"

"Well may you ask, young man!" said Mr. Binks tartly. "Some of your friends, like as not, having trouble with those St. Frank's boys!"

A frown crossed Joe's brow.

"Well, them St. Frank's chaps have asked for it, haven't they?" he growled. "Fancy them refusin' to play the Rovers! Sauce, I call it! They're only a lot of snobs—"

"And while you boys quarrel, I suppose I must starve?" demanded Mr. Binks, with much annoyance. "In all probability these boys were coming down to make purchases—"

"I'll go and see about it, Mr. Binks," said Joe.

He hurried off, and he noted that many other shopkeepers had come to their doors, and were gazing down the street. All the noise seemed to be coming from the lower end of the thoroughfare, where there were hardly any lights.

Joe arrived just as the scrap was developing into a genuine fight, and he went charging in, bent upon making a few inquiries.

"What's all this about?" he demanded, at the top of his voice. "What are you chaps fighting about?"

"Is that you, Spence?" roared Nipper, from the heart of the fight.

"Yes!" bawled Joe.

"You're the chap I want!" shouted Nipper. "I've come to offer you a match for Saturday!"

"What!"

"A match—for Saturday!" thundered Nipper.

Joe Spence jumped about a foot into the air.

"Here!" he panted, fighting his way through the struggling boys. "Half a minute, you chaps! Steady on! It's Nipper—the St. Frank's Junior Skipper! Don't you understand, you idiots? He's offered us a match!"

"Crums!"

"Stop it, you chaps!"

"We didn't know anything about it!"

"It's all spoof!" shouted Lumpy Bill. "They're just tryin' to pull your leg, Spence, you blockhead!"

"Oh, you're here, are you?" shouted

Joe Spence angrily. "I might have known it! Don't you fellows take any notice of Lumpy Bill! He's always tryin' to make trouble!"

"And he's found it this time, too!" said Handforth fiercely.

"Steady, old man!" gasped Nipper. "Don't keep it up!"

He found himself face to face with Joe Spence, and the others crowded round, excited, ~~breath~~ dishevelled, and breathless.

"Hold on, you fellows!" said Joe. "Evenin', Master Nipper! Was that right, what you just said?"

"Of course it was right," said Nipper. "We're the Remove Eleven, with a few other chaps, and we came down especially to offer you a match for Saturday."

"Crikey!" said Joe. "Why didn't you say so?"

"I've been trying to say it for five minutes past," retorted Nipper. "We know that the seniors have refused to play Bellton Rovers, and we don't approve of it—"

"Good old Nipper!"

"He's a sportsman, he is!"

"I hope we're all sportsmen," said Nipper. "I believe there must be some misunderstanding about Bob Catchpole's challenge."

"They've refused Bob the game, haven't they?" asked Alf Catchpole aggressively.

"Now, you be quiet, young Alf!" said Spence. "You know jolly well that Bob had some trouble over at Mid-shott last week. Maybe them St. Frank's seniors have heard about it."

"What was that?" asked Nipper.

"Oh, nothing much," said Alf. "But my brother was accused of fouling, and the League nobs are goin' to hold an inquiry about it. It's all rot, of course. Bob ain't the kind of chap to foul. One of the cleanest players in the Rovers!"

"Oh-ho!" said Nipper. "Perhaps this explains the milk in the coconut! Perhaps our seniors aren't such snobs,

after all. Anyway, you can take it for granted, Spence, that we're not snobs. We want you to play us on Saturday—on our own ground."

"You mean my team—the Junior Eleven?" asked Spence eagerly.

"Of course I do?"

"Then you're a good 'un!" said Spence, excited and delighted. "And what's more, Master Nipper, I want to apologise for these chaps settin' on you as they did. They ought to be ashamed of themselves!"

"Don't mention it," smiled Nipper. "Merely a misunderstanding."

"Oh, rather!" said Archie Glen-thorne, adjusting his collar. "I mean to say, an apology puts everything absolutely right, what? I'm dashed glad, laddies, that the trouble has ceased. Odds horrors and confusion!" he added, in a startled voice. "Some foul blighter has absolutely shoved a yard of ventilation into the good old bags!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Never mind, Archie—you've got plenty of other bags in your wardrobe!" grinned Nipper. "Well, that's fixed, you chaps?" he went on, turning to the village boys. "You'll turn up on Saturday? Half-past two, sharp, don't forget. We'll give you a good game."

"I dare say you'll lick us, too!" said Ernie Sprigg. "Still, we'll do our best."

"You bet we will!" remarked Alf Catchpole. "Lumme! A game against the St. Frank's chaps. We are comin' up!"

Complete harmony was restored, and the village boys were so overjoyed that they were sincere in their repeated apologies. The St. Frank's fellows had come down to offer them a match, and they had set upon them! Certainly an apology had been essential.

Lumpy Bill and his own particular clique slunk away—only too glad to get out of further trouble. Much to their consternation, they had found themselves getting the worst of the fight.

And now they cleared off because they had an inkling that Joe Spence and his sturdy friends would set upon them on their own account.

"It's always that there Lumpy Bill!" said Alf indignantly. "It was him who started all the trouble."

"Blow him!" said Joe Spence happily. "These young gentles have offered us a match, an' we're honoured. It ain't as if the Bellton Juniors are a proper team. We haven't had any real good fixtures yet. But, crikey, we'll try to show what we can do on Saturday!"

And so everybody was happy.

The village footballers unanimously declared that the St. Frank's boys were sports, after all, and Nipper and his companions went back to the school fully content. They had proved that St. Frank's did not consist of snobs, and they were looking forward to Saturday's match with a good deal of interest and amusement.

Of course they would whack these village boys into a cocked hat—but, at the same time, the match would probably be a novelty.

CHAPTER 13.

A Surprise for the Remove!

JIMMY POTTS, the boot-boy baronet, was hovering about anxiously in the Ancient House lobby later on that evening.

It was nearly his bed-time, and he was full of a deep concern. Every time footsteps sounded he pretended to be busily pinning something on to the notice-board. Already he had pinned an unimportant sheet on that baize six times.

"I'd better give it up!" he muttered disconsolately.

Footsteps sounded again, and he hurried towards the notice-board. Out of the corner of his eye he saw Vivian Travers stroll languidly out of the Junior passage into the lobby. In a flash Jimmy turned, and his eyes were gleaming.

"I've been waiting to speak to you, sir!" he said, in a low voice.

"Great Samson!" ejaculated Travers. "What are you sirring me for?"

"Somebody might hear—"

"Come along to the study," said Travers obligingly. "If you wanted to see me why on earth didn't you come straight in?"

"I—I thought it would look—well, funny," said Potts. "I don't want anybody to suspect—"

"You'll be having all sorts of people suspect if you indulge in this sort of thing," said Travers, as he propelled Jimmy towards Study A. "You'll be far safer if you come straight to my study and walk in. If Gulliver and Bell are there you can simply 'sir' me, and say that I'm wanted outside."

"I hadn't thought of that," said Jimmy.

"Brains!" nodded Vivian Travers. "That's what you want, dear old fellow—brains! Come on in!"

They went in, and Jimmy was greatly relieved to find that Gulliver and Bell were not there.

"I say, Travers," he said eagerly, "is it true that the St. Frank's fellows—the Remove team—are going to play the villagers on Saturday afternoon?"

"Perfectly true," said Travers. "I'm in the Eleven, as a matter of fact."

"Then—then I shall be playing against you!" panted Jimmy. "Don't you understand, Travers? I went down and saw Joe Spence this evening, and he's promised to give me a chance in the village Eleven."

"Good man!" said Travers heartily. "That's the stuff! You haven't wasted much time in getting to work, Jimmy! You always were hot on football, weren't you?"

"But—but will this make any difference?" asked Jimmy anxiously. "Do you think the fellows will object?"

"Why should they object?" asked Vivian Travers. "You're just as good as any of the village chaps, aren't you? A jolly sight better, I should think! And as for playing football—well, you'll

leave them all on the starting line. In fact, my son, between you and me and the poker, you're going to give the Remove team a pretty big shock!"

"Oh, cheese it!" growled Jimmy. "I'm not such a wonder as all that, Travers. I'm out of form, too. I was wondering if I ought to go and see Nipper and explain."

"Then don't wonder any longer," replied Travers promptly. "Forget it!"

"But——"

"Don't say a word about it to a soul," continued Travers. "In fact, give Joe Spence the tip to keep it dark. Think of the surprise you'll give our chaps on Saturday! The Ancient House boot-boy turning out against the Remove Eleven!"

"They might be awfully wild," said Jimmy doubtfully.

"Don't you believe it!" laughed Travers. "You go to bed, dear old fellow, and set your mind at rest. And as for Grayson, I hope you've forgotten him."

"Yes, nearly," smiled Jimmy. "I don't think he can harm me. The only trouble is, he might take it into his head to tell some of the fellows who I really am."

"He won't do that as long as he thinks you're going to be useful to him," replied Travers. "I've been making a few inquiries this evening, and I've learned all I want to know about Grayson. He certainly is a chip of the old block! A gambler, a bully, a twister and everything that's rocky. I don't pretend to be a saint myself, but I'm not quite such an outsider as Grayson."

He wouldn't hear any more protests from Jimmy Potts, and soon afterwards Jimmy went to bed, his mind at rest. He was beginning to feel that life at St. Frank's as boot-boy for the Ancient House had many more advantages than he had first suspected.

The secret was kept until Saturday, too.

Jimmy went down to the village, and he practised with Joe Spence and his

team. Those village boys had had one or two surprises in their lives—but Jimmy Potts had eclipsed them all. When the villagers presented themselves at St. Frank's on Saturday afternoon they were looking extraordinarily confident.

It was a clear, crisp day, with a fairly stiff breeze blowing down Little Side.

The Remove footballers were already in the pavilion, and crowds of fellows had gathered round the ropes. There was a good deal of interest taken in this match against the village boys—particularly as it had been organised to prove that St. Frank's was not snobbish.

The Fourth, who had no match of their own, turned out in large numbers, and Willy Handforth and his vallants of the Third were there, too.

"Welcome to St. Frank's, old man," said Nipper genially, as he shook hands with Joe Spence. "Let's hope we have a good game. It's a glorious afternoon, and—— Hallo! What the——"

He broke off, and he was staring at Jimmy Potts—who was there with all the other village boys, wearing the Bellon Junior colours.

"He's playing inside-right for us," explained Spence carelessly.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" ejaculated Handforth. "Potts is a St. Frank's chap!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Don't be an ass, Handy!" laughed Nipper. "Potts is a boot-boy, and therefore he comes within the category of Bellon residents."

"Of course he does!" said Travers, with a glance at the anxious Jimmy. "Our worthy Potts will have the singular experience of playing against a lot of footer boots that he cleaned this morning."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, it's something new, anyhow!" chuckled Reggie Pitt. "It's the first time we've ever played against our own boot-boy. Well, let's hope you play a good game, Potts, old son!"

"I'll do my best," said Jimmy breathlessly.

"You wait!" said Spence, with a strange smile. "Just you wait!"

But none of the St. Frank's footballers took much notice of that significant advice.

Jimmy Potts, who even now couldn't quite believe that everything was all right, plucked at Nipper's sleeve.

"I say, sir, you don't mind, do you?" he asked.

"Mind!" replied Nipper. "Mind what?"

"Me playing against you, sir."

"My dear chap, why should I mind?" smiled Nipper. "Go ahead, and good luck to you!"

He clapped Jimmy Potts on the back, and Jimmy flushed with pleasure.

"There's no reason why you shouldn't play for the villagers," continued Nipper. "And if you show any form at all, Potts, I don't mind coaching you a bit, if you like."

"Thanks awfully, sir!" said Jimmy. "I say, sir, you're a real good 'un!"

"Rats!" smiled Nipper.

Vivian Travers, who was near by, chuckled heartily to himself. He felt that he was going to enjoy this game tremendously.

Browne, of the Fifth, had promised to act as referee, and the lanky Fifth-Former now came striding on to the field, his whistle ready.

"Come, brothers!" he sang out. "Let us not dally. It is no exaggeration to state that the spectators are quivering with eagerness and expectancy. I am all in favour of this game. Let there be goodwill and comradeship all round."

"Well, go ahead, Browne, old man," said Nipper. "We're waiting for you!"

The teams were lined up, and a preliminary cheer went up from the spectators as Browne sharply blew his whistle. The villagers had won the toss, and they would have the wind with them during the first half.

"Our chaps will win by about twenty goals to one, I expect!" chuckled Buster Boots, of the Fourth.

"Twenty goals to nil, you mean!" said Bob Christine. "I'll bet these village chaps won't score once! They'll never get the leather past Handy!"

"They'll have their work cut out, anyhow," agreed Boots. "Handy's a champion in goal!"

Perhaps it was this over-confidence which was the direct cause of the early disaster. Every member of the Remove team felt quite convinced that this game would be fairly easy for them.

The forwards had made up their minds to go easily, and not to score too often. The defence were frankly slack, for they felt that they would have no need to exert themselves. Handforth, in goal, was actually leaning against one of the posts, idly chatting with some fellows behind the net.

Exactly as the St. Frank's fellows had expected, the villagers were inclined to bunch themselves up, and to leave their places and to miskick.

Joe Spence was centre-forward, and right at the beginning of the game he missed a glorious opportunity of getting through. One of the St. Frank's defenders ambled up and robbed him of the leather just as he was preparing to get away.

And it was at that moment that the miracle happened.

Jimmy Potts, the boot-boy, robbed the St. Frank's half-back in turn—robbed him so neatly and so cleanly that everybody thought it was a fluke.

But the next moment Jimmy was off—off like lightning.

He sped for goal, and the Remove backs bore down upon him, grinning. They would soon dispossess this cheeky boot-boy!

With the skill of a master, Jimmy feinted, dodged, and was then off again, leaving both the St. Frank's backs in his rear. It was one of the neatest manoeuvres that the St. Frank's spectators had ever seen.

And Jimmy Potts was controlling the leather with that uncanny skill which marks the born footballer; he was moving like the wind, the ball seeming

glued to his feet. A roar of yelling went up from the onlookers. The St. Frank's backs, frantic with anxiety, were racing after Jimmy at top speed—but he had them well beaten.

"Look out, Handy!" went up a yell.

"Eh?" gasped Handforth. "What the— I say! What on earth—"
Slam!

From the edge of the penalty-area Jimmy Potts let fly. It was a terrific drive—a shot that left Handforth absolutely helpless. The leather curved obliquely across the goalmouth, and banged into the net at a high angle.

"Goal!"

"Oh, well kicked!"

"Great Scott! They've scored!"

"Oh, my goodness!"

"Good old Jimmy!" murmured Vivian Travers, as he ran past Potts. "Same old form!"

"I—I— It was such a ripping chance!" panted Jimmy.

"It was a ripping shot, you mean!" grinned Travers. "What do you mean by telling me you were out of form?"

But then Joe Spence and his fellow players came crowding round, showering congratulations upon their inside-right. As for the Remove team, nearly all the fellows were looking blue. Nipper gave them a few sharp words.

"It's no good being slack, you fellows," he said. "Potts never ought to have got through there—although, by Jove, it was a lovely run! That young fellow is a dark horse!"

"Horse!" ejaculated Reggie Pitt. "More like a hare!"

"Come, brothers—come!" said Browne. "Let the battle continue. In your consternation at the prowess of Brother Potts, do not let the game be delayed."

The teams lined up again, and play restarted. But there was a different story to tell now.

The Remove Eleven felt humiliated by that goal against them, and they went all out to equalise. In no circumstances must they let that deficiency stand.

And so the Bellton defence found itself harrassed to breaking point during the next few minutes. The Remove forwards put their utmost efforts into their play, and following one of Reggie Pitt's famous runs down the wing, Nipper got the leather at his feet and sent in a first-time drive that the Bellton goalie hardly saw.

"We've equalised, anyhow!" said Handforth.

It was strange but true, however, that less than five minutes later the villagers were up again. For once more had Jimmy Potts scored—and he had scored by another such run as his first. This time it had been much more praiseworthy, since the Remove defence was on the alert.

Yet they could do nothing with this boot-boy footballer! He streaked clean through them, tricking defender after defender—until he let drive a shot that Handforth only just managed to save by the skin of his teeth. He punched the leather back into play, and Jimmy's head met it—to send it whizzing, high up, into the net. And that piece of headwork of Jimmy's had stamped him once and for all as a footballer of extraordinary ability.

The Remove was certainly getting a big surprise!

CHAPTER 14.

A Near Thing!

WHEN half-time arrived the score stood at 3—2.

The Remove had gained another two goals, and were one up. But, according to the spectators, this was a disgraceful score—since everybody declared that the Removeites ought to have gained at least ten goals.

But then the spectators had reckoned without Jimmy Potts.

Jimmy had played a marvellous game, for not only was he displaying a positive genius for first-time shots, but he was constantly going to the rescue of the defence. Time after time he had smashed up a perfect movement of the

St. Frank's forwards, and had retrieved the blunders of his fellow players.

Jimmy, in fact, was playing such a game that he was the centre of all attention. The St. Frank's spectators were nearly as enthusiastic for him as the village boys who had come up to cheer their own champions.

As soon as the second half started, Vivian Travers distinguished himself by scoring a beautiful goal. From the very beginning of this game he had been playing well, and Nipper had long since marked Travers down as a certain player for the next big junior match.

Travers had a style all his own. In this game he was playing in the half-back line, but it was quite obvious that he was a forward; and although he seemed to be taking the game in a lackadaisical manner, he was really working hard. His passing was accurate, his timing splendid, and he had a curious little trick of hesitating and confusing his opponents.

"We're doing well this term," chuckled Reggie Pitt, during a brief breather, while the ball was out of play. "Travers is hot stuff—and we've got a boot-boy who's equal to any chap in the team!"

"Pity we can't play him for ourselves!" said Jack Grey. "He's a wonder!"

The praise was by no means undeserved. For during the next five minutes Jimmy Potts made it quite clear beyond all question that he was a wonder.

With the score at 4—2, and with the villagers seemingly in a hopeless position, Jimmy set himself out to retrieve it.

By his forceful tactics he compelled Handforth to concede a corner, and although the resulting flag kick was by no means perfect, Jimmy leapt up with such accuracy and judgment that he got his head to the ball before any of the St. Frank's defenders could know what was happening. And in went the leather over the top of Handforth's head.

"Well, I'm blowed!" gasped Handforth blankly.

"Goal!"

"Oh, good header, Potts!"

"The man's a marvel!"

"That's three times!" gasped Handforth. "That chap's scored three times!"

During the next minute Jimmy Potts scored for the fourth time! It seemed altogether too absurd to be true—but unfortunately it was true. And here were these village boys, a ridiculously ragged team, equal with the Removites!

Four—four!

It seemed utterly fantastic. But without question Jimmy Potts was the sole and only cause. All those four goals had been scored by him, even Joe Spence showing himself to be a weakling in attack compared to the remarkable boot-boy.

However, the thing could not last, out question Jimmy Potts was the one Reggie Pitt had scored, and the teams left the field with St. Frank's two goals up. But they had had to fight for their victory—they had had to fight all the time. And they had confidently told themselves beforehand that it would be a walk-over!

Jimmy Potts was surrounded by an enthusiastic, yelling crowd.

"Good man, Potts!"

"You nearly won the game for your team, Potts!"

"It's all right, young gents!" panted Jimmy, never forgetting for a moment his position. "It was gorgeous, wasn't it? I did my best, and I hope you don't mind me scoring—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You'd have been a silly ass, Potts, if you hadn't scored!" laughed Nipper. "But I want to know one thing, my son. Where on earth did you learn to play such ripping football? Where did you spring from before you came to St. Frank's?"

Jimmy had been fearing this question. It was impossible for him to make any reference to Beccleston. But

a way out occurred to him, and he was quick with his reply.

"Why, Master Nipper, I was coached by a professional," he replied.

"Oh, you were, were you?" shouted Handforth. "Then that explains it! Did you hear that, you chaps? Potts says that he was trained by a professional!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Why didn't he tell us that before?"

Vivian Travers chuckled to himself. Potts' statement had been perfectly correct. For at Beccleston a professional had been on the spot to coach the school Elevens.

"Well, Potts, you've given us a big surprise," said Nipper. "And we hope we shall play against you in some other game. There'll probably be a return fixture—on your own ground."

"I hope so, sir!" said Jimmy eagerly.

"You played well, too, Travers," went on Nipper, turning to the new boy. "You were a bit unlucky in the second half, but if you had been in the forward-line you would have scored more than one goal. In the next game you'll play inside-left, old man."

"Good!" said Travers. "That's my favourite position."

"Where's Potts?" asked Handforth, looking round. "I want to ask him who that professional was! And I want to know where he was coached, too!"

"Better not trouble, old man," said Travers. "I've got a sort of idea that Potts doesn't want to say much. He's a bit shy, dear old fellow. I suppose he feels it—being only a boot-boy, you know."

"Yes, leave him alone, Handy!" said Nipper.

Jimmy Potts had gone. He had seized the opportunity to slip away, having made some excuse that he had to get back to his duties.

Later on, Vivian Travers found an opportunity of seeking out this remarkable boot-boy and congratulating him fervently.

"Oh, it was gorgeous, Travers—just

gorgeous!" said Jimmy, hugging himself. "I never dreamed that I should be able to play real football at St. Frank's! How could I dream of it? It—it seemed so impossible."

Vivian Travers patted him on the back.

"Nothing's impossible, dear old fellow," he replied. "And this life is full of little surprises. You may be a baronet, and you may have blue blood in your veins—but here you are, cleaning boots for us. Somehow, I've got an idea that your life at St. Frank's will be adventurous."

"It's a lot better than I ever thought it would be, if that's what you mean," said Jimmy.

"It's a good joke, isn't it?" chuckled Travers. "I wonder what these fellows would say if I told them that you used to be Junior Captain at Beccleston College—and that you were known in the Fourth as 'Sharp-Shooter Jimmy,' because of your genius for goal getting?"

"You won't tell them, Travers, will you?" asked Jimmy anxiously. "Don't forget that if you give the authorities an inkling of my real position it would be fatal. They'd sack me at once!"

Travers smiled whimsically.

"Jove!" he muttered, half to himself. "What a sensation it would cause if they did know. Wouldn't Nipper and Handy and all the others get a shock. Why, they wouldn't believe it at first. What is that old saying? 'Truth is stranger than fiction.' How well it fits this case, Jimmy, old fellow!"

Jimmy nodded.

"Yes, it would sound rather impossible," he agreed. "Then I can rely upon you to keep silent, Travers?"

"Mum's the word, Jimmy!" Travers smiled, then added: "And just the same, I ask you to keep my little secret. Don't forget that I was sacked from Beccleston, and it is in your power to get me kicked out of here. So we're quits. I can get you kicked out of St. Frank's, and you can do the same. From now on 'silence' is our motto!"

Jimmy Potts breathed a sigh of relief. He knew he could trust Travers, and he certainly did not intend to give away that fellow's secret.

And so Jimmy Potts, the boot-boy baronet, started his life at St. Frank's. When he went to bed that night he had a feeling within him that it was too good to be true.

Perhaps there was some excellent reason for this thought. Certainly the immediate future was likely to provide Jimmy Potts with some strange adventures and with some great trials.

Incidentally, it was to provide Vivian Travers with some peculiar sport, too!

CHAPTER 15.

Grayson at It Again!

AS Vivian Travers came out of the Ancient House, just after dinner the next day, he paused. He frowned. He compressed his lips. For, over on the other side of the Triangle, he could see Harold Grayson, of the Fifth, talking with Potts, the boot-boy.

"I thought it wouldn't be long!" Travers muttered complacently. "Very well, Master Grayson! You're asking for it, so you'll get it! I'm going to play a pretty little game with you—a rather deep game—and it's going to be confoundedly amusing, too!"

It was a half-holiday this afternoon, and Travers had been thinking about taking a run into Bannington. He had said very little to Gulliver and Bell that day. They were his study mates, and he had been thrown into their company quite a lot. But there was a distant air between them. Gulliver and Bell had not shown up in a good light all the time Travers had known them. Travers treated them with open contempt, and they felt it.

On the other side of the Triangle, near the East House, Grayson was looking at Potts with an unpleasant leer on his face.

"They're my orders, Potts!" he said

curtly. "See that they are carried out!"

"You're doing this deliberately, Grayson!" muttered Jimmy Potts fiercely. "You know very well that I've got work to do this afternoon. It may be a half-holiday for the school, but I'm only the boot-boy—the buttons! I haven't got the afternoon off."

"And if you neglect your own duties, and spend your time working for me, you'll get into a row, eh?" said Grayson. "Well, what the dickens do I care? Of course I'm doing it deliberately! I've got you on toast, young Potts! Either you do as I order, or you'll be sorry for yourself!"

"Yes, but——"

"I don't want any objections!" snapped Grayson. "I'm going out this afternoon, and you've got to clean up my study. Understand? When I come back, I shall expect that study to be as tidy as a new pin—absolutely spotless! If it isn't, out comes the truth!"

Grayson walked off, without allowing Jimmy Potts to say another word, and there had been something in his tone which told Jimmy that he had meant what he said. The bully of the Fifth was taking full advantage of that knowledge of his!

"Trouble, dear old fellow?" asked Vivian Travers, strolling up.

Jimmy turned, his eyes glowing with resentment.

"Yes!" he muttered. "It's Grayson again!"

"I thought so," nodded Travers. "What is it this time?"

"He's given me orders to clean out his study!" said Jimmy fiercely. "It's not my work, Travers! I haven't the time, either! I've got to help Mrs. Poulter this afternoon—and she'll report me if I fail to turn up. That might mean an inquiry—and dismissal."

"Don't worry yourself, dear old fellow," said Travers. "Leave this to me."

"But how can you do anything?" asked Jimmy.

"Just give my brain a few minutes to get going, and it will evolve a ripe scheme," said Travers. "Grayson wants his study turned out, doesn't he? When he comes back, he wants to find it spotless, eh? All right, Jimmy! He will find it spotless. In fact, I'll undertake to do the work. You buzz off into your own House, and get busy on your usual duties."

"Yes, but you can't clean out that study!" said Jimmy, staring. "You, least of all fellows, Travers! I've never known you to do any work in your life! Even at Beccleston, you let all the other fellows wash up, and——"

"I know!" interrupted Travers sadly. "Laziness was always one of my weaknesses. But there are times, Jimmy, when I surprise even myself. It may sound incredible, but this afternoon I am going to work!"

Travers would not allow the boot-boy baronet to say another word. He "shoo-ed" Jimmy away, and made him go into the Ancient House, where he really belonged. Then Travers stuck his hands deep into his trousers pockets, and he noticed that Handforth & Co., Nipper, Fullwood, Reggie Pitt and a few other Remove fellows were bearing down upon him. He awaited their arrival calmly.

"If you want me for football this afternoon, dear old fellows, there's nothing doing," he said, before any of them could speak. "I'm engaged."

"We weren't going to talk about football, Travers," said Fullwood. "We were wondering why you were standing there, talking so familiarly with Potts. Anyone would think you two were great friends, whereas he is almost a complete stranger to you."

"Is there any rule which prohibits me from talking with Potts?" asked Travers politely, evading replying to Fullwood's last sentence. "He's a darn good sort."

"Yes, you're right there," said Nipper. "Good fellow! He's got the right spirit in him—the real, genuine

pluck! As for you being familiar with him, Travers—well, that's your own concern."

"Thanks awfully," said Travers. "As a matter of fact, I believe in being familiar with everybody. I'm glad you've come, all of you, because I've got something to put before you. There's work to be done this afternoon."

The juniors looked at Travers inquiringly.

"Work?" repeated Church, staring. "For us?"

"Yes—for us!" said Vivian Travers. "To put it briefly, we're all going to clear out Grayson's study!"

Nipper grinned.

"Oh, so we're going to clean up Grayson's study, are we?" he said pleasantly. "That's a piece of news, Travers! What's the idea, you ass? Explain yourself."

"Yes, choke it up!" said Handforth. "By George! Grayson is the last fellow in the world I'd help! He's a rotten bully, and he's a blackguard, too!"

"I agree with you," said Travers. "Well, in a nutshell, Grayson has just been ordering Potts—our boot-boy, mark you—to clean his study out this afternoon!"

"Nerve!" said Fullwood indignantly.

"It would be serious enough if Grayson ordered his own boot-boy to do such work," said Travers. "But our boot-boy! Our boot-boy, you fellows—our own little Jimmy! He, and he alone, has been ordered to do this scavenging!"

"Well, it's like Grayson's nerve!" said Nipper, frowning. "Of all the impudence! Giving orders to the Ancient House boot-boy!"

"I've just told Potts to take no notice of it," said Travers nodding.

"I should think so!" roared Handforth. "If you hadn't told him——"

"Just a minute, dear old fellow," interrupted Travers. "You see, the problem is a little difficult. If Grayson

comes back and finds that his study isn't cleaned up, he's liable to take it out of Pott's hide. It's all very well for us to say that we shall protect him—but Grayson will find all sorts of opportunities for grabbing the poor kid. So what do you say to the idea of us cleaning out the study?"

"Dotty!" said Handforth promptly.

"Rotten!" said Nipper.

"Worst idea under the sun!" contributed somebody else.

"Well, that's a pity," said Travers thoughtfully. "I had rather an idea that we could do the job well."

Vivian Travers proceeded to add a few embellishments. As he proceeded, his listeners smiled, and then grinned. Even Handforth found himself roaring with laughter at the end—Handforth, who rather had a habit of decrying the ideas of other people.

"It won't take us any more than ten minutes, if we all work hard," said Travers. "Well, you fellows, are you game?"

"Rather!" grinned Church. "Come on—let's get it over!"

"Hear, hear!"

"And it'll serve Grayson right—for his giddy nerve!" said Handforth gruffly. "The trouble is, this scheme isn't strong enough, Travers. We want to do something more ambitious."

"Rats!" said Nipper. "I don't believe in doing any real harm in a fellow's study—even though he is a rotter."

After a little argument they all went into the East House, and before long they were within Harold Grayson's study, in the Fifth Form passage. As it was fine that afternoon, hardly any of the fellows were indoors. So the juniors had the place to themselves.

The work was a little more difficult than they had believed, and a full half-hour had elapsed before they emerged into the Triangle once more—dusty, but satisfied. They dispersed, and Travers refused all offers to go to the playing fields.

"No, dear old fellows, I'll hang about

here, if you don't mind," he said. "I rather want to see Grayson's face when he comes in. There's no need for everybody to wait, of course—he may be an hour or two yet. But I have a good stock of patience."

"Well, you can stay here if you like—but we're going," said Handforth.

"Thanks awfully," beamed Vivian Travers.

His vigil was not so wearisome as he had feared. For, less than three-quarters of an hour later, Grayson came striding across the Triangle from the main gates. He was accompanied by Kenmore, of the Sixth, and Shaw, of the Fifth. Shaw was Grayson's study mate, and he was nearly as big a rascal as Grayson himself.

Kenmore parted from them, and went off towards the Modern House; Grayson and Shaw came up the East House steps, and strode through the lobby. They took no notice of Travers whatever. But Travers turned, and leisurely followed them into the Fifth Form passage.

"We're back a bit too soon, aren't we?" Shaw was saying. "I expect we shall find that beastly boot-boy in the study. It was a dotty idea of yours, Grayson, to order him to clean it up. He's not our boot-boy, anyhow, and—"

"Never mind about that," interrupted Grayson. "I've scared the kid out of his wits. He does everything I tell him! Besides," he added, "I thought perhaps we could play a little Banker before tea!"

He opened the door of his study, and strode in. But he only took about one step into that apartment. Then he paused, and his mouth opened wide. His eyes bulged from his head.

"By gad!" he gasped, at length.

"What's the matter?" demanded Shaw impatiently. "What are you standing there for, you idiot?"

"Look at this!" roared Grayson violently. Frederick Shaw went into the study—and then he understood exactly why Grayson had become so excited!

CHAPTER 16.

Upside Down!

GRAYSON'S study was upside down.

That is to say, the contents of Grayson's study were upside down. Not in the ordinary, accepted meaning of the phrase—but literally so. That apartment bore an extraordinary aspect.

Everything was spotlessly clean, just as Grayson had ordered. But the carpet was showing its reverse side to the world—even the linoleum border was upside down, too. The table was upside down, and the chairs were similarly placed. The bookcase—the bureau—the easy-chair—the fender—the pictures on the walls—the curtains at the windows—everything!

Every object of the room, big and small, was upside down!

"Well, I'm hanged!" said Shaw thickly.

"Who—who's done this?" yelled Grayson. "Potts, I'll bet! The young hound! I told him to come here and

"Calm yourself, Grayson!" said Vivian Travers, from the doorway.

Grayson swung round, and he glared at Travers.

"What are you doing here, you confounded Remove idiot?" he demanded. "You're a new kid in the school, aren't you?"

"Not exactly now," said Travers. "Rather second-hand, in fact—"

"Don't be funny with me!" roared Grayson.

"I will admit that it is unnecessary to be funny with you, Grayson," said Travers coolly. "You are quite funny enough without my assistance."

"Look here—"

"As for this room, you can hold me responsible," went on Travers. "I did this."

"You!" shouted Grayson.

"I, said the sparrow, with my bow and arrow!" nodded Travers.

"You cheeky, infernal, blithering—"

"Don't rack your brains for any more grammatical terms, dear old fellow," said Travers. "I am ready to admit that a number of other fellows helped me to carry out the idea. But I am responsible. Rather neat, isn't it?"

"Neat!" howled Grayson. "I'll tan the life out of you for this!"

"Well, of course, that depends," said Travers. "I might object, Grayson. In fact, I do object. You see, you told our boot-boy to clean your study out, and quite a number of Ancient House fellows objected to the scheme. So I suggested that we should turn your study upside down, after thoroughly cleaning it, and this is the result. One of the smartest jobs I've ever seen."

"Shut that door!" snarled Grayson. "That's right, Shaw! Shut it—and lock it! Where's my malacca? I'm going to tan this kid until—"

"Now, don't get so excited!" said Travers indulgently. "Excitement is never good for you, Grayson. It was only a joke, after all. Can't you take a joke?"

"I'll soon show you whether I regard this as a joke!" roared Grayson savagely.

"It's rather a pity that you're so violent," said Travers, with regret. "I'm not an eavesdropper by nature, but I happened to hear a few remarks concerning Banker. And Banker is my one weakness. I was looking forward to a little game with you."

Travers thoughtfully pulled a hand from his trousers pocket, revealing about thirty shillings' worth of silver and a whole bundle of currency notes.

The effect upon Grayson was immediate. He regarded that money with a sudden, cunning gleam in his eye. It so happened that Grayson was rather short, and Shaw was flush. Grayson had suggested Banker because he felt that he would be able to get some of Shaw's cash. Unfortunately, he and Shaw knew one another—they knew their own little tricks, and Grayson

had felt all along that he would not get much change out of his disreputable study-mate.

But here was a Removite—a mere kid—a new fellow into the bargain! Here he was, asking for a game of Banker, and he was displaying a sum of money that could not be less than ten or twelve pounds! Harold Grayson could easily afford to forget the "joke" that had been played upon him.

"Of course, if you won't admit me into the game I shall have to suffer the dread penalty of solitude," said Travers. "Unfortunately, there aren't any fellows in the Remove—well, hardly any—who can play Banker properly. Gulliver and Bell are likely candidates, I will admit. But they are both broke, and I am inclined to favour high stakes. Five shillings a bet is my usual."

"By gad!" said Grayson blankly.

Travers turned to the door.

"Well, I'll be going," he said, putting his money back. "I shouldn't advise you to use your malacca, Grayson. It'll only create a noise, and——"

"Just a minute," growled the bully of the Fifth. "I didn't mean that just now, Travers. Your name is Travers, isn't it?"

"Vivian Travers—at your service!" nodded the new boy.

"Well, I don't want to quarrel with you," said Grayson. "As it was only a joke, I'll forget all about it. You're welcome to a game, if you like."

"That's fine!" said Travers, beaming. "In about twenty minutes, say?"

"Why twenty minutes?"

"I want to give you two fellows time to straighten out the study," said Travers coolly. "All right, I'll be back within twenty minutes."

He opened the door and strolled out. Grayson and Shaw looked at one another, and had nothing to say. Vivian Travers was ready enough to join them in a game of Banker—but

he certainly was not going to help them to straighten that study!

At five o'clock Vivian Travers rose to his feet.

"I'd like to stay longer, dear old fellows, but I arranged to have tea in the Ancient House," he said regretfully. "We've had quite a nice game, and we're all friendly. What could be better?"

"You're quite welcome to stay if you like," said Grayson. "Why not have tea here? We could continue the game."

"Thanks, all the same, but an hour of Banker is enough for me at one sitting," replied Travers. "I must have lost a few bob, too. Well, what does it matter? The game's worth it. Before now I've lost seven or eight quid at a sitting. Who cares? It's all in the game!"

He was smiling and cheerful, and Harold Grayson was particularly delighted—because, at that moment, he had twenty-five shillings of Travers' money in his pocket. The Removite seemed to think it was a mere trifle, but Grayson was by no means averse to such trifles as these.

"Well, if you must go, you must," said the Fifth Former, at length. "But what about to-night?"

"To-night?" said Travers, as he moved towards the door.

"Yes," said Grayson. "I told you that Shaw and I are going off after lights-out. There's a special spree on at the Wheatsheaf, at Bannington. Are you game to come with us?"

"I'm game for anything," said Travers promptly. "Splendid! We'll all go along to the Wheatsheaf and have a good time—after lights-out, eh? Well, well! What naughty tricks these boys will get up to! I'll drop in later, Grayson, and we can fix up the details."

He strolled out, and Grayson frowned as the door closed.

"Cheeky young ass!" he said.

"Yes, he's got a nerve," agreed Shaw. "But I've won fifteen bob off him."

"He's got pots more money, too," added Grayson, his expression changing. "By gad! We'll properly rook him to-night, Shaw! A kid like that deserves to be parted from his money!"

Later on Travers came back, and an appointment was arranged. What is more, that appointment was kept. Travers slipped out of the Ancient House after lights-out—after all the other fellows had gone off to sleep—and it was not until one o'clock in the morning that a shadowy figure came creeping upstairs.

In ordinary circumstances, Travers would have reached his dormitory without being spotted. But, by a curious piece of ill-luck, he ran right into Edward Oswald Handforth—of all fellows!

Handforth, as a matter of fact, had been to the bath-room to get some treacle off his feet. Some unknown joker had emptied a tin of treacle into the foot of Handforth's bed, and the leader of Study D had not discovered the tragedy until long after midnight—when he had ventured to put his feet down into the cold part of the bed. Until then he had hunched his knees up, and the unknown joker had been rather disappointed. For no wild roars had come from Handforth's dormitory.

They came later on, however—as Church and McClure knew to their cost. After a lot of arguments, during which both Church and McClure had persistently refused to change beds with Handforth, the latter had gone off to the bath-room to wash his treacly feet. And now he was on the way back, burning with indignation and bursting for revenge.

"Who's that?" demanded Handforth, as he caught sight of the dim figure.

"All right—don't shout," said Travers coolly. "It's only me!"

"Oh!" said Handforth darkly. "So you're the culprit, are you?"

"Who has told you this terrible thing?" asked Travers tragically. "Is it possible that I am undone?"

"You silly ass!" roared Handforth. "What do you mean by putting treacle in my bed?"

"Treacle in your bed?" said Travers, with a chuckle. "Not guilty, my lord! At the same time, I admit it's rather a brainy idea. Congratulations to the unknown genius!"

"You howling idiot!" shouted Handforth, exasperated. "My bed's in a terrible state now, and I shall have to sleep on the floor for the rest of the night!"

"We all have our troubles, dear old fellow," said Travers. "Sleeping on the floor, after all, is a minor tragedy."

Two or three doors opened; many heads appeared, and lights were switched on. Fullwood, Gresham, Nipper, Tregellis-West, and several other Remove fellows came into the corridor.

"What's all the row about here?" asked Nipper. "Hallo, Travers! What on earth are you doing, fully dressed like that?"

"By George!" said Handforth, staring. "I hadn't noticed that before!"

Vivian Travers was in no way perturbed—although he had been caught red-handed.

"Have you been breaking bounds, you ass?" demanded Fullwood.

"I cannot tell a lie!" said Travers simply. "I have!"

"Oh, so that's the kind of chap you are, is it?" said Handforth, with contempt in his voice.

"Merely a brief, innocent flutter," said Travers apologetically. "A short visit to the Wheatsheaf, in Bannington. Surely, there is nothing wrong with that?"

"We don't want to hear about your doings, Travers," said Nipper curtly.

"If you like to be idiot enough to break bounds at night, and risk expulsion by going into public-houses, that's your affair! But we don't think much of you!"

Vivian Travers grinned.

"Well, as it happens, dear old fellow, I don't care a toss what any of you think of me," he said candidly. "As I have frequently remarked, I go my own road."

Travers went into his dormitory, leaving Handforth to explain his own treacherous affairs to the others. And Travers was feeling in a good humour. For there was one concrete result from his illicit jaunt. Harold Grayson, of the Fifth, owed him five pounds.

And, somehow, Travers seemed to think that this was something extraordinarily good!

CHAPTER 17.

Coing the Pace!

AFTER breakfast the next morning Vivian Travers made a point of strolling in the Triangle. He wanted to have a word with Grayson—although he had no desire to seek Grayson out. An apparently accidental meeting would be much better.

Incidentally, Handforth was ram-paging up and down the Ancient House, through the West House, and, in fact, all over the school, trying to find the miscreant who had put treacle into his bed over night. But, so far, Handforth had drawn blank. There was some hint that Willy, his minor, knew something about it—but this hint was not allowed to reach Edward Oswald's ears.

"Well, well!" said Travers genially. "So here we are, dear old fellow!"

Grayson had just walked out of the East House, and he had frowned slightly as he caught sight of the Remove fellow.

"Morning, Travers!" he said bluntly.

"You don't appear to be in the

sweetest of tempers, this morning, Grayson?" said Travers inquiringly.

"I had rotten luck last night!" growled the Fifth Former.

"You certainly did!" agreed Travers. "But don't let that prey on your mind, dear old fellow. And for the love of Samson, don't worry about that fiver. Any old time, you know."

Grayson frowned again. Things had certainly gone very awry last night. He had welcomed Vivian Travers' advent, because he had expected to take a lot of money from him. He had taken a lot to begin with, but Travers had won it all back—and five pounds in addition to the cash that Grayson could hand out. Grayson hated being in debt, and to be in debt to a mere junior was humiliating.

"You'll get your fiver all right, Travers," he said unpleasantly. "I shall be able to pay you in cash on Saturday—"

"Why wait until Saturday?" asked Travers. "My dear old fellow, what about some revenge? Hang it, I don't want your money. I merely want a game so that you can wipe off the deficit. I like losing better than winning, really."

"That's why you win, I suppose," said Grayson cynically. "Well, you can come to my study, if you like—"

"Isn't it your turn to be my guest?" asked Travers. "How about a little flutter to-night—after lights-out? In my dormitory, eh?"

"Over in the Ancient House?"

"Yes. Why not?"

"What about the fellows who share the dormitory with you?"

"Gulliver and Bell will be only too pleased to join in the revels," said Travers coolly. "Bring Shaw, and even Kenmore, if you like. He's a game bird, isn't he? I always like to fix these things up well in advance."

As a matter of fact, it was fixed up then and there, and that night, after lights-out, the party took place, according to plan.

Travers' bed-room, in the Ancient House, was the scene of much revelry.

The air was blue with smoke, and the window was closely shaded by two or three blankets—which had the effect of making the atmosphere more stuffy than ever.

One of the beds was used as a card-table, and a motley crew sat round it. They were composed of Travers and Gulliver and Bell of the Remove, Grayson and Shaw, of the Fifth, and Kenmore and Sinclair, of the Sixth. They were all birds of a feather—all rascals.

Vivian Travers seemed to be enjoying himself immensely. He was smoking harder than any of the others, and making heavier bets. He didn't seem to care how much he wagered—how much he lost, or how much he won.

It was all in the game to him—all a bit of sport. And because of this very indifference, perhaps, he consistently won. When it seemed that he must inevitably lose, the luck was in his favour, and he scooped in the pool.

All manner of games were tried, including banker, shilling-nap, and even "pontoon." But Vivian Travers' luck never changed.

As the hour grew later, so Grayson's face grew blacker. As Travers was enjoying the game, so Grayson was hating it. For he was losing heavily—and always to Travers. There was something uncanny about it—something almost mysterious.

It was well after midnight now, and far from Grayson having cleared off that five-pound debt, he now owed Travers no less than seventeen pounds, five shillings!

Grayson was inclined to plunge heavily, in order to reduce the debt. In this form of insanity Travers encouraged him. He kept on saying that Grayson's luck would be bound to turn sooner or later. Perhaps he would clear the debt in one fell swoop, if he only had the courage to keep on.

And Grayson did keep on—but his luck did not alter!

CHAPTER 18.

Mysterious Voices!

EDWARD OSWALD HANDFORTH sat up in bed, listening intently.

"Funny!" he said, frowning.

Was it his imagination, or did he hear a continuous rise and fall of conversation? An examination of his watch had told him that the time was eleven minutes past one, and it was most remarkable that voices should be audible at that hour. Now and again, too, a low laugh would sound.

Handforth did not quite know why he had awakened. As a rule, he slept like a top. Perhaps his wakefulness to-night had something to do with that treacle episode. Twice, after getting into bed, Handforth had positively declared that some practical joker had been playing another game on him. He had turned his bed inside out in order to find some imaginary lump, and there had been quite a row in the dormitory because Church and McClure had refused to help their leader to make the bed again.

Anyhow, Handforth was very disturbed to-night, and it was for this reason, perhaps, that he had awakened. He sat there, listening more intently than ever.

"There jolly well is somebody talking!" he told himself. "What's more, I'm going to investigate!"

He jumped out of bed, and his first act, naturally, was to arouse Church and McClure from their sleep. There was no earthly reason why he should make them join in his investigation, but Handforth had no mercy.

"Come on, you chaps!" he said, in a low voice. "There's something rummy going on!"

"Well, what's it got to do with us?" demanded Church sleepily. "What's the time, anyhow?"

"Quarter-past one," said Handforth. "I woke up just now, and I thought I could hear voices. We'll slip a few things on, and go out to find out what it means."

Church and McClure, from long experience, knew that it would be safer

and speedier to agree. This was no time for lengthy arguments.

So they humourous Handforth, and slipped into a few of their clothes. It was better this way. They would go out, prove that Handforth had been imagining things, and then they would be able to get back to bed again. The whole thing would be over in five minutes.

But for once Church and McClure were wrong.

For when they got out in the corridor they distinctly heard a murmur of voices—just as Handforth had done. They crept along, suspicions coming to them. When they reached the door of Vivian Travers' bed-room, they understood perfectly.

For the revellers within had grown so excited that they were no longer taking care to keep their voices down to mere whispers. The game, perhaps, had reached an exciting point, and the gamblers had forgotten their caution.

"Hang you, I'll raise it ten shillings!" they heard Grayson say in a savage voice.

"Go it!" came Travers' drawl. "That's the style, dear old fellow! Plunge on—you're bound to win!"

"Shut up!" growled Grayson.

"I'll see your ten bob!" came the voice of Kenmore, of the Sixth. "And here's another ten bob."

"What does it make now?" asked Travers. "Three-pound-ten in there? All right, I'll see the lot, and raise it —"

"By George!" breathed Handforth thickly. "They're gambling in there—and for high stakes, too!"

"Travers' bed-room!" muttered Church. "I say, what a rotter! And we thought he had some decency in him, too! Just look at the way he plays football! He's a marvel in the forward line!"

"The chap's a blackguard, anyhow," said Handforth fiercely. "He's got all these smoky, gambling rotters in his bed-room. East House fellows, too! Are we going to allow it?"

"No fear!" said Church and McClure, in one voice.

But they pulled Handforth back as he was about to put his hand on the door-knob.

"Cheese it, Handy!" whispered Church. "Three of us won't be enough! Let's go along and rouse Nipper and Watson, Fullwood, Gresham and Duncan and all the others. We'll make a proper affair of it!"

"Why waste time?"

"My dear chap, we shall get the worst of it if we barge in now!" said McClure. "And think what a chance this is! Kenmore is a prefect, and we shall have the opportunity of booting him! Think of that, Handy! Booting a prefect without any fear of the consequences!"

"By George!" said Handforth exultantly. "You're right!"

It was, indeed, a golden opportunity. For they could kick Kenmore of the Sixth out, and Kenmore would not dare to make any complaint afterwards. It was a chance in a thousand!

Five minutes later nearly all the fellows in the Ancient House Remove were aroused. Nipper was grim about it.

"It's a jolly good thing you woke up, Handy!" he said. "So this is the kind of game that Travers is getting up to, is it? He may be a new fellow, but he'll have to understand that he can't invite those East House cads into our House!"

"Rather!" said Graham indignantly. "Why, if anything of this came out, the House would be in disgrace!"

"Come on!" said Handforth aggressively. "Let's go in, drag them out by their hair, and pitch the whole crowd out of doors!"

The Removites moved relentlessly forward.

Simon Kenmore looked up with a startled expression on his flushed face.

"Who's that?" he ejaculated, with a gulp.

A knock had sounded on the door.

and all the revellers were looking scared. That knock had come unexpectedly—dramatically.

"It's all right—only me!" came the voice of Handforth.

"Well, well!" murmured Travers, grinning. "Dear old Handforth again! What a fellow he is for investigating!"

"What are we going to do?" muttered Grayson. "Confound Handforth! You know what an interfering beggar he is! If we don't let him in he'll kick up a row!"

"Come on—open the door!" came Handforth's voice. "If you don't, I'll jolly well kick up a dust!"

"Better open it!" said Gulliver hastily. "There'll be the very dickens to pay if Nipper and the other fellows come crowding round!"

The door was locked, as Nipper had discovered when he silently tested it. But it was quickly unlocked now, for the rascals within believed that they only had Handforth to deal with, and they had already made signals to one another—indicating that they would treat Handforth very drastically when he came in.

But this little plan was doomed to failure.

"Now, then!" sang out Handforth, as soon as the door opened. "Pile in, you fellows!"

The fellows did pile in—over a dozen of them. They poured into the room like a stream, and Kenmore and Grayson and the others leapt to their feet, startled beyond measure.

"You rotter, Travers!" said Nipper, glaring at Vivian Travers. "I'll bet this is your doing! You invited these East House seniors here!"

"What of it?" asked Travers coolly. "It's my bed-room, isn't it?"

"Come on, Kenmore—you, too, Sinclair!" said Handforth exultantly. "I'd like to smash you on the nose, but we don't want to kick up too much noise. We don't want any disgrace. But, by George, I'm going to have the satisfaction of kicking you!"

"You young fool!" snarled Kenmore, backing away. "Don't forget that I'm a prefect!"

"You seem to have forgotten that you're a prefect!" retorted Handforth curtly.

That sally went right home, and Kenmore could think of nothing to say. Not that he had any opportunity of saying much, for he was seized by many hands, and he was yanked out into the corridor. He was held securely, while other juniors, in the rear, booted him. It was quite a unique experience—to boot a prefect.

The worst of it was—from Kenmore's point of view—he couldn't raise any outcry. He had to submit, gnashing his teeth with helpless rage. Indeed, he was only too glad to get out of the Ancient House in safety, before any master came along to catch him in this uncompromising situation.

The others came along, too—Sinclair, Grayson, and Shaw. They were all booted out—they were all given their marching orders by the indignant Removites.

After they had gone, Vivian Travers came in for some scathing remarks. He was held in contempt by all the decent fellows.

"You're a disgrace to the House, Travers!" said Nipper angrily. "It's bad enough to gamble in your own study and your own bed-room, with your own pals, but when you invite these East House seniors here, it's nothing but a disgrace."

"We all have our own points of view," said Travers, yawning.

"And you'd better keep out of the football in future," said Handforth darkly.

"Why?" asked Travers, raising his eyebrows. "As long as my form is all right—as long as I play a good game—why should I be barred? Is that fair? Is that sporting?"

"Well, I didn't mean it, exactly," growled Handforth. "But you're a cad, all the same!"

CHAPTER 19.

The Winning Goal!

"As it happens, I'm the football skipper, Handy," said Nipper quietly. "And as long as Travers plays a good game, he's welcome in the Eleven. What a man does in his own time is his own concern. But you'll soon crack up, Travers, if you keep up this pace!"

Travers shrugged carelessly. He was in no way perturbed by the grim expressions on the faces of the juniors surrounding him.

"Thank you for those kind words, dear old fellow!" he said coolly, addressing Nipper.

"Cut that out!" snapped the junior skipper. "You ought to be thoroughly ashamed of yourself, Travers!"

"We'd better send him to Coventry, and done with it!" said Church contemptuously.

"Hear, hear!"

And, by mutual consent, Vivian Travers was sent to Coventry. He did not seem to care in the least.

Later on, after the juniors had gone, and after all the lights were extinguished, he lay in his bed, chuckling. He was going his own road—and as for everybody else, they didn't worry him in the least.

For Vivian Travers was playing his own game.

"Twenty-three-pounds-sixteen!" he murmured. "That's the nice little sum that Grayson owes me. I've got I O U's for the whole amount—and Kenmore and Shaw and Sinclair know all about it. Gulliver and Bell, too. Plenty of witnesses!"

He chuckled hugely.

"Everything's going just as I planned it!" he told himself with satisfaction. "In a very short time I shall have Grayson where I want him! And then—"

And then?

Vivian Travers gloated over the infinite possibilities that opened out. His schemes were working well. Little did Harold Grayson know exactly what this new fellow in the Remove was planning in that scheming mind of his!

"O H, well saved, Handy!"
"Good man!"

"That's the style, Handy—keep 'em out!"

Edward Oswald Handforth, of the St. Frank's Remove, flushed with pleasure and confidence. It was, indeed, his settled policy to "keep 'em out." As goalkeeper of the St. Frank's Junior Eleven, he regarded himself as invincible—and when the opposition managed to score, Handforth was always very astonished.

This afternoon the valiants of the Junior School were playing against Bannington Grammar School, on the latter's ground. The game was nearing its end, and the situation was tense.

For at half-time St. Frank's had been leading by two goals to one, and upon the resumption of play the Grammarians had displayed tremendous energy, and had not only equalised, but had got one goal ahead.

Nipper, by forceful tactics, had brought the scores level again, and now the game had developed into a ding-dong struggle, with the Grammarians in the ascendancy. They were playing on their own ground, and therefore had the advantage.

It had seemed that a certain goal was about to be scored, but Handforth, by Herculean efforts, had saved the situation. And now the game was veering off into mid-field once more.

"Keep 'em out, Handy!"

"Let's make it a draw, anyhow!"

"Why not make it a win?" roared Handforth. "What's the matter with the forwards?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The game was tense in the extreme. With the score at three-all, and with only five minutes to go, the spectators kept up one continuous roar of shouting and cheering.

There were a large number of St. Frank's juniors on the spot, to say nothing of a sprinkling of the Moor View



The thief grabbed the notes from the rifled drawer. With shaking, fumbling fingers he counted them in the light of his torch. "Twenty-five pounds!" he muttered. It was the price of his safety! He thrust the notes into his pocket fearing discovery at any moment, while the figure outside the window stared coolly in, a witness to the other's crime.

girls. Irene & Co. were as keen as any of the boys.

"There he goes again!" cried Winnie Pitt suddenly. "Oh, look at him!"

For a moment the other girls thought she was talking about her brother, Reggie—the famous outside-right of the St. Frank's team. But no; Winnie was staring at another junior, on the other wing.

Winnie was not the only one, either.

The inside-left of the St. Frank's team had claimed attention from them all by his wonderful play. Already he had scored one of the St. Frank's goals, and he had helped in the getting of a second. From the very beginning of the game he had been going all out, and there was something very fascinating in his style of play.

"Go it, Travers!"

"Hurrah!"

"One more. Travers, old man—one more!"

Vivian Travers, the new boy in the Remove, was smiling calmly. He never allowed himself to be flustered.

It was only natural that the spectators should give Travers more attention than any of the other players. He was a new fellow—and therefore he had to be watched. The crowd knew the stirring centre-forward play of Nipper—they knew the wonderful runs of Reggie Pitt, on the wing. They knew the sturdy defence of Handforth, in goal. But Vivian Travers' play was something new—something different.

His football was polished—his every movement was delightful to watch—and, although the Grammarian half-backs shadowed him relentlessly, he nearly always eluded them.

Two minutes to go!

A wild roar went up from the St. Frank's spectators when it was seen that Reggie Pitt had the leather again. Down the wing he streaked, in one of his celebrated runs. He had the opposing back all at sea, but he centred the ball a trifle too far in advance of his forward line.

Travers was the nearest forward, and,

without an instant's hesitation he ran. The other Grammarian back ran at the same time, and it developed into a race.

"Go it, Travers!"

"Oh shoot, man—shoot!"

Then the shouts died away. The suspense was almost painful. Well on-side, Travers had a fine chance of scoring—if only he could get to the leather before his opponent. And by a fraction of a second he won that race.

He tipped the ball ever so lightly, just as the back reached it. With a movement that was as agile as a monkey's, he dodged round the Grammarian defender, and ran on, the ball at his feet, and with nobody but the goalie to beat!

Slam!

It was a wonderful shot, and the leather flew diagonally across the goal mouth. The goalie leapt wildly, but he was a shade too late. The ball whizzed into the corner of the net, and there came the sharp blast of the referee's whistle.

"Goal!"

"Hurrah!"

"Well played, Travers!"

St. Frank's had won—for, within a minute, the game was over, and the name of Vivian Travers was on everybody's lips.

"Well done, Travers!"

Nipper, his face beaming with glee, clapped Vivian Travers on the back with some warmth. They were both walking off the field towards the pavilion, and Travers smiled complacently.

"That, of course is a matter of opinion dear old fellow," he replied. "After all, we are all on the field to do our best, aren't we? Personally, I am rather against this congratulating stuff. It tends to give a fellow a swelled head. Not that there's any danger of that in my direction," he added whimsically.

"I am sure there isn't," smiled Nipper.

"You see," said Travers, "we're not

deserving of praise. We go on the field to play our hardest, and if we're successful—well, it's all to the good. Why pick on me for this shoulder-clapping business? What about Handforth? He kept goal like a champion!"

"So he did!" agreed Nipper. "Handy was great."

"And then, what about yourself?" went on Travers coolly. "What about your brilliant centre-forward work?"

"Dry up!" growled Nipper. "I rather think you're right, Travers—and we'll cut out the congratulations."

A good many of the others were not of the same opinion. Vivian Travers, indeed, came in for a good deal of praise from his fellow players. As for the spectators, they crowded round the pavilion, eagerly waiting for the players to come off the field.

Irene & Co., of the Moor View School, were there, too—just as keen as any of the boys.

As it happened, Handforth was one of the first fellows there, and he swelled almost visibly with pleasure as he noted that Irene Manners was running up to him. Irene was his own special girl chum, and he listened to her congratulations with unfeigned delight.

"Of course, Ted, your goalkeeping was wonderful," said Irene. "But it was that new boy who really won the game for St. Frank's, wasn't it?"

Handforth frowned.

"Travers, you mean?" he said, in a tone of disapproval.

"Yes, I've heard that his name is Travers—Vivian Travers," said Irene, nodding. "Rather a nice name, isn't it?"

"Vivian!" said Handforth, in astonishment. "Nice? Of all the idiotic names—Eh? I—I mean—Oh, crumbs!"

Irene smiled sweetly.

"Never mind, Ted—we're all entitled to our opinions, aren't we?"

"Yes, but—but I didn't mean—that is—"

"Well, when he comes up, I want you

to introduce him to me," said Irene gently.

"Oh, rather!" declared Doris Berkeley, as she came up with Winnie Pitt and Marjorie Temple. "We want to be introduced, too, Ted."

Handforth said nothing for a moment, and it was only with great difficulty that he succeeded in controlling his emotions. Even as it was, the girls could see, by the very expression on his face, that he was by no means pleased. But they passed one or two winks round amongst themselves, believing that Handforth was suffering from a little spasm of jealousy.

As a matter of fact, Handforth's emotion was due to quite another cause.

In his own magisterial way, he felt that Vivian Travers was not the kind of fellow to introduce to such nice girls as Irene & Co. They did not know, for example, that Travers had been virtually sent to Coventry some days earlier, and that he had been given the cold shoulder of late.

Not that Travers seemed to mind in the least. He had gone about his business in the usual way, had had a cheery word for anybody and everybody, and had shown the utmost indifference to the studied coolness of his Form fellows. But that was Vivian Travers' way. As he had often said, he went his own road, and he didn't care a toss what anybody else thought of him.

There wasn't the slightest doubt that he could play amazingly good football. There were so many points in his favour that the majority of the Removites were inclined to wink at his bad habits.

They did not know that Vivian Travers was a schemer—that he was playing a deep game of his own!

Vivian Travers was quite enjoying himself.

He knew that most of the fellows were uncertain about him, and this appealed to his whimsical nature. It was just the sort of thing he liked.

He came off the field now, happy in the knowledge that he had played a good game for his school, and feeling at

peace with all the world. Travers was very keen on football, and he was grateful to Nipper for having given him such an early chance in the Junior Eleven.

"Here he is!" sang out somebody.

"Good old Travers!"

Vivian Travers smiled.

"It's a strange world, dear old fellow," he remarked turning to Nipper. "Only yesterday most of these fellows were cutting me dead."

"You've redeemed yourself by your play this afternoon," said Nipper, with a chuckle.

"Virtue has its own reward," said Travers complacently. "I must seriously think about turning over a new leaf. But, for the love of Samson, what is all this?"

Handforth was coming forward, accompanied by Irene, Winnie, and the other girls. And Handforth was not looking at all pleased.

"Just a minute, Travers!" he said gruffly.

"With pleasure, dear old fellow," said Travers. "My time is yours!"

"You played a good game to-day, Travers, but I want you to understand that I don't approve of you!" said Handforth sternly. "In some ways, you seem to be a decent sort of chap—but in other ways you're a rotter! You're a smoky boulder, and you gamble, and —"

"We all have our good points, and we all have our bad points," interrupted Travers, with a wave of his hand. "Fortunately, we cannot be saints. I should hate to be too good, Handforth. Life would be a dull, dreary business, I'm afraid."

"Rats!" said Handforth bluntly. "For some unearthly reason, these girls want me to introduce you to them. Girls, this is Vivian Travers, of Study A, in the Remove. Travers, this is Irene Manners, and this is Reggie Pitt's sister Winnie—"

"Delighted!" said Travers coolly.

Handforth completed the introductions, and everybody else stood round, grinning—mainly because Handforth

performed his duty in such a grudging spirit.

As for Travers, he got on famously with the girls. His manner was so easy—so winning. Irene & Co. could see nothing wrong with him. He was just an open, smiling, genial youngster. For the life of them, they couldn't understand Handforth's thinly-veiled hostility.

"We're glad to know you, Travers," said Winnie Pitt, in her frank way. "And now that we do know you, perhaps you'd like to come to our party to-morrow evening."

"Parties," said Travers, "are my fatal weakness. Thanks most awfully. I imagine that this is some special occasion?"

"Rather!" put in Doris, with a nod. "It's Winnie's birthday to-morrow, and we're having a good old gathering. Lots of the fellows are coming—Ted Handforth, Nipper, and Reggie, of course, Ralph Fullwood, and Archie Glen-thorne, and— Oh, lots of others!"

"Splendid!" said Travers. "Nothing will please me better than to add my humble presence to the throng. It has been said—without reason, I am afraid—that I can sing slightly. If there are any demands for a rich tenor voice, do not hesitate to call upon me."

The girls laughed merrily, and Edward Oswald Handforth gritted his teeth with helpless rage. It made him boil to see the girls gathering round this new fellow, and Handforth was frankly disgusted at the prospect of Travers coming to that exclusive party on the morrow.

But he was helpless in the matter. It was Winnie's party, and she had issued the invitation.

CHAPTER 20.

An Old Acquaintance!

"WELL, well!" said Travers, in mild astonishment.

Twenty minutes had elapsed, and Travers had managed to

escape from the girls. In fact, he was now in Bannington High Street, having gone off alone. He instinctively felt that the other fellows did not want him with them, and Travers, who preferred to be alone in any case, had made himself scarce.

Now, twenty yards down the High Street, he beheld a flashy-looking gentleman in a big check overcoat and a light-coloured soft hat. Travers had recognised this gentleman at once. Indeed, the recognition was mutual.

"Well, bless me!" ejaculated the gentleman, as he slowed up, and seized Travers by the hand. "This is a surprise, Mr. Travers, sir! Just about the last person I expected to see here in this one-horse town! Here for the races, eh?"

"Unfortunately, no, dear old fellow," said Travers. "Don't you recognise the cap? I belong to St. Frank's College—the eminent seat of learning situated about two miles due south, as the crow flies."

"Why, I thought you were at Beccleston, sir!" said the flashy gentleman.

"No," replied Travers. "It would be correct to say that I was at Beccleston, Lloyd—but times have changed. Without going into painful details, I will mention that Beccleston became too hot for me. And so here I am, at St. Frank's."

"Well, I'm thundering glad to see you, young Mr. Travers!" said the other boisterously. "One of my best customers in the old days, eh? Any chance of some business now?"

"Well, I wouldn't say," replied Travers. "But I fancy not. After the recent happenings at Beccleston, I must be very careful. The Headmaster of St. Frank's might be quite annoyed if he found me hobnobbing with Sam Lloyd, the bookie."

"I'm as honest as the next man!" declared Sam Lloyd promptly.

"I dare say," nodded Travers. "In all probability your honesty, Lloyd, is on a much higher plane than the next

man's. I suppose you're down here for the steeplechase racing?"

"That's it, sir," nodded the bookmaker. "Had a pretty rough time of it to-day, too. I haven't made up my accounts yet, but I reckon I'm close upon fifty quid down on the day."

"Well, we must take the rough with the smooth," said Travers. "I dare say you'll catch a few mugs to-morrow, Lloyd."

They strolled along, and Travers was only amused when he observed Fullwood and Jack Grey, Reggie Pitt and one or two other Removites on the other side of the road. They had given him a queer look—for they had no difficulty in recognising his companion as a member of the racing fraternity.

"I am staying up at the Wheat-sheaf," said Mr Lloyd. "Care to come along, sir? We could have a chew over old times——"

"If it's all the same to you, dear old fellow, I'd rather not," said Travers. "You see, there are a good many St. Frank's fellows in the town this afternoon—and I shouldn't be surprised if one or two masters hove in sight, too. And it's rather against the rules for a junior to enter the Wheatsheaf."

"I understand, sir!" grinned Mr. Lloyd. "Well, if there's anything I can do for you——"

"Yes," said Travers thoughtfully. "That reminds me. There may be something that you can do for me, dear old fellow. In fact, it's more than possible that I shall be able to put a tenner in your way—an easy tenner, too."

"Going to back a loser?" grinned the bookmaker.

"No," said Travers. "I rather think that I shall back a winner—but it will mean ten pounds in your pocket, all the same. To tell you the truth, I can't be sure yet, but if you'll give me your telephone number I shall be obliged. I might ring you through his evening—or to-morrow."

Mr. Lloyd obliged, and Travers made a note of the number on the outside of a packet of cigarettes.

"What's the idea, young gent?" asked Mr. Lloyd curiously.

"Sorry, dear old fellow, but I can't tell you just now," replied Travers coolly. "It all depends on how events go this evening. But I know where you live—and I know your telephone number. That, for the present, is enough."

And Travers changed the subject. He had known Sam Lloyd in the old days—at Beccleston—and, in a way, he rather liked this genial, bluff bookmaker. Many of the other fellows, perhaps, would have regarded Mr. Lloyd as a rascal.

But, as Travers knew, there were bookmakers and bookmakers, and Travers was by no means ashamed to own Mr. Lloyd as a friend. It didn't matter a twopenny toss what anybody else thought about him.

As Travers crossed the Triangle of St. Frank's in the gathering dusk he was met by Jimmy Potts, as the latter came out of the basement.

"Tough luck, old man," said Travers, as he paused. "While I have been disporting myself on the greensward, you have been toiling in the basements, juggling with boots, and—"

"As a matter of fact, I've been cleaning silver!" interrupted Jimmy, with a grin. "But you needn't pity me, Travers. Working for a living isn't half so bad as you seem to think. I've heard about the game, and you seem to have been doing wonders. Congrats!"

"Nonsense!" said Travers gruffly. "Hang it, can't a fellow play decently without being praised by all and sundry? What the deuce do you think I was in the team for, anyhow? Do you suppose I was there just to get into the other fellows' way?"

Jimmy Potts chuckled.

"Perhaps you're right!" he said. "Well, I'd better be passing on. I mustn't be seen talking to you—"

"Why not?" interrupted Travers. "I can talk to the boot-boy if I like, can't I? Nobody else can hear us, anyhow."

But, as it happened, several other juniors hove into sight just then, and Jimmy, touching his cap, moved off. In the presence of the others Jimmy was very respectful, and never for an instant did he forget his position.

Travers was very thoughtful as he went indoors—into the East House. It wasn't his House at all, but he evidently had a call to make.

He chuckled as he made his way to Grayson's study.

Arriving, he tapped on the door, and entered. He was pleased to find that Grayson was alone. Shaw, his study-mate, was conspicuous by his absence.

"Hallo, Travers!" said Grayson, as he looked up from the easy-chair. "Come in. Make yourself at home!"

"Thanks most frightfully—but this is a business call," said Travers. "In fact, Grayson, I've come to dun you for money."

Grayson sat up in his chair abruptly.

"Oh, you have, have you?" he said unpleasantly. "Well, I can tell you straight away that you won't get a cent. Why, you told me only a couple of days ago that I needn't worry about that debt at all. You said that you'd keep my IOUs, and that I could pay you after I'd had a bit of luck with the horses, or—"

"Circumstances," said Travers, "alter cases. You owe me twenty-five quid, Grayson, and I need the money."

"You'll have to go on needing it," interrupted Grayson curily.

"But, my dear old fellow, be reasonable!" urged Travers. "Quite by accident, I ran into a bookie this afternoon, in Bannington. A chap I knew at my other school. Well, to cut a long story short, the fellow is dunning me for money. I must have some. And as you owe me twenty-five of the best, why not come across, and—"

"You can fish for it!" sneered Grayson. "I can't help your troubles, you cheeky junior! You shouldn't get into a mess-up with a bookmaker. You ought to have more sense! Anyhow,

"I can't pay you twenty-five quid—or twenty-five pence!"

"But you owe me the money——"

"I don't care about that!" snapped Grayson savagely. "I didn't expect you to come on me like this, did I? I can't pay you, and there's an end of it!"

Vivian Travers sat down on the table.

"I don't think so," he said quietly.

"In fact, Grayson, this is not the end of it!"

CHAPTER 21.

Just What He Wanted!

HAROLD GRAYSON heaved himself out of his chair, and stood face to face with his visitor.

"Look here, Travers, I've had enough of your infernal cheek!" he said grimly. "Who the deuce do you think you are—to come here demanding impossible sums of money?"

"Impossible sums?"

"Yes, confound you!" said Grayson.

"Do you think I can pick up twenty-five quid out of the air? You know I'm broke! In any case, I never had the money in actual cash. You only won it at cards——"

"Great Samson!" said Travers, staring. "You're not going to repudiate a debt of honour, are you?"

Grayson coloured.

"No, of course not!" he growled. "At the same time, it's a bit different to a cash debt. And I want time to pay it—so let's have no more of this nonsense."

"We'd better get this thing clear," said Travers evenly. "I've already told you that I met a bookie in Bannington this afternoon—an old acquaintance of mine. Well, he wants this money. I'm not saying he was nasty, but—— Well, you know what these fellows are when they get such ideas into their heads. There's going to be trouble for me, Grayson, if I can't pay up."

"You have my sympathy," sneered Grayson.

"Unfortunately, I want something rather more substantial," said Travers. "This fellow is named Lloyd—he's not a local man at all, but a bookie from London. He goes about the country, to all the different race meetings, you know."

Grayson listened with a bored air. He wasn't in the least interested in Vivian Travers' troubles. And although Travers was—to put it bluntly—giving a very garbled account of the actual truth, Grayson was not to know this. For Travers had an axe of his own to grind—and a very peculiar axe, too.

"So you see, dear fellow, something must be done," said the Removite. "Lloyd won't wait, and I happen to be stumped. I must get some money from somewhere. You owe me twenty-five quid——"

"You silly young fool!" interrupted Grayson savagely. "You speak of twenty-five quid as though it were a mere nothing! I tell you I can't do it! Why, I haven't got twenty-five shillings!"

"That's bad!" said Travers, frowning. "Can't you raise the money somehow? You know plenty of chaps in the Senior School, Grayson. Why not go round, borrowing here and there?"

"For you?" said Grayson, with a mocking laugh. "Borrow money from Kenmore and the other fellows—just to pay you? Do you think I'm mad?"

"Why discuss your mental condition?" asked Travers. "The facts are perfectly simple. I must have money—and you owe me money. If I don't get it, Grayson, this bookie is going to see the Head."

"Well, that'll be your funeral—not mine!" said Grayson callously.

"Are you going to help me or not?" demanded Travers, his manner changing. "Look here, Grayson—be serious! You owe me that money, and if you like to put yourself out you can get hold of it! What's it going to be? Will

you pay this debt of honour—or will you see me sacked?"

Grayson shrugged his shoulders.

"If you want to know the truth, Travers, I don't care a hang whether you're sacked or not!" he said contemptuously. "Hang your confounded impudence! You'll get the money when I can pay you—and not before!"

"Yes, but look here——"

"That's about enough!" interrupted Grayson curtly. "Get out of this study!"

For a moment Vivian Travers did not speak. He was looking at Grayson with utter scorn—although there was no trace of it in his eyes. He seemed as cool and collected as ever. He had known all along that Harold Grayson was a rotter, but he had hardly suspected the Fifth Former of such despicability as this.

Grayson was willing to see Travers sacked, and he didn't care! And yet the money that Grayson owed him would be sufficient to get him out of this supposed trouble. Travers' determination to keep on with his scheme was greatly strengthened.

"Well, if you won't, you won't," he said, slipping off the end of the table. "But it's a pretty ugly sort of hole for me, Grayson—and unless I can do something pretty quickly I shall go under."

Grayson made no reply, and Travers moved towards the door. Just as he was about to lay his hand on the knob he turned again.

"There's just one possibility," he said thoughtfully. "Lloyd may be willing to wait for his money if he sees some kind of security. You're a senior, Grayson, and this bookie will have more faith in you than he has in me, perhaps."

"What are you getting at?" asked Grayson suspiciously.

"Oh, you needn't worry," said Travers. "My idea is quite simple. Supposing I give the bookie those IOU's in lieu of the money?"

Grayson stared.

"Give him my IOU's?" he repeated.

"That's what I said."

"My dear, idiotic kid!" said Grayson. "Give him the IOU's by all means—if he'll accept them. He's welcome to them!"

And Grayson laughed heartily. Vivian Travers didn't laugh—although he chuckled inwardly. For he had been leading up to this point ever since he had come into the room—and Grayson had fallen into the trap!

Outside, Travers indulged himself to the extent of an open grin. But nobody was within sight, so it didn't matter.

"Good!" murmured the scheming Removeite. "So Grayson has given me permission to hand over those IOU's. I always thought he was brainless—and now I know it!"

He went on his way, well content. He went across to the Ancient House, and made his way to Study A, in the Remove passage. He rather expected to find Gulliver and Bell in possession—but the study was empty. Travers then remembered that Gulliver and Bell had gone to tea with Merrell and Marriott, of the Fourth.

Travers was quite pleased. He didn't care particularly for Gulliver and Bell, although everybody else in the Remove regarded him as their new leader.

Travers didn't bother about any tea. He sat down in an easy-chair, poked the fire, and gave himself to thought. He was thinking mainly of Jimmy Potts.

After about ten minutes Travers got to his feet, looking very contented. He went to the Remove Common-room, and just as he had expected, the apartment was practically empty. Most of the fellows were still busy with their teas.

Travers went over to the telephone-box and shut himself in. He gave the number of the Wheatsheaf Hotel in Bannington, and when he had got through he asked for Mr. Lloyd.

Within a minute the bookmaker was at the telephone.

"That you, Mr. Travers, sir?" he asked, in his boisterous voice. "Want something on one of the races to-morrow?"

"Well, hardly," replied Travers. "I'm off that game for a bit, Lloyd. But you can do me a favour, if you like—and earn that tanner to put into your pocket at the same time."

"I'm always willing to get hold of an easy ten quid, sir," said Mr. Lloyd.

"All right, then—be over here in the morning," replied Travers. "If you can manage it, I should like you to arrive at about half-past eight. Don't come into the school grounds, but wait for me outside in the lane. I'll be there at half-past eight, looking for you."

"But what's the idea, young gent?" asked Mr. Lloyd curiously.

"I'll tell you in the morning—too risky over the 'phone," replied Travers. "But you can take it from me that it'll be perfectly above board. Is it O.K.? Will you come?"

"I'll be there, Mr. Travers, sir," said the bookmaker. "Rather early for me, but it won't hurt me for once in a while. Half-past eight, outside the school grounds, eh? I'll find you waiting?"

"Yes—about a hundred yards from the school," said Travers. "That's fixed up, then? Good man! Thanks, Lloyd—you're just the right man in the right place. Good-bye!"

Travers hung up the receiver, and opened the door of the sound-proof box. He knew that he could rely upon Mr. Sam Lloyd to be there. Everything was going very smoothly.

A voice came to Travers' ears as he opened the telephone-box, and he grinned to himself. A number of fellows had come into the Common-room, and Handforth was prominent among them.

"I'm not saying anything against the chap's football," Handforth was remarking. "He's a jolly good forward—one of the best we've got."

"I'm glad you admit it!" said Church tartly.

"At the same time, he's not the kind of fellow to introduce to Irene and the other girls," said Handforth in a stubborn voice. "And as for him going to that party to-morrow evening—well, it's all wrong! Travers oughtn't to be there!"

"Well, well!" said Vivian Travers indulgently.

Handforth and the other juniors turned round and stared at him. Until that moment they had not known that he was in the room.

"Don't mind me!" went on Travers, with a wave of his hand. "Carry on, dear old fellows. I'm awfully sorry I'm in your bad books, Handforth, but—"

"Oh, I don't care about you hearing what I said!" interrupted Handforth gruffly. "I'll say it to your face, Travers! I don't think you're the kind of fellow who ought to be at Winnie's party to-morrow evening."

"What's wrong with me?" asked Travers, looking down at himself. "I would remind you that I shall be wearing a different suit—a new one for the occasion. I shall even go to the length of a brand new shirt, too. I always maintain that linen is an important —"

"You silly ass!" retorted Handforth. "I'm not talking about your appearance—I'm talking about you!"

"Yes, Travers, a good many of us agree with Handy!" said De Valerie. "Who was that fellow you were with this afternoon?"

"Which fellow?" asked Travers.

"That chap in the Bannington High Street."

"Oh, him!" said Travers, with a smile. "Old Sam Lloyd, you mean. Quite a decent fellow in his own way. A bookmaker, you know."

"A bookmaker!" yelled Handforth.

"Men earn their living in different ways," said Travers. "I'm ready to agree that quite a large number of bookmakers are scamps. But old Sam Lloyd is an exception. He's a sports-

man—and always has been. Quite an old friend of mine," he added casually.

"There you are!" said Handforth, turning excitedly to the others. "He even boasts of it! Boasts of his friendship with a bookmaker! And he's been invited to Winnie's party to-morrow evening! What are we going to do about it?"

"Nothing, I'm afraid," said Fullwood, with a chuckle. "After the way Travers played in the game this afternoon, the girls are all in favour of him. Don't be an ass, Handy. I've got a suspicion that Travers is only pulling your leg."

"Pulling my leg!" ejaculated Handforth, with a start. "My leg?"

"One never knows," said Vivian Travers amiably, as he passed out of the room.

CHAPTER 22.

More Scheming!

AS half-past eight was striking on the school clock the following morning, Vivian Travers, with little concern, detached himself from the top of a gate and strode out into the road. He had heard the sound of an approaching motor-car; and, as he had half-expected, the new arrival proved to be Mr. Sam Lloyd.

"Well, here we are, Mr. Travers, sir," said the bookmaker genially. "Right on the stroke of time, eh? All I hope is that this job of yours is worth coming over for. You got me out at a rare early hour this morning. I can tell you!"

"Early rising," said Travers, "is beneficial to the general health, dear old fellow. You don't mind if I come in and sit beside you, do you? So much more comfortable."

He got into the car and lounged in the seat next to Lloyd. Then he produced Grayson's IOU's from his pocket, and handed them to his companion. The bookmaker looked at them in astonishment.

"What are these for, young gent?" he asked.

"For you."

"But why?" said Lloyd. "I don't want them!"

"You see what they are, don't you?"

"Well, I ought to know!" grinned Mr. Lloyd. "IOU's, that's what they are. And they're all signed by a gent named 'H. Grayson.'"

Travers nodded.

"You're quite right about the 'H. Grayson,' but you're not right about the gent," he said smoothly. "However, that doesn't matter. Do you notice anything else about them?"

"Well, they total twenty-five quid altogether," said the bookmaker. "They're quite plain otherwise—no names on them."

"Exactly!" said Travers. "As a matter of fact, Grayson gave them to me—he owes me twenty-five quid, you understand. But I want you to take charge of them, Lloyd—and act just as though they had been given to you."

"Look here, Mr. Travers—what's the game?" asked Lloyd bluntly.

"A perfectly harmless game, I can assure you," said Travers. "I hope you don't mind, but I've been telling Grayson that you've been dunning me for money. A pure piece of spoof, you must understand, but necessary. I told Grayson that I should give you those IOU's instead of the cash, and he was highly amused."

"I don't wonder at it!"

"But he won't be amused this morning," went on Travers. "What I want you to do, dear old fellow, is this. Go to Grayson, and tell him that you've accepted these IOU's from me, and that you want the real money from him. Tell him that if he won't pay up you'll go to the headmaster. Give him until mid-day to-morrow as a time limit. If he can't pay by then you've got to threaten to go to the headmaster and expose him. Lay it on thick, Lloyd. You're a man of brains, so I needn't tell you anything further. You can make up the rest."

Mr. Lloyd did not seem particularly impressed.

"Just a minute, Mr. Travers. —"

just a minute," he said, scratching his head. "It's all very well for you to ask me to do this—"

"I'm giving you a tenner for the service, don't forget," said Travers.

"And very generous of you, too, sir," agreed Mr. Lloyd heartily. "Very generous, I must say! All the same, I'd like to have it a bit clearer. You're not suggesting that I really should go to the headmaster, are you?"

"For the love of Samson, no!" laughed Travers. "It's all spoof, I tell you! All I want you to do is to put the wind up Grayson. But you've got to make it appear genuine. If he thinks you'll go to the Head and expose him—well, he'll be desperate. And I want him to be desperate."

"You always were a qucer sort of young gent," said Mr. Lloyd, as he put the I O U's into his pocket. "No good asking you what the game is, I suppose?"

"No good at all," replied Travers.

"I thought not," said Mr. Lloyd. "Well, I don't think it'll take me long to put a scare into this young gentleman. But I tell you frankly I don't want to have anything to do with any of the masters."

"That's all right," said Travers. "You may be a bookmaker, Lloyd, but you look a gentleman. A trifle too glaring in your choice of colour and pattern, perhaps, but we mustn't be too critical. Anyhow, you're a stranger at St. Frank's, and there's not one chance in a thousand that anybody will stop you and ask questions."

"And how do I find this young Grayson?"

"Easily," said Travers. "You walk through the main gateway, and the East House is the first big doorway on your left as you go up the Triangle. You just pass the gymnasium, and then you come to the East House. Walk right in, and ask the first fellow you see to show you to Grayson's study."

Mr. Lloyd nodded assent.

"Grayson?" said Armstrong of the Fourth,

"That's the name!" nodded Mr. Lloyd. "I shall be obliged if you'll show me to his study."

They were standing in the East House lobby, and Armstrong was looking at the visitor with some curiosity. Not that there was anything particularly startling in Mr. Lloyd's appearance.

Except for a slight tendency to over-dress—as Travers had pointed out—Mr. Lloyd was very smart and very well attired. There was nothing of the ordinary bookmaker about him. This morning he had discarded that loud check overcoat, and his hat was an ordinary conventional bowler.

"This way, sir," said Armstrong. "I suppose you're a relative of Grayson's?"

"Well, not exactly," replied Mr. Lloyd guardedly. "Just a friend. As I was in the neighbourhood I thought I would drop in to see him."

They went into the Fifth Form passage, and, by a lucky chance, Grayson himself came striding down it from the opposite direction. He paused for a moment as he was about to enter his study, wondering who this stranger could be.

"Half a tick, Grayson!" said Armstrong. "This gentleman wants to see you."

"See me?" said Grayson, staring.

"Why, Grayson, of course!" said Mr. Lloyd genially, as he strode forward and clapped Grayson on the back. "Splendid! You don't look a week older, young 'un!"

Mr. Lloyd opened the study door while Grayson was still staring, and they both entered. Lloyd closed the door after him, and the Fifth Former frowned unpleasantly.

"What's the idea of this?" he demanded. "What do you mean by pretending to know me? I've never seen you before in my life!"

"I thought it would be diplomatic, young gent," said Mr. Lloyd, seating himself in the easy chair. "Don't want to let all the other young gents know

that we're strangers, eh? I'm here on business. And I thought you might be upset if all the other boys knew that I was a bookmaker."

Grayson stared harder than ever.

"A bookmaker!" he repeated. "What the dickens——"

"Now, Master Grayson, keep cool!" said Mr. Lloyd, holding up a hand. "As it happens, this business of mine isn't any too pleasant, and the sooner we get it over the better. In a nutshell, I want twenty-five pounds from you!"

"But I don't owe you twenty-five pounds!" ejaculated Grayson hotly.

"Perhaps you don't, young gent—but that makes no difference," said the other. "It may make things clear to you if I explain that I have been having a bit of trouble with another young gent belonging to this school. No need to mention names."

Grayson started.

"Do you mean Travers, of the Remove?" he asked.

"Let it pass, sir," said Lloyd, waving a hand. "Anyhow, the unpleasantness with that young gentleman is over. And here I've got one or two little documents—that you signed, sir."

He produced the IOU's, and Grayson watched him in a fascinated kind of way. From the other side of the table he could see those IOU's distinctly—he could see his own signature upon them. Mr. Lloyd held them so that he could be under no misapprehension regarding their actual reality.

"What's the idea?" demanded Grayson thickly. "You confounded fool, do you think you can come here and demand money from me like this? I don't owe you a cent. I've never seen you before in my life!"

"Steady, sir!" said Mr. Lloyd calmly. "The whole thing is just a little arrangement. But you can't get away from these signatures, can you? These IOU's represent twenty-five pounds—and that money is owing by you. It doesn't matter much who holds the

IOU's, does it? They're mine now—and I want the cash."

"Well, you won't get it!" shouted Grayson furiously. "I've never heard of such nonsense in all my life! Get out of here!" he added, pointing to the door.

"It'll pay you much better, young gentleman, if you keep calm," said the bookmaker, his voice changing its note. "This sort of thing won't do you any good. I'll get out of here when I want—and not before. I came here to be pleasant—not to be nasty. But I can be nasty if you like."

Harold Grayson felt dizzy. Certainly he had given Travers permission to pass those IOU's on to a bookmaker—but he had never believed for a moment that Travers would do such a thing. Even so, of what use were they to a stranger? Evidently Grayson had not thought the matter out—or he would not have been so complacent during the past twelve hours.

"You can't get any money out of me!" he said hoarsely. "You're a stranger to me—and I don't owe you a penny! Unless you get out of this room within two minutes, confound you, I'll call a crowd of the other fellows and we'll throw you out!"

Mr. Lloyd rose to his feet.

"Will you?" he said, his face becoming flushed. "I don't allow people to talk to me like that, Mr. Grayson! I wanted to conduct this affair pleasantly, but you won't let me. All right—I'll go to your headmaster and see what he has to say about it."

Mr. Lloyd had not intended to use any such threat so early, but he was genuinely annoyed. He had come to the conclusion that Vivian Travers knew what he was doing. This fellow Grayson was an utter cad—a young blackguard of the worst type. Mr. Lloyd gauged Grayson's character very accurately.

As for Grayson himself, all the colour fled from his cheeks. He clutched at the table, and stared at Mr. Lloyd in dazed alarm.

"The Head!" he panted. "No, no! You mustn't go to the Head, you fool! You mustn't go—"

"Either you cool down, and talk to me sensibly—or I shall go to your headmaster at once!" snapped Mr. Lloyd. "What's it going to be? Now then. Mr. Grayson—out with it! One or the other!"

Grayson seemed to crumble.

"I'll keep cool!" he muttered huskily.

CHAPTER 23.

The Ultimatum!

FOR nearly two minutes there was silence in the study.

Mr. Lloyd was glad of this respite, for it allowed him to cool down. As for Grayson, he recovered some of his own composure. A minute's reflection had assured him that there was nothing in this man's threat. He didn't owe him a cent—so what harm could the bookmaker do, even if he did go to the headmaster?

"By gad!" muttered Grayson, clutching at the table and bending over it. "You nearly bluffed me just then!"

"Did I?" said Mr. Lloyd. "It's the first time I knew it! There's no bluff about my words, young gent—"

"Yes, there is!" interrupted Grayson harshly. "It's all bluff! Do you think I care if you go to the Head? You can't do me any harm!"

"That's a matter for your headmaster to decide!" said the other. "Look at these IOU's, sir! See them? There's your name—on every one! No other name—just blank, except for the figures. Oh, I'm not quite so green! I've got these IOU's into my possession, and I want the money for them!"

"But I gave them to Travers!" shouted Grayson fiercely.

"I don't care who you gave them to—I've got them now!" snapped Mr. Lloyd. "And if I take them to your headmaster, do you think he's going to ask

a dozen questions? I shall tell him that these little slips of paper were given to me by you. Do you think he'll believe it'll do any good to drag in the name of another boy? Don't you believe it, sir! I've had experience of this sort of thing before—and if I go to your headmaster it'll be marching orders for you!"

Harold Grayson gulped, and all the strength seemed to ooze from his limbs. He stood there, beside the table, limp and dazed. For the truth of Sam Lloyd's words had scared their way into his understanding.

For those words were true—absolutely true!

As Grayson knew well enough, his reputation at St. Frank's was none too good. More than once he had escaped expulsion only by the skin of his teeth. Even now Mr. Goole, his Housemaster, suspected him—and kept a close watch over him. The headmaster himself had more than once received bad reports about him.

What, then, would be the result if Sam Lloyd went to the Head with those IOU's?

Would the Head believe that they had been given to Travers? It was hardly likely! If Grayson told the truth about them, he would be disbelieved. The whole thing was a trap—and Grayson knew it now.

This bookmaker would tell a whole string of lies to the Head, and Grayson's denials would seem thin and weak. There would be only one outcome. Expulsion for Grayson—and Travers, even if he was dragged into it, would probably get off scot-free. For young Travers was a cool beggar, and there was no direct evidence against him, anyhow!

"Well?" came Mr. Lloyd's cold voice.

Grayson started again, and he caught his breath in.

"Don't—don't go to the Head!" he panted. "The whole thing's mad! It's a trick—a plot to ruin me!"

"Don't be silly!" said Mr. Lloyd contemptuously. "I don't want to ruin you, young gent. All I want is my twenty-five pounds. I shan't go to the headmaster if you're reasonable. I'd rather not go—because it may mean that I shall have to wait a long time for my money. But I want some sort of definite answer now."

"But—but I can't pay you!" panted Grayson hoarsely. "I haven't got the money!"

"Can't you borrow it from some of your swell young friends?"

"No!" said Grayson fiercely. "I can't do that! I should be the talk of the whole House if I went round borrowing sums of that sort!"

"Well, I'm not a hard man," said Mr. Lloyd magnanimously. "I'll tell you what I'll do, Mr. Grayson. I'll give you till mid-day to-morrow. I'll be here again at half-past twelve to-morrow, and if you haven't got that money ready then—well, I shall have to go to your headmaster. That's all. But remember—I'm not the kind of man to go back on what I say. You've got until mid-day to-morrow—and not a minute later!"

Without another word Mr. Lloyd flung open the door and walked out. Grayson wanted to say something, but the words wouldn't come. He watched the door close, and he sagged over the table limply; his face was pale.

"To-morrow!" he muttered. "I can't get it by to-morrow! It's impossible! I can't get twenty-five quid by to-morrow!"

After a few moments he seemed to come to himself; his breath was hard and forced as he glanced at his haggard reflection in the mirror over the mantelpiece.

"And I don't owe him anything—I've never seen him before!" he panted. "This is Travers' doing! By gad! I'll make him suffer for this, the infernal young hound!"

Yet, even as Grayson was uttering the threat, he pulled himself up. Hadn't he given Travers permission to pass

those IOU's on to the bookmaker? Besides, nothing could alter the fact that Grayson had written the IOU's, and they were undoubtedly genuine. It would be idle to deny that truth.

So what did it really matter who held them?

The one important thing which filled the whole of Grayson's thoughts was that he had to get that money by mid-day to-morrow!

But how?

It was a problem which Harold Grayson shied at!

CHAPTER 24.

In the Net!

VIVIAN TRAVERS placed two five-pound notes into Mr. Lloyd's willing hand.

"They're yours, Sam—and you've earned them!" said Travers easily.

"Well, anyway, I've put a dose of fear into the young gent!" grinned Mr. Lloyd. "He looked like a ghost when I came out. He thinks I meant it, too—he thinks I shall be back in the morning, and that I shall go to the headmaster if that money isn't ready."

"That's the stuff!" said Travers, nodding.

"A cunning bit of work, isn't it?" went on the bookmaker, looking at Travers admiringly. "I suppose you want that twenty-five quid pretty badly, eh? And you thought of this scheme to frighten it out of the young feller?"

"Come, come, Sam!" said Travers reproachfully. "You can do better than that, can't you? I don't seem short of money when I hand over two fivers to you, do I?"

"Well, what's the game, then?"

"If it's all the same to you, dear old fellow, I'd rather keep it to myself," replied Travers coolly. "I'm not in any need of money—and if I want you again I may be able to put another tenner in your pocket. How long will you be staying in Bannington, anyhow?"

"Till the end of the week," replied Mr. Lloyd promptly. "You know my telephone number. Mr. Travers, sir. Any time you like, you know—I'll be ready!"

"That's fine!" said Travers. "All right, Sam—I'll be getting along."

Travers nodded and strode off towards the school gates, while Mr. Lloyd drove away in his car, looking very puzzled. "Not that it really mattered to him what Travers' game was. He had earned his money, and, as far as he was concerned, the matter was over."

But with Travers it was only just beginning.

Everything was working well. Travers had deliberately sought Grayson's company, careless of what the other fellows thought of him. He had played cards with Grayson—he had plunged heavily, and everything had gone according to programme. Grayson had lost, and those IOU's had been the result.

In other words, Grayson, though he did not suspect it, was slowly but surely falling into the trap set by Travers!

The Removite had only got half-way across the Triangle before he saw a burly figure hurrying towards him. Travers smiled inwardly. For that burly figure belonged to Grayson of the Fifth.

"Just a minute, Travers!" said Grayson, in a strained voice.

"Anything wrong, dear old fellow?" asked Travers, in mild surprise.

"Come to my study!" muttered Grayson.

"Why?" said Travers. "There's nobody within earshot. Can't we talk here? It's nothing excessively private, is it?"

"You—you young cub!" snarled Grayson, seizing Travers savagely by the arm. "What do you mean by it?"

"Mean by what?"

"I've just had a visit from that—that confounded bookmaker of yours!" snapped Grayson. "What do you mean by giving him those IOU's? They were yours! They represented a little debt between you and me. What do you

mean by giving them to this—this stranger?"

"He isn't a stranger," said Travers coolly. "I've known him for nearly a couple of years."

"He's a stranger to me!" shouted Grayson, nearly beside himself with rage. "I'll half kill you for this, Travers! I'll make your life a misery!"

"Well, well!" said Travers, standing back and looking at Grayson curiously. "What strange ideas we do get into our heads! You'd better pull yourself together, dear old fellow. You're talking wildly. Surely you remember giving me permission to hand over those IOU's to our mutual friend?"

"But I didn't think you'd do it!" panted Grayson harshly.

"Well, of course, that's your trouble," said Travers, shrugging his shoulders. "Why should I care? You didn't care when I told you that the bookie had threatened to go to the Head and expose me. Why should I care when you're in the same boat? Lloyd accepted those little slips of paper, and now the trouble is yours. I've done with it."

There was something so utterly cool in Travers' manner that Grayson found it difficult to frame any words. His trouble was accentuated by the fact that he knew Travers was speaking the truth.

"That rogue is going to show my IOU's to the Head—by mid-day to-morrow—unless I have the money for him!" said Grayson tensely. "Look here, Travers, you've got to help me! You got me into this mess, and—"

"Frightfully sorry, dear old fellow, but I'm in a hurry," said Travers, pushing past. "I'm very much afraid that Lloyd is an impatient sort of fellow. Only until mid-day to-morrow, eh? That's awkward for you! But surely you'll be able to get the money?"

He walked on, leaving Grayson helpless. For not only had two or three prefects appeared on the other side of the Triangle, but Mr. Beverley Stokes, of

the West House, was within sight, too. Grayson could do nothing.

And Travers, feeling very happy, went indoors.

CHAPTER 25.

Handy Does His Best!

EDWARD OSWALD HANDFORTH grinned with appreciation.

"Yes, it's a great idea!" he said genially. "In fact, a marvellous idea!"

"Oh, rather!" said Church, nodding. "One of yours, I suppose?"

"Yes!"

"Then it's bound to be marvellous!" said Church, with a grin.

The famous chums were in Study D, and dinner was over. In fact, it would not be long before the bell clanged out for afternoon lessons.

"There's nothing like modesty, of course," said McClure. "But if you tell us what this idea is, Handy, we might be able to give you some frank criticism."

Handforth frowned

"I don't want any criticism!" he retorted. "It's a great idea and I'm going to execute it!"

"All your ideas ought to be executed!" said McClure firmly.

"It's about Travers," went on Handforth, without paying any attention.

"Travers isn't a bad chap in his way—he's a good footballer, and he seems to have a frank sort of way with him. But you can't get away from the fact that he tells whoppers, and that he smokes cigarettes and invites cads like Grayson and Kenmore to his study."

"It's not for us to judge him," said Church. "If he's ass enough to indulge in these idiotic amusements, why should we interfere?"

"I'm not going to interfere!" replied Handforth, with a frown. "It's not my business—and I never poke my nose into other people's business!"

"Ahem!" coughed McClure carelessly.

"I'm thinking about this party to-night," continued Handforth, pacing

up and down the study. "Winnie's party, you know—at the Moor View School. She's invited lots of us, and that boulder Travers is going, too. At least, he thinks he is!"

Church and McClure looked at their leader in sudden alarm.

"Look here, Handy, you're not going to butt in, are you?" asked Church. "Hang it, it's Winnie's party, and she's at liberty to invite whoever she likes, isn't she? It'll be frightfully bad form if you barge in, and—"

"I'm not going to barge in!" interrupted Handforth coldly. "This idea of mine is a corker. It's a wonder! It's a winner!"

"So you said before," remarked Church, rather wearily. "But what is the idea?"

"I'm going to find Travers—now!" replied Handforth, moving towards the door. "And I'm going to give him an ultimatum. He can either excuse himself from the party—or he can fight me! It's got to be one or the other!"

"Well, he's not likely to excuse himself from the party," said McClure. "He's rather keen on going, I believe."

"Then he'll have to fight me!" declared Edward Oswald.

"But what good will that do?" asked Church. "And where's this great idea of yours?"

"Why, you ass, that is it!" said Handforth indignantly.

"Oh, sorry!" said Church hastily. "I didn't recognise it as an idea! Well, as Travers is bound to refuse to make any excuse, it'll mean that you're going to fight him."

"Of course it will!" said Handforth, rolling up his sleeves in preparation.

"But what good will that do?" asked Church. "You're not going to knock him unconscious are you?"

"No; but I'm going to make a mess of him!" replied Handforth dreamily. "I'm going to black his eyes, and make his nose about twice the normal size. He won't feel inclined to go to Winnie's party when he's marked like that!"

"Oh, so that's the wheeze?" grinned McClure. "Well, on the whole, it's not so bad. But there's a snag, Handy."

"A snag?" said Handforth. "Where?"

"Well, have you forgotten that Travers is rather good at ju-jitsu?"

"Oh, that!" said Handforth, with a careless wave of his hand. "Who cares? I shan't give him a chance to get a grip on me. Besides, I've been reading about ju-jitsu this week, and if Travers starts any of his funny business with me, he'll get a surprise!" he added triumphantly. "Come on! Let's get it over!"

Handforth strode out of the study, and marched towards the lobby. As luck would have it, Vivian Travers was just coming indoors at the moment, and he paused good-humouredly as Handforth bellowed out his name.

"Well, well!" said Travers. "What is it now, dear old fellow? If there is anything I can do, just say the word."

"I don't want any rot with you, Travers!" said Handforth grimly. "You're a good footballer, and in lots of ways you're a thoroughly decent chap."

"Thanks awfully for those kind words!"

"But in other ways, you're a silly ass!" roared Handforth.

"At times we are all silly asses," murmured Travers sadly. "It is just one of Nature's tricks to remind us of our own shortcomings."

"And I don't think you're a fit and proper person to go to Winnie Pitt's party this evening!" went on Handforth aggressively. "What's more, I'm not going to allow it! You've got to make an excuse, Travers! You've got to send a message by Reggie to say that you can't go!"

"And the alternative?" asked Travers, with mild interest.

"You'll fight me—with bare fists!" said Handforth calmly. "Mind you, Travers, I'm not wild with you. I'm not trying to lick you, either. It's just a matter of principle."

"Oh I see!" nodded Travers. "Well, get on with it!"

"Eh? Get on with what?"

"The fight!" said Travers. "Aren't we going to fight?"

A chuckle went round, for by this time quite a number of juniors had gathered in the lobby, to listen to this interesting conversation.

"Does that mean that you refuse to make an excuse?" asked Handforth darkly.

"Of course," replied Travers. "I've been invited to that party—and I'm going."

"Then put up your hands!" roared Handforth, peeling off his jacket. "Put 'em up, you rotter!"

Vivian Travers put them up—like lightning. The next second Handforth seemed to sail through the air, right over Travers' shoulder, and he thudded to the floor with a dull, jarring crash!

"Frightfully sorry!" said Travers calmly. "Hope I didn't hurt you, dear old fellow?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Handforth sat up, looking dazed.

"Who—who did that?" he gasped.

"Travers did, of course!" grinned Church. "We warned you, Handy—so you can't pretend that you didn't know. Travers is hot stuff at ju-jitsu."

"But—but I've been reading it all up!" ejaculated Handforth, in a startled voice. "And I've learned how to overcome all the different ju-jitsu grips!"

"You need a few more lessons, old man!" said McClure, shaking his head.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Handforth leapt to his feet, and his face was flushed.

"Look here, Travers, you rotter!" he wanted. "No more of this idiotic ju-jitsu! I'm going to fight you—and I'm going to turn your face into a pulp!"

"I hate to deny you this pleasure, but I need my face for other purposes, dear old fellow," said Travers calmly. "It has always been one of my lifelong principles to avoid fighting. I'm a friendly

chap, and I do hate having my face battered. It gives me such a shock when I look into the mirror!"

"I expect it always gives you a shock!" retorted Handforth fiercely.

"Always!" agreed Travers, nodding. "But by the exercise of stoical fortitude, I am growing accustomed to it."

He walked out of the lobby, and everybody chuckled. It really was impossible to fight Vivian Travers in the ordinary way. He never allowed a chap to get angry with him. He was always so cool—so collected. There was scarcely a fellow in the junior school with such a charming manner.

It was just as well, perhaps that somebody yelled "Cave" at that moment: the crowd vanished from the lobby. Church and McClure dragging Handforth out into the Triangle. A master had appeared, and so the crisis passed.

Travers, in the Remove passage, smiled complacently to himself. He was just going to turn into Study A, when he caught sight of a figure farther down the corridor. He waved genially.

"Just a minute, Potts!" he said. "I want a word with you."

"Yes, sir!" said the boot-boy.

He came up, and they both went into the study. Gulliver and Bell were not there, and Travers closed the door.

"Why this sombre display?" he asked, indicating Jimmy Potts' overcoat and scarf. "Why are you hiding the dazzling buttons and the cheery blue?"

"I'm going into Bannington," replied Potts. "As a matter of fact, I was just coming along to you, Travers, to ask if you wanted anything in the town."

"Very kind of you, dear old fellow—very thoughtful!" said Travers. "But I don't think there's anything I want this afternoon. I suppose it's your half-day off?"

"Well, not exactly," replied the boot-boy baronet. "My mother sent a message, and I've got special leave. You see, she's going to Bannington this afternoon, and she wanted me to go

with her. We're going on the bus, from Bellton."

And Jimmy grinned, as though at some hidden joke.

"Is there something funny about the bus?" asked Travers politely.

"No, of course not," replied Jimmy, with a chuckle. "I wasn't thinking about the bus at all, but, you see, my mother has got the wind up a bit. She has to go to the bank in Bannington, and she's going to bring about thirty-five pounds back with her—in currency notes. So she wants me to go with her as a sort of bodyguard."

Vivian Travers looked at the boot-boy with a queer light in his eyes.

"Thirty-five pounds—in cash!" he said softly. "That's very interesting!"

"The under-mistress goes as a rule," said Jimmy. "But I understand that she is ill this week, and so the house-keeper—my mother—is going instead. And she doesn't quite like the job."

"What is the reason for all this wealth?" asked Travers.

"Oh, it's for the girls," explained Jimmy. "Their week-end pocket-money, you know. Miss Bond—the headmistress of the Moor View School—always gets out the cash like this."

"And, no doubt, she keeps it in her desk until the appointed hour for the share-out?" suggested Travers thoughtfully.

"As a matter of fact, Miss Bond is out to-day—some big conference somewhere," said Jimmy. "I believe that's why mother is a little bit nervous. She's been told to get the money, and then put it straight into Miss Bond's desk when she gets back."

Travers made no comment. He was looking into the fire, and there was a keen expression in his eyes now.

To tell the truth, Travers was struck by the strange nature of this situation. The ways of chance were queer! Here, providentially, had come a solution to the one problem that Travers had been faced with. The way in which the thing fitted in was almost uncanny!

CHAPTER 26.

A Word of Advice!

DURING those few moments that Vivian Travers stared into the fire, an idea had come into his head. By the time he looked up it was all cut and dried; but there was one very important point to be dealt with.

"Of course, your mother is unnecessarily nervous," he said, looking at Jimmy. "There aren't any hold-up men in this district. Besides, who is to know that she's carrying thirty-five quid in her bag?"

"That's just what I was thinking," chuckled Jimmy Potts. "But mother has always been like that about money. Even when—when we were rich, she never liked to carry any cash about with her. One of her little fads, I suppose."

Travers nodded.

"Yet, at the same time, it's just as well to be careful with money," he said.

"And currency notes are particularly easy to get rid of, if they're stolen. If I were you, Jimmy, I should advise your mother to jot down the numbers of those notes."

"Take the numbers of them?" said Jimmy, staring.

"Yes."

"But what on earth for?" asked the boot-boy. "They're not fivers! Nobody takes down the numbers of currency notes!"

"That's where they're unwise," said Travers. "Anyhow, I want you to promise me that you'll see that all the numbers of those thirty-five notes are jotted down. You can do it yourself, dear old fellow. And afterwards, be sure that your mother gives the paper, with the numbers on it, to Miss Bond."

Jimmy looked at his companion rather directly.

"What's this, Travers?" he asked. "Another of your schemes?"

"For the love of Samson, don't make a mystery out of nothing," said Travers carelessly. "Merely a matter of precaution, dear old fellow. I am thinking

about your mother. It will probably make her much easier in mind if she knows that the numbers are taken, and that the money is safeguarded."

"Oh, all right," said Jimmy. "Perhaps it's a good idea, Travers. But I never know with you. You're such a deep sort of fellow."

"Perhaps I am," agreed Travers.

"And that reminds me," went on Jimmy. "What have you done to Grayson?"

"Done to him?"

"Yes," said Jimmy. "Grayson hasn't been persecuting me during these last few days. You told me that you were going to help, Travers, and I noticed that you've been rather thick with Grayson. You're not really friendly with him, are you?"

Vivian Travers chuckled.

"If you had seen us out in the Triangle this morning you wouldn't ask that," he replied. "Grayson wanted to fight me on the spot. No, Jimmy, we're not friendly. I might even go so far as to say that we are deadly enemies; we are at daggers drawn."

"But you were friendly until to-day," Jimmy. "And I believe you did it on purpose—so that you could help me."

"I shouldn't be at all surprised," replied Travers lightly. "Jimmy, dear old fellow, don't ask any questions. Just keep calm. In fact, all you've got to do is to sit tight. Before very long something will happen."

"What do you mean—something will happen?"

"Something big," said Travers dreamily. "Of course, there may be a hitch or two—but in the long run I shall win. So take my advice, Jimmy, and sit tight."

Travers refused to say any more, and soon afterwards Jimmy was compelled to go. He went in a thoughtful mood. For by now he was convinced that his former school-fellow of Beccleston was engaged in some cunning scheme of his own. Grayson was involved in it—yes, and Jimmy, too.

After Potts had gone, Travers flung himself into the easy chair and stretched his legs.

"Amazing!" he murmured. "Thirty-five pounds—in cash! And it will be in Miss Bond's desk this evening. Could anything be sweeter?"

Travers seemed to attach great importance to that comparatively small sum of money. He lounged back in his chair and closed his eyes.

"Yes, thirty-five quid!" he murmured. "It's bound to be there this evening, and—"

"Talking to yourself?"

Travers opened his eyes with a start. He hadn't heard the door open, but now, looking in that direction, he saw that Hubbard, of Study B, was standing on the threshold. And Hubbard had an expression of astonishment on his face.

"Merely ruminating, dear old fellow," explained Travers, without a trace of annoyance, although his eyes were cold. "But—pardon me—is it usual to come into a fellow's room like a ghost?"

"Sorry!" said Hubbard, colouring. "As a matter of fact, I was looking for Teddy Long."

"And do you usually look for him in this way?"

"I believe the cadging rotter is going round the studies, bagging tuck from the cupboards," said Hubbard. "I thought I'd creep on him unawares, and catch him red-handed. You haven't seen him about, I suppose?"

"My interest in Teddy Long," said Travers, "is nil. And my interest in you, Hubbard, is precisely the same. Kindly remove your obnoxious person."

"Fathead!" said Hubbard, glaring.

He went out, wondering vaguely what Vivian Travers could have been talking about. But he didn't give the matter much thought. Travers was a queer sort of fellow at the best—and Hubbard's mind was centred upon the missing Teddy Long.

CHAPTER 27.

Sowing the Seed!

"TRAVERS!"

Mr. Crowell, the master of the Remove, spoke the name sharply, and everybody in the Remove Form-room looked up from work. After-noon lessons were more than half-way through, and the Form was beginning to feel cheery in consequence.

"Sir!" said Travers, in a weary voice. "Is anything the matter with you, Travers?" asked Mr Crowell keenly.

"I don't think so, sir—nothing much," replied Travers, passing a hand over his eyes. "I feel a bit sick, perhaps, and I've got a frightful headache. That's all, sir."

Mr. Crowell frowned.

"For the last half-hour, Travers, you have been holding your head," said the Form-master. "I have noticed, too, that you have frequently passed a hand in front of your eyes."

"Yes, sir," said Travers. "Everything goes blurred now and again. I can't quite make out what's the matter. I suppose I'm not particularly well."

"I think you had better go outside for half an hour, Travers," said Mr. Crowell. "A little fresh air might put you to rights. As soon as you feel better, come back again."

"Thank you, sir," said Travers, rising to his feet. "I'm awfully grateful, sir."

He passed a hand over his eyes, and walked rather unsteadily to the door. He was still looking slightly ill after he had fetched his overcoat from the Ancient House, and after he had passed out beyond the school gateway into the lane.

But as he strolled up the road in the direction of the Moor View School a change came over him. A faint smile overspread his features, and the droop came out of his shoulders.

"Easy!" he murmured contentedly. "And I didn't even have to ask!"

For about twenty minutes Travers strolled leisurely up and down, just round the bend, so that the school gates were out of view. Very shortly after-

wards, a figure came swinging down the lane, and Travers smiled to himself once more.

"I thought I should just about hit it," he murmured complacently.

Jimmy Potts came up, and he gave Travers a curious look.

"Have you been waiting for me?" he asked, in a cautious voice.

"Well, yes, to be perfectly candid," replied Travers. "Don't worry, Jimmy, we're quite alone here—nobody can overhear us. For once you can be Sir James, and—"

"Oh, do dry up!" urged Jimmy Potts. "You're such a reckless chap, Travers! I thought you were doing lessons at this hour of the afternoon."

"I ought to be, strictly speaking," nodded Travers. "But I faked a headache, and Mr. Crowell let me out. I wanted to meet you—to hear how everything went."

"But why the dickens should you be interested?" asked the boot-boy baronet, in astonishment.

"Well, I am, that's all," said Travers. "Did you get that money all right?"

"You mean, did my mother get it?" said Potts. "Of course she did. By this time it's in Miss Bond's desk, and I expect it'll stop there until to-morrow."

"You don't think she'll put the money in the safe?"

"As far as I know, they haven't got a safe," replied Jimmy. "My mother didn't say anything about it, anyhow."

"And you took all the numbers?"

"Yes, and my mother has promised to give the paper to Miss Bond later on," replied Jimmy. "But what on earth does it mean, Travers? Why are you so interested? Why did you want those numbers taken?"

"Patience, little one—patience!" said Travers. "Whatever happens, Jimmy, I want you to keep quiet. I want you to remain as mum as an oyster."

"What do you mean—whatever happens?"

"At the moment I can't be more explicit," said Travers coolly. "But later

on you might understand. Anyhow, don't be surprised at anything, dear old fellow. And promise me that you will hold your tongue."

"Well, of course I'll promise," said Jimmy Potts. "But I can't for the life of me see why you're making such a mystery, Travers. I can't fathom your game at all."

"All the better," said Travers. "And now I think I'd better be getting back, otherwise Mr. Crowell will be making a few inquiries. Surprising enough, my headache has completely gone, and my vision is no longer blurred. Everything has become crystal-clear."

"It may be crystal-clear to you—but it's just about as clear as mud to me," said Jimmy. "I wish you'd tell me what you're up to, Travers. I don't quite like it, you know. I feel that you're doing something for my sake, and I don't want you to do it."

Vivian Travers merely laughed, and shrugged his shoulder. In his own peculiar way, Travers was fond of Jimmy Potts, and he had made up his mind to help this novel boot-boy.

So they parted without Travers giving any word of explanation, and about an hour later Grayson of the Fifth ran into Travers in the East House lobby. Lessons were over now, and Grayson was looking haggard and worn.

"I was coming out to find you, Travers!" said Grayson, in a low voice. "Look here, you've got to help me! You've got to do something! I've tried one or two fellows, but they won't lend me a penny! And if I don't have the money by to-morrow—"

"Need we discuss these things in such a public place?" interrupted Travers. "Come outside, dear old fellow. Let us stroll up and down the Triangle, and have a quiet chat. You won't improve the position by getting excited."

They went out, and Grayson was in a fever of impatience.

"You young cub!" he snapped, his

voice harsh with anxiety and hatred. "You got me into this mess! It was you who gave those IOU's to that bookmaker! If it hadn't been for you I shouldn't—"

"Must we go all over that again?" interrupted Travers. "You told me I could use those IOU's as I pleased, Grayson, and I did so—so what are you grumbling at? I'd help you if I could—but I can't."

"Haven't you got any money?"

"Nothing to speak of," replied Travers regretfully. "It's a rummy thing, Grayson, but whenever I'm broke I always hear about lots of money. Exasperating, isn't it?"

"Who's got lots of money?" asked Grayson, clutching at the straw.

"Oh, nobody that you can touch, I'm afraid," replied Travers. "Miss Bond, at the Moor View School; in fact, I was having a few words with Jimmy Potts this afternoon. It seems that he and his mother went over to Bannington this afternoon, and drew thirty-five quid out of the bank."

"Thirty-five quid!" said Grayson huskily.

"Yes. Potts' mother is housekeeper at the Moor View School," said Travers casually. "She got quite windy about having all that money in her possession. Jimmy says that she was quite relieved when she put it into Miss Bond's desk."

"In Miss Bond's desk!" repeated Grayson, a strange note creeping into his voice. "And—and Miss Bond's study is on the ground-floor! Thirty-five pounds!"

"Yes—in currency notes," said Travers. "Exasperating, isn't it? Well, I'll have to be getting along, Grayson. I'd like to help you, but I'm afraid it's impossible. I simply haven't got the money, and there's an end of it. I'm afraid you'll have to deal with this trouble yourself."

And Vivian Travers walked off—fully aware of the gleam that had just entered Harold Grayson's eye!

Indoors, Travers considered the position.

"Well, it's up to Grayson now," he told himself. "I've sown the seed, and it won't be long before we know if there's any fruit. I rather think there will be. If Grayson is made of the stuff I suspect, he'll have a shot at that Moor View money. But I didn't egg him on; I didn't put any suggestion in his mind. If he's honest, he'll forget it. If he's crooked, he'll act!"

Travers thus satisfied himself that he had not done anything that would afterwards affect his conscience. In a way, he was right in this conclusion. He had merely mentioned that Moor View School money to Grayson in a conversational way, and if Grayson were dishonest enough to take advantage of the information the guilt would be entirely his.

Travers was particularly pleased with the way things were going on—for he himself would be at the Moor View School that evening. It would be easy enough for him to keep his eyes open—and his ears, too. There wasn't the slightest chance that Grayson would do anything desperate until the evening was fairly advanced.

Travers had thought it all out. The bully of the Fifth was now in a state of indecision—worried, harassed, uncertain. It might even be necessary to provide a prod in order to force Grayson to take the fatal step; Travers was ready with that necessary prod. For soon after tea he rang up Mr. Sam Lloyd, and had a brief talk with that gentleman.

"That'll be all right, Mr. Travers, sir," said the bookmaker. "At seven o'clock, eh?"

"Yes—precisely at seven o'clock," said Travers. "You won't forget, Lloyd, will you? You won't forget, Sam, dear old fellow?"

"I won't forget, sir!" said Lloyd.

Travers rang off, and it was characteristic of him to put the entire matter out of his mind for the time being.

He went upstairs, and changed. He made himself so smart and spruce that even Archie Glenthorne was almost eclipsed.

Quite a number of fellows were going to Winnie Pitt's party.

Naturally, Nipper and Tregellis-West and Watson were among the most prominent guests—and so were Handforth & Co. Reggie Pitt was taking several members of his own House—Jack Grey, Singleton, and Tom Burton, and a few others. Fullwood and Russell were going—and so were Harry Gresham and Alan Castleton.

When Travers came down he found most of the juniors collecting in the Ancient House lobby, and even Handforth was amazingly well groomed. His linen was spotless, and although he looked uncomfortable, he also looked happy. At least, he looked happy until he saw Travers.

"Well, well," said the leader of Study A. "How smart we are this evening!"

"Oh! So you're coming, then?" said Handforth, frowning. "I thought you'd think better of it, Travers. I suppose you know you're not wanted?"

"I was expressly invited by Miss Pitt, so I rather think I am wanted," replied Travers. "All the same, if you fellows decide against me, I'm quite willing to abide by the vote."

"Oh, don't let's have any unpleasantness," said Nipper. "You didn't mean that, Handy, did you? You don't want to get up a vote against Travers?"

Put to the test, Handforth crumpled up.

"Oh, well, no!" he admitted. "I've got nothing against the fellow, really. He's several kinds of an ass, and he was cheeky enough to floor me this morning. But it's not my way to be nasty. He's invited, so I expect we'd better let him come with us."

"You fellows ready?" sang out Reggie Pitt, appearing at the open doorway.

"Yes, rather!"

"Then come along!" said Reggie. "You know what my sister is if we're late—she gets as ratty as the dickens!"

"Don't be an ass!" said Fullwood promptly. "I don't believe your sister could get ratty, Reggie!"

Everybody chuckled—except Ralph Leslie Fullwood, and he flushed. For everybody knew that Winnie was his own special chum.

CHAPTER 24.

The Thief!

"MANY happy returns, Winnie, old girl!"

"Absolutely, what-ho, and yocks!"

"Hear, hear!"

"A toast for Winnie!"

"A toast—a toast!"

The party was now a merry one. It had been in progress for well over an hour now, and tea was practically at an end.

Winnie Pitt, looking very flushed and happy, had already been toasted several times by the enthusiastic guests. Tea was the beverage that was used for this purpose, but the guests were all of the opinion that it could not be bettered.

For this very special occasion the Moor View lecture hall was being used, and it was looking gay with decorations, bright with lights, and it rang with laughter and chatter.

There were well over a dozen of the girls there, including all the damsels who were on such friendly terms with the St. Frank's fellows—Irene Manners, Ethel Church, Violet Watson, Marjorie Temple, Doris Berkeley, and the others.

"Well, as soon as you fellows are ready, we'll clear away," said Irene smilingly. "We've got to have music and dancing. Yes, and some games, too!"

"Good old games!" said Vivian Travers cheerfully.

"You're not sneering, are you?" asked Doris.

"For the love of Samson, why should you think that?" asked Travers.

"Well, some fellows are rather shy of party games," replied Doris. "They think they're too big for it—they think it's beneath their dignity, you know."

Travers grinned.

"Don't include me among those spoilsports, please," he said. "There's nothing I like better than a good old-fashioned game. My favourite, by the way, is kiss-in-the-ring!"

"You'll do!" said Doris, with a chuckle.

Travers meant every word he said. He was not one of those superior fellows, although, judging by his manner, he was very sophisticated. But he entered heart and soul into the game that followed.

Just about this time—as the clock was striking seven—Harold Grayson, in the East House at St. Frank's, was informed by somebody that he was wanted on the telephone.

Grayson was looking more haggard than ever. He had been going through torture. No matter how he tried to thrust the thought of that money out of his mind, it returned.

Thirty-five pounds—in Miss Bond's desk! Again and again he told himself that he must forget it. It would be too risky—altogether too mad. He might be seen! Somebody might come in, and then— But Grayson had refused to picture the possible consequences.

He went to the telephone, vaguely hopeful. Earlier in the evening he had rung up some of his shady acquaintances in Bannington, and he had asked them to lend him money. They had all refused—they had all made excuses. Perhaps one of them had changed his mind.

But when Grayson answered the phone, the voice of Sam Lloyd came to him.

"What—what do you want?" asked Grayson harshly.

"Just a reminder, young gent—that's all," said Lloyd. "I don't want you to forget about to-morrow."

"Look here, I can't do it!" panted Grayson fiercely. "Do you hear? I can't let you have it by mid-day to-morrow! It's impossible! I'm glad you rang up, because I want to tell you—"

"Sorry, young gent, but I can't listen," said Lloyd. "I'm leaving the town to-morrow, and I must have the money before I go."

"Yes, but—"

"I shall be up at the school at about half-past twelve in the morning," went on Lloyd relentlessly. "If you have that money for me—all well and good. But if you don't have it, I shall take those slips of paper to your headmaster. That's final!"

"But you mustn't!" panted Grayson. "I should be sacked!"

"Well, get the money!" said Lloyd. "I don't want you to get into trouble, young gent, but I'm not going to be fooled about. If I tell your headmaster he'll write to your father, and I shall get the money from him. I don't care how I get it; I mean to have it! It'll be a lot simpler if you rake it up from somewhere, and have it ready for me in the morning. That's all. Good-night, young gent!"

While Grayson was attempting to formulate some words the line became dead. He staggered out of the telephone-box like a fellow in a dream.

And, exactly as Travers had anticipated, this "prod" had the desired effect. For, after Grayson had gone out into the Triangle his face was set, his eyes were gleaming with a burning light.

"I've got to do it!" he muttered. "It's the only possible way. Nobody will know, nobody will ever suspect me! And those beastly juniors are over at the Moor View School, too! If there's any fuss, they'll probably be suspected. By gad, it's a chance!"

Three minutes later, after having got his overcoat and cap, he turned to the

main gateway and slunk out into the road.

Truth to tell, Harold Grayson was in a condition of mortal fear. It wasn't that he feared Sam Lloyd so much, but if Lloyd went to the headmaster there would be an inquiry. Many of Grayson's shady habits would come to light, and, in all probability, many witnesses would be called. Unquestionably, he would be sacked in disgrace.

And that disaster must be avoided at any cost!

As he neared the Moor View School his heart was beating rapidly. His eyes were still burning, but a great calmness had come over him. The suspense had passed. The period of uncertainty was over.

Grayson knew what he was going to do now, and so he was calmed. And in his desperation he did not realise the heinous nature of the offence he was about to commit!

CHAPTER 29.

The Watcher at the Window!

VIVIAN TRAVERS glanced at his watch.

"Twelve minutes past seven!" he murmured. "Just about the critical time. I shall have to make tracks!"

It was easy enough for him to excuse himself. He casually mentioned to one or two of the fellows that he wanted to go outside to the main lobby to get something from his overcoat pocket. Nobody took much notice, for the party was noisy and everybody was talking at once. But it was remembered later.

Travers slipped out almost unobserved, but he did not go to his overcoat in the lobby. Instead, he passed out through a side door, and found himself under the wintry stars. It was very dark out there, and a wind was blowing.

Travers glanced up and down, and he was satisfied to see that everything was quiet. Nobody seemed to be about.

Lights were gleaming from many windows, but there was one wing which was dark.

Travers knew, from many inquiries that he had made that this wing contained the headmistress' study. Moving like a shadow, Travers crept closer and closer.

Suddenly he stiffened. He became absolutely rigid. Out of a corner of his eye he had seen a dim figure moving some little distance away. Travers remained like a statue, watching. He felt his pulse quickening.

At the same time he was aware of a sense of exhilaration. How amazingly well his plans had worked out!

Here was Grayson, almost to the minute!

Travers had expected him to come, and he was not disappointed. For that dim figure among the laurels, just a little distance away, belonged to Grayson of the Fifth.

Travers watched, remaining quite motionless. He watched the figure of the Fifth Former as he came nearer and nearer to the window of Miss Bond's study. The window was dark, and Grayson was feeling wildly excited. This was better than he had hoped for!

There would be no waiting, no hanging about. If Travers were right, that money was in the desk. And Grayson would have it, and would be away, well within five minutes.

Everything was astoundingly in favour of the thief.

For when Grayson crept close up to the window he found that it was unlatched. Yet this was not surprising, for Miss Bond believed in fresh air, and she had never had any reason to suppose that there was any chance of intruders breaking in.

As a matter of fact, Miss Bond was taking a class of senior girls who were preparing for an examination, and she was due back in her study at almost any minute. Grayson did not know this, but he realised the necessity for swift action.

In a moment he had the window open, and in another moment he was inside. He paused and listened, but everything was quiet, except for the sighing of the wind in the trees outside. Grayson did not notice the slight movement from just outside the window. But Travers had moved up, and now he was peering in.

He saw Grayson pull an electric torch from his pocket and switch it on. A tiny gleam of light spread across the room, shattering the darkness. The beam waved to and fro, and at last came to rest on the central desk.

Even in the reflected light from the torch Travers could see that Grayson's face was pale and drawn. But now that the actual moment had come Grayson was not so nervous. He was beginning to realise that this task of his was an easy one.

If anybody approached he would hear the footsteps—and it would be the work of a second for him to dive through the window and dash away. In the darkness he could easily escape, and although there might be a hue-and-cry, he would be safe. Who would suspect him—a senior scholar of St. Franks?

He tried the drawers of the desk, and although most of them opened easily, the top drawer was locked. This fact, in itself, was significant.

Grayson tugged at it, and Travers, at the window, watched with satisfaction.

He saw Grayson give a desperate heave; with a sudden splintering, the fragile lock gave way, and the drawer came shooting out. With a gasp, Grayson stood rigid, listening. But the sound of that smashing lock, seemingly so noisy to him, had not penetrated beyond the closed door of the study.

Feverishly Grayson searched in the drawer, and Travers heard him give a little gasp of satisfaction. The notes were there—thirty-five of them, with a small elastic band round them!

Ten—fifteen—twenty—twenty-five!

Grayson counted them out with quivering fingers, and he did not trouble to ascertain how many were left. He only wanted the twenty-five. Rascal though he was, he could not bring himself to take any more than that exact figure. He only needed the twenty-five, so that he could avert the threatened disaster.

Stumbling against a chair, half-tripping over the carpet, he came towards the window. He dived out, landed on the path, and blundered away. He had got the money—and he had taken no trouble to hide any of the traces. What did it matter? The loss was bound to be discovered sooner or later.

Once Grayson was well away, it would only take him five minutes to get back to the school. Then he would be safe—safe! No matter how many inquiries were made—even if the police were called in—he would be secure. For he was a senior of St. Franks, and this theft would be put down to a passing tramp, or some such vagabond.

And all the money was in notes—ordinary, soiled currency notes.

Little did Harold Grayson realise that the numbers of those notes had been taken, and were in Miss Bond's possession!

CHAPTER 39.

The Alarm!

"HALLO!" said Handforth, giving Travers a curious glance.
"Hallo!" said Travers amiably.

"Fathead!" frowned Handforth. "Where the dickens have you been to? What have you been doing for the last ten minutes?"

"I went out to get something from my overcoat," replied Travers easily. "And when I got there, dear old fellow, I found that I'd forgotten it. How are the games going?"

"Come on!" sang out somebody.

"Musical chairs! Take your places, all of you!"

There was something refreshing in this boy and girl party, with everybody enjoying the healthy, old-fashioned parlour games. Many supercilious fellows would have turned up their noses at such pleasure—but Nipper & Co. and all the other juniors were far too sensible to act like that. They were enjoying themselves immensely.

After the musical chairs came an impromptu dance, a gramophone being used to supply the necessary fox-trot and waltz music.

Eight o'clock was just striking, and it was getting near the time for the guests to depart, when the door suddenly opened and Miss Bond came striding in. Her face was flushed, and her whole expression was one of anxiety and alarm. The girls were particularly surprised, for it was seldom, indeed, that they saw their headmistress so flustered.

"I am very sorry to interrupt like this, but I am afraid you boys will have to go back to your own school," said Miss Bond. "In ordinary circumstances I should like you to enjoy yourselves, and I do not object to these parties, but to-night I am worried—and I must have quietness. The school has been robbed!"

"Robbed!" went up an amazed echo.

"Oh, Miss Bond, whatever do you mean?" cried Irene, running forward towards the headmistress.

"Are we to blame?" asked Winnie anxiously. "It's my party, and—"

"No, child, no!" said Miss Bond. "I am not blaming you in the least—although I dare say the robber took advantage of the noise that was going on in this part of the school. He realised that he would have an easy task."

"But what has been taken?" asked Winnie. "Oh, Miss Bond, please tell us! How did this happen?"

"Yes, rather," said Handforth, pushing forward. "Perhaps we can do

something, Miss Bond! By George, we'll investigate, and it won't take us long to get on the track of the thief!"

"I have already rung up the police, and an inspector from Bannington is coming over at once," said Miss Bond. "So I hardly think, boys, that I shall need your assistance. The robbery is not very grave; my study was broken into this evening—at some period during the last hour—and twenty-five pounds, in notes, have been taken from my desk!"

"Good gad!" said Archie. "I mean, not a frightfully large amount, what?"

"It is very mysterious," said Miss Bond, frowning. "There were thirty-five pounds in one bundle in the top drawer of my desk, and yet only twenty-five pounds have been taken. The other ten notes are still there, and I cannot possibly understand why the robber rejected them."

"Well, if we can be of any help, Miss Bond, you've only got to say the word," said Nipper.

But the good lady declared that it would be far better if all the juniors got back to their own school before the police arrived. It would only complicate matters if they were dodging all over the place. The girls were ordered to their own quarters, and there were many hasty good-nights.

Outside, as the fellows were buttoning their overcoats, Handforth was suddenly struck by a rather startling idea.

"I say!" he said in a low voice, drawing Nipper aside. "What do you make of this?"

"I don't make anything of it," replied Nipper. "It's very rummy, though. The man who took those notes must have known they were there—"

"Man!" repeated Handforth. "How do you know it was a man?"

"Well, that's the natural assumption, isn't it?"

"I don't want to say anything to any of the others, but I'm not any too sure of Travers," said Handforth.

"Travers!" echoed Nipper, aghast. "You're not suggesting—"

"I'm blessed if I know what to think!" growled Handforth. "But Travers made some silly excuse to go out at about a quarter-past seven, and he was away for over a quarter of an hour. He said he went to fetch something out of his overcoat, but that was all spoof. Where was he during that quarter of an hour?"

"Talking about me?" asked Travers calmly.

"Eh?" gasped Handforth. "I—I— Yes, blow you, I was!" he added, seeing that any further concealment was impossible. "Where were you when you went out, Travers?"

"Well, I wasn't in Miss Bond's study pinching money!" replied Travers coolly.

Handforth's loud voice had given him away again, and it was no longer possible to keep this thing secret. In less than a minute all the juniors were discussing the matter, and Travers was listening with amused toleration.

"Hang it, you're not suspecting me of being a thief, I hope?" he said. "Go ahead, if you want to—"

"Cheese it, Travers!" said Nipper uncomfortably. "We're not considering such a ridiculous idea for a moment. All the same, you might tell us where you went to. We shouldn't ask ordinarily, but it might be necessary for you to have an alibi. You know what silly ideas the police get into their heads sometimes."

"But they won't be silly enough to accuse me!" said Travers lightly. "I happen to be one of the richest fellows in the Junior School—and I'm not boasting about it. I've got three or four fivers on me at the present moment, and I can get as much money as I like from my pater. So why on earth should I want to rob Miss Bond's desk?"

But some of the juniors were looking at him very suspiciously. He had evaded any answer to that question—

he had not explained where he had gone to during his mysterious absence. There was something very mysterious about it all!

CHAPTER 31.

Bluff!

"A BURGLARY?" asked Buster Boots of the Fourth. "At the Moor View School?"

"Yes!" said Fullwood. "It happened this evening, while we were there—at Winnie Pitt's party."

"Well, I'm jiggered!" said Boots.

There was quite a lot of talk. Most of the guests had arrived back at St Frank's, and it had not taken long for the news to get round. Groups of juniors were standing in the various lobbies discussing the situation. It did not affect them directly, but they were naturally interested.

"Miss Bond came and told us all about it," said Fatty Little indignantly. "It was a dirty trick, breaking up the party like that—because we were going to have some more refreshments later on. There were lots of cakes and things left, and—"

"Oh, dry up, you greedy ass!" said Fullwood, with a grin. "Never mind about the grub. Miss Bond told us that she had had thirty-five quid in her desk, you chaps," he went on, turning to the others. "But the rummy thing is that only twenty-five quid was taken."

"I say!" panted Teddy Long, pushing forward. "Some of the chaps are saying that Travers took the money."

"Dry up, you little idiot!" snapped Fullwood. "Just because Travers went out for a quarter of an hour, that's no reason why he should be suspected. It's disgraceful! If I hear you talking like that again, Long, I'll make you smart!"

"I'm only repeating what some of the other chaps are saying!" protested Teddy, backing away.

"The best thing you chaps can do is to forget it!" said Fullwood gruffly.

"Personally I don't believe Travers would do such a thing. He's not the kind—besides, he's got plenty of money of his own. There's no direct evidence—no proof. So the sooner these rumours are killed, the better."

Most of the other sensible fellows shared this opinion. At the same time, the rumours persisted—and Vivian Travers found himself vaguely suspected that evening.

But at the moment he knew nothing about this—for he was outside in the lane. He had deliberately lagged behind, and it was more by chance than anything else that he ran into Grayson just near the school gates. Grayson had come up on his bicycle, and he was fagged and hot after a hard ride.

"You're the very fellow I want to see, Travers!" said the Fifth Former, as he stood beside his machine. "I've just come from Bannington."

"Exercise?" asked Travers, noting the relieved expression on Grayson's face.

"No, you young ass!" said the Fifth Former. "I went over to see that confounded bookie of yours."

"He's not my bookie."

"Don't quibble!" snapped Grayson. "You nearly got me into a mess, confound you, and I'm lucky to get out of it. I wired to a friend of mine this afternoon, and he turned up trumps."

"Splendid!" said Travers.

"Yes, he sent me the money by telegram," explained Grayson glibly. "So I went straight over to Bannington, and saw that bookie and paid him. Everything's all right now. So the sooner we forget the whole infernal business, the better."

"Congrats, dear old fellow," said Travers smoothly. "That friend of yours was a handy sort of fellow."

"Yes, rather," agreed Grayson. "Well, thank goodness I've settled with Lloyd! He won't be here to-morrow, and I can forget the whole beastly business."

He walked on, and Travers shook his head in the darkness. In the circumstances, Grayson's bluff had been very ineffective. For Travers knew that he had been lying from start to finish. He had got that money from Miss Bond's desk, and then he had ridden straight over to Bannington, so that he could pay it over. Grayson fondly believed that he was safe.

He might have thought differently if he had followed Travers into the Ancient House a few minutes later. For Travers went straight to the telephone, and he rang up the Wheatsheaf, in Bannington. In less than two minutes he was speaking to Sam Lloyd.

"I understand that you've seen Grayson?" asked Travers. "He's given you twenty-five pounds in notes, hasn't he?"

"That's right, Mr. Travers, sir," said Lloyd. "Fair took me by surprise, too. I gave him the IOU's, and he burnt them up."

"You've still got those notes, haven't you?" asked Travers quickly. "You haven't changed any of them?"

"No, of course not," said Lloyd. "They're not mine. It's just a trick of yours, isn't it, to get the money into your own hands? What shall I do with it?"

"Bring it over to me here—now!" said Travers. "I'll meet you outside. It'll be after locking-up, but I'll get out somehow. And you must bring the actual notes, Lloyd—the very ones that Grayson gave you. When you get here I'll give you a fiver for your trouble."

"I'll be there within half an hour," said the bookmaker promptly.

Sam Lloyd was as good as his word, too.

Barely twenty-nine minutes had elapsed before his car came humming up the lane from the direction of Bell-ton village. As it drew near to the school a shadowy form came out from the hedge and stood in the middle of the road. Travers had been watching and waiting.

"That you, Lloyd?" he asked, as he

shielded his eyes from the glare of the headlamps.

The car came to a standstill.

"It's me right enough, Mr. Travers, sir," replied the bookmaker, leaning out. "I'm not late, am I?"

"You've done well," said Travers. "But for goodness' sake turn those headlamps off. I'm not supposed to be out here at all, and I shall get into trouble if I am seen. Here, I'd better get into the car with you."

He jumped inside, and sat next to Lloyd. The latter was taking a bundle of notes from his pocket, and he handed them over with a grin.

"You're a deep 'un, young gent," he said admiringly. "You can't fool me, either. That other young fellow owed you the money, and you wanted it."

"Don't you believe it!" said Travers lightly. "Why, it's cost me fifteen quid, hasn't it? I gave you a tenner before—and here's another five."

Lloyd scratched his head.

"Well, hang me if I can understand what you're up to!" he said candidly.

"It isn't in the least necessary why you should understand," replied Travers. "I want this money—and, later on, I may want you to give some evidence."

"Evidence!" ejaculated the bookmaker, startled.

"Oh, you needn't worry!" replied Travers. "It will be private evidence—just between you and another gentleman and myself, perhaps. I'll let you know later on. But if I do want you, I shall be willing to pay for your services."

"I'll be ready," said the bookmaker. "You're a liberal young gent, an' no mistake. Why, I'm making more money out of you than I make out o' the horses. And if you're satisfied, I am."

"Then we're all serene," said Travers smoothly. "That's all, Lloyd. That's all, Sam, dear old fellow. You'd better be going—and I must get indoors. When I want you again I'll ring you up. If you're not in the Wheatsheaf at the

moment I'll leave a message for you. Is that clear?"

"Clear enough for me," said Mr. Lloyd.

"There's just one other thing," said Travers, as he prepared to get out of the car. "You're sure that these notes are the actual ones that Grayson gave to you?"

"Of course they are," said the bookmaker. "But what does it matter? One note is just as good as another, isn't it?"

"Ordinarily—but not this time," said Travers. "But I don't want to make too much of a mystery of it, Sam. I'll just tell you one thing. Those notes were stolen."

"Here, I say!" ejaculated Mr. Lloyd in alarm. "What are you talking about, sir? I don't want to be dragged into —"

"You'll be dragged into nothing," interrupted Travers. "But I'm just telling you at once that those notes were stolen by Grayson, and you might have to give evidence against him. Not to the police, of course—and you can take my word for it that everything will be strictly private. There's nothing for you to worry about, Sam. Those notes were paid to you in the ordinary way, and you kept the whole transaction to yourself, didn't you?"

"You bet I did!" said Mr. Lloyd.

"Then there's nothing to worry about," continued Travers, getting out of the car. "Just hold yourself in readiness to come when I want you, and the whole thing will be over and done with."

Mr. Lloyd went, feeling very uncertain and not a little uneasy.

But Vivian Travers was not uneasy in the least. He got indoors without being spotted, and the first thing he did was to go to his study and lock himself in.

He made sure that the blind was drawn, and then he went over to his own desk—rather an elaborate affair, which filled one corner of the little room. He unlocked the top and slid it

back. Then he placed the twenty-five currency notes into one of the pigeon-holes, after which he locked the desk again, and grinned appreciatively.

"The evidence!" he murmured. "Yes, by Samson, I've got all the evidence! The numbers of these notes are in Miss Bond's possession, and the notes themselves are in mine. When it comes to a 'show-down,' Grayson will be caught like a rat in a trap!"

This thought seemed to give Travers a great deal of satisfaction. Indeed, he openly gloated. His scheming had borne fruit. His cunning plan—whatever it was—was working out just as he had desired.

CHAPTER 32.

A Visitor for Travers!

IT was two days later. Morning lessons were in full swing, and everything was going well in the Remove Form-room.

Mr. Crowell, for once, was in an excellent temper, and he had even gone to the length of making several alleged jokes—at which the Form had dutifully tittered.

The second lesson was now in progress, and the wintry sunshine was pouring through the big windows.

A tap sounded on the door, and Mr. Crowell turned his head away from the blackboard.

"Come in!" he said, frowning.

Mr. Crowell was a gentleman who detested being disturbed in the middle of lessons, and his good-humour deserted him for a moment. But his face cleared again when he saw that the visitor was only Potts, the Ancient House page.

"Well, Potts?" said Mr. Crowell. "What do you want?"

"There's a gentleman to see Master Travers, sir," said Jimmy.

"Indeed!" ejaculated Mr. Crowell, with slight sarcasm. "You had better tell the gentleman, Potts, that my pupils are not in the habit of receiving

visitors in the middle of morning school."

The Remove listened with interest, and many glances were turned in the direction of Vivian Travers. But the latter was quite unconcerned, and he was in no way surprised. Indeed, if the truth must be told, he had been expecting this visitor for the past hour.

"The gentleman has come all the way from London, sir," said Potts. "He says that he must see Master Travers now. It's a very urgent business matter, sir."

Mr. Crowell turned.

"Do you know anything of this, Travers?" he asked.

"Yes, sir," replied Travers. "I invited the gentleman to come—although I didn't know that he would interrupt morning lessons."

"I greatly dislike these disturbances," said the Form-master tartly. "Perhaps you had better go, Travers—but get back as quickly as you can. And I trust that you will arrange matters, in future, so that you can attend to your business out of the school hours!"

"I'll try to, sir," said Travers calmly.

He went out, and the Remove wondered what it could mean. But there was no chance of knowing, for the morning was only half over, and Travers wasn't the sort of fellow to come back and tell his business to all and sundry.

He made his way into the Ancient House, accompanied by Jimmy Potts. And Jimmy was now looking flushed and excited.

"What does it mean, Travers?" he asked tensely, as they crossed the Triangle from the School House to the Ancient House. "What have you done? This—this man is Mr. Grayson."

"I know it!" said Travers, nodding.

"I told him to come."

"You told him to!" gasped Jimmy. "But—but—"

"Don't excite yourself, dear old fellow," interrupted Travers. "It's my affair, and I'm rather sorry that you know about it. Mr. Montague Gray-

son is the fellow who ruined your father. Please don't think that he's a friend of mine."

"I don't—of course I don't!" said Jimmy Potts. "But why is he here? What business can he possibly have with you, Travers?"

"Wait and see!" replied the cool Removeite.

And he wouldn't say any more. He went to Study A in the Remove passage, and walked in. Standing near the window was Mr. Montague Grayson, the father of Harold Grayson of the Fifth. Travers closed the door, and Mr. Grayson spun round.

He was a heavily-built man with a somewhat bloated countenance. He was well-dressed, and was spruce from head to foot. The expression on his face was one of anger and grimness.

"Are you—are you this boy Travers?" he demanded harshly.

"At your service, Mr. Grayson!" said Travers smoothly. "I see that you got my letter."

"You infernal young puppy!" said Mr. Grayson furiously. "What do you mean by sending me such an effusion? How dare you? Answer me! How dare you write to me that my son is in danger of being expelled? That you hold his good name in your hands? Give me an explanation this very instant!"

"You shall have it, sir," replied Travers. "But won't you sit down first?"

"I will not sit down!" shouted Mr. Grayson. "You have made a most outrageous statement in your letter, and I have come down especially to thrash the matter out. Come, boy—out with it!"

"You need an explanation, sir—and I'll give you one," replied Travers evenly. "But please prepare yourself for a shock—because I'm going to give you one!"

Mr. Montague Grayson fumed.

It exasperated him beyond measure to see his young host sitting coolly on a corner of the study table, unfolding

a paper that he had taken from his pocket. It was a double sheet of note-paper, and at last Travers looked up.

"Well, what is the matter with you?" snapped Mr. Grayson. "Do you think I can waste the whole day over you? What nonsense—"

"Just a minute, Mr. Grayson," interrupted Travers. "This is a copy of the letter that I sent to you. I told you that your son is in danger of being expelled in disgrace—and that his safety lies in my hands. I also told you that unless you came down to see me this morning, I should place certain facts before the headmaster, and so encompass your son's downfall. I am glad to see that you thought it fit to come down."

"I came because I mean to have you drastically punished for your outrageous effrontery!" retorted Mr. Grayson, breathing harder than ever. "I shall hear your story—and I have not the slightest doubt that it will prove to be a preposterous one—and then I shall go to the headmaster."

"Perhaps you'll change your mind before then, sir," said Travers coolly. "Well, we won't beat about the bush. There's nothing like the blunt truth. In a nutshell, your son is a thief!"

Mr. Grayson started as though he had been stung.

"How dare you?" he shouted thickly.

"I dare—because I have the proof!"

"The proof!" echoed Mr. Grayson.

"You are telling me that my son is a thief—and that you have proof of it? I wonder I do not strike you down! You insolent young puppy! You insulting —"

"Steady, sir!" interrupted Vivian Travers. "It won't do any good to get violent—or to get excited. I'm just telling you the simple facts. Grayson of the Fifth—your son—is a thief!"

"You are lying!" snarled the other. "I will not stay here for another minute! I shall go straight to the headmaster, and I shall report your infamous conduct!"

"You'd better wait, sir!" said

Travers, his tone becoming grim. "Don't forget that I have the proof!"

"Lies—lies!"

"You don't like hearing this, of course, because the truth is generally hard to listen to," said Travers. "Briefly, Mr. Grayson, the facts are these: A few days ago the sum of twenty-five pounds was stolen from the Moor View School—a girls' college, a short way up the road."

"Twenty-five pounds!," said Mr. Grayson contemptuously. "A ridiculous sum!"

"It may be ridiculous to you, Mr. Grayson, but I don't think it's ridiculous to Miss Bond," said Travers. "You're practically a millionaire, and you're accustomed to dealing with sums that run into hundreds of thousands, so twenty-five pounds is just a drop in the ocean. But that makes no difference. The police are trying to trace this thief, and a word from me will put them on the track of your son."

"I don't believe you!" said Mr. Grayson, his voice harsh with fury. "I don't believe a word of this fantastic story!"

"Naturally, I have other witnesses," said Travers. "Your son stole that money so that he could pay off a bookmaker—a man named Sam Lloyd. I might mention that Lloyd is ready to give evidence, if I should call upon him to do so."

"And who will believe this story?" asked Mr. Grayson contemptuously. "Who will take the word of a bookmaker against my son, a scholar of St. Frank's?"

"It doesn't merely rest with Lloyd's word—or your son's word, either," said Travers. "The numbers of all those notes were taken, and Lloyd's first action, on receiving the money from your son, was to send it all to me."

"You have this money now?"

"Yes," nodded Travers. "And please remember that the numbers of those notes were not only taken, but published in the local paper. The police

know them—everybody knows them. And Lloyd will swear on his oath—in any witness box—that these self-same notes were handed to him in discharge of a debt by your son. Isn't that evidence strong enough for you, Mr. Grayson? It is direct—not merely circumstantial."

For two or three minutes, Mr. Montague Grayson paced up and down the little study. He was still in a tearing rage, but, at the same time, he was now alarmed. There was something singularly impressive in Travers' coolness—something sinister in his air of determination. At last, Mr. Grayson halted and stared at the scheming junior.

"Well?" he barked. "What is all this to you? Why have you done this, boy?"

"Just a whim of mine," replied Travers. "I've been to a lot of trouble to get this evidence together, and I'm going to put a proposition before you, Mr. Grayson. If you agree, all well and good. If you don't agree, it will be in my power to have your son exposed."

"Do you think I fear this—this exposure?" shouted Mr. Grayson heatedly. "Who will believe you and this infernal bookmaker of yours?"

"You seem to forget that the notes themselves will be dumb evidence," said Travers grimly. "When this story comes out, Mr. Grayson, your son will be in a pretty rocky position. In any case, he will be expelled from St. Frank's in disgrace—merely for having dealings with a bookmaker. And the theft? Your son will be exposed as a thief, and the authorities at the Moor View School will probably prosecute."

"Prosecute!" Mr. Grayson started back.

"Why not?" asked Travers. "Isn't it usual to prosecute in a case of theft? And what will happen to your precious son then? He may be sent to Borstal!"

As Travers mentioned the name of that celebrated institution, every atom of colour fled from Mr. Grayson's face!

CHAPTER 33.

The Alternative!

"BORSTAL!" muttered Mr. Grayson hoarsely

"It's not a nice word—but then, it's not a nice place!" said Travers. "It may seem presumptuous on my part, Mr. Grayson, to tell you to keep cool. But it will pay you to do so. Any undue excitement at this stage might be pretty costly."

It was with great difficulty that Mr. Montague Grayson kept himself under control

"So far, I have been patient," he said, his words slow and tense. "But I warn you, boy, that I am nearly at the limit of my endurance. It is in my mind to take you by the scruff of your neck, and to thrash you within an inch of your life!"

"Too risky!" said Travers, shaking his head. "Don't do it, sir!"

"Why have you done this?" went on the stockbroker, taking a step forward and glaring into the junior's face. "Why have you done it? Tell me! What object can you have in collecting this—this evidence against my son?"

"I am going to give you a surprise, Mr. Grayson—and probably a shock," replied Travers, as icily cool as ever. "You might get very angry with me—even angrier than you are now. But if you do, always remember that a quarrel with me will spell disaster for your son."

"Go on!" said Mr. Grayson harshly.

"I happen to know that you are nearly a millionaire," proceeded Travers. "I also happen to know that you handled the affairs of the late Sir James Potts."

Mr. Grayson started violently. At that second it seemed that he actually would lay violent hands upon this boy. Travers himself was aware that his heart was beating more rapidly than usual. This was the great moment.

It was the moment that he had been working up for—for weeks! All his scheming had aimed at this climax.

"Good heavens!" panted Mr. Grayson. "You—you young hound! You have the audacity to pry into my business affairs, and to—"

"You'll excuse me, sir, but I haven't been prying into any of your affairs at all," interrupted Travers. "But I am interested in the affairs of Lady Potts and her son. I might mention that young Potts was a school-chum of mine, at Beccleston College. And I know that the Potts' fortune amounted to a sum well over fifty thousand pounds. The late Sir James did business with you—took your advice regarding speculations."

"You—you—"

"Wait a minute, sir!" went on Travers grimly. "This isn't easy to hear, is it? I can see that it has already touched you on the raw. Sir James lost his entire fortune, owing to your manipulations, and that fortune went into your own pockets. The blow killed Jimmy's father—and now Jimmy and his mother are compelled to work for their living."

"Have you done?" snarled Mr. Grayson.

"Not yet!" said Travers. "Working for one's living is no disgrace, of course—but justice is justice. I don't pretend to be a judge, and, strictly speaking, this is none of my business. But if, by a little scheming, I can put things on an honest basis, I'll do it."

"Are you suggesting that I am dishonest?" shouted Mr. Grayson. "Are you hinting that—"

"I don't want to hint at anything—and I'm not interested in any details," said Vivian Travers. "But I am going to put a suggestion to you, Mr. Grayson. Lady Potts is at the Moor View School, in the position of housekeeper. She is known as Mrs. Potts, for she has lost everything and prefers to be incognito, so to speak. Do you want to hear my suggestion?"

Mr. Grayson made an inarticulate sound, and Travers nodded.

"Very well, sir," he said. "Here it is.

I want you to write to Lady Potts, and I want you to tell her that certain deeds and shares—I'll leave the little details to you—have come to light. You'll tell her that her entire fortune of, roughly, fifty thousand pounds is restored. You will make over the necessary securities, and you will also see that the Potts' estates are handed back to Lady Potts!"

Mr. Grayson gulped.

"And the alternative?" he asked, in a voice of thunder.

"The alternative is very simple, Mr. Grayson," replied Travers. "If you refuse, then I shall go straight to the headmaster, and I shall tell him of your son's guilt. Incidentally, I shall also telephone to the Bannington police, and within an hour Inspector Jameson will be here. I shall hand him the stolen notes, and explain exactly how they came into my possession. Sam Lloyd, the bookmaker, will give his own evidence, and the proof against your son will be absolute."

"You crazy young fool!" said Mr. Grayson, almost in a whisper. "Do you think I believe any of this? Do you think I take any heed of your preposterous threats?"

"Nevertheless, Mr. Grayson, you are in a trap," said the junior. "You don't like to admit it—but you know very well that you are in the trap. Either you make restitution to Lady Potts, or your son is expelled from St. Frank's in disgrace, and prosecuted for theft, with the chance of being sent to a reformatory. Quite simple, isn't it?"

The alternative was certainly a terrible one. And although Mr. Montague Grayson was beside himself with rage, he also knew that he would have to deal carefully with this cool school-boy.

A sum of fifty thousand pounds was involved. It was staggering—stupendous. Unquestionably, Travers' nerve was colossal. How he had ever conceived this startling scheme was a mystery in itself. But as a piece of sheer

audacity, it would have taken a lot of beating.

He had deliberately plotted against Harold Grayson of the Fifth. He had worked things so that Grayson had resorted to theft. He had all the evidence cut and dried—and now he had Grayson's father in front of him, and was coolly giving him this dramatic alternative.

Without doubt, Vivian Travers was something novel in the run of Removites!

The sheer nerve of the thing was breathless. Not one boy in a thousand could have carried through with this game of bluff. For, at rock bottom, it was little else. How did Travers know that the Moor View people would prosecute? How did he know that there was any real chance of Grayson being sent to a reformatory?

Yet Travers was prepared for these eventualities. His cunning brain had thought of everything.

"You are mad!" said Mr. Grayson, at length. "You are stark, raving mad! Do you seriously think, you young fool, that I shall pay a sum like fifty thousand pounds to extricate my son from this—this trivial difficulty? Do you seriously believe that your nonsensical story has convinced me?"

Travers strolled to the window, and waved two or three times.

"Naturally, Mr. Grayson, you will want some corroboration," he said, turning. "I don't expect you to take my bare word."

"What are you doing?" demanded the other harshly. "Who were you signalling to just now?"

"It's all right—only Lloyd, the bookie," replied Travers. "I told him to be on hand this morning, and he is within sight of this window. He'll be here within a minute—and then you'll hear what he has to say."

Mr. Montague Grayson paced up and down the study like a man possessed. Never for an instant did he doubt the story of that theft. He was quite con-

vinced, indeed, that his son had actually stolen the money. And there was something about Travers' attitude, too, that told him that Travers would keep his word.

A tap sounded on the door, and a moment later Mr. Sam Lloyd strode in.

"Morning, young gent!" he said, smiling at Travers. "Hallo! Visitor, eh?"

"This is a gentleman that I want you to see, Lloyd," said Travers. "Let me introduce you to Mr. Montague Grayson. He's the father of the fellow who handed you that money the other day."

"Pleased to meet you, sir!" said Mr. Lloyd agreeably.

"You despicable rogue!" snapped Mr. Grayson. "Are you in this plot, too?"

"Plot?" said Mr. Lloyd. "Here, steady, sir! You'd better be careful what you're saying!"

"You mustn't be too hard on Mr. Grayson, Sam, dear old fellow," said Travers. "He's rather upset at the moment. All I want you to do is to tell your story."

"That'll be easy, sir," said Mr. Lloyd. "I took twenty-five pounds in notes from your son, Mr. Grayson," he went on, turning to the visitor. "The money was given to me in settlement of some IOU's that I was holding. But owing to Master Travers' word of warning, I knew that the money had been stolen. What was more, the numbers of those notes were known, and so I didn't want to touch the stuff."

"Why did you not inform the police?" demanded Mr. Grayson, glaring.

"Well, for one thing, the affair was pretty serious—and Master Travers here seemed to have some game of his own on," replied Mr. Lloyd. "He asked me to give him the notes, so I gave them to him. Just a little arrangement between ourselves. Not that it makes any difference to the main fact. The money that I received from your son was stolen from the girls' school. Yes,

and I shall be perfectly willing to swear that in the witness box, if necessary."

Mr. Lloyd could easily make this statement—since it was the gospel truth. He had received that money from Grayson, and so he could truthfully say so under oath.

"Go!" panted Mr. Grayson, pointing to the door. "I want to hear no more!"

"Here are the notes, sir," said Travers, producing them from his pocket. "And here, on the table, is a local newspaper—with the numbers of the notes printed in this column. If you will compare these numbers with the numbers on the notes, you will find—"

"Enough!" snarled Mr. Grayson. "I can see that you have been plotting together—that you have been deliberately trying to encompass my son's dishonour."

"That's all, Sam, dear old fellow," said Travers quietly, turning to the bookmaker. "But don't go away just yet—not until I see you, anyhow. You may be wanted again."

"Right you are, Master Travers, sir—I'm free for another hour," said Mr. Lloyd.

He went out, and Travers immediately turned to Mr. Grayson again.

"There's one thing that I want to correct, Mr. Grayson," he said. "There has been no plotting to encompass your son's dishonour. The plotting has been for a different reason altogether. I want Lady Potts to have justice. That is all. If you do the sensible thing, not a single word of this scandal will come out. Your son will continue at St. Frank's as though nothing had happened and there will not be a breath of suspicion against him. The notes will be returned to the Moor View School anonymously, and the whole affair will naturally drop. It rests with you, Mr. Grayson."

"I want to see my son!" panted the other. "Before I decide anything, I want to see Harold!"

"That's easy," replied Travers. "If

you'll wait here for five minutes, sir, I'll bring him back with me.

The junior quickly left the apartment, and he was back with Harold Grayson within four minutes by the clock. A word to Mr. Pagett, the Fifth Form-master, that Grayson's father was waiting to see him, had been sufficient.

"Pater!" ejaculated Grayson, as he came into Study A, and stared at his father. "What's brought you here? I didn't know——"

"Harold, this boy has been telling me that you are a thief!" interrupted his father bluntly.

Grayson staggered.

"A—a thief!" he faltered, turning white. "I—I don't know——"

"This is no time for beating about the bush, Harold!" panted his father. "Did you, or did you not, steal twenty-five pounds in notes from the Moor View School? Answer me, boy! I must know the truth!"

"You'd better answer, dear old fellow," drawled Travers. "Here are the notes—handed to me by Lloyd. The numbers on these notes correspond with the published numbers. You'd better make a clean breast of it."

And Harold Grayson, taken utterly by surprise—taken off his guard—crumpled up.

CHAPTER 34.

The Victory!

HAROLD GRAYSON was not a resourceful fellow at the best of times. His brain did not work rapidly. He might have bluffed the whole thing out—he might have brazened it through—but he wasn't built that way.

For a moment or two he muttered and stuttered, and he became incoherent. Then, in response to a sharp command from his father, he blurted out his guilt.

"I—I was desperate!" he babbled. "Lloyd was pestering me—said that he

was going to the Head! That would have meant the sack, and I—I had to get the money somehow!"

"And you stole it?" demanded his father in a terrible voice.

"It—it wasn't my fault!" panted Grayson. "Travers was at the bottom of the whole plot! I really owed the money to him, and I gave him my IOU's. But he passed them over to Lloyd, and Lloyd came up here and threatened to give me away to the Head."

"You see," said Travers easily. "I told you it was a put-up job, Mr. Grayson. But it doesn't alter the fact that your son stole the money."

"It was Travers who told me that the money was at the Moor View School," went on Grayson, clutching at the slightest straw. "He put the idea into my head."

"Enough—enough!" said his father. "I can easily see that this boy has been engineering the whole wretched business. But you stole that money, Harold, and you gave it to this bookmaker. The evidence against you is deadly."

"So you see, sir, it boils down to the one alternative," said Travers. "Either you make restitution to Lady Potts, or I shall go to the headmaster and to the police and tell my story."

"Silence!" thundered Mr. Grayson, white with fury. "Let me think—let me think!"

Montague Grayson had not always been rich and influential. He was almost a millionaire now, and he had set great hopes in his son. The prospect of Grayson being expelled in disgrace from St. Frank's was an appalling one. And expulsion was absolutely inevitable if the truth came out. Whatever happened with regard to the police, Grayson would not be allowed to remain at St. Frank's.

"You young hound!" said Mr. Grayson at length, turning to Travers. "You have been very clever—very cunning! But, by heaven, this scheme of yours shall not be successful!"

"Does that mean that you're going to let me tell my story to the Head and to the police?" asked Travers.

"It does!" snarled Mr. Grayson. "I don't care for you—not a snap of the fingers! I shall interview the head-master myself, and I shall tell him that you plotted——"

"Just a minute, sir," interrupted Travers. "It's quite likely that I shall get the sack for what I did—but so will your son get the sack. I didn't urge him to steal money from the Moor View School. That was his own idea. If he had had honest instincts he wouldn't have taken any notice of my suggestions!"

"Bah! This affair has gone far enough!" said the stockbroker. "You cannot frighten me with your absurd threats! I shall interview the people at this—this Moor View School. There will be no prosecution—no police-court action."

"You can't be sure of it, though, sir," said Travers quickly. "Why should the people at the Moor View School be tender towards your son? He stole that money, like any common thief—and there is a distinct chance that they will let the law take its course."

"You—you won't let the police take me, pater?" panted Grayson, in horror.

"Silence!" said his father. "Even, supposing the police do take you—you'll be safe, Harold. As a first offender, and as my son, it is more than likely that you will be only bound over."

"More than likely, eh?" echoed Travers mockingly. "Is it worth the risk, Mr. Grayson? Are you going to take all these chances? Just think for a minute! Expulsion for your son is inevitable—if I tell the truth. The people at the Moor View School may refrain from prosecuting. Or if they do prosecute the police may save your son from Borstal. But aren't there a good many doubts here?"

"There are none—none!" shouted Mr. Grayson, beside himself.

"I rather think you're mistaken, sir," said Travers. "Your only course is to

look on the worst side—and to be prepared for disaster. If the Moor View School authorities prosecute, your son will be arrested. It is more than likely that he will be remanded—and put in the dock at the next Assizes. And even though you are a rich man, and even though you have influence, that won't prevent your son from going to Borstal. Rank won't make any difference to British justice. Your son has stolen twenty-five pounds—he has broken into the Moor View School like a common thief. The evidence is deadly against him. Are you going to risk all this, Mr. Grayson? Are you going to risk ruin for your son—disgrace for yourself?"

Vivian Travers was clever here. Mr. Montague Grayson was at his wits' end—he was tormented by anxiety and doubt—and Travers was pressing his points home cunningly. This was the time to strike—while the iron was hot.

"You'd better think carefully, sir," went on the Removite. "The fate of your son is in my hands. And the alternative is easy enough, isn't it? All I ask you to do is to put things right for Lady Potts. What is it to you? The sum is a comparatively trivial one to a man of your immense wealth. And it will mean the safety of your son. It will mean that no breath of suspicion will fall upon him. Your family name will not be dragged into the mud—dishonoured and disgraced. Isn't it worth it? What are you going to do?"

"Be silent, you young demon!" panted Mr. Grayson, swinging round on him. "Let me have time——"

"That's just what I can't let you have, sir," interrupted Travers calmly. "Either you tell me now—on the spot—that you'll make restitution to Lady Potts, or I shall go straight to the head-master and start the ball rolling."

"Don't let him go, pater—don't let him go!" gasped Grayson in utter terror.

Mr. Grayson sank down into the nearest chair, and his face was haggard—his drooping shoulders denoted that he was beaten.

CHAPTER 35.

Saints versus Visitors!

VIVIAN TRAVERS was looking very contented and happy that afternoon. In his present frame of mind he almost forgot that the big match was to take place to-day—the match between the St. Frank's First Eleven and the Bellton Rovers. For an inquiry having completely cleared Bob Catchpole of the charge against him, Fenton had hastened to fix up a match against the local team.

Mr. Montague Grayson had gone.

The stockbroker had not actually said that he would restore the Potts' fortunes, but Travers was convinced that everything would now work out right. He had seen that Mr. Grayson was beaten.

It was just a question of time now—perhaps a few hours, perhaps a day or so. It all depended upon how Mr. Grayson acted.

But Travers could see that Mr. Grayson was not willing to take the risk. If everything went well, the disgrace would be bad enough. Expulsion for his son—the sordid publication of the details concerning the robbery—a police-court appearance, and more publicity resulting, perhaps, in Grayson of the Fifth being bound over.

But the worst side of the picture was terrible indeed. Expulsion—police-court proceedings—Borstal!

This latter was most unlikely, but, as Travers had said, it was an undoubted risk. And could Mr. Grayson afford to take that risk?

After he had cooled down, and had looked at the matter in a commonsense light, he knew that he was caught in the trap. For the disgrace of his son would act like a boomerang, and it would come back upon himself. His own name would be dishonoured, and all his wonderful plans for his son's future would be wrecked. His very business would be affected, too. It might mean the loss of tens of thousands of pounds. Even now, he was in the midst of gigantic financial undertakings. A

breath of disgrace against his name would mean that his most influential customers would desert him.

So there was every reason for Vivian Travers' satisfaction that afternoon. He knew that Mr. Montague Grayson was a beaten man, and he knew that his plot had succeeded.

Strolling over towards Big Side, where most of the crowd was going, Travers found everybody talking excitedly.

"We're going to see a jolly good game this afternoon!" Handforth was saying. "Have you heard the news, Travers?"

"I can't say I have, dear old fellow," replied Travers. "What news do you mean?"

"About Potts."

"Ah, good old Jimmy Potts!" nodded Travers. "What about him?"

"He's playing for Bellton Rovers—against the First!" grinned Handforth. "What do you think of it? Our giddy boot-boy—playing against Fenton and all his merry men! A bit of a cheek, isn't it?"

"Good luck to him!" said Travers cheerfully.

"Rather!" agreed Handforth. "Jolly good luck to him! If it comes to that, he's too good to play for the Rovers. Young Potts is one of the finest players I've ever seen."

"And he'll give our seniors some anxious moments, too," said Church. "I say, wouldn't it be a lark if the Rovers won the match!"

Everybody was discussing the situation.

It had come as a surprise to find Jimmy Potts turning out with the Bellton Rovers. The seniors themselves were not merely astonished, but they were indignant. They felt that their dignity had been touched. The boot-boy of the Ancient House was in the opposing team. The very nerve of the thing tended to put the seniors on their mettle. In no circumstances could they allow this boot-boy to score a single goal!

"He won't do much," said Morrow,

as he stood talking with Fenton and one or two other members of the First Eleven. "Potts played against the juniors a week ago, and he scored a lot of goals, too. But playing against the juniors is a different proposition to playing against us."

"He'll find that out before long," smiled Fenton. "There's nothing wrong with our defence, and if young Potts can get past it he'll be a wonder."

It seemed that Fenton's words were thoroughly justified. For when the game started soon afterwards Jimmy Potts was not particularly noticeable. He played an excellent game, it was true, but he had a hard time against the stalwart St. Frank's defence.

Jimmy was the youngest member of the Rovers' team. All the others, captained by Bob Catchpole, were burly youths, ranging from seventeen to twenty. Jimmy, in the forward line, was nippy enough—he was alert and eager.

But somehow he couldn't quite get into his stride. More than once he made a brilliant run, but before he could attempt to shoot he was robbed of the leather, or he was beaten in other ways.

At all events, when half-time came, Jimmy Potts had not distinguished himself as the juniors had hoped. He had not scored a goal, and he hadn't looked like scoring one either.

But both Fenton and Browne had scored during that first half, and the Rovers had only replied once. So the score stood at 2-1 when the half-time whistle blew.

The St. Frank's seniors left the ground feeling that the game was in their hands. During the second half they would soon settle the villagers' hash.

Not that Jimmy Potts had any time to think of football once he had left the field. For he had only just got to the pavilion when he caught sight of a figure near by. He started, he flushed, and then he ran forward.

"Mother!" he ejaculated in delighted surprise.

Lady Potts was standing there—a dignified, quietly-dressed figure. Jimmy hadn't known that she was coming—he hadn't hoped for such good fortune.

"My boy—my boy!" murmured Lady Potts tensely.

And Jimmy knew that something had happened. He looked at his mother with anxious eyes. She was flushed, and she was even trembling.

"Mother," said Jimmy, clutching at her arm, "what is it? What's happened? Why are you looking so—so different? Tell me, mother!"

"Jimmy dear, I hardly know what to say," replied Lady Potts in a low voice. "Can't we go somewhere alone? Just for a few minutes? I want to talk to you, dear."

"It's all right, mother, we can walk up and down here," said Jimmy, as he led her away.

They found themselves alone, walking over the wide stretch of grass behind the pavilion, where the school grounds extended over towards Little Side.

"Now, mother, what is it?" asked Jimmy breathlessly.

"I don't know how to tell you, Jimmy!" replied his mother, pressing his arm. "It's too wonderful—it's too good to be true almost. Sometimes I think I must be dreaming."

"Oh, mother, what is it?"

Jimmy was getting very excited now, particularly as he saw that his mother was more flushed than ever. Jimmy hadn't seen that look in her eyes for many months.

"This morning, just before the girls went in to their dinner, Mr. Grayson came to see me," said Lady Potts at length.

"Mr. Grayson!" panted Jimmy, startled. "You—you mean the man who ruined us?"

"I hardly know what to think now, Jimmy," said Lady Potts quietly. "I always believed that Mr. Grayson ruined us, and perhaps I was right. Perhaps

his conscience has been tormenting him. I can only tell you that he came to me to-day, and that he has assured me that our money is intact."

"Oh, crumbs!" ejaculated Jimmy, agast.

This piece of news was rather too much for him. And Lady Potts allowed it to soak in. They walked on over the grass, oblivious of everything and everybody.

"Intact!" said Jimmy at last. "Do—do you mean, mother, that we shall be able to go back to the old home?"

"Mr. Grayson told me that the Manor will be ready for us within a month," replied Lady Potts softly. "Certain securities have suddenly risen in value—or perhaps they were shares. I don't know, Jimmy, I was never any good at financial matters. I left that all to your father. But Mr. Grayson has assured me that every penny of our money is now safe. We're rich, Jimmy dear—we're certain of a wonderful income for life. We shall go back to the Manor, and—and—oh, my boy, can't you realise what it all means?"

But Jimmy Potts was stunned. And, somehow, at the back of his head, a vague idea was beginning to take shape.

Then, in a flash, he knew the truth.

It came to him almost like a blow. Vivian Travers! It was Travers who had done this—Travers who had engineered the whole thing! In a flood Jimmy remembered Travers' curious attitude of late. He had always told Jimmy to wait. And then, Mr. Grayson had come to see Travers that morning.

Jimmy had almost forgotten the fact, even though his mother had just told him that Mr. Grayson had been to see her. Curiously enough, he hadn't connected the two facts at first.

But now he knew!

Mr. Grayson had come down from London to see Travers that morning—and within an hour or two Mr. Grayson had gone to see Lady Potts, and had told her that her fortunes were restored! It wasn't merely significant—it was conclusive.

Jimmy felt a little pressure on his arm.

"Isn't it wonderful, dear?" asked his mother softly.

"I'm thinking of something, mum dear," said Jimmy, his eyes shining. "No, I can't tell you yet—I don't know whether I ought to. But you mustn't think that Mr. Grayson has suddenly turned good. It isn't that at all! He has been forced to do this—he couldn't help himself!"

"Whatever do you mean, Jimmy?" asked Lady Potts in wonder.

"Perhaps I'll tell you later on, mother, when everything is really certain."

"But it's certain now, dear," said Lady Potts. "Don't you realise it? Mr. Grayson has given me a signed letter—a written statement, briefly telling me that the Manor is now my freehold property, and that certain definite stocks and shares and securities are mine. Early next week he wants me to go to London, to meet solicitors, and to —"

"Oh, I don't want to hear it, mum!" interrupted Jimmy happily. "It's true, then—absolutely true! There's just one thing I want to know—only one! We're rich now, aren't we?"

"You know we are, Jimmy boy!"

"And we shall soon be able to use our real names?" said Jimmy breathlessly. "You'll be Lady Potts, and you'll be back at the old home. It means that I shall be able to go to school again—doesn't it, mum?"

"Yes, Jimmy dear," said Lady Potts. "You'll go back to Beccleston—"

"That's just it, mum!" said Jimmy eagerly. "Must I go back to Beccleston? Can't I come to St. Frank's—as a pupil?"

"Jimmy!"

"Why not, mother?" urged Jimmy.

"But you've been here as the boot-boy, and—"

"That doesn't matter!" panted Jimmy. "Everybody will know about it—it's bound to be in the papers! And

even if it isn't in the papers, we shan't be able to keep it secret. There's nothing I'd like better than to stay on at St. Frank's. Oh, wouldn't it be glorious if I could go into the Remove—and be on equal terms with Travers, and all the other fellows. They're fine chaps, mum—even better than the fellows at Beccleston! Please, please let me stay here!"

"We'll see about it, Jimmy," said Lady Potts smiling. "There! Isn't that a whistle of some kind?"

"My hat!" gasped Jimmy. "I believe they're waiting for me! They're all lined up, ready!"

"Then hurry off—and play your best, dear," said Lady Potts. "I'll go to the headmaster—and I'll tell him everything! I'll ask him if you can stay. How will that do?"

"Do!" shouted Jimmy, leaping a yard into the air. "I shall wake up in a minute! These sort of things only happen in dreams!"

CHAPTER 35.

The Winning Goal!

FENTON of the Sixth, looked at Jimmy Potts somewhat impatiently as the latter came hurrying up.

"Take your time!" said Fenton, not without sarcasm. "We're in no hurry, young Potts!"

"I—I'm awfully sorry, sir!" said Jimmy, with a gulp. "I—I was talking to my mother, you know!"

"That's all right," said the St. Frank's captain good-humouredly. "Take your place, young 'un." We're waiting to start."

Several members of the Senior Eleven looked at Jimmy Potts curiously as he took his place. He seemed a changed fellow now. In some indefinable way he seemed to be more confident—more at home.

It was really a psychological change. Jimmy, knowing that the family for-

tunes were restored, felt that he was the equal of these St. Frank's fellows. He was no longer the boot-boy—and if everything went all right he would soon be in the Remove.

During the first few minutes of the second half, Jimmy was really awful. He missed one or two excellent passes, and he seemed to be playing like a fellow in a dream. His kicking was erratic, his whole play was at random.

He wasn't concentrating. He was thinking about his mother. Lady Potts had gone to see the Head—to make an arrangement, if possible, for Jimmy to remain at the school.

Then, as these thoughts followed their logical course, Jimmy suddenly realised that he was now, to all intents and purposes, a St. Frank's fellow, and it behoved him to play a good game—so that he would be able to get into the regular Junior Eleven.

The very thought thrilled him through and through. A place in the Junior Eleven! It was what he had dreamed about—a thing that had seemed unattainable.

From that moment Jimmy's play became electrified.

He forgot his mother—he forgot Travers—he forgot the wonderful news concerning the family fortunes. He only knew that he was playing football, and he concentrated every atom of his energy.

The Rovers were hard-pressed, and it seemed that the St. Frank's seniors were to get a third goal. But Jimmy, going to the rescue of his half-backs, trapped the leather and was off.

He was really like a fellow possessed. Down the field he streaked, tricking opponent after opponent. A roar went up from all the spectators, for there was something thrilling, something exhilarating, in that run. Right through the St. Frank's defence went Jimmy Potts, and the swelling roar arose to a stupendous shout as he prepared himself to shoot.

"Look out, goalie!"

"Shoot, Potts—shoot!"

Slam!

Jimmy Potts sent the leather spinning into the back of the net, yards away from the reach of the beaten goalkeeper.

"Goal!"

"Oh, good shot!"

"Well played, Potts!"

The Bellon Rovers had equalised, and Jimmy's success did not end there. He found himself shadowed by the amazed St. Frank's half-backs, but they were powerless against this live-wire.

Again and again Jimmy got through, and three times in succession he sent in first-time shots that the goalkeeper only just saved. Before long the entire crowd was watching Jimmy—for he had become the most outstanding player on the field.

In spite of all their efforts, Fenton and his men could not score again. Jimmy's example had spurred the Rovers on, and they were packing their goal, making desperate efforts to stave off defeat. They were on equal terms now, and they meant to force a draw.

But Jimmy was after something better!

Ten minutes from the end, he accepted a pass from the left-wing, and never for a second did he hesitate. Without even waiting for the ball to bounce, he met it as it came—and deflected the course of the leather. It swerved giddily, bewilderingly, and a roar of consternation went up from the St. Frank's spectators when the ball was seen to curl under the cross-bar, and drop at the back of the net.

"Goal!"

"Great Scott! He's done it again!"

"Well played, Potts!"

There was nothing niggardly in the shout of praise that went up. That goal had been against the St. Frank's team, but it had been such a wonderful goal that the spectators yelled with delight. The juniors, indeed, were by no means displeased to see the seniors in trouble. They rather enjoyed the spec-

tacle of their boot-boy making rings round the lordly men of the Sixth.

The rest of the game was little better than a scramble. Unexpectedly, the seniors found themselves compelled to be on the defensive. The entire forward line of the Rovers was on the aggressive now, and it seemed that nothing could stop them. The amazing play of Jimmy Potts had instilled every villager with unbounded enthusiasm.

When the final whistle blew the Rovers left the field the winners. Three goals to two! And the St. Frank's First had undoubtedly been defeated by the play of Jimmy Potts, the boot-boy.

But Jimmy did not wait to receive any congratulations. He raced off like the wind, eluding all those fellows who tried to intercept him.

For he had seen his mother again—some little distance from the crowd. He went rushing up to her, and he clutched at her arm frantically.

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"Well, mother," he panted, "have you seen the Head? Oh, mum, I can't wait for you to tell me!"

"Jimmy," protested his mother. "You mustn't be so excited. It's all right—"

"You—you mean——"

"I have explained everything to Dr. Stafford, and he was wonderfully nice to me," said Lady Potts gently. "He has promised to make a public announcement later on, and you will enter the school as a pupil——"

But Jimmy didn't hear any more. His great dream had come true.

From this minute he was no longer the boot-boy of the Ancient House—but a Removeite!

CHAPTER 37.

Introducing Sir James Potts, Bart.

VIVIAN TRAVERS grinned amiably as he saw Jimmy Potts running across the turf towards him. Jimmy had spotted Travers a minute or two earlier, and he had lost no time in racing to his friend's side.

"Good man, Jimmy!" said Travers. "You played a marvellous game—especially in the second half."

"Never mind about the game!" panted Jimmy. "How did you do it, Travers?"

"Do what, dear old fellow?"

"Oh, you know what I mean!"

"Do I?" said Travers. "That's just where you're wrong. As far as I can make out, you're talking out of the back of your neck!"

"I mean about Mr. Grayson!" said Jimmy tensely. "Mr. Grayson came to see you this morning, and now my mother tells me that everything is all right. Our money is intact, and we're going back to the old Manor House, which has been in our family for centuries!"

"Splendid!" said Travers coolly. "Didn't I always say, Jimmy, that everything would come right?"

"But you've done it, Travers—you've done it!" insisted Jimmy.

"Rot!"

"Oh, why do you keep on pretending?" said the boot-boy baronet. "You can't fool me, Travers. And look here—mother has fixed up everything with the Head, and I'm going to stay on at St. Frank's! I'm coming into the Remove—with you!"

"Better and better!" said Travers contentedly. "Well, well, what a surprise for the chaps! Is this official, Jimmy?"

"Yes, of course; my mother has arranged it definitely."

"Then there's no reason why we shouldn't have a little fun!" said Vivian Travers, with a chuckle. "I suppose the Head is going to make an announcement of some kind, eh? Well, let's forestall him!"

Travers had seen that a number of Remove fellows were charging up. They were intent upon seizing Jimmy now, so that they could congratulate him in a fitting way. So far he had eluded them, but now he was within their reach.

"You're not going to tell them?" gasped Jimmy in dismay. "Look here, Travers! Tell me about Mr. Grayson! What have you done? How did you work it?"

"As I mentioned before, you're talking out of the back of your neck," said Travers calmly. "Why should you think I've worked anything? What could I have done?"

"Oh, but——"

Jimmy was not allowed to get any further, for just then the St. Frank's juniors came surging round. They slapped him on the back, they shook him by the hand, and they generally battered him about.

"Good old Potts!" said Handforth enthusiastically. "You're the kind of boot-boy to have! By George, you made the seniors sit up, didn't you?"

"It's a pity you can't play for the

Junior Eleven," said Nipper ruefully. "You're just the sort of fellow we need, Potts. Where on earth did you learn to play such marvellous football?"

"I can tell you that!" said Travers, with a grin. "He learned it at Beccleston College!"

"Eh?"

"Where?"

"Beccleston!" said Travers. "Jimmy Potts was junior captain at Beccleston."

"Junior captain?" said Nipper, staring. "But Beccleston is a great public school—nearly as big as St. Frank's!"

"Exactly!" nodded Travers. "Oh, and there's something else you fellows! Kindly allow me to introduce a new fellow for the Remove!"

He dragged Jimmy forward.

"Sir James Potts, Bart.!" he said whimsically. "Meet the chaps, Sir James. So far you've only been Jimmy, the boot-boy, but—"

"Good gad!" ejaculated Archie Glen-thorne. "Isn't this a bit below the line, Travers, old bird? I mean, hardly the sort of thing—"

"It wouldn't be the sort of thing if I were only spoofing," said Travers. "But it happens to be the truth. This is Sir James, Potts, Bart.!"

"You silly ass!" frowned Handforth. "What do you want to spoof the chap for?"

"I'm awfully sorry, you chaps, but it happens to be true," said Jimmy breathlessly. "I am Sir James Potts, and my mother is Lady Potts. I'm going to be in the Remove from now on."

"Welcome to the Remove!" said Nipper, grabbing Jimmy's hand. "Kindly allow me to fall on your neck, old son!"

so you're really going to join the Junior Eleven, after all?"

The fellows could hardly believe it at first. But they believed it all right when the headmaster made an announcement to the whole school a little later on.

And in all this excitement Vivian Travers was hardly thought of.

Yet he was the fellow who had brought it all about, and, by doing it, he had got himself a bad name in the Remove. Not that Travers cared in the least.

Later on that day, however, Travers met Harold Grayson, and when he saw the misery and utter abjection on the Fifth Former's face he felt a momentary twinge. In that second he realised that two wrongs did not make a right. He realised what agony of mind his cunning scheme must have caused the senior.

But the feeling did not last. In the exaltation at the success of his plan, Travers soon forgot it, and he passed Grayson without a word. Travers went on his way down to the post office, and he slipped a sealed packet into the box. That package contained the missing twenty-five notes, and it was addressed to Miss Bond, at the Moor View School.

It signified the end of this episode.

The notes had been returned, and thus the search for the thief would end. Mr. Montague Grayson had taken the only course that had been open to him, and he had made restitution to Lady Potts and her son.

And Vivian Travers, of the Remove, was responsible for it all, although he received no praise. For nobody ever knew.



The END





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WANTED—DEAD OR ALIVE!

ONE of the longest and most amazing man-hunts ever carried out came to an end this year when Andre Spada, the last of the Corsican bandit chiefs, was finally run to earth in his mountain stronghold.

The career of this modern Robin Hood—the leader of a wild and lawless band at twenty—reads more like sensational fiction than the sober truth it really is.

A Bandit Defiant.

For more than twelve years Spada had defied every effort of the French authorities to bring him to justice. Troops, gendarmes, police detectives—he laughed at them all as, safe in some well-nigh inaccessible cave in the mountains or a cunningly-concealed hiding-place in the wilderness of tangled scrub, he watched their slow, wearisome searches that always came to nothing.

Clever as he was, however, Spada could never have eluded the long arm of the law for long without the amazing secret service that rarely failed to get a warning through to him whenever a police attack was planned. All over Corsica his army of spies was unceasingly at work, and such was the loyalty of these humble peasants and villagers to the bandit king that not even the heavy bribes offered by the authorities could tempt them to betray him.

With every successful coup Spada and his followers grew more and more daring, until scarcely a consignment of any value could be sent across the island without falling into the hands of this agile, swift-moving band, armed to the teeth and dozens strong, from whom not even the most closely-guarded secret seemed safe.

Wealthy travellers were received with open arms and politely requested to spend a few weeks in some remote fastness in the hills until the ransom money for their release was forthcoming.

Spada's crowning exploit, however, was to swoop down with his band on the postal car running between Ajaccio and Sari-d'Orcine, overpower the guard, and vanish with booty worth thousands of pounds.

It was then that the French Government decided to take stern action and rid Corsica of its outlaw bands once and for all. In November, 1931, two French battleships steamed into Ajaccio Bay, and 600 men under the command of General Huot made a surprise landing on the island to comb the bush.

A Mocking Message.

The troops and sailors had ten armoured cars, scouting aeroplanes, machine-guns, motor-tractors, and twenty specially trained dogs to track down the bandits in their mountain lairs, yet still Spada eluded his pursuers.

One by one the members of his band were caught in the wide-flung net, and then came word that Spada and the rest of his followers had fortified themselves in the mountains near Vico. At once an expedition was sent out to rope them in, but when their fortress was stormed there was only a mocking message from Spada to greet them; in some mysterious fashion he and his men had made yet another complete and baffling getaway.

Two years went by, two years of fruitless chasing after the shadowy bandit leader, who knew every secret hide-out, every cunning trick for throwing his pursuers off the scent. But then, his

repeated triumphs making him overbold, he committed his first and fatal mistake by waiking through the village of Coggia openly and in broad daylight.

Nobody dared speak to him, but within a few hours the police had learned of his whereabouts, and under cover of darkness his mother's cottage in the mountains was surrounded by armed men. At daybreak the commanding officer and a dozen gendarmes burst in, revolvers ready.

They found Spada in bed, and threw themselves on him before he could snatch the long Corsican dagger from his belt. Even then it needed half a dozen men to overpower him. With liberty, perhaps his life, at stake, Spada fought with the strength of a madman, but the law had its iron grip on the bandit king at last, and it did not let go.

Two days later, Andre Spada, manacled hand and foot, was taken aboard a ship in Ajaccio Bay—en route for France and his long-delayed trial. It will be a long time, if ever, before he looks on his native mountains again.

"The King of the Forests!"

"Get him—dead or alive!" These were the grim instructions issued to every policeman in the Nasik district of India when news of yet another of Nana Pharari's lawless and daring exploits reached headquarters. The hunt for this picturesque Robin Hood of India redoubled in intensity. Hundreds of men began a house-to-house search through the villages—combed every square foot of forest and jungle for miles around. He had to be tracked down!

Pharari had been a thorn in the side of the authorities for years, defying every determined effort they made to put him behind bars. There was a price of 500 rupees on his head, but not even the fortune that this represented to the struggling, poverty-stricken villagers had brought any of them forward to earn it. The strength,

courage and daring of the "king of the forests"—as they called Pharari—had made him an almost legendary hero—all-powerful, swift to reward loyalty, swifter still to punish treachery.

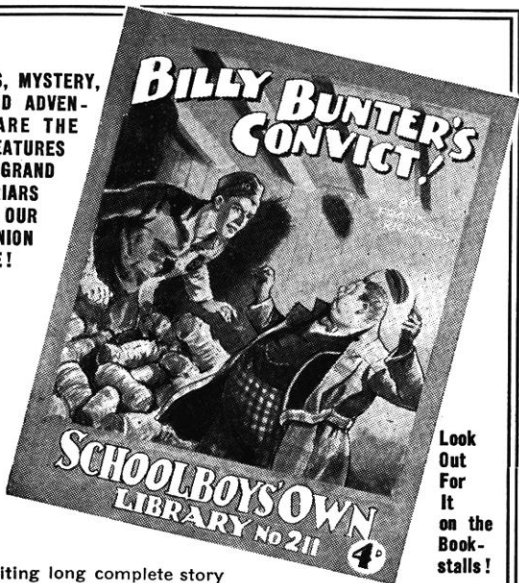
His very appearance was terrifying, for he wore a tiger skin with many barbaric adornments, and always carried a long rhinoceros-hide whip—a dangerous weapon that he did not hesitate to use. Armed with this, Pharari had made a sudden and startling appearance in a village square on fair day in order to settle accounts with a head constable whom he accused of terrorising the villagers.

Adding Insult to Injury.

In less than a minute the square became emptied of every man, woman and child, leaving the constable and Pharari facing each other in the middle. The struggle was short and sharp. With a slash of his whip Pharari jerked his opponent off his feet, and then, before the eyes of the jubilant, wildly shouting crowd of villagers, proceeded to give him the thrashing of his life. Finally, to add insult to injury, he thrust a handful of dried fish into the grovelling policeman's mouth, and treated him to a long lecture on the iniquity of his ways.

It was this piece of colossal "nerve" on Pharari's part that forced the authorities into making their last great drive against him. Every hiding-place that he had been known to use was searched without result, and then a chance discovery by a young detective led the police to a cave in the hillside. As soon as night fell they wormed their way stealthily towards it, but before they could gain the cave-mouth a volley of rifle shots from the wary bandit dropped three of the attackers in their tracks. The fight was too one-sided to last long, however. A deadly return fire poured into the cave from all angles, and a few minutes later the first of the police stumbled across Pharari's dead body.

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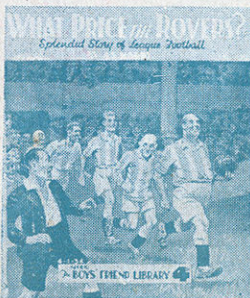
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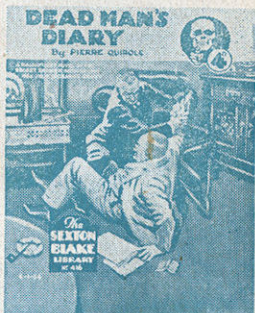
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