

Who shall be Captain?



THE SCHOOLBOYS' OWN
LIBRARY N° 136 4^p

6.11.30.

Splendid Gifts for Boys



The HOBBY ANNUAL is a great book for the fellow who is keen on making things, and finding out how things work. It is lavishly illustrated and contains articles on Aviation, Model Making, Wireless, Railways and every kind of subject of interest to the boy with a liking for things mechanical.

Every Boy's Hobby Annual

6/- net.

Here is a fascinating book for the boy who loves the great Outdoors. It tells all about the wonders of Bird and Animal life and is profusely illustrated with remarkable action photographs. The NEW NATURE BOOK is amusing, astonishing, instructive. If you want a useful present ask for this wonderful Book.

The New Nature Book



At all Newsagents and Booksellers - 6/- net



WHO SHALL BE CAPTAIN?



CHAPTER I.

A Slight Misunderstanding.

"**D**EAR old Algy!"

Cuthbert Archibald Bootles, better known as Bunny, spoke in the most affectionate tones.

He was sitting on the corner of the table in Study No. 5 in the Fourth Form passage at St. Kilda's, swinging his little fat legs.

St. Leger of the Fourth was sitting at the opposite corner, his head bent over a sheet of impot paper. There was a wrinkle of deep thought in Algy St. Leger's noble brow, and his eyeglass was screwed tightly into his eyes. He did not answer Bunny, and did not even look at him. Evidently Algy was deeply engrossed in his task—whatever it was.

"Algy, old chap—"

"Six!" said St. Leger, apparently speaking to himself.

"I say, Algy—"

"Perhaps seven—"

"Dear old fellow—"

"Countin' myself, eight!" continued Algernon Aubrey St. Leger, still without looking up. "Out of twenty-two—"

Bunny Bootles gave a snort.

"What on earth are you babbling about, Algy?" he demanded. "Can't you listen to a fellow when he's got something important to say?"

"Eight!" repeated St. Leger. "Will Wilnot vote, I wonder? If he would, that would make nine."

"Will you listen to a chap?" roared Bunny Bootles.

St. Leger looked up at last.

"Will you shut up for a bit, Bunny?"

Dead-heat in votes for junior captaincy of St. Kilda's. New boy's vote decides!

he asked. "I've told you no end of times that you talk too much."

"Look here——"
"Eight—or nine——"

"If you're mugging up mathematics, you can chuck it for a bit," said Bunny warmly. "This matter is important, Algy. I suppose you know that since Carton went there's going to be an election for a new captain of the Fourth Form?"

"Yass, aye!"

"It's coming off on Wednesday," continued Bunny.

"Oh, yass!"

"And to-day's Tuesday——"

"Go hon!"

"There's no time to be lost," said Bunny. "Do let that rat alone, Algy, and listen to me. It's important. Now, Tracy of the top study has put his name in as candidate. All Carton's old gang are going to rally round him. Most of the fellows seem to think it will be a walk-over for Tracy. But my idea is—are you listening to me?" roared Bunny, as Algy's eyes fixed on his impet paper again.

"Eh? No!"

"You thrumping are——"

"Don't keep on bothering, Bunny, old bean," urged St. Leger. "Can't you see I'm busy? Go away and play. Blow away, old bean—blow away."

"My idea is that the new captain ought to come out of this study!" said Bunny assertively.

Algy looked up at that; he seemed interested at last.

"Now you're talking sense, Bunny," he said. "Excuse me, you know—naturally, I never expected you to talk sense."

"You agree?" asked Bunny.

"Oh, yass!"

"Good! I thought you wouldn't go back on an old pal, Algy," said Bunny affectionately.

"No fear!" agreed Algy.

"If this study stands together—you and Wilmot and me—we ought to be able to carry the election."

"Oh, yass!"

"Lots of the fellows would back us up—you've got some influence in the Fourth, Algy."

"Yass."

"You could ask the fellows home to Westcourt Park, you know, and all that, and then they'd rally round you——"

"You fat blunder!"

"Well, you know what election methods

are," argued Bunny Bootles. "Can't be too particular in an election. Look how they get into the House of Commons——"

"St. Kit's is a bit more particular than the House of Commons, I hope!"

"Yea, but we have to stretch a point at times, you know. That's the line I'm going to take. I'm going to issue a whole sheet of invitations for the holidays at Bootles Castle——"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Algy.

"What are you cackling at!" demanded Bunny. "I wish you'd be serious. Now, in this study we count three votes, if the candidate votes for himself——"

"But will he?" said Algy.

"Certainly. That's three. There's only twenty-two fellows in the St. Kit's Fourth—two will be candidates, and that leaves twenty voters——"

"You're gettin' on fine with your arithmetic, begad," said Algernon Aubrey admiringly. "Did you do that in your head, Bunny?"

"Oh, don't rot! There's twenty voters, and we ought to get a majority if we all stand together. You can ask fellows home to Westcourt Park—I'll issue invitations to Bootles Castle—and Wilmot can shell out some money—his father makes him a jolly good allowance, I hear, and the money couldn't be spent in a better cause, could it? We'll beat Tracy and his gang, shoulder to shoulder," said Bunny confidently.

"Are you proposin' bribery an' corruption, you fat reiter?"

"Can't be too particular in an election——"

"Scat!"

"Tracy has asked all his supporters to a big spread in No. 9 after the election to-morrow——"

"Well, we might go as far as that!" admitted St. Leger thoughtfully.

"Of course we could," said Bunny. "It's simply electioneering, you know. Voters have to be fed. This study is going to provide the new captain of the Fourth. Wilmot will play up if you ask him, Algy, as you're so jolly chummy."

"I hope so."

"It's as good as done," said Bunny. "I must say I'm rather obliged to you, Algy, for playing up like this. Of course, I know you'd back up an old pal. I shan't forget you when I'm captain of the Fourth."

Algy jumped.

"You—captain of the Fourth!" he ejaculated.

"Little me!" said Bunny, with a fat smile. "I don't want to brag, but I must say that the Fourth never had a skipper quite like me before. With you and Wilmot backing me up, I shall get in all right——"

"You!" exclaimed Algy, staring at him. "Are you thinkin' of puttin' up as a candidate, you fat lobster?"

"Eh? Isn't that what we've just been discussing?" demanded Bunny in surprise.

"Not at all."

"Eh, what? You agreed that the candidate must come from this study——"

St. Leger chuckled.

"You misunderstood, dear boy," he explained. "I was thinkin' of Wilmot——"

"Wilmot?"

"Yass. Weren't you proposin' to back up Wilmot as captain of the Fourth?" asked Algy.

"You—you——" Bunny Bootles gasped. "You—you silly owl! You—you tailor's dunny! I'm the candidate!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bunny Bootles rolled off the table. His fat face was pink with wrath.

"Ain't you going to vote for me?" he demanded.

"Ha, ha! No. I'm just makin' up a list of fellows to vote for Wilmot!" chuckled Algy. "You see, I'm goin' to propose him to stand for election, and I've got your name down as a voter for him——"

"Mine?" roiled Bunny.

"Yass."

"You—you howling ass!" gasped Bunny. "Catch me voting for Wilmot! Wilmot wouldn't have the cheek to put up! Who the thump is Wilmot, anyhow? Blow, Wilmot!"

"Hallo! Who's taking my name in vain?" asked a cheery voice in the doorway. And Harry Wilmot of the Fourth came into Study No. 5.

CHAPTER 2.

The Rival Candidates!

HARRY WILMOT nodded cheerily to St. Leger. The junior who had once been known at St. Kili's as "Harry Nameless" looked very fit and well and cheery. His handsome

face was in a glow from putting the ball about in a keen wind on the football-field.

"Slacking as usual, what?" he asked, with a smile.

"Workin'!" answered Algy with dignity.

"Lines?"

"No. Makin' up a list of voters for the popular candidate," said the daddy of the Fourth gravely.

Wilmot frowned a little.

"Are you backing up Tracy?" he asked.

"I suppose Tracy will get in, as there is no rival candidate so far. But I shall not vote for him. I wish some other candidate would come forward."

"One has come," grinned St. Leger.

"Bunny's offerin' himself——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The fat junior blinked indignantly at his two study-mates. Culbert Archibald Bootles, at all events, could see nothing comic in his candidature.

"Where does the cackle come in?" he demanded. "Stubbs cackled just the same when I told him I was putting up. So did Wheatford. I expected a bit more sense in this study."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, cut it off!" growled Bunny.

"Blow away, old bean," said Algy mildly. "I've got to talk business to Wilmot."

"Hot!"

"Kick him out, Wilmot, old chap. You're more energetic than I am."

"Certainly!" said Harry, laughing.

Bunny Bootles disengaged round the table.

"I'm going," he said, "and I'm jolly well going to talk to Tracy. If Tracy does the decent thing, I may vote for him! Yah!"

And Bunny Bootles rolled out of the study, bestowing an indignant and scornful snarl upon the chums of the Fourth as he went. Harry Wilmot dropped into the armchair.

Algernon Aubrey St. Leger glanced at the list of names on his sheet of impromptu paper, and then looked at his chum.

"About the election, old bean," he said. Wilmot smiled.

"I thought you weren't interested in that, Algy," he said. "What's the news of this sudden activity?"

"I've thought of a nobby idea," explained Algernon Aubrey. "Some remarks of yours put it into my head, old bean. You weren't satisfied with Vernon Carter

as captain of the Fourth when he was here."

"Hardly."

"And you won't be satisfied if his pal Tracy gets the job?"

Wilmot's handsome face became serious.

"The Fourth wants a better captain than one of the punts, if it can get one," he said. "The eleven wants pulling together. One of those slackers in No. 3 would be of no use. Darners could play, if he liked—but he doesn't like. Tracy is no good at all. Lumley and Howard are no better. Quite a different sort of chap is wanted as Form captain."

"I agree," said Algy. "Same chap with character—"

"Yes."

"A good footballer an' cricketer, an' good all-round sportsman—"

"Just so."

"Chap who could be depended on to play the game straight, an' hold the scales of justice even, an' all that, you—"

"You've got it," assented Harry.

"Well, I've got my eye on just such a chap, an' I'm thinkin' of puttin' him up as this study's candidate."

"Good man!" said Harry at once. "I'll back him up. Are you thinking of Stubbs, or Myers—"

"Not at all," grinned Algy.

"What's his name, then?"

"Wilmot!"

"Oh!" ejaculated Harry.

"That lets the merry cat out of the bag," smiled St. Leger. "You're the giddy candidate, old bean. Plenty of time for your name to go down. How does it strike you?"

Wilmot looked thoughtful.

"Well, I may as well own up that it crossed my mind that I should make a fairly good Form captain," he confessed. "I think I could pull the football team together a bit, anyhow. But—"

"Cut out the buts," said Algy. "You're goin' up as candidate. I've got a list of voters."

"I'm rather new here—"

"My dear chap, a lot of the fellows will jump at backing you up," said Algy.

"All the footballin' crowd—which doesn't include me. But I'll back you up out of friendship."

Wilmot nodded.

"I feel inclined to have a shot at it," he said. "I know I could do better than one of the punts, anyhow."

"Of course you could!"

"But why not yourself, Algy, old fellow?"

"Little me!" ejaculated St. Leger. "My only hat! Too jolly strenuous, old bean. Not in my line at all! Leave me out! Have mercy on a hapless slacker! No—if this study provides a candidate, it will have to be either you or Bunny Bootles!"

"If you backed up a bit, and—"

"There's nothin' in the solar system that would induce me to back up even a little bit," drawled St. Leger. "I'm goin' strong to get you in as a captain. That's all! After that I shall take a prolonged rest. Now, I've got a list here—look at it. Stubbs, Myers, Wheatford, Scott, Elliott, Bootles—that's six. Tinker perhaps—that's seven. Little me—that's eight. If you vote for yourself, that's nine."

"I couldn't do that."

"If the other candidate does, you shall," said Algy. "I'll make you, if I have to take you by the scruff of your neck. But we can make an arrangement about that with our giddy rival. Twenty voters—an' I think we can count on eight already. Two more to tie—three to win, what?"

"I hardly think you can count on Bootles," said Wilmot, laughing.

"Oh, Bootles will play up—he feeds in this study, you know, and if he doesn't play up, we'll keep him short of grub."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We'll gather in some more voters, too," said Algy confidently. "When I get fairly goin' you'll be surprised at my electioneerin'. And we'll move into the top study after the election and—"

"Oh," said Harry.

"You know it's the custom for the captain of the Form to have the top study," said St. Leger. "Unbroken and unwritten rule ever since St. Kit's had a giddy local habitation and a name. Better study than this—three windows, you know—no end rippin'. No end of a lark, too, to shift the merry nuts out of it, what?"

"I fancy Tracy & Co. will kick."

"Let 'em! The fact is, old top, you simply must get in as captain, an' bag the top study—it's important. There's room in that study for a sofa—"

"A sofa?" repeated Harry.

St. Leger nodded seriously.

"Yass. I've always wanted a luxurious sofa on which to rest my weary limbs after the terrific exertion of walkin' upstairs. Either the Head must put in a lift in the

Fourth Form passage, or you must get in as captain an' bag the top study. Catch on!"

Wilnot laughed.

"I'll do my best to get in as captain, then, old fellow. Let's put a notice on the board next to Tracy's."

"Good man!"

Two heads were bent together over the study table. The chums of the Fourth were still busy when Bunny Bootles rolled back into the study. The fat junior fired a lofty and scornful glance at his study-mates.

"I've done it!" he announced.

"Done whom, Fatty?" yawned St. Leger. "You're always doing somebody."

"I'm going to vote for Tracy. He's doing the decent thing. If a fellow treats me as a pal, I treat him as a pal," said Bootles. "Tracy offered to lend me ten bob in the most generous way."

"He would—in the circumstances," said Wilnot, with a curl of the lip.

"So you can put that in your pipe and smoke it!" said Bunny loftily.

"Oh, go an' eat coke, old bean!" Algernon Aubrey St. Leger rose from the table. "I think that will do, Wilnot."

"I think so."

The chums of the Fourth moved to the door.

"I say, do you fellows know it's past tea-time?" asked Bunny.

"Yaa."

"Well, what about tea?"

"Tea?" said Algy. "Seems that important question for yourself, old bean."

"I say, ain't you going to have tea in the study to-day?" exclaimed Bootles, in dismay.

"My dear man, go and call on your pal Tracy, and mention that you've come to tea," grinned Algy.

"Oh, I say!"

Wilnot and St. Leger quitted Study No. 5, and Bunny Bootles was left alone, with dismay in his fat face. In transferring his allegiance to the rival study, Bunny had rather forgotten the important question of the commissariat—quite a remarkable omission for Bunny to make. Certainly, Rex Tracy was not likely to refuse a tea to a voter in the forthcoming election—but afterwards?

Bunny did some deep thinking.

Algernon Aubrey's study was a land flowing with milk and honey—in that lavish study Bunny had always been a good deal like a pig in clover. And after the election,

Bunny was well aware that in Tracy's study all he had to expect was a drive from Rex Tracy's elegant boot. The fat junior had food for thought now—unluckily, he had no other kind of food, and it was past tea-time. And while Wilnot and St. Leger went cheerily down the staircase, Biddy Bootles, with a discontented frown on his fat face, rolled away to the top study.

CHAPTER 2.

The Root for Bootles!

"S T. LEGER! Held as a minute!"

"Certainly, old bean!"

Two juniors were coming up the staircase, as Harry Wilnot and Algernon Aubrey St. Leger went down, and they met on the landing. It was Rex Tracy who hailed the dandy of the Fourth, and St. Leger stopped politely. Wilnot stopped, too; but Tracy and Durance paid no heed to him.

"Just a word, Algy," said Tracy.

"Go ahead," said St. Leger amiably.

"The election comes off to-morrow," said Tracy. "Now old Carion's gone, you know—"

"I've heard of it," said Algy gravely.

"I'm the only candidate so far," said Tracy. "Of course, I'm going to romp home. But there's been some jaw in the Common-room about another candidate. Stubbs was sayin' that you might be induced to put up—"

"Little man!"

"Yes, yes! There's nothin' in it, I suppose!"

Rex Tracy asked the question casually enough, but his eyes fixed very sharply on St. Leger's face.

Exactly why St. Leger, the handsome and fastidious dandy of St. Kit's, had so much influence among his fellows, nobody quite knew; but undoubtedly his influence was very great. In some ways he was a slacker, though at times he could display tremendous energy—for short times, certainly. He never went out of his way to conciliate anybody's regard—indeed, some of his remarks had a keen edge on them. But whatever was the reason, there was no doubt that the Fourth Form at St. Kit's thought a great deal of Algernon Aubrey; and that if he had chosen to put himself forward as a candidate for the

For a captaincy, he would have been easily in the running. Tracy would not have stood a very handsome chance against him, and he knew it. So Tracy's careless manner concealed—or did not conceal—a considerable amount of inward uneasiness.

St. Leger realised that well enough, and he smiled genially. The paper in his hand, containing the notice of Harry Wilnot's candidature, was folded, and Algy did not display it. So far, Tracy had no suspicion that there was going to be another and quite unexpected Richmond in the field.

"Well?" asked Tracy sharply.
 "Is there anything in it?" asked Durance.
 "I'm backin' up Tracy, of course, but if you put up, St. Leger——"

"Raise your minds, old scouts," said Algy. "I'm not puttin' up! If the Form offered me the captaincy on their bended knees I should request them, as politely as possible, to take it away an' bury it."

"Honest!" said Tracy, his face brightening.

"Honest Injun!"

"Good man! Then it's a walk-over for me."

"I wouldn't bet on that, dear man," said St. Leger. "I've heard Bunny Bootles hint that he might put up——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The nuts of the Fourth laughed as they went on up the staircase. They weren't afraid of the rivalry of Cuthbert Archibald Bootles.

Tracy and Durance strolled elegantly along the Fourth-Form passage, quite satisfied with themselves and things generally.

They had been satisfied with the captaincy of the late lamented Vernon Carton, though a number of the fellows in the Fourth hadn't been.

With Tracy in the post, the nuts in the Fourth considered that things would go on as before—in the way they were used to and approved of.

At the upper end of the Fourth-Form passage was a step, and the "top study," as it was called, faced the passage at the end. On either side of the passage were four studios. The "top study" was easily the best room in the passage, and was much coveted; and by immemorial tradition it appertained to the captain of the Fourth. It was a good deal larger than the other rooms, and had three windows, and a handsome fireplace and other

advantages. Losing the election meant quitting the top study, and Tracy had no desire to turn out of his comfortable quarters, where he and Durance had been Vernon Carton's study-mates during Carton's captaincy.

There were several juniors in the top study when Tracy and Durance entered. Howard and Lumley and Mallan, three very elegant youths, belonged to the exclusive circle of which Vernon Carton had been the head, and which now acknowledged Rex Tracy as its leader. Tracy counted upon them—though he would have been very doubtful of their allegiance if Algernon Aubrey had put up as his rival. Bunny Bootles was also in the study, standing with his back to the fire, his hands in his pockets.

Tracy raised his eyebrows at the sight of Bunny.

"What's that porpoise doin' here?" he asked.

"Rolled in," said Howard.

Bunny bestowed an ingratiating smile upon the chief of the St. Kit's goats.

"I thought I'd just drop in and talk over election prospects, old fellow," he remarked.

"You mean you thought you'd drop in to tea?" asked Durance.

"Ahem——"

Tracy pointed to the door.

"Outside!" he remarked briefly.

"Hem! About my vote, Tracy——" hinted Bunny.

Tracy laughed. Now that he was reassured on the subject of St. Leger, he was not worrying about Bunny's vote.

"Take your vote along with you, old porpoise," he remarked.

"Oh, I say——"

"And cut!"

Bunny blinked at him. Only half an hour ago Rex Tracy had agreed to lend him a ten-shilling note, after the election. Bunny could not quite understand this change of front.

"If you don't want my vote, Tracy——" he began, with a great deal of dignity.

"I've said I don't."

"How's that?" asked Lumley, looking round. "Isn't St. Leger——"

"He's not standin'—it was only Stubby's cot," said Tracy. "Stubbs would be glad to see a man standin' up to this study. But Algy's told me honest Injun that he's not takin' it on."

"Oh," said Lunsley, "that's all right then! Algy's word is as good as gold. It'll be a walk-over."

"Don't be so jolly sure of that!" hooted Bunny Bootles, very much discomfited to see his importance diminish so suddenly. "There's going to be a candidate from our study—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tracy. "We've heard about that! I don't think we shall ever see Captain Bunny Bootles."

"I mean—"

"Never mind what you mean," said Tracy. "You came here to stick me for a spread, and there's nothin' doin'. Get out!"

"But I tell you—"

"Outside!" snapped Tracy. Bunny almost gasped with indignation. Only half an hour ago Tracy had been all politeness. And now—

"Why, you—you—you rotter!" he stammered. "You—you were calling me old fellow, and old pal, when I saw you in the Common-room—"

"Was I?" yawned Tracy, while his nutty comrade grinned. "Well, perhaps I'd go on callin' you old fellow and old pal if St. Leger was standing for the election—only till after the count, though. Then I should have called you fat porker and bloated porpoise and greedy grub-hunter, as usual."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You cheeky rotter!" roared Bunny. "I can tell you—"

"Travel!"

"Wilmot is going—"

"Bless Wilmot! Get outside!"

"I'll jolly well vote for—yaaaaaooooo!"

Bunny Bootles was cut short by Tracy's hand dropping on his collar. A swing of Tracy's arm sent him spinning into the passage.

The nuts of St. Kit's never stood on ceremony with the fat and fatuous Bunny. And now Tracy was less ceremonious than ever, to compensate, perhaps, for the politeness he had wasted on Cuthbert Archibald under a misapprehension.

Bunny Bootles tottered, rolled over the edge of the passage step, and sat down in the Fourth-Form passage.

"Owl! Yoop!" gasped Bunny.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You cheeky rotters—"

Slam!

The door of the top study closed on

Bunny. The fat junior picked himself up and limped away, breathless with indignant wrath. In the top study Tracy & Co. sat down to an elegant and luxurious spread. There was plenty of money in that study, and study spreads there were always on a lavish scale, as the hapless Bunny knew. Tracy & Co. were in great spirits—the coming election was, from their point of view, a foregone conclusion, and Tracy was already, in his own eyes, captain of the St. Kit's Fourth. He did not remember just then the old proverb, that there is many a slip 'twixt cup and lip.

CHAPTER 2.

NOT A WALK-OVER!

ALGERNON AUBREY ST. LEGER strolled elegantly up to the notice-board in the hall, and looked for a place for his paper. Several juniors who were lounging near at hand glanced at him.

"Anybody got a pin?" asked Algy, glancing round.

"Here you are," said Stubbs.

"Thank you, dear boy."

St. Leger pinned up the paper.

"What's it about?" asked Elliott.

Algernon Aubrey waved a delicate hand at the notice.

"Look at it, dear boys. Read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest. Come on, Wilmot, old top." And Algernon Aubrey sauntered out into the quadrangle with his chin.

A crowd of fellows gathered round the notice-board, and the paper, written in Algy's elegant calligraphy, was eagerly scanned. It ran:

"CANDIDATE'S NOTICE:

HARRY WILMOT, of Study No. 5, Fourth Form, has the honour to request the suffrages of his respected Form-fellows in the election for Form captain now pending.

VOTE FOR WILMOT, the Popular Candidate.

Supporters of H. Wilmot are requested to give in their names at Study No. 5 after six o'clock this evening. Light refreshments.

(Signed)

A. A. ST. LEGER,

Election Manager."

"My only hat!" ejaculated Stubbs. "Nameless—I mean Wilmot—is putting up as captain."

"Like his cheek!" remarked Catesby.

"I don't see it. Why shouldn't he?"

"A nameless boulder!" said Catesby, with his unpleasant grin and a shrug of his narrow shoulders.

"Oh, cut that out!" said Stubbs gruffly.

"Wilmot's as decent a fellow as any in the Fourth, and as for his being nameless, that's all rot, and you know it. If St. Leger backs him up I'm his man, too. I'd rather have voted for Algy, but Wilmot will make a jolly good Form captain; he will buck up the footer, too."

"Hear, hear!" said Cary.

"Never thought of Wilmot," said Elliott. "I'd rather have Wilmot than any of the crowd in the top study——"

"Yes, rather!"

"I'm jolly well going to give in my name!"

"Same here."

"You bet!"

Quite an enthusiastic group gathered round the notice-board, discussing the matter warmly. Catesby shrugged his shoulders again, and strolled away, grinning. The end of the Fourth did not like Wilmot, and he did not like St. Leger—he did not like anybody, in fact. But he was rather entertained at the idea of a spoke being put in Tracy's wheel in this way. He did not like Tracy. Catesby was not a member of the exclusive circle of the nuts, and he was treated with considerable disdain by Tracy & Co. He went up the staircase and headed for the top study, quite enjoying the news he was carrying there.

There was a sound of cheery voices in Study No. 9 when Catesby tapped at the door.

"Come in!" called out Durance.

Catesby entered.

He did not receive welcoming looks from the circle of happy nuts round the well-spread table.

"Well, what do you want?" asked Tracy.

"Nothing."

"Take it and go," suggested Lanley.

"I thought you'd be interested in the latest notice on the board," drawled Catesby.

"What rot!" yawned Tracy. "Another

meeting of the Sixth Form Debating Society, with Oligdaunt in the chair!"

"Not exactly."

"The Head got anything fresh to say?" asked Howard.

"Oh, no!"

"Shut the door after you," said Tracy pointedly.

Catesby smiled.

"Right-ho! I suppose you're pretty sure of beating Wilmot in the election to-morrow?"

"What?"

"Which?"

"Eh?"

Catesby strolled out of the study. Tracy jumped up.

"Hold on, Cat, old chap. Stop a minute. Come in." Catesby came back, smiling.

"Is that honest Injun—is Wilmot puttin' up?"

"There's a notion on the board in St. Leger's fist. He's backin' Wilmot up," yawned Catesby. "Half a dozen fellows are howling out that they're going to vote for St. Leger's man."

"By gad!"

Tracy's brow was black as a thunder-cloud.

In an instant he realised that this news was serious. It was very probable that it would make a considerable difference to his prospects.

"The rotter!" he burst out at last. "I—I asked him, and he said he wasn't puttin' up himself——"

"Well, he isn't," said Durance.

"He had a paper in his hand, I remember—that must be the very notice that's stuck on the board."

"And he didn't tell us!" grinned Durance. "He was pullin' your leg, old nut."

Tracy gritted his teeth.

"The rotter! Puttin' up that nameless cad—a fellow from nowhere——"

"Oh, draw that mild, old man!" said Durance. "That's all ancient history now. Wilmot's father is Colonel Wilmot, a very respectable old gent, and brother-in-law to a giddy lord. Wilmot's all right."

"Are you backin' him up?" pelted Tracy.

Durance shook his head.

"Not the least little bit! I'm backin' you up, old top; we're birds of a feather, ain't we? You'll make the worst Form captain the Fourth ever had, and I wish you joy of it."

"You silly chump——"

"Perhaps Catesby's only gemmonin'," suggested Howard. "You know what a thumpin' liar he is!"

Tracy gave the cad of the Fourth a very unpleasant look.

"If this isn't genuine, Catesby——"

"Go and look," said Catesby.

"You cut down and look, Melton," said Tracy. "You hang on here for a bit, Catesby."

"I don't mind."

Melton left the study. He returned in a few minutes with a very serious expression on his face.

"O.K.," he said.

"The notice is really up?"

"Yes."

"That rotter Algy has done this as one up against this study," said Tracy. "But he's not goin' to beat us. We'll get a majority easily enough to-morrow."

"Rather a pity you kicked Bootles out, isn't it?" remarked Durance reflectively.

"Hang Bootles!"

"Hang him as high as Haman," agreed Durance. "But a vote is a vote, and Bunny's vote is as good as anybody else's."

"Well, that's so," said Tracy, calming down. "But a feed will bring that fat rotter round any time. By the way, Cat, you haven't been to tea with us for a long time."

"You've forgotten to ask me," said Catesby politely.

"I'm askin' you now."

"You're awfully good," said Catesby.

"Here's a chair, old man," said Lumley.

"Thanks!"

Catesby sat down. The sudden politeness that was turned upon him was only too palpable, especially to a keen fellow like Catesby. But the needy hanger-on was not thin-skinned; it was his way to make hay while the sun was shining. He sat down to tea with a cheery smile on his face, and from the way Tracy & Co. treated him it might have been supposed that Catesby was a fellow whom the nats delighted to honour.

Algy's notice on the board had quite knocked out the cheery confidence that had reigned in the top study. Instead of a walk-over, it was pretty clear that the captain's election was going to be a struggle, and that success was by no means a cert.

Tracy pushed the tea-things aside, and

put a pocket-book on the corner of the table, and began counting over a list of names. His face was angry and thoughtful.

"There's five of us here," he said.

"That's five——"

"Is Catesby one of us?" yawned Durance.

"Oh, Cat is goin' to stand by us, ain't you, Cat?"

Catesby nodded.

"Count me in," he said.

"Good man! I shan't forget this, Cat."

"I hope you won't," said Catesby.

Tracy coughed.

"That's five," he said. "Verney and Leigh make seven; they're in our set, and will stand by us, of course. I think Lane will be all right."

"Oh, I'm sure of Lane!" said Durance. "You've asked him home for the holidays. Fellow can't go back on that."

"Lane makes eight," said Tracy. "That's not so bad out of twenty voters. O'Donoghue will back us up if we lend him some money—that's nine."

"St. Leger might lend him more money," suggested Durance.

"St. Leger wouldn't—too dashed high-falutin'," said Tracy, with a sneer. "We can count on O'Donoghue. What about Scott?"

"Leave Scott out. He wouldn't be found dead in our crowd."

"He's poor," said Tracy. "A quid will work wonders with a chap who's hard up. I'm goin' to try Scott."

Durance shrugged his shoulders. He was a much keener fellow than Tracy, but he was too lazy to argue.

"There's Tinker Smith!" said Lumley.

"That fool!" said Tracy.

"Well, a fool can vote."

"Quite so. I'll get Tinker Smith on my side. That will make eleven, and give us a majority of one——"

"You're countin' your chickens rather early," drawled Durance.

Tracy jumped up.

"Let's make an electioneerin' round, lookin' out the voters," he said. "I want to get their promises, with the dashed election comin' off to-morrow afternoon. You fellows finished tea?"

"Oh, yes!"

"I haven't!" remarked Catesby coolly.

"Go ahead, old chap. You don't mind us clearin', do you?"

"Not at all!" smiled Catesby.

And Tracy & Co. cleared, leaving Catesby alone in the top study. Catesby grinned, and devoted himself to finishing a very ample tea. It was not often that such a spread came Catesby's way; and all was glee that came to his mill.

CHAPTER 5.

Electioneering.

SIX o'clock was striking when Algernon Aubrey St. Leger strolled into Study No. 5 in the Fourth. He was followed by Tuckle, the school page, who carried a large basket. Algernon Aubrey had evidently been expending some of his ample cash at the school shop. Tuckle placed the basket on the table and waited, and grinned.

Algernon Aubrey disposed his elegant person in the armchair.

"Would you mind unpackin' the basket, Tuckle?" he asked politely.

"Yessir."

"Thank you as much."

Tuckle unpacked the basket, and in a few minutes the study table was glowing with good things. Algernon Aubrey thoughtfully screwed his eyeglass into his eye and surveyed the display.

"Is that the lot, Tuckle?" he asked, as the page picked up the empty basket.

"Yessir," grinned Tuckle.

"Would you consider that sufficient, in the way of light refreshment, for a congregation of eight or nine fellows, Tuckle?"

"Cranda," said Tuckle, "I should think so, sir!"

"Thank you very much for your expert opinion, Tuckle. It was very kind of you to carry up that basket for me."

"Not at all, sir," said Tuckle.

"You are not really bound, I believe, by the terms of your engagement, to carry up baskets for members of the Fourth Form," remarked Algy thoughtfully.

"Always glad to do anything for you, sir," said Tuckle. "You ain't like some fellows, sir, looking down on a bloke, sir—like Master Tracy, f'rinstance—as if a bloke was common hearth."

Algernon Aubrey regarded Tuckle thoughtfully through his eyeglass.

"Master Tracy's conduct, in that respect, is extremely reprehensible, Tuckle,"

he said gravely. "I am shocked at Master Tracy. Will you do me the pleasure of acceptin' this half-crown, Tuckle?"

"Thank you kindly, sir!"

Tuckle jerked the coin into his pocket and departed. Algernon Aubrey smiled.

"What a pity Tuckle hasn't a vote in the election," he murmured. "I am sure he would back up my candidate. By Jove, is that you, Stubbs?"

Stubbs came in.

He started at the sight of the stack of good things on the table, and grinned expansively.

"I'm here!" he announced. "Lots coming."

"Oh, good! Put your name down, dear boy."

Algernon Aubrey indicated a sheet of input paper on his desk, with a pen handy. The sheet was headed: "Wilmot's Supporters." Stubbs of the Fourth wrote his name down with a flourish. Then he turned a hungry eye upon the study table.

"We are much obliged to you for your support, Stubbs," said Algernon Aubrey.

"Have you had your tea?"

"Well, I've had it," admitted Stubbs.

"Not a very fat tea, if you come to that."

"Perhaps you would care to partake of a little light refreshment?"

"Perhaps I would!" agreed Stubbs.

"Pile in, dear boy!"

"What ho!"

Stubbs piled in. His jaws were going busily when Elliot dropped into the study. Elliot's face also seemed to brighten at the sight of the light refreshments.

Elliot wrote his name down as a supporter of Harry Wilmot, and joined Stubbs in his attack on the light refreshments. Cary and Myers came in together, and followed his example. Then came Wheatford; Jones minor was next. Algernon Aubrey smiled pleasantly. Six juniors had written their names down, and were piling into the light refreshments. Whether they were keen on the candidate, or keen on St. Leger, or keen on the light refreshments, the election manager did not trouble to inquire. Probably they had a mixture of feelings. But there was no doubt that they liked the refreshments; on that point there was no shadow of doubt—no possible probable shadow of doubt, as the song says; no possible doubt whatever.

"Oh, I say!"

Bunny Bootles' face loomed into the doorway. Algernon Aubrey raised a forbidding hand.

"Outside!" he said.

"This is my study, ain't it?" howled Bootles.

"At present it is the candidate's committee-room, and voters for the other side are not admitted."

"Go easy with those tarts, you fellows!" gasped Bunny. "I say, I haven't had my tea. I'm backing you up, Algy."

Algernon Aubrey shook his head.

"But I am, really!" gasped Bunny. "I—I say, word of honour, you know! I wouldn't back up that sad Tracy for untold gold. The beast kicked me out of his study when I went there to tea—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Nothing to cackle at that I can see. I don't believe he really means to lend me ten bob after the election, either. What security have I got?" said Bunny. "Now, you'd lend me ten bob if I asked you, wouldn't you, Algy?"

"No."

"Hem! I—I say Algy, old top—"

"Would you mind callin' me St. Legor?" asked Algernon Aubrey politely. "I am Algy only to my pals."

"I say, old chap, I'm your pal, ain't I?—especially when I'm going to vote for Wilmot in the election. You see, he's just the man we want," said Bunny. "The—the very candidate I should have selected myself! First-class fellow, you know—straight as a die—all there, you know. I say, Algy, won't you let me put my name down?"

Algernon Aubrey grinned.

"Put it down, you fat boulder, and tuck in!"

"Done!"

Bootles made a jump for the desk and scribbled down his name in a great hurry, with a plentiful adornment of blot. Then he made another jump for the table, fearful lest the rest of the supporters should clear it before he had a chance of distinguishing himself.

Algernon Aubrey rose, and strolled out of the study, leaving seven keen supporters of his candidate dealing with the light refreshments. There seemed to be no more coming. The dandy of St. Kit's strolled down to the Common-room, where he found Harry Wilmot.

"Gettin' on, dear boy," said Algy

brightly. "I'm workin' in the good cause like a merry Trojan. Seven enthusiastic voters feedin' in the study at the present moment."

Harry Wilmot laughed.

"You ought to be doin' some electioneerin' yourself," said Algy anxiously. "Seven from twenty leaves thirteen; and that will be an unlucky number for us if Tracy bags their giddy suffrages. You don't seem jolly keen on bein' elected, though a sofa for me in the top study depends on it."

"I'm keen enough," said Harry. "but—but I don't quite like the idea of going round cadging for votes—"

"All right! Leave the cadgin' to me," said Algy cheerily.

Wilmot coloured.

"I don't mean that—"

"Of course you don't, old bean—only your usual high-falutin'," said Algy amiably. "Now, I've bagged six enthusiasts, who'd vote for Old Nick rather than Tracy—and Bunny has come to the lutech—that's seven. Little me makes eight. We want at least three more. No good tuckin' any of the nobs—they'd vote for me, but they won't vote for you by long chalk. Leave them to the enemy. There's Scott—and Smith—and Licke—I punched Scott's nose the other day, so we'll leave him till last. Will you tackle Licke while I charm the Smithbird?"

"I'd rather—" Wilmot hesitated.

"You'd rather tackle Tinker Smith?"

"No—no. I mean—" Wilmot paused.

"All right, Algy, I'll go and see Licke."

"He will vote for you if you promise to join his society and take a deep interest in moths, and gnats, and things," said Algy. "The Tinker is a more difficult proposition, but I hope to be able to pull his leg. Can an electioneerer's hard work, you know?"

Algernon Aubrey took his chum's arm and led him away out of the Common-room. Wilmot, as a matter of fact, would have been better pleased to leave the notice on the board announcing his candidature, and leave it at that. But his indefatigable election manager was not to be denied. Algernon Aubrey was determined to see his chum successfully through the election, and he was going to leave no stone unturned.

So Harry Wilmot dropped into Licke's study, and found that learned youth blink-

ing through his big glasses at the latest specimen he had added to his collection. And having listened to Liche's description of the specimen for a quarter of an hour, Wilnot ventured on the subject of the election. Liche beamed on him through his glasses.

"My dear fellow, I'm voting for you," he said. "My belief is that we want a Form captain who takes a real, deep interest in moths and butterflies and beetles. It gives a higher tone to the Form, I think. You may be able to use your influence to get the whole Form to join the Natural History Club. What?"

"I—I—" "Rely on me," said Liche. "Now, look at this moth—"

Wilnot suppressed a groan. It lasted twenty minutes longer. When Wilnot left Liche's study there were beads of perspiration upon his brow, and he was feeling a considerable size in humbugs. But he was sure of Liche's vote. Algernon Aubrey was loafing in the passage, and he smiled inquiringly at his chum.

"Got Liche?" he asked. "Yes; but—"

"Good! I've been goin' to tackle Tinker, but I've been shrinkin' from the awful ordeal. But if you can stand Liche, I can stand Tinker," said Algy. "I'm dashed if I like this game," said Wilnot. "Look here, Algy—"

"Dashed if I like it, either," said St. Leger, with a nod; "but I've got to get a study with room for a sofa."

Wilnot laughed. "What about prep?" he asked. "On an occasion like this, blow prep."

"But Mr. Rawlings—" "Blow Mr. Rawlings, likewise," said Algy airily. "Think you feel up to tacklin' Scott, while I diddle the Tinker bird?"

Wilnot shook his head. "Fed-up," he answered. "Liche's tired me out with his dashed moths and rubbish, and—and I feel no end of a humbug—" "That's the drawback of bein' candidate in an election—chap has to be a bit of a humbug."

"I don't like it." "Then go into a quiet corner, and do your prep, and leave me to do the humbuggin'," said Algernon Aubrey genially. "But I—"

"I couldn't trust you to humbug Tinker, anyhow. Leave him to me."

And Algernon Aubrey, nerving himself for the ordeal, walked away to Study No. 3, where Smith of the Fourth had his habitation. Wilnot looked after him, and hesitated. Electioneering certainly was not to his taste—though he knew that Tracy & Co. were fully prepared to carry the election by any means, however unscrupulous. He repaired to Study No. 5 at last. The light refreshments were gone, and the supporters were gone also, excepting Bunny Bootles, who was lying back in the armchair, with a rather queer expression on his fat face. Wilnot took out his books and sat down to prep. A faint groan from the armchair startled him, and he looked up.

"What's the trouble?" he asked. "All the fault of those blighters," rumbled Bunny Bootles. "They were scoffing at such a rate, a fellow wouldn't have had a chance if he hadn't been a bit rapid—ow! I—I think it would have been wiser to leave the cream-puffs over—ow! D-d-d-do you think that cream-puffs agree with sardines, Wilnot?"

"I've never tried—" "It might be the lobster, of course," said Bunny. "I got the lobster down fairly fast—Jones minor had an eye on it. Or perhaps it's the jam-tarts or the currant-cake. It's possible that jam-tarts don't wholly agree with lobster—eaten in a hurry—when there's sardines and cream-puffs at the same time—ow! Or—or was it the ginger-pop on top of the lot?"

Wilnot did not attempt to solve that problem, deep as its import was to Bunny Bootles. He gave his attention to his prep, while the hapless Bunny remained stretched in the armchair, emitting an occasional groan—which indicated that the lobster and the sardines were still on fighting terms with the cream-puffs, the jam-tarts, and the ginger-pop.

CHAPTER 4.

A Wasted Martyrdom!

THE Honourable Algernon Aubrey St. Leger hesitated when he reached the door of Study No. 3 in the Fourth.

He was not eager to enter that study.

Licke, the bughunter, was a bore, and Algy would have walked a quarter of a mile to avoid a conversation with Licke. But Licke was quite entertaining in comparison with Smith of the Fourth. Tinker Smith was the limit.

His name was not Tinker. His name was Handel Mozart Smith. He came of a musical family, and he was musical. The irreverent Fourth-Formers had nicknamed him Tinker on account of the weird, alleged musical noises that were frequently heard proceeding from his study. As Algernon Aubrey passed outside the study there came a sudden sound from within.

Pong!

It was the sound of Smith's tuning-fork. Apparently he was "getting his note."

Algy suppressed a groan.

Not for wealth untold would he have ventured into that study on his own account. But Algy was capable of greater exertions for his chum than for himself. He was determined that Harry Wilmut should be captain of the Fourth; and if Tinker's vote could do it, Tinker's vote should be bagged—at any cost to the heroic Algy. So he tapped at the door and entered.

Smith of the Fourth was alone there. Even his study mates, Lane and Leigh, did not yearn for his society. Sometimes, indeed, Lane and Leigh combined forces to hurl Smith out of the study when he was too musical. Just now Lane and Leigh were helping Tracy with his election campaign, and Tinker was left in peace.

Tinker was seated at the table, with a sheaf of music-paper before him, a stamp of pencil in his right hand, a tuning-fork in his left. He raised his eyes to Algy, but did not speak. Tinker's face was rather long and pale, his forehead high and expansive, his hair in want of a cut. It curled over his rather large ears—a wavy curl, which some fellows hinted was deliberately produced by curling-pins.

"Smith, old fellow——" began Algy.

Tinker Smith waved his tuning-fork at him almost frantically. Algy understood that he was to be silent. Evidently he had dropped into the study while the Tinker was in the throes of composition. Form elections were matters of little moment to Tinker at such a time.

Algy sighed and subsided into a chair. He had taken the plunge now, and was

going to have Tinker's vote, even if he had to listen to some of Tinker's music as the price thereof.

Tinker Smith was silent for some minutes, his expansive brow corrugated in deep thought. Then he struck the tuning-fork again on the table, so suddenly that it made Algy jump.

Pong!

"Good!" ejaculated Smith.

"Toppin'!" said Algy, thinking that he was called upon to admire. He did not know what he was to admire, but he was prepared to render admiration—as much admiration as was needed to secure Smith's vote for his candidate.

Smith stared at him.

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"Eh?"

"What's toppin'?" asked Smith irritably. St. Leger coughed.

"I—I mean—— I mean——" He paused helplessly. Really, he did not know what he meant, excepting that he meant to have Smith's vote.

"Don't be an ass!" said Smith.

"Eh!"

"I've got it!" said Smith.

"Good!" said Algy, wondering what Smith had got.

"I thought I had!" continued Smith.

"You were quite right," said Algy loudly. "I—I felt sure that you'd got it, Tinker."

"Got what?" asked Smith.

"Eh? Why, the—the—whatever it was you were mentionin'!" said Algy feebly.

Smith sniffed.

"Let you know about it!" he said.

"I'm rather ignorant on these subjects," confessed Algy meekly. "I'm not really musical like you, Smith."

"You're jolly well not!" assented Smith.

"Still, I don't mind telling you what I'd got, if you care to hear."

"Delighted, old bean!" murmured Algy.

"I've got the note."

"Oh, good!" said Algy heartily. "I hope it's a flyer!"

"What?"

"A pound note isn't to be despised in these hard times," said Algy. "I congratulate you, Tinker! Tip from your party—what?"

"Fasthead!"

"Oh!"

"I'm alluding to my note in music!"

"Oh, I—I see!" gasped Algy, realising

that he had put his nose foot in it. "I—I quite see, Smith!"

"It's fairly difficult composing music without a piano in the study," said the St. Kit's musician. "Can't have one, of course. Some composers couldn't do it at all without a piano. Not me, though. I've got pitch."

"Have you?" murmured Algy.

"I say, you're not such a silly ass as you look, really, St. Leger!" said the St. Kit's genius; and Algy realised, with relief, that he had struck the right chord at last. "That change into G minor is a novelty—I may say, a stroke of genius. Listen to it again."

Algernon Aubrey suppressed his feelings and listened to it again. Once more he was loud in his admiration. Tinker Smith beamed on him pleasantly. He was in great good humour now, and Algy considered that the time had come to refer to the election.

"By the way, Smithy, you know we're electin' a new Form captain to-morrow—"

"Oh, yes! Never mind that."

"Wilmot's my candidate. You'll vote for him?"

"I'd be glad to," said Smith. "I'd like to oblige you, St. Leger, as you're the only fellow at St. Kit's who understands anything about music. Can't be done, though. I've promised for Tracy."

"What?" gasped Algy.

"Now listen to this little bit in A minor—"

"You're not backin' up Tracy?"

"Can't be helped. You see, Lane and Leigh are backing him up, and they swore they'd tear up all my music if I didn't vote with them. So I promised. It doesn't matter—What the thump does it matter who's captain of the Fourth?" said Tinker impatiently. "Never mind all that! Now, listen—"

"You've promised!"

"Yes, yes! Never mind that! Now—"

"I can't ask you to break a promise!" said Algy wrathfully. "Why couldn't you tell me you were backed, you silly ass? I'll give you A minor! I'll give you major! You howling chump!"

"Rhy! What! My hat! Yoooh!" roared Smith, as Algy, overcome by his feelings, grabbed the sheaf of music-paper

from the table, took a firm grasp on it, and smote Tinker on the head with it.

"Crack!"

"Yoooooooh!"

"There, you silly ass!" gasped Algy.

"Yaw-ow! What—Why—"

Yoooh! Are you potty? Yoooh! Goooh! Leggo! Oh, crumbs!"

Algernon Aubrey stuffed the music down Smith's back and strode out of the study, banging the door after him.

The astonished musician was left in a breathless and gasping state, making efforts to extract his sonata from the back of his neck.

Algernon Aubrey walked along to Study No. 5, where he found Wilmot at prep, and Bussy, pallid and flabby, in the arm-chair.

"Dagged Tinker's vote?" asked Harry, looking up with a smile.

St. Leger breathed hard.

"Namus! But I've banged him on the napper, that's one comfort!" he said. "After torturin' me for half an hour or more, he let out that he'd promised already to vote for Tracy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, it may be amusing," said Algy, "but it wasn't very entertainin' while it lasted, I can tell you! However, I gave him a jolly good bang on the napper with a stack of music-paper! I'm glad of that! I'm not goin' to do any more electioneering this evenin'!"

"Better do some prep."

"Oh, blow prep!"

And the Honourable Algernon Aubrey sat down to rest after his labours. He felt that he needed it.

CHAPTER 7. Tracy's Luck!

REX TRACY tapped on the door of Study No. 7 and lounged in elegantly. Scott of the Fourth was at prep there. Scott shared Study No. 7 with O'Donoghue, who was one of Tracy's supporters, and was now in the top study with the nutty crowd. Scott was a hard worker, and he did not look pleased when Tracy strolled in. Generally the juts of the Fourth scorned Scott as a "swot," and made no secret of their lofty contempt. But just now Tracy's

manner was urbanity itself. He nodded to Scott in the most affable way.

"Busy?" he asked.

"Yes," answered Scott briefly.

"Spare a few minutes—what?" asked Tracy, taking a seat on the corner of the study table.

"Well, yes," said Scott reluctantly. "What is it?"

"Swotting"—eh?"

"Prep," said Scott.

"I wish I could stick to it like you do, old top!" said Tracy amiably. "You'll be baggin' prizes again this term—what?"

"I hope so."

"Well, about the election," said Tracy. "I hope you're votin' for me, old top!"

"I don't suppose I shall vote at all," said Scott.

"I'd really like you to back me up," said Tracy. "We've been pretty good friends, haven't we?"

"Not that I know of."

Tracy coughed.

"Well, you're so stand-offish," he remarked. "You never let yourself go like other chaps. I wish you'd drop into the top study sometimes."

"Thanks! I don't care for cigarettes or playing banker."

"Hem! Well, about the election—"

"Oh, bother the election!" said Scott.

"You don't want my vote, anyhow, as there isn't any other candidate. You'll be elected."

Tracy's lip curled involuntarily. This blessed swot, he reflected, was so deep in his dashed swotting that he hadn't even heard of the advent of a rival candidate. He was in utter ignorance of the excitement that was raging in the St. Kit's Fourth. It was all that Tracy could do to keep from openly displaying his contempt and derision.

"The—the fact is," he said, "another fellow has put up. That nameless rotter. What's his name?"

"Wilmet!" asked Scott.

"That's the cad."

"Oh, in that case, I think I shall vote!" said Scott. "Certainly Wilmet's a good man for the job."

Tracy hit his lip.

"I want you to vote for me," he said.

"Nothing doing."

"Shouldn't I make as good a Farm captain as Wilmet—or better, for that matter?" demanded Tracy.

"I think not."

"Now, look here, Scott! I've got ten promised supporters," said Tracy persuasively. "One more vote makes it a cert for me. If you support me it's a dead cert, Scott!"

"Sorry!" said Scott politely; and he turned to his books again, as a hint that the interview was over.

But Tracy was not finished yet.

"Let's go into this," he said. "If a fellow backs me up I'm prepared to do the decent thing. You're not so jolly well off, Scott, if you don't mind me mentionin' it."

"You've mentioned it often enough," said Scott dryly. "Once more doesn't matter very much."

"Hem! Well, I'm pretty well off myself," hinted Tracy.

"You've mentioned that fairly often, too."

"Look here! Let's come to business!" said Tracy abruptly. "If you back me up at the election it will be worth a quid to you. There."

Scott looked at him.

"A quid?" he repeated.

"That's business," said Tracy.

A gleam came into the Scottish junior's eyes.

"You're offering me a bribe to vote for you?" he asked.

"Don't put it like that," said Tracy. "One good turn deserves another. That's how I look at it. You're hard up."

"That's so."

"A quid's a quid," said Tracy.

"No doubt about that," assented Scott, with a nod. "If I sold my vote, though, I should probably want to sell it higher than that."

"I'm not sticking at trifles," said Tracy. "I want to get in. Make it a couple of quid, and it's a go."

"Two pounds for acting like a sneaking cad and blackguard!" said Scott reflectively, and with a look on his face that Rex Tracy did not quite like. "I suppose, in my position, you'd jump at it, Tracy!"

"I jolly well would!" assented Tracy.

"Well, I'm not going to jump at it!" said Scott, rising to his feet. "I'm going to kick you out of my study, you rotter!"

"What!" yelled Tracy, sliding off the table in a great hurry. "Who, you cheeky

cad—you hard-up prize-hunter—you—
Hands off, you rotter!"

Tracy's peculiar mode of electioneering was not premeditated—in Scott's study, at least. The Scottish junior grasped him by the shoulders, receiving without heeding a savage blow from the nut of the Fourth. He swung Tracy round in the doorway, and drove his boot upon Tracy's well-fitting trousers with a terrific drive.

Tracy fairly shot out into the Fourth-Form passage.

"Oh! Ow! Oooh!"

He landed on his hands and knees.

Scott stood in the doorway and grinned.

"Come back and have another, if you feel like it!" he said.

Rex Tracy scrambled up, his face convulsed with rage. He was not a fighting man, as a rule, but he was in a towering rage now. He rushed back furiously at Scott, and the two juniors closed in strife.

The struggle lasted a minute, and then Tracy came flying out of the study doorway again.

Crash!

He landed in the passage with a terrific impact, and sprawled there, gasping. Scott, breathing rather hard, stood victorious in the doorway, and waited for Tracy to come on again.

But the chief of the St. Kit's goats had had enough. He staggered to his feet, shook a furious fist at Scott, and limped away to the top study. Scott looked after him, with a curl of the lip, and, after a few moments' thought, walked along to Study No. 5. He tapped at the door and opened it.

"Wilnot here?" he asked.

"Here I am," said Harry. "Come in!"

"I haven't finished prep. Just looked in to tell you that I'm voting for you to-morrow," said Scott.

And he closed the door and withdrew.

Algernon Aubrey St. Leger smiled as the door closed. He took out his little Russia-leather-covered pocket-book, and entered the name of Dugald Scott in his list.

"Ten for us!" he said. "Looks as if it will be honours divided. So long as Bunny sticks to us. If he doesn't, I'll skin him!"

"Oh, I say!" murmured Bootles.

"Scott's got his back up," smiled Algy.

"I fancy I can guess why. Bootles wouldn't get his back up if Tracy offered to

bribe him for his vote—would you, Bunny?"

"Of course, I should stick to my old pals," said Bunny. "I should expect Wilnot to give me a place in the eleven if I help to elect him."

Harry Wilnot laughed.

"You'd be disappointed, then, Bunny!" he said. "You can't play football!"

"Look here, Wilnot! If you want me to vote for you—"

"Please yourself," said Harry, shrugging his shoulders.

Bunny Bootles breathed hard. But a fresh pang from the ill-digested lobster caught him, and he groaned instead of replying. The Honourable Algernon Aubrey looked at his chum, with an affectionate grin.

"You'd better not stand for Parliament when you're a man, Wilnot," he remarked. "You're about the last chap in the wide world to get elected for anything. But I'm goin' to see you through to-morrow. If Bunny deserts the old flag I'll bail him in all! Worse still, I'll keep him short of grub! Hear that, Bunny!"

"Ow!"

"What's the matter with you, old fat tulip?"

"Wow! I—I think it's the lobster—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, dear!"

Elections did not interest Bunny just then. He was still pale and shaky when the Fourth Form went up to their dormitory, and he groaned himself to sleep.

But the next morning the lobster was at peace, and Bunny had quite recovered—judging by the way he distinguished himself at the breakfast-table.

CHAPTER 3.

A Close Call!

ELECTION day was a day of excitement to the Fourth Form of St. Kit's.

There was hardly a fellow in the Fourth who did not take a keen interest in the election. Tinker Smith was probably the only fellow who did not care how it went.

In other circumstances, Algernon Aubrey St. Leger would certainly have been a careless Gallo, so to speak. But as it was his best chum who was opposing Tracy, Alger-

ness Aubrey was in his most energetic mood. Wilmot and St. Leger, indeed, seemed to have changed characters. Wilmot paid no heed to electioneering, and did not seem to care whether the fellows voted for him or not. Certainly he would not go around, like Carolanus of old, cajoling the voters for their "sweet visions." Algernon Aubrey certainly would not have done so, either, on his own account. But on his chum's account he was indefatigable.

Judging by the buzz of endless discussion in the Fourth, the fate of St. Kit's might have been hanging in the balance.

The other Forms went on the even tenor of their way, regardless. Babbie & Co. of the Shell affected a disdainful ignorance of the whole proceedings. Verney of the Shell had a minor in the Fourth, but Verney major was loftily regardless of Verney minor's hopes and fears. The fags of the Third cared nothing about Fourth-Form politics. Indeed, the Third were very keen just then on a terrific combat that was coming off between West minor and Judson minious, and had no time to think about Fourth-Form affairs.

The Fifth, of course, were still more lofty than the Shell, and if they noted the excitement in the Fourth at all, they noticed it with indulgent smiles. Hilton, the captain of the Fifth, was going to officiate as a teller in the voting, being a good-natured fellow. Gunter, of the Fifth, was heard to growl that the dashed fags had been kicking up a dance of a row lately in the Glory Hole. That was all the notice Gunter deigned to take of the affair.

While the Sixth, of course, were too high and mighty to deign to be aware that a junior election was impending at all. Indeed, the Sixth almost affected to be unaware of the existence of a Fourth Form.

Only Oliphant, of the Sixth, the captain of the school, was not allowed to remain in that state of lofty ignorance. Oliphant having been called upon to preside at the election. And Oliphant had said that he would "look in" at the Glory Hole for ten minutes—while looked as if even old Oliphant was unimpressed by the importance of that afternoon's proceedings.

So while, judging by the Fourth, the fate of St. Kit's might have been trembling in the balance, judging by the rest of the school, the ancient scholastic establishment was still firm upon its ancient foundations.

Morning lessons in the Fourth-Form room were rather trying to Mr. Rawlings that Wednesday.

The adventures of the "pious Æneas" were a mere nothing to the Fourth compared with the captain's election. In the thrilling circumstances, history was a bore and mathematics a torture.

Master and pupils were equally glad when lessons were over and the Fourth Form dismissed for the day, Wednesday being a half-holiday at St. Kit's.

There was much half-suppressed eager discussion among the juniors at the long dinner-table in Hall.

The election was close at hand now, and it was certain that the voting would be very close. Each of the rival candidates had ten names on his list, and there were only twenty voters.

But each counted hopefully on defections from the other side, or upon the chance that some voter might miss the election.

The election was to take place at four, and any fellow who was not in the Glory Hole by ten minutes to four was left out of it. The door was to be closed and locked then, excluding all late-comers.

An absent-minded fellow like Tinker Smith was very likely to miss the great event, and Tracy detailed one of his benchmen to keep a very special and watchful eye upon Tinker.

On the other side, Bunny Bootles was rather at uncertain quantity.

It was well known that Bunny would follow his fat nose in the direction of a spread at any time, and it was quite possible that he might be enticed away. Even his vote was not a real "cert" if he turned up. For Bunny was inclined to "spread" himself on his importance at the present juncture, and to patronise his candidate, and Wilmot of the Fourth was about the last fellow at St. Kit's to tolerate patronage from the fat and fatuous Bunny. It was possible that Wilmot erred a little on the side of a too stiff independence. Certainly he did not err on the side of conciliation. Algernon Aubrey was in a state of constant anxiety lest his candidate's unpromising manners and customs should alienate a precious voter.

After dinner Algernon Aubrey came on his candidate in talk with Nipper, of the Fourth. Nipper was alarmed. He was still

more alarmed when he found that Wilmot was saying:

"Look here, Lickel! It's not good enough!"

"Why? What's not good enough, Wilmot?" asked Lickel, blinking at him through his big spectacles.

"I was pulling your leg yesterday," said Wilmot.

"But?"

"I don't care a twopenny rap about bug-hunting!" said the candidate, with hair-raising frankness—from his election manager's point of view. "I wouldn't own a collection of moths for worlds! I think it's beastly to stick pins through the poor little beasts! Now you know!"

"Oh!" said Lickel, blinking at him in great astonishment. "You seem to me to be a perfect fool, Wilmot!"

"And to me, begad!" groaned Algy.

"Well, I'm not going to pull your leg for your vote!" said Wilmot. "You can vote for me or not, as you like. I'd like you to. But hang bug-hunting!"

"Oh, you crazy ass!" murmured Algy.

Lickel regarded Wilmot thoughtfully through his glasses.

"Well, I like your cheek!" he remarked at last. "I'm disappointed in you, Wilmot. I thought you had some sense. I see you haven't. Do you really mean to say that you ain't interested in my collection of moths?"

"Not a bit."

"You wouldn't like to see my new beetle?"

"I'd hate to!"

"Well, my hat!" said Lickel. "You don't mind my mentioning that you're a crazy idiot, do you, Wilmot?"

"Not at all," said Wilmot, laughing.

"I'll vote for you, all the same," said Lickel. "I hope to have some good long talks with you about moths and things, old chap. You'll see the fascination of it some day. I'm going to vote for you, all the same."

"Thanks, old chap!" said Harry gratefully.

"What a dashed narrow escape!" gasped Algernon Aubrey, as Lickel walked away, blinking. "Wilmot, you howlin' ass, is that what you call electioneering?"

"All serene, old fellow!" said Harry.

"If I get in as captain, I'd rather get in without any dashed electioneering."

"You jolly well won't get in if you talk to your electors like that!" groaned Algy. "Lickel's played up like a little man, but the others—"

"That's all right!"

"I'm going to see that it's all right!" said Algernon Aubrey. "I'm jolly well goin' to keep an eye on you, old man, till we go into the Glory Hole for the merry election!"

And Algernon Aubrey was as faithful as a shadow to his chum after that till half-past three, when they went into the Glory Hole together. Several of the Fourth were already there. More and more dropped in as the minutes passed. Tracy & Co. came in in a body, with very confident looks. There was a jingle of cash in Cuthbert's trouser-pocket, which looked as if Cuthbert had been raising the wind somewhere. Duranco and Howard walked arm-in-arm with Tinker Smith. They had abducted him from his study almost by force, and marched him down to the Glory Hole. Smith was telling them about a great work he was planning in D minor, and they were listening. They were prepared to listen till the election.

At a quarter to four all the Fourth Form, excepting Bunny Bostles, had gathered in the Glory Hole. Algernon Aubrey's celebrated eyeglass glimmered round anxiously in search of Cuthbert Archibald.

"Anybody know where Bostles is?" he asked.

"Bunny?" said Stubbs. "I saw him heading for the tuckshop as I came in."

"Somebody been lending him money?" grinned Elliott.

Algernon Aubrey looked anxious.

"Stubby, see that none of the asses bolt, while I run out and look for Bunny!" he said.

"Right you are," said Stubbs.

"Door closes at ten to!" called out Tracy, as the Honourable Algernon Aubrey started.

St. Leger did not heed. He had five minutes. Follows who usually saw Algy lounging gracefully along with easy, leisurely movements would have been surprised to see him now. He did not look much of a slacker as he whipped out of the School House and cut across the quad to the little school shop in the corner behind the oaks. Algernon Aubrey was almost breathless, and his eyeglass was glimmering

at the end of its cord as he darted into the tuckshop. A fat figure sat on a high stool at the counter, regarded with rather an amused smile by Mrs. Coote.

"Bunny!" gasped Algy.

Bunny glanced at him. He was not eating, though he looked hungry. He gave Algy a nod.

"What are you doing here, you dunder?" shouted St. Leger.

"Waiting for four o'clock."

"The election's at four——"

"Oh, I know!"

"Well, then, come on——"

"Can't. I'm waiting," said Bunny.

"Mrs. Coote is going to hand out the stuff at four—ain't you, Mrs. Coote?"

"Yes, Master Bootles."

"What on earth do you mean, Bunny?"

"Food at four," explained Bunny.

"Tracy ain't such a bad sort. He's offered a spread for me. Pound's worth of tuck! A whole pound, you know!" said Bunny, his eyes glistening. "It's prime, ain't it? Only on condition that I have it at exactly four. Says it wouldn't be good for me to eat too soon after dinner. Pure rot, of course! Still, Tracy's paying. He's paid Mrs. Coote in advance—hasn't he, Mrs. Coote?"

"Yes, Master Bootles."

"There's the stuff," said Bunny, jerking a fat thumb towards a stack of excellent things on the other side of the counter. "It's getting on for four."

"You silly, fat chump! It's a trick to keep you away from the election!" howled Algy.

Bunny nodded.

"Oh, I know that!" he answered coolly. "And I jolly well wish that fellows would keep on playing tricks like this on me! Don't I just?"

"Come on, I tell you!"

"No fear! If I don't have it at four, Mrs. Coote's got to keep it for Tracy—haven't you, Mrs. Coote?"

"Yes, Master Bootles."

"So, you see, there's nothing doing!" said Bunny, blinking seriously at his exasperated study-mate. "I'm sorry! But, after all, you know, you and Wilmot refused to back me up as a candidate. I had to let my candidature drop. You can't expect—— Yarooooooop!"

Bump!

There was no time to lose, and Algermon

Aubrey lost patience. He grasped the fat junior by the collar with both hands, and the high stool rocked, and Bunny Bootles came off it with a crash.

"Yaroooh! Help! I'm killed—— Yoo-ooop!" roared Bunny.

"Come on, you fat villain!"

"Yah! Leggo!"

The infuriated Algy grasped Bunny by both ears and fairly yanked him to the door. Mrs. Coote looked on dumbfounded. Fiendish yells rang out from the hapless Bunny.

"Yah! Oh! Yooop! Oh, crumba! I won't—yah—vote for your man if I do come! Yarrooooooh! Pound's worth of—you-oo!—grah! Oh, crumba!"

But Bunny came. Algy's grasp upon his ears was not to be denied. He came out of the tuckshop with a whirl. In the quad Algy released one ear, but retained an iron grip on the other, and raced across to the School House, with Bunny's ear. Needless to say, Bunny accompanied the ear. A parsing would have been too painful. Letting out a yell at every step, Bunny raced across the quad with Algy, his fat little legs going like machinery.

They burst into the School House, and very nearly rushed into Gunter of the Fifth, who was coming out with Price. Gunter yelled wrathfully.

"You cheeky lags! Where are you running to?"

But Algy did not heed the Fifth-Former. He rushed Bunny away down the passage to the Glory Hole.

"Come on!" yelled Stubbs in the doorway. "Just in time!"

"Too late!" shouted Leigh. "It's turned ten to! I say, Hilton, ain't it too late?"

"Keep 'em out!"

"Shut that door!" roared Tracy.

Three or four of the nuts rushed at the door to slam it. Algy swung Bonno's weight against it, and the door flew open fast enough. The dandy of the Fourth staggered in, still with Bunno's hapless ear in his convulsive grasp.

"Gad! Just in time!" he gasped.

"Late! Too late!" shouted Durance.

"Turn 'em out!"

"Just try it on!" roared Stubbs defiantly.

"Olfphant, isn't it too late——"

Olfphant and Hilton had just arrived. The captain of the school came forward.

"What rot!" he said gruffly. "Stop that

row! Shut the door now! Better lock it, and save any more raggings!"

Algernon Aubrey grinned breathlessly. He was quite content to have the door locked now; every member of the Fourth Form at St. Kit's was safe inside. The dandy of the Fourth had saved the situation just in time.

CHAPTER 9. Honours Divided!

OLIPHANT of the Sixth glanced round the crowd in the Glory Hole and exchanged a look with Hilton, who nodded. The two seniors had kindly consented to take charge of the junior election; partly from good-nature, and partly because a junior election without a perfect present was likely to end in a terrific shindy. But both the seniors had affairs elsewhere and were not anxious to put in more time than could be helped in the Glory Hole.

"Time!" said Oliphant. "Get on with it."

"Two candidates, I think," said Hilton of the Fifth.

"Yess," said Algernon Aubrey St. Leger, his cool and unshakable self once more. "Here's my man."

"And here's ours!" said Durance.

"Well, somebody get up and propose, and somebody else second," said Oliphant briskly. "Time's going."

Dick Durance stepped on a chair.

"Gentlemen—"

"Hear, hear!"

"Gentlemen, I beg to propose my friend and trusty comrade, Rex Tracy, for the high and honourable post of the captain of the St. Kit's Fourth—"

"Hear, hear!" roared the nuts.

"I beg to second the motion!" said Howard, "and to add a few remarks—"

"Never mind the remarks," said Oliphant. "Let's come down to the nutton. You got anything to say, St. Leger?"

"Lots, dear boy."

"Cut out the lots; time's going."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Gentlemen of St. Kit's," said the Honourable Algernon, "I propose my esteemed friend and relative, Harry Wilmot, and beg that you will afford him your suffrages. One said Wilmot—"

"No!" said Oliphant, who

certainly seemed to be in a very business-like mood that afternoon. "Anybody second that?"

"Seconded!" rapped out Stubbs.

"Hear, hear!"

"Show of hands for the first candidate, Tracy."

Ten hands went up. Tracy made a movement, hesitating whether to put up his own hand in favour of himself. Cately whispered to him.

"Shove it up—Wilmot won't—he's too jolly lofty to vote for himself."

And up went Tracy's hand.

There was a roar from the rival party at once.

"He's voting for himself! Is that in order, Oliphant?"

"No. Put your paw down, Tracy!" snapped the St. Kit's skipper. And Tracy blushed and put down his paw.

"Then!" said Oliphant, counting. "You make it ten, Hilton?"

"That's it—ten," said Hilton.

"New hands up for Wilmot."

Eights hands went up promptly, Algy's first. Then Lickie, with a kind and forgiving blink at Wilmot, put up his hand. Bunny Bootles, instead of putting up his fat paw, gave Algernon Aubrey a malevolent blink, and rubbed his fat ear. Bunny's ear was still suffering—and his thoughts were on the feed in the tuckshop—now gone for ever.

Algernon Aubrey breathed hard. His eye was on Bunny—gleaming through his monocle. And in that gleaming eye Bunny read deadly threats—and Bunny remembered, in time, that Study No. 5—that land flowing with milk and honey—would be closed to him in case of back-sliding. Bunny bethought himself in time; and as Hilton and Oliphant began to count, his fat and grubby hand went slowly up.

"Ten!" said Oliphant, and Hilton laughed. "Make it ten, Hilton!"

"Yes."

Oliphant rubbed his nose thoughtfully.

"Looks like a tie," he said.

"It does."

"Any of you kids changing your minds, if we take another count?" asked the St. Kit's captain, at a loss how to deal with the problem.

"No fear!"

"Nothing doing, old top."

Oliphant shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, it's a tie, and another candidate

is elected," he said. "The election will take place again on Saturday; and if there is still a tie, a Form-captain for the Fourth will be selected by a meeting of the prefects."

With that Oliphant of the Sixth walked out of the Glory Hole followed by Hilton.

There was a hush as soon as they were gone.

"You fat rotter, Bootles," hissed Tracy. "Yam agreed—"

"It was all St. Leger's fault. He——"

"How much did you tip Catesby to vote for you, Tracy?" bawled Stubbs.

"Ho, ha, ha!"

Tinker Smith came over to Howard and Durance, with a beaming smile.

"Now this rot's over, we can talk," he said. "I was telling you about that little thing of mine in D minor—— Oh!"

Durance and Howard never learned about Tinker's little thing in D minor. They were fed-up with the choir musician, and they were done with him now. Now was the time to repay the biggest bore at St. Kit's for the rudest way in which he had bored them. They collared Tinker simultaneously, and upended him, and Tinker went rolling along the floor in a state of great astonishment.

The meeting in the Glory Hole broke up in confusion, with mutual defiance and howls and cat-calls exchanged between the rival parties. Rex Tracy stalked with his comrades, with a black and lowering brow. He had not been beaten; but he had not been successful, and he was in a mood of savage disappointment. Harry Wilmot's handsome face was clear and calm as he walked away with St. Leger.

"Rather rotten, what?" asked Algy.

"Well, I'd have liked to be elected," said Harry frankly. "I think I could do some good as captain of the Fourth—more than Tracy, anyhow. But it can't be helped. I suppose the result will be much the same on Saturday."

"I suppose so—I'll see that they don't bribe Bootles with tuck to desert us, anyhow."

"Then the prefects will select a captain for the Form," said Harry thoughtfully.

"Nobody will like that," said Algernon Aubrey. "We've got to manage it somehow. I'm going to do some big thinkin'."

Wilmot smiled.

A little later Bunny Bootles cornered Algy in the Fourth Form passage. The

fat junior came up to him with deep reproach in his fat face.

"You owe me a pound, Algy!" he said.

"Oh, blow away!"

"You owe me a quid——"

"Allow do you make that out?" snapped the dandy of the Fourth.

"That feed——"

"Go and eat cake."

"Tracy's got it from Mrs. Cootie now, and he won't even ask me to tea. He kicked me when I spoke to him—kicked me hard," said Bunny pathetically. "He's awfully wild at not getting in as skipper. He will have to tip Catesby again to vote for him on Saturday—ten bob at least. I say, Algy, you owe me a pound for that feed. You made me lose it."

"Would you like two pounds?" asked St. Leger.

Bunny's fat face brightened.

"Yes, rather—you're a good sort, Algy!"

"Here's one," said Algy, and he pounded Bunny on his fat chest, and Bunny sat down in the passage with a bump and a roar.

"Oooooooooop!"

"Now get up and have the other!" said Algernon Aubrey ferociously.

But Bunny Bootles didn't want the other. He sat and roared, while the dandy of the Fourth walked away; and Cuthbert Archibald Bootles never claimed the other pound!

CHAPTER 12.

Startling News!

BUNNY was the first fellow that knew! But it was soon all over the Fourth Form.

The rumour spread along the Fourth Form passage, causing excitement in every study.

Tinker Smith, busy upon his little thing in D minor, wasn't interested; but he was the only fellow that wasn't. Even Locke showed some interest when he heard the rumour.

The rumour was discussed almost breathlessly by the nuts in the top study. It was like a ray of light to Tracy & Co.

"That's our chance!" said Tracy.

And the St. Kit's goats agreed that it was.

In Study No. 5 there was less excitement. Harry Wilmot, indeed, refused to be moved by the news at all. Algernon Aubrey St.

Leger polished his eyeglass thoughtfully, and looked at Harry.

"That may be our chance!" he said.

And Harry nodded.

Bunny was full of it. He was the first with the news; he generally was the first with news. So long as keyholes were made to doors Bunny Bootles was always likely to know a great deal that was going on.

It was Friday when the rumour spread. The deferred election was to take place on Saturday afternoon; and on Friday evening the rumour had been substantiated into fact!

The rumour was one that would have caused not the faintest ripple of excitement in the Fourth in ordinary times. It was simply a report that a new fellow was coming on Saturday!

New fellows came to St. Kit's at times and nobody was a penny the worse, or a halfpenny the better. New fellows simply did not matter. But this occasion was unique.

For it was ascertained that the new fellow was coming into the Fourth; and a new fellow in the Fourth meant one more voter in Saturday's election; and if the new fellow cared to vote it was in his power to decide the contest at his own sweet will. Only one vote was required to turn the scale!

For the strength of the rival parties had not changed. A sense of honour kept fellows from deserting the party they had chosen, as well as the exasperated state of feelings induced by party strife and mutual defiance and scorn. And Tracy & Co. were careful to look well after their supporters; while Algernon Aubrey had a keen eye on Wilmot's voters. Even Bunny Bootles was firm and faithful now, it having been impressed upon his fat mind that if he turned traitor or missed the election the dandy of the Fourth would cut him dead for ever afterwards. And Algy was a sort of goldmine to Bunny—and Bunny realized that one tempting spread, however tempting, would not compensate him for being kicked out of the noble society of Algernon Aubrey for good. So Bunny was firm and faithful; and he made his noble loyalty the excuse for borrowing small sums from Algy about twice a day. He never failed to point out that Tracy was open to bribe him, and that he was nobly resisting bribery and corruption. He wasn't a fellow like Harry, Bunny declared loftily.

He was backing up Algy's party from sheer loyalty and loftiness of principle—and losing money by it. So he felt justified in asking for small loans—and he did it without ruth.

Ten voters on either side was the fixed number, therefore; and there was not the slightest prospect of a change, till the rumour spread that a new fellow was coming into the Fourth.

That put a new complexion on matters at once.

It was certain that the new junior would not be a quarter of an hour inside the school before he heard of the burning question that divided the Fourth. It was fairly certain that, finding himself entitled to a vote, he would vote. And the side upon which he would vote would carry the day!

So the new fellow, as yet unseen, assumed a strange and amazing importance in the estimation of the whole Form.

Half the Fourth had determined to see him as soon as he arrived, and explain to him the crucial state of affairs, and how he ought to vote.

Stubbs declared that if the new kid had the sense of a bunny rabbit he would see how matters stood, and would vote on the right side, and save the Fourth Form of St. Kit's from going to the dogs. While Howard declared that if the new kid was endowed with the commonest principles of decency he would see which was the right side to vote on, and save the Fourth from "goin' to the giddy low-ows." Stubbs' and Howard's views differed as to which was the right side.

Algernon Aubrey turned the matter over in his noble mind on Friday evening while resting his weary and elegant limbs in the armchair. Wilmot, who was at prep, looked at him reprovingly.

"Prep!" he said.

"Algy waved a delicate hand."

"My brain's workin'," he said. "Don't interrupt the mighty processes of my powerful intellect, dear boy."

"But if you cut prep Hawlings will be down on you in the morning, old chap," said Wilmot seriously.

"Let him be down!"

"You missed it last night——"

"I was thinkin' over this serious situation, dear boy."

"And the night before——"

"I was worryin' over the tie in the election——"

"And the night before that——"

"I was gettin' ready for the election then."

Harry Wilnot laughed.

"My dear chap, you must do some work. Pleased if I know how you keep your end up in class at all."

"Never mind class now," said St. Leger; "more important things than class to think of. I think I begin to see light. Wilnot, old man, go on with the thrillin' joys of prep, while I enjoy the light an' genial conversation of our esteemed friend Bunny. Honey, my fat old bean, lend me your ears. You know all about this new fellow, of course."

"I generally get to know things," said Bunny modestly.

"What's his name?"

"Rake."

"Ye gods! What a name! Any other name?"

"Robert."

"Where does he come from?"

"Australia."

"My only aunt! He's not comin' from Australia to-morrow, is he?"

"He's coming down from London. He's been with some people there. A solicitor or something is coming with him."

"How the thump do you know all that?" asked Harry.

Bunny grinned.

"I happened to hear the Head telling Mr. Rawlings——"

"Br-r-r-r-r."

"If you jolly well turn up your nose at me, Wilnot, I jolly well shan't vote for you in the election on Saturday."

"Got and eat coke."

"Look here——" roared Bunny indignantly.

"Shut up, Bunny! You talk too much!" said Algernon Aubrey. "I'm always tellin' you that you talk too much, old bean. So the new kid's named Rake, and he hails from Australia, and he's comin' on Saturday. Know when?"

"The two-thirty at Wicko. Cooto's to take the trap and fetch him and the legal Johnny here."

"He will be with the Head and Mr. Rawlings for some time," said St. Leger smilingly; "but there will be lots of time

before four. I fancy that new kid is goin' to vote for us."

Wilnot looked up with a smile.

"Why should he?" he asked; "he doesn't even know us."

"We're goin' to introduce ourselves, an' he's bound to see what nice chaps we are," said St. Leger. "Easy as fallin' off a form. After his legal protector's gone, we'll get him in the study to tea——"

"But——"

"And talk to him like Dutch uncles——"

"But——"

"Bother your buts, old man. We'll have a party to meet him at tea, to introduce him to his future Form-fellows. All our voters, in fact. And he will walk down to the Glory Hole with our crowd for the election. He will vote on our side like a good little man, and everything in the garden will be first class. What?"

"Ho, he, he!" cackled Bunny Bootles.

"Well, what does that harmonious enunciation mean, my fat and bloated Bunny-rabbit?" inquired Algy.

"Ho, ha! Suppose Tracy & Co. play the same game!"

"By Jove, they might—they're rotters enough to try and nobble the new kid, an' catch his vote before he's had time to look round him——"

"Ho, ha, ha!" roared Wilnot; "isn't that what you're proposing to do?"

"Ahem! There's a difference, of course——"

"Where does it come in?" asked Harry.

"Dear old man, you're catchin' Bunny's complaint; you talk too much, at times," said Algy. "Leave this to me. I'll have a talk with some of the fellows. You can stand out of it Wilnot—nobblin' voters isn't your bizness. Leave that to your election manager."

"But——"

"How-wow, old bean——"

Algernon Aubrey strolled out of the study, evidently full of his new idea. In the top study at the same time, a discussion was going on, on the same topic. The new boy from Australia, when he arrived, was likely to be somewhat surprised by his reception at St. Kit's. The contest for the possession of the new junior was likely to be as fierce as the historic struggle for the body of Paracelus. In his bed in London that night Bob Rake certainly was not dreaming of the excitement his coming was causing at St. Kit's.

CHAPTER II.

Bob Rake, of Australia!

"W HOA!" said old Coote.

Coote, the porter at St. Kit's, was always called old Coote—not to his satisfaction. In Coote's own opinion he was a rather youngish-looking man of fifty. But the estimates of his age, among the St. Kit's juniors, varied from seventy-five to a hundred.

Old Coote was taking out the trap; but he did not seem in a hurry to start. It was Saturday afternoon—a fine winter's afternoon. Coote had been directed to take the trap to the station to fetch the new junior, and his travelling companion, the legal gentleman, who was to land the new fellow safely at St. Kit's and leave him there. Coote grumbled as he led out the trap, and grumbled as he held the horse and waited. Old Coote was given to grumbling. Bunny Bootles loomed up in the office, and lentowed a lofty nod on old Coote.

"Going to the station?" asked Bunny.

"Yes, Master Bootles."

"Fetchin' Rake?"

"Yes."

"Like the job?"

Grunt!

"I'll drive for you, if you like," offered Bunny.

Grunt!

"Oh, here you are, Cootey!" said Tracy of the Fourth, coming out with Durance. Old Coote touched his hat to the nuts of the Fourth—a salute he had not troubled to bestow on Bunny Bootles.

Evidently Coote had been waiting for the two nuts. Much to the surprise of Bunny, Tracy and Durance proceeded to climb into the trap.

"I say, have you been tipping Coote to take you for a drive, you fellows?" inquired Bunny.

Tracy and his comrade did not deign to answer. Old Coote clambered laboriously into his place, took the reins, cracked the whip, and started. Bunny Bootles was left staring after the trap.

Rex Tracy grinned as the vehicle bowled away down the road to Wicks. He had stolen a march on the enemy, he was sure of that. While the Honourable Algernon Aubrey was laying his plans to "nibble" the new junior at St. Kit's, Rex Tracy was going to meet him on his arrival at the station, and get in the first word. Tracy

had little doubt that he would be able to enlist the new fellow. He was going to be gracious to him—kind and gracious—and hold out hopes to him of admission to the magic circle of the nuts of St. Kit's; he was going, in short, to pull Bob Rake's leg, and secure his vote as the election, at any cost. And he was pleased at the prospect.

"No end of a stunt," he confided to Durance, as the trap bowled along, all Coote's attention being fixed on the horse, which was rather fresh. "We'll tag the savage from the wilds before those blighters have a chance to put in a word, what?"

"Better not allude to him as a savage from the wilds, though," said Durance dryly.

Tracy laughed.

"Oh, trust me to butter him," he answered. "I hear that he comes from some fearful place in the bush, or something—but I don't care if he eats with his knife, and breathes through his mouth, and drops his fl's, so long as he votes for me. That's the point. We can drop him like a hot brick after the election—once it's over and I'm captain of the Fourth."

"Which will give the stranger from afar a delightful impression of Public school manners in the old country," remarked Durance.

"Oh, don't be a goat," said Tracy. "You've always got something rotten to say, Durance."

"Suitin' my words to your actions, old top," said Durance imperturbably.

"Oh, rot!"

The trap rattled into Wicks village, and stopped at the station. Tracy and Durance alighted there. Tracy looked at his watch.

"Two-twenty-five!" he said; "lots of time! Let's amble into the station, and meet the noble savage on the platform."

"Right-ho!"

Old Coote stayed with the trap, while the two juniors went into the station. Tracy and Durance had dressed themselves very nicely for the occasion, and they looked very elegant, and they had their best manners on now. They wanted to make the best possible impression upon Bob Rake and his legal companion.

The train came in, and the two nuts looked eagerly for the new arrival. Tracy had it fixed in his mind that the new boy was some sort of a savage barbarian, and he would not have been surprised to see

him arrive in leather breeches and a sombrero. But there was no such figure to be seen among the few passengers who alighted at Wicke. A stout and portly gentleman, with an unmistakable legal aspect, alighted from a first-class carriage, and Durance looked at him and nudged his companion.

"That's the lawyer bird, you bet," he said.

"And where's the merry barbarian?" asked Tracy.

"Here he comes."

"Gad! He looks quite decent!"

A lad of about fifteen, in Etons, with a coat on his arm, stepped from the carriage.

The nuts regarded him very seriously.

Bob Rake—if this was Bob Rake—certainly did not look like a savage from the wilds, as Tracy had pictured him.

Certainly he was not so elegant as the nuts—his clothes were not so expensive, and he did not look as if he spent a great deal of time upon the arrangement of his hair and his necktie.

But he was quite well-dressed, and he had a manner of easy assurance, and a bright and cheerful glance. He was very sturdy in build—as sturdy as the sturdiest fellow in the Lower School at St. Kit's. His chest was broad, and his limbs were powerful. His feet, undoubtedly, were a good size. They could not have been crammed by any means into Tracy's elegant boots. His face was not exactly handsome, but it was so healthy, so good-natured, and so frank and cheery, that one could not help liking it at the first glance.

Most fellows would have taken a liking to Bob Rake. But Tracy at least, realized that the new junior was "not his sort." Bob Rake did not look as if he was the kind of fellow to enjoy surreptitious cigarettes and games of backer behind a locked study door. He looked as if he would be more at home on the football field.

He came down the platform with a free and easy tread, while the portly gentleman was speaking to a porter about the baggage.

"Go it!" murmured Durance.

Tracy nodded, and "went it."

He stepped forward, and raised his shining silk topper politely to the new junior. The latter stopped, looked at him, and raised his own hat in reply. Pro-

bably he guessed that the elegant youth was from St. Kit's.

"Excuse me," said Tracy, with great courtesy; "new chap for St. Kit's, what?"

"Yes."

"Rake, I think!"

"That's my name," assented the new fellow.

"Mind's Tracy—this chap is Durance. We're in the Fourth Form at St. Kit's."

"Glad to meet you," said Rake.

"I understand that it's already arranged for you to go into the Fourth?" said Tracy.

Much depended on Rake's answer to that question.

For if the new junior was not going into the Fourth Form he would not have a vote in the Form election, and he would be of no use to Rex Tracy. In which case Tracy was prepared to drop him on the spot without wasting further trouble or politeness on him. But the answer was in the affirmative.

"Yes," said Bob Rake.

"Good—our Form! We thought we'd hop along to the station and meet you, as you're come such a thumpin' long way," he said. "Sort of welcome you to the school, you know."

"You're awfully kind," said Bob, with real cordiality and gratitude in his tone. He did not know much about St. Kit's, but he understood that this was rather an unusual act of courtesy towards a new boy, and naturally he did not suspect any ulterior motive at that stage.

"Don't mench," said Tracy airily.

"New kids feel a bit lost at first, sometimes," remarked Durance.

"Yes, I suppose so."

"We're goin' to look after you, an' all that," said Tracy, and with all his desire to be pleasant he could not keep a tinge of patronage out of his voice and manner.

Bob Rake smiled cheerily.

"You're very good," he said; "I fancy I can look after myself pretty well, but I'm very much obliged to you all the same."

The legal gentleman came up, and the nuts introduced themselves and learned that his name was Mr. Scupper. Quite a pleasant party walked out of the station to the trap.

Tracy took a seat in the trap with Bob Rake and Mr. Scupper. There was no room for Durance.

That youth raised his hat very politely as the trap drove away. When it was bowling away down the old High Street of Wicks, Durance shrugged his shoulders and smiled.

"Ten to one Tracy makes a muck of it!" he murmured. And Durance strolled away to the Lizard, to knock the balls about in the billiards-room until it was time to turn up at St. Kit's for the election.

CHAPTER 12.

Tracy Tries It Out

BOB RAKE looked about him with eager interest as the trap rattled out of Wicks and passed along the lane.

The green, English countryside seemed attractive to his eyes, and he did not think of concealing the fact that he was happy and cheerful, not having learned the lesson of the nuts, that lofty indifference and nonchalance constituted the first duty of men.

"Jolly looking country," he remarked to Tracy.

"Oh, yes!" assented Tracy.

"They're the Sussex Downs yonder, I suppose?"

"Oh, the Downs—yes!"

"Fine country."

It had never even occurred in the chief of the St. Kit's nuts to notice whether it was a fine country or not.

"Plenty of colour about, though it's winter," said Bob.

"Eh? Oh, yes!"

Tracy wasn't interested in the scenery. Just then he was surveying his own elegant trousers, and thinking how much more nicely they were creased than Bob Rake's.

Bob's necktie, too, afforded Tracy much secret entertainment. He wondered whether the fellow had the brains ever to learn how to tie a necktie. It took Tracy five minutes to arrange a tie to his satisfaction. Probably it took Bob about five seconds.

"St. Kit's is a jolly place, what?" asked Bob, seeking for information regarding his new school.

"Oh, no end!" said Tracy. "In fact, you'll find the Fourth Form full of excitement to-day."

"Something special on?"

"Exactly."

"Football match?" asked Bob.

Tracy laughed, he could not help it. The idea of the lofty and fashionable nuts of St. Kit's getting excited about a football match tickled him.

"Not exactly," he said. "Not quite! We're havin' a Form election."

"A—a what?"

"You know, every Form at St. Kit's has its own captain," said Tracy, with a touch of patronage again.

"I don't know the school customs, of course," said Bob, in his frank way. "I'm quite keen to learn, though. There's a captain of the school, I suppose?"

"Oh, yes; old Oliphant of the Sixth. But every Form has a captain, too—Hilton's captain of the Fifth, Babin of the Sixth, and so on. Carton was captain of the Fourth, but he's left. I'm puttin' up in his place."

"Oh, I see!"

"The election takes place at four this afternoon, so you'll just be in time for it," said Tracy. "As you're new, you know, I'll give you some pointers about it—put you up in the ropes, as it were."

"Thanks!" Bob Rake glanced round him. The trap was passing over the stone bridge over the Wicke, half-way to St. Kit's. "That looks a jolly little river—bathing and swimming there, I suppose?"

"Oh, lots! That's where St. Leger was nearly drowned once," said Tracy. "A chap dived from the bridge here and fetched him out."

"My hat! Must have been a hefty chap to do that," said Bob Rake, with great admiration. "It wanted some nerve."

Tracy decided not to mention that it had been Harry Wilmot who did that great dive.

"St. Leger a St. Kit's chap?" asked Bob.

"Yes, in the Fourth."

"Who fetched him out of the water?"

"Oh, a fellow—I forget his name," said Tracy hastily. "About the election—"

"Oh, yes about the election!"

"I'm expressin' rather a humpin' majority," said Tracy. "But every vote tells. There's rather a rotten character in our Form who's got the nerve to put up as a candidate—a fellow who's no class, and generally dis-

liked. I want to make sure of beating him."

Bob Bake gave him a rather keen look. "If he's no class, and generally disliked; he can't have much chance of getting in at an election, can he?" he asked.

Tracy bit his lip.

"Well, he's cunning," he said. "Sort of wily things, you see."

Bob did not quite see, but he nodded. Somehow, he did not find himself liking this elegant junior very much, though Tracy had apparently gone out of his way to be kind to the newcomer.

"I'd like to count on your vote, old man," said Tracy. "I'll show you exactly what to do, you know. You'll be with my friends, and they'll see that you're not put on by the other party. You just have to walk into the Glory Hole on your vote. Put up your hand when my name's called, you know."

Bob was silent.

St. Kit's was in sight now, the grey old tower and some of the red roofs showing over the trees.

"That's the school!" asked Bob.

"Oh, yes! We shall be there in a few minutes now," said Tracy. "You'll have to see the Head and your Farm-master. Come to the top study when it's over."

"The top study?" repeated Bob.

"Yes, that's my study, the best in the Fourth Form passage. I'd like you to fix up there," said Tracy mendaciously. "I'll ask Mr. Rawlings to let me have you as a study-mate—after the election. You'll be jolly comfy in the top study. Come there to tea to-day, will you? Anybody will show you the way."

"You're very good—"

"Well, I like to look after a new fellow a bit, and make him feel at home," said Tracy, quite surprising himself with his powers as an Ananias. "There are the school gates. By the way, I suppose I can count on your vote at the election this afternoon, Bake?"

"Well, you see—" Bob paused. "Is a new fellow allowed to vote?"

"Oh, yes!"

"Of course, being as new, I don't know the rights of the affair—I haven't even seen the other candidate," said Bob. "Wouldn't it be rather better for me to stand out of the matter?"

"You'll be expected to vote," said Tracy.

"The fellows would take it in very bad part if you stand out, when the whole Farm's bustlin' with the affair."

"Oh, I see! In that case I'll certainly vote."

"For me, I hope?"

"Well—" said Bob slowly.

Tracy's eyes glistened.

Apparently his task was not going to be quite as easy with this new fellow as he had expected.

"I'm counting on you," he said.

Bob coloured slightly.

"I'd hate to refuse," he said frankly.

"But if it's an election surely a voter ought to see both candidates, at least, before he makes up his mind."

"Not necessary at all. I've told you the other man is a rotter."

"Yes, but—"

"But what?" said Tracy sharply.

"Well, we might take different views, you know," said Bob. "I'd really like to see the other man, at least, before I decide how I'm going to vote."

Rex Tracy drew a deep breath. The trap was close to the school gates now, and there was not much more time.

"Look here, Bake," said Tracy. "I want you to vote for me. I've taken a lot of trouble about it. It's goin' to be a very close thing, and I want your vote."

"But if the other fellow's a rotter, and generally disliked, how can the election be such a close thing?" asked Bob.

Again Tracy bit his lip. His sentences had been a little too astute. And he was getting angry now.

"Well, he's got his supporters," he said.

"Ratters like himself?" asked Bob innocently.

"Yes, exactly."

"But half the Fourth at St. Kit's can't be ratters, surely?"

Tracy gave the new junior a sharp, suspicious look. It actually came into his mind that Bob Bake, of Australia, was poking fun at him. But the new junior's cherry face was quite serious.

"The question is, will you vote for me, Bake?" he said.

"I'd like to think it out first, if you don't mind," said Bob politely.

"I do mind!" snapped Tracy.

"Well, all the same, I'd like to think it out first."

"If that's what you call deciding after all

the trouble I've taken over you—" burst out Tracy, losing his temper.

Bob's lip curled slightly.

"You make me begin to think that you had a reason for taking a lot of trouble over me," he said dryly. "The fact is, Tracy, I'm not going to promise to vote for anybody until I know the rights of the matter. I'm sorry—but there it is."

"Look here, you cad—"

"What?"

The trap stopped. Tracy, feeling that he had said too much, and afraid to trust himself to speak further, jumped down and hurried away without another word to the new junior. Bob Rake stared after him in surprise.

"Well, my hat!" he murmured.

The probability was great that Bob Rake would not be in a hurry to vote for the junior who had so kindly met him at the station.

CHAPTER II.

A Much-Sought-After Youth!

"HIS came!"

Bunny Bootles made that announcement in Study No. 5.

Harry Wilmot was on the football ground, but Algernon Aubrey St. Leger was adorning the armchair in Study No. 5 with his elegant person.

He sat up.

"Who's come?"

"The Rake-bird," chuckled Bunny.

"Seen him?"

"Yes. Looks a rather hefty chap," said Bunny. "Tracy came with him in the trap from Wicke. I saw him get out."

"Bohnd! Did Tracy go to the station with Coote, then?"

"I saw him," grinned Bunny. "He's stolen a march on you, Algy. Bet you he's nabbed the new boy's vote already."

Algernon Aubrey breathed hard through his noble nose.

"Where's the new kid now?" he asked.

"In the Head's study."

St. Leger glanced at his handsome gold "ticker."

"Three o'clock," he said. "Lots of time. Bunny, you'll remember to be in the Glory Hole in good time to-day."

"You don't think I'd go back on an old pal, do you?" asked Bunny in a tone of deep reproach.

"I think you'd better not, you fat owl."

"Oh, I say!"

"I've no time to watch you to-day," said St. Leger. "But if you look out, Bunny, look out for a thin time ahead. You'll fancy you're in the Russian famine."

"I'm sticking to my old pals," said Bunny affectionately. "I say, Algy, can I do some shopping for you for tea? Better have tea immediately after the election; we shall be hungry."

"If Wilmot is elected, old bean, there will be a spread in the study that will break all records," said Algernon Aubrey. "I'll give you carte blanche to do the shoppin'."

Bunny's eyes glinted.

"Good man," he said. "As for depending on me, Algy, you could trust me with your life. I'm votin' for dear old Wilmot. D-d-do you think Oliphant would notice if I voted with both hands? That would count one to the good if he didn't notice it—"

"You fat rascal!" roared Algy.

"Oh, I say!"

"Why they sent you to St. Kit's, Bunny, instead of to a reformatory is a puzzle to me," said Algy, shaking his head.

"Oh, don't be a funny ass, you know," said Bunny. "I say, we've got to get our man in somehow. Must do it—for—for the good of the school, you know—and—and so on. That new kid's got to vote for him; that'll do the trick. I'll get a chance of telling him about the spread—"

"Dry up!"

"You're not so keen about electing old Wilmot as I am, Algy," said Bootles. "I'd do anything for such an old pal. Will there be meringues at the spread? Mrs. Coote's got meringues."

"Give me a rest, fatty. Blow away for a bit, old bean."

"I say, Algy—"

"Well?"

"I've run out of tin. Could you lend me half-a-crown?"

"Go and eat cake!"

Algernon Aubrey walked out of the study. Bunny Bootles blinked after him with a very injured look.

"Blasted if some fellows wouldn't go and vote for Tracy after that," he murmured. "But—but I'll stick to Algy. That cad Tracy would turn me down immediately after he got elected; I know that. Not the sort of fellow we want for Form captain."

And Bunny Bootles generously decided to

forgive Algy and to stand by the old flag at all costs.

Algernon Aubrey walked down to the football ground, where he found Harry Wilnot busy. But Harry came off at St. Leger's fall.

"Only practice, isn't it?" asked St. Leger.

"Yes," said Harry with a smile.

"The new kid's come."

"Has he?" said Harry indifferently.

"I want you to come and lie in wait for him, and make his acquaintance, old bean." Wilnot shook his head.

"Look here," urged Algy.

"How can I ask the kid for his vote when I don't even know him?" asked Harry.

"Tracy begged him at the station, and came in the trap with him. Bet your Sunday socks Tracy's asked him."

"Then it's too late."

"He mayn't have promised."

"Leave it till the election," said Harry.

"If Rake is there he will be able to decide for himself whom to vote for."

Algy grunted.

"Call yourself an electioneer?" he said in disgust. "Go back to your merry football, you ass. I'll do the best I can for you."

"Join us at the fooler," suggested Harry.

"Oh, rats!"

Harry laughed and rejoined the footballers. Algernon Aubrey walked away to the School House.

As he strolled in a leisurely way into the Head's corridor he found that there were three other fellows there already. Tracy and Howard and Lamley were lounging by the window. They grinned at the sight of St. Leger.

"Lookin' for our bird?" asked Howard.

"Eh, what?"

"You know the new kid's with the Head, and you're after him," sneered Tracy. "Well, you're not goin' to have him."

Algy shrugged his graceful shoulders.

"That remains to be seen, old pheasant," he answered.

And he strolled about the passage until the door of the Head's study opened. As the door opened there was a general movement of interest in the corridor. But Mr. Rawlings, the master of the Fourth, came out with Rake, the legal gentleman remaining with Dr. Chenier.

Mr. Rawlings glanced at the juniors in the corridor, and walked on with Bob to

his own study. The door of that apartment closed on them.

Algernon Aubrey shrugged his shoulders, and Tracy & Co. mustered under their breath. All four of the juniors got a move on, and took up a position in the passage outside Mr. Rawlings' study.

When the door of that study opened there was again a movement of interest. But again Mr. Rawlings came out with the new junior.

Bob Rake smiled faintly as he saw the same crowd in the passage, Tracy among them. Bob was "catching on" to the state of affairs in the Fourth Form at St. Kit's, and finding it rather amusing.

Mr. Rawlings walked away with Bob to the house-dame's room. Tracy & Co. exchanged looks of disgust.

"Jewver see anythin' so beastly annoyin'?" growled Tracy. "When are we goin' to catch the brute?"

"St. Leger's followin' on——"

"Come on, then."

Four expectant juniors took up their stand near Mrs. Brown's door. After the interview with the house-dame Mr. Rawlings came out with Bob, and raised his eyebrows at the sight of St. Leger, Tracy, Howard, and Lamley. He was growing rather surprised at seeing so much of those juniors. But he did not leave the new boy even then. He walked with him to the Fourth Form class-room.

"Showin' the cad round," muttered Tracy.

Four juniors followed on. They were joined by a fifth, Durance having returned by this time.

Mr. Rawlings came out of the Fourth Form-room, and his eyebrows went up again at the sight of his increased following. He paused and called to Algernon Aubrey.

"St. Leger!"

"Yass, sir."

"Kindly take Rake—this is the new boy. Robert Rake—kindly take him to the Fourth Form passage——"

"Oh, yass, sir!" said Algy brightly. "Very pleased, sir."

"Rake will be placed in Study No. 2," said Mr. Rawlings. "There is room for him there, as Carton has left."

"Oh!" said Algy.

Tracy grinned.

Certainly he did not want the fellow to be planted in his study for good. But he wanted him very much for that afternoon. Afterwards Tracy did not doubt that he

would find some way of getting rid of the encumbrance.

"Rake is a new boy from a distant country, St. Leger," said Mr. Rawlings. "In the circumstances, I should be glad if you would show him any little attention in your power on his first day at the school."

"Delighted, sir," said Algy with such heartiness that Mr. Rawlings smiled and nodded very approvingly.

"Thank you, St. Leger," he said.

"Not at all, sir."

"Rake, you will go with St. Leger now, and he will show you your new quarters."

"Very well, sir."

Bob Rake walked away with the dandy of the Fourth, and Mr. Rawlings rustled off to his own quarters. Tracy & Co. looked at one another. Durance smiled. It was because Mr. Rawlings knew that Algy, with all his classified ways, had a kind heart and a generous nature, that he had trusted the new boy into his care instead of calling upon Tracy, whom otherwise he would naturally have selected, as Bob's future study-mate. Tracy had only himself to thank for being overlooked, for in other circumstances Tracy would have looked on the task of taking charge of a new boy as a bore and a trouble, and would have shown his feelings pretty plainly. Hence Durance's smile. Tracy gave him a savage look in answer to his smile.

"Is there anythin' to grin at?" he snarled.

"Keep your wool on, old bean," said Durance, laughing. "The game isn't lost till it's won. As he's goin' to be our study-mate we ought to be able to bag him somehow."

"Come on," said Tracy, between his teeth.

And the two followed on the trail of Algernon Aubrey St. Leger and the new junior.

CHAPTER 14.

Looking After Bob Rake.

"YOUR name's St. Leger," said Bob Rake, as Algy was taking him up the big staircase.

"Yess, dear boy. Happen to know me?" asked Algy.

"Chap spoke of you who came in the trap with me," said Bob. "Chap named Tracy—one of the fellows yonder. You're the punch Out was in the river when ———— took off the bridge for you, ————"

"I came over that bridge from Wickie," said Bob. "It was rather a hefty dive for anybody. Chap who did that must be at there."

Algernon Aubrey smiled sweetly.

"It was my chum, Wilnot," he said.

"Tracy had forgotten the name of——"

"Had he?" murmured Algy.

"What did you say?"

"Nothin', dear boy. It was my pal Nameless—I mean, Wilnot—who dived in for me. Hefty, if you like," said Algy. "It was his first day at St. Kit's, and I was a stranger to him then. You'll meet Wilnot. By the way, do you know there's an election this afternoon?"

Bob chuckled.

"I reckon so."

"Heard all about it from Tracy, what?"

"That's it."

"I hope you haven't promised him your vote," said Algy anxiously.

"No; I said I'd keep an open mind till the election, or words to that effect. Is this the Fourth Form passage?"

"Yass."

Algy looked rather curiously at the Corn-stalk. There was nothing of the shy, sheepish new boy about Bob Rake. His manner had no uncertainty that was not offensive in any way; but that showed that Robert Rake knew quite well how to take care of himself, and was not likely to be caught napping very easily.

"Tracy's one candidate," said Algy.

"Who's the other?"

"My pal Wilnot."

Rake looked interested.

"The chap who dived from the bridge?" he asked.

"Yass."

"I'd like to see him," said Bob.

"I'd like you to vote for him, dear boy."

Bob laughed.

"I'd rather see him first. I suppose I shall see both candidates at the election?"

"Yass."

"I'll make up my mind then. Which is my study?"

"You're put into the top study," said Algernon Aubrey. "I'd really like you to be put into mine."

"Honest?"

Algy considered a moment, and then laughed.

"Yass. I don't want a rival in the study; it's horrid. But I'd stand it to secure your votes for a pal."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Bob Rake. "You're confidant, at any rate."

Tracy & Co. appeared in the passage at the staircase end, and Algy added rather hurriedly:

"Come into my study now, old bean, and I'll explain to you how matters stand."

"I'd like to see my own room," said Rake.

"You see——"

Tracy & Co. came up at a run.

"Come into your study, Rake," said Tracy. "It's my study, too. This chap, Durance, will be your study-mate as well. Come and look at your new quarters."

"Do!" urged Durance.

"Look here, Mr. Rawlings gave the new kid into my charge," said Algernon Aubrey warmly.

"You're so specially fond of lookin' after new kids, ain't you?" grinned Howard.

"When there's an election on!" chuckled Lumley.

"Come on, Rake." Tracy slipped an arm through Rake's. "This way! Best study in the passage. You'll be very sunny."

Bob Rake hesitated. He was no fool, and he could distinguish between real kindness and the effusiveness of Tracy & Co. He shook off Rex Tracy's arm.

"I'll stay with St. Leger a bit, if he doesn't mind," he said. "He was good enough to——"

"Mind?" said Algy. "I'm delighted!"

"You wouldn't touch the fellow with a barge-pole if you didn't want his vote!" booted Lumley.

"Shut up, Lumley!" whispered Durance hastily.

Algernon Aubrey turned his eyeglass upon Lumley.

"You express yourself very coarsely, dear old bean," he said gently. "Your mode of expressin' yourself, my dear fellow, is very painful to my sensitive nervous system. Would you strongly object to blowin' away for a bit?"

"Oh, rats!" growled Lumley.

"Well, come and see the study, anyhow, Rake," said Tracy.

"Yass, come on," said Algy.

And, thus invited by both parties, Bob Rake progressed along to the top study to survey that celebrated apartment.

Bunny Bootles came rolling up the passage.

"Man Scupper asking after Rake," he said. "He's going."

"Oh! I must say good-bye to him," said

Bob, and he left the top study hastily, Algy accompanying him.

Tracy & Co. followed on, determined not to lose sight of the prize. It was getting towards election-time now, and the question of Bob Rake's doubtful vote was growing one of burning interest to all parties.

Mr. Scupper departed, Bob dutifully bidding him good-bye at the door. Then he was left to the juniors again. Harry Wilmot came in from footer with Stubbs and Wheatford, looking very tuddy and cheerful.

"By Jove! Here's my pal!" exclaimed Algy. "Harry, old bean, this way! This is the new kid, Rake, from New Zealand."

"Australia!" said Bob.

"I mean Australia, Rake, old not. This is Harry Wilmot, the popular candidate."

"The nameless candidate," sneered Tracy, loud enough for Harry Wilmot to hear.

Harry glanced at him with a glimmer of scorn in his eyes, but did not speak. Bob looked curiously from one to the other. He shook hands heartily enough with Harry; the story of the dive from the bridge had prepossessed him in favour of the "popular" candidate.

Harry went into the lobby to get rid of some mud before turning up in the Glory Hole for the election. Algernon Aubrey piloted the new junior towards the Glory Hole, and Tracy & Co. followed them in. The Fourth Form were gathering now from all quarters.

The new boy's name was on every lip, and every fellow was anxious to see him. Counting and canvassing on both sides had revealed and ascertained the fact that nobody was deserting his party colours—the voters were still ten aside. The result of the election, therefore, depended absolutely upon Bob Rake's vote—if he voted at all.

By this time Bob fully realised his importance in the politics of the St. Kn's Fourth.

A little swank would have been pardonable in the circumstances; but there was no sign of swank about the Cornstalk. He seemed a little entertained, that was all. His manner was perfectly cool and self-possessed under the stare of twenty pairs of eyes.

"Voting for us, old bean?" asked Bunny Bootles, rolling up to the new junior, with a familiar grin.

"Who's us?" inquired Bob.

"I'm a Wilmotite—Wilmot's my closest

gah, you know," said Bunny. "I'm his dearest chum. Ain't I, Algy?"

"Not at all."

"Oh, I say, Algy, you beast——"

"Come over this side, Rake," said Tracy. "These fellows are my voters. Oliphant and Hilton will be in to take the vote in a few minutes."

"Here comes that nameless cad!" muttered Lamley.

Bob glanced round and saw Harry Wilmot coming into the Glory Hole. He turned quietly to St. Leger, moving off with him, in spite of the fascinating wiles of Tracy & Co.

"I've several times heard a queer expression applied to your friend Wilmot, St. Leger," he said. "Why the thump is he called nameless? Isn't his name Wilmot?"

St. Leger nodded.

"Wilmot has a rather queer history," he said. "He was lost when he was a kid, and grew up without knowing his father. But it turned out all right—his pater found him at last. He was called Nameless when he was a kid."

"But if his father's claimed him, and his father's named Wilmot, he's not nameless now," said Bob.

"Hardly."

"These fellows are keeping it up against him, is that it?"

"I suppose so."

"Isn't that rather mean?"

"Harsh!" said Algy.

"I rather think that Tracy won't get my vote," remarked the junior from "down under," after a thoughtful pause.

"Good man!" smiled Algy.

It occurred to the Honourable Algernon Aubrey that Tracy & Co. were playing his game for him. They were acting according to their natures—and their natures were very different from Bob Rake's.

There was a buzz as Oliphant of the Sixth came into the room, and Hilton followed him in, yawning a little. The great men of the senior Forms were rather bored with the affair that was so greatly exciting the Fourth.

"All here?" asked Oliphant.

"Yes, Oliphant."

"Shut the door, then."

Stalton banged the door of the Glory Hole.

CHAPTER 15.

The Election!

ALGERNON AUBREY ST. LEGER had slipped his arm through Bob Rake's. Bob seemed quite content to remain with the dandy of the Fourth. But Tracy was not exactly contented to see it. After some whispering among his comrades he came over to Bob.

"You're goin' to vote?" he asked.

"I think so."

"For me?"

Bob shook his head.

Tracy's eyes glittered. He made an effort to control his temper, however.

"You're not goin' back on me, Rake?" he muttered.

"It doesn't come to that. I've a right to vote for whom I please, haven't I, if I vote at all?"

"Yes. But——"

"Back up your own study," said Lamley. "You're in the top study, you know, and you're bound to back it up."

Bob hesitated.

"That's all right," said Algy calmly. "The top study here, Rake, always belongs to the captain of the Form. If Wilmot's elected he changes into the top study."

"Oh!" said Bob.

"So you'll be backin' up your own study if you vote for Wilmot, if he gets in as captain; and he will if you vote for him," said St. Leger.

Tracy gave the dandy of the Fourth a venomous look.

"Shut up, St. Leger! I'm speaking to the new chap; I'm dependin' on your vote, Rake."

"Sorry!"

"You won't vote for me?" asked Tracy between his teeth.

"No."

"Why not?" hissed Tracy.

"I like the other candidate better," said Bob.

"He hasn't even asked you for your vote, I believe," said Lamley.

"No, he hasn't."

"He doesn't think it's worth askin' for!" sneered Howard.

"He hasn't come to the station to meet me, making out that it was civility to new fellows, after my vote, anyhow," said Bob bluntly. "You chaps were pulling me out at Woking, and you know it! True, let it out pretty plainly in the trap. Anyhow, my vote's my own."



Mrs. Coots looked on dumfounded as Algernon Aubrey seized Dunny Scottie by the collar and pulled him off the stool.

"You'd better not vote against me!" muttered Tracy. "Your life won't be worth livin' in the top study if you turn me down! I warn you of that!"

Bob shrugged his broad shoulders contentedly.

"So you're getting on to threats," he said coolly. "Well, I'll show you how much I care for your threats. I'm going to vote for Wilmot."

"You rotten cad——"

"That's enough! I'm not used to being called names. If you want my knuckles on your nose, Tracy, you've only to say that again!"

"Why, you——you——"

"Now then, no ragging there!" called out Oliphant. "Now we're ready to take the count. Order, please!"

Duranc pulled Tracy away. It really looked as if the candidate was going to commit assault and battery upon the new voter just then.

"Keep cool, you see!" whispered Duranc.

"I'll make him suffer for it if he votes against me!" muttered Tracy, choking with rage.

"Keep cool, I tell you. Put in a protest against a new fellow votin'—it may work!"

Tracy brightened up. It was a chance.

"Now, hands up for Tracy!" called out Oliphant, getting to business.

"Hold on, Oliphant!" exclaimed Tracy, setting at once on Dick Duranc's sage suggestion. "There's a fellow present who doesn't really belong to the Fourth——"

"Eh! Turn him out, then!" said the St. Kit's captain.

"Outside!" hissed Lumley.

"Get out, Rake!"

"Now then, get out if you're not in the Fourth!" said Hilton gruffly.

Bob Rake did not stir.

There was a yell of protest from Wilmot's supporters. Tracy's action showed them how the new boy's vote was likely to go.

"He is in the Fourth, Oliphant!" yelled Snubbe.

"Yaas, he's in the Fourth right enough!"

"It's all right, Hilton; he's the new chap in the Fourth."

"Silence!" shouted Oliphant. "Now, then, let's have this out. Step out here, kid. What's your name?"

"Bob Rake."

"New kid, of course! I've never seen you before."

"Arrived to-day, your worship," answered Bob cheerfully; and there was a ripple of laughter in the Glory Hole.

Oliphant smiled.

"Well, you've got plenty of assurance for a new kid," he said. "Are you in the Fourth Form?"

"Yes."

"Then what do you mean, Tracy?"

"He's only just come," said Tracy. "It's not to let him come into the election the minute he sets foot in the school!"

"I've been here over an hour," said Bob.

"You want to vote?" asked Oliphant.

"Yes, rather."

"Perhaps you'd better stand aside as a new kid who doesn't know the ropes yet."

"Perhaps I'd better not," said Bob coolly.

"What?"

"I'm in the Fourth. My Form-master has given me a locker and a desk in the Form-room and stuck me in a study. Doesn't that make me a regular member of the Fourth Form?"

"Well, yes," said Oliphant, knitting his brows. "It does, right enough. If you claim your vote——"

"I do!"

"Yaas, begud!" said Algy.

"It would be in rather better taste to stand aside, I think, in the—the circumstances," said Oliphant.

"I'm not out for the best taste, thanks; I'm out to vote in the election," remarked Bob.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I protest!" shouted Tracy.

"Protest—protest!" echoed his supporters.

Oliphant consulted with Hilton.

"Tracy protested!" said Bob cheerfully. "But, as a matter of fact, Tracy has asked me to vote for him."

Oliphant turned quickly.

"What's that? Has Tracy asked you for your vote?"

"Yes."

"That settles it, then! If you've asked the kid for his vote, Tracy, what the thump do you mean by protesting against his voting?" demanded the captain of St. Kit's angrily.

"I—I haven't!" said Tracy desperately.

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Hilton of the Fifth. "Somebody's lying!"

"Tracy has asked me, in the presence of witnesses," said Bob Bake, with cheery assurance. "Only a few minutes ago he was threatening to make my life not worth living in the top study if I didn't vote for him!"

"Is that so, Tracy?"

"No!" yelled Tracy.

"St. Leger heard him——"

"Yaas, begad!"

"So did I!" howled Bunny Bootles.

"And I!" roared Stubbs.

Oliphant's brow darkened, and he gave Rex Tracy a very ominous look.

"The less you say, the better, Tracy!" he rapped out. "The new boy will vote. Now, then, silence! Hands up for Tracy!"

Ten hands went up as on the previous occasion.

"Ten!" said Oliphant.

"Ten!" concurred Hilton.

"New hands up for Wilnot."

Eleven hands rose in the air.

It was a foregone conclusion now that it was known how the new boy was going to vote. But as Oliphant announced the result there was a roar of enthusiastic applause from Wilnot's party.

"Eleven——"

"Hurrah!"

"Wilnot wins!"

"Bravo!"

"By one vote!"

"Hip-hip!"

"Harry Wilnot is duly elected captain of the Fourth Form at St. Kit's!" announced Oliphant.

"Hip-pip-hurrah!"

"Beavo!"

"Good old Wilnot!"

It was a terrific roar. It was answered by yells and catcalls from the defeated party. Tracy clenched his hands with rage.

"And now clear, the lot of you!" said Oliphant, raising his hand. The captain of St. Kit's had no doubt whatever that the election would be followed by a free fight in the Glory Hole if the excited juniors were left to themselves in their present state of feeling. "Outside! Sharp!"

"Hurrah!"

"Shoulder high!" shouted Algy.

"Yes, rather! Hurrah!"

A rush was made for Wilnot. The new captain of the Fourth, laughing and protesting, was raised on the shoulders of

Algernon Aubrey and Stuns, and carried in triumph out of the Glory Hole.

The nobody who had come to St. Kit's as "Harry Nameless" was captain of the Fourth, and his handsome face was very bright as he was borne out of the Glory Hole shoulder-high amid thunderous cheers.

CHAPTER 16.

Captain of the Fourth!

STUDY No. 5, in the Fourth, presented a festive scene.

Bunny Bootles was in his element. The fat junior congratulated himself on having remained as loyally faithful to the old flag.

The study table groined under good things.

Algernon Aubrey had given Bunny "carte blanche" at the tuck-shop, and Bunny had fulfilled his task nobly.

Mrs. Coote's stock had been heavily drawn upon. Half a dozen fellows had helped Bunny to carry the tuck to Study No. 5.

It could not be called bribery and corruption, for the election was over and done with, and Harry Wilnot was captain of the Fourth. Study No. 5 had a right to feast their loyal supporters, and they did it royally. Every fellow who had voted for Wilnot was present, and the study was crowded. A guest of honour among them was Bob Bake, whose vote had decided the election. He was now "only a new kid." But he was treated with some distinction by Algernon Aubrey, with friendly cordiality by Harry, and very civilly by all the rest. And he enjoyed the spread in Study No. 5 on his first day at St. Kit's.

It was a glorious celebration.

Even Licks had deserted his beloved moths and beetles to come—every loyal supporter was there. Indeed, there was open house for all the Fourth—members of the defeated party were welcome to join in the feast if they cared to come. And a good many cared to come! Tinker Smith dropped in, and was made welcome—though he was firmly suppressed when he tried to tell Bob Bake all about a little thing in L. minor. Lams and Leigh dropped in—and Cateby, of course. Cateby would not have missed a feast at the table of his deadliest enemy. Verney missed——

O'Donoghue came along. By that time the study was crowded, not to say crammed.

But everybody was cheerful and in the best of spirits.

The new captain's health was drunk in ginger-beer and lemonade, and then his chairman-manager's health was drunk—in fact, there was no limit to the number of healths that were drunk, the ginger-pop and the lemonade being almost unlimited.

In the top study Rex Tracy was gritting his teeth, and muttering words which it was as well for him that his Form master did not hear. But nobody in the jolly party in Study No. 5 had any thoughts to waste on Tracy.

Long and loud was the celebration, and it ended up with the singing of "He's a Jolly Good Fellow" in a chorus that was heard far beyond the confines of the Fourth Form passage.

The merry party broke up at last.

It was Saturday night, and there was "Sunday prep" to be considered. In ones and twos the cheery guests departed, till Bob Rake was the only one that remained in Study No. 5 with Harry, Algy, and Bunny Bootles. And the new junior rose to go.

"Hang on here for prep, dear boy," said Algernon Aubrey kindly. "I'll put you through your paces!"

"New kids don't have any prep first night," said Bunny.

"Oh, good!" said Bob.

"Hang on, all the same, till bed-time," said Harry.

"Thanks! But I think I'll see about getting my things in my quarters," said Bob.

Algy coughed.

"The fact is, you're goin' into the top study," he said. "Little us are goin' to take possession of that commodious and desirable residence on Monday. But at present—ah—"

"He, ha, ha! They'll make it hot for you!" chuckled Bunny.

"Shut up, Bunsey!"

"Well, they will, you know!" said Bunny, apparently much entertained at the prospect. "They'll make him sit up for voting for Wilms!"

Bob Rake smiled quietly.

"I fancy I can take care of myself," he remarked. "I'm not looking for trouble. But if anybody wakes me up he will find my eyes wide open. Ta-ra, you fellows!"

And Bob swung cheerily out of the study.

If there was trouble awaiting him in his own quarters he seemed quite prepared to face it—and undoubtedly there was severe trouble in the top study waiting for the cheery junior whose vote had decided that burning question, who shall be captain?

CHAPTER 17.

The RAGGING of Bob Rake!

"HERE he is!"
"Here's the rotter!"
"Here's the cad!"
Bob Rake grinned.

It was a sort of chorus that greeted him as he threw open the door of the top study, in the Fourth Form passage at St. Kit's, and entered. But certainly it was not a chorus of welcome.

There was quite a crowd of juniors in the top study.

Tracy, the defeated candidate in the captain's election that had taken place last afternoon, stood leaning on the mantelpiece, his hands driven deep into his pockets and a scowl on his face. He fixed a black and bitter look on the new junior as he entered the study.

Lumley and Howard and Verney minor were seated around the fire; but they jumped at the sight of Bob Rake.

Dick Durance was reclining in the arm-chair, with his legs crossed and a slight smile on his face. He was the only member of the happy family of nuts who did not glare at the new fellow and join in the general chorus that greeted Bob Rake's entrance.

"Here's the beastly cad!" continued Tracy. "Here's the rotter that lost us the election!"

"He's got the cheek to come here!" said Lumley.

"Some cads have cheek enough for anything!" remarked Howard.

"I'm glad he's come," said Tracy with a venomous look. "We can deal with him now."

"Yes, rather!"

Bob Rake looked at the glowering faces round him, and did not seem very much disturbed.

There were five juniors in the study, and they were all his enemies. The new junior from Australia was venturing into something like a lion's den in entering the

top study. But it was evident that Bob Rake dared to be a Daniel!

"Hallo, old tops!" he said cheerily. "What's hitting you? This is a pretty sort of welcome to give to a new fellow in his own study on his first day at St. Kit's. Have I had the awful misfortune to displease your High Mightinesses in any way?"

"You rather——"

"You said——"

"You outsider——"

"Do get on with the list!" said Bob Rake. "I've got that by heart already. Besides, I don't allow fellows to call me names like that. It looks to me as if somebody is going to have his nose punched pretty soon."

"You rotten outsider——" recommenced Lumley.

Bob took a step towards Lumley, a glint coming into his blue eyes. Lumley broke off quite suddenly.

"Enough of that!" said Bob quietly. "You've paid me enough compliments. What's the trouble?"

"You know what the trouble is, you——" Tracy paused at the word "rotter." He did not like the glint in the Australian's eyes, any more than Lumley did. "You know well enough. There was a tie in the election for Form captain this afternoon, and you wedged in and voted for Harry Wilmot, and did me out of it. That's the trouble."

"Jolly glad that I arrived at St. Kit's on this merry Saturday," said Bob. "Just in time to frustrate your knavish tricks, Tracy, what? You wouldn't cut much ice as Form captain in the Fourth. I don't know much about Wilmot, but I fancy he's ever so much better a man for the job."

"What?"

"Ever so much better a man for the job." Tracy breathed hard.

There was a slight chuckle from Durance, in the armchair. Durance seemed to find something entertaining in the genial coolness of the youth from "down under."

"This is my study, it seems," said Bob, glancing round him. "Mr. Rawlings told me so, at all events. Do all you fellows belong here?"

"No!" snapped Verney minor.

"Oh, I don't mind—I'm not particular," Bob Rake assured him. "Still, a little more room would be a comfort. How many belong here?"

"Tracy and I," said Durance, as nobody else troubled to answer.

"Then we shall be three," said Bob cheerily. "I hope we shall get on together. We haven't started well, certainly. But you'll find me quite nice on closer acquaintance. I hope I shall find you fellows the same. It doesn't look like it—but I hope so."

"You've got plenty to say for yourself for a new kid," remarked Durance.

"Always bad," said Bob Rake.

"You refused to vote for me in the Form election——" began Tracy.

"That's over and done with," said Bob amicably. "Wilmot is captain of the Fourth now. He seems a decent sort of chap."

"He's a rotten outsider."

"Oh rats!"

"If you'd given me your vote I should have been Form captain. It needed only one to turn the scale."

"That's ancient history now," urged Bob.

"Do you think we're going to stand you in this study after that?" demanded Tracy. Bob looked at him.

"I don't quite see how you're going to help it," he answered. "The Form-master has placed me here, and it's my study, too."

"You're not comin' in here."

"It seems to me that I've come."

"You're goin' out on your neck," explained Tracy.

Bob Rake laughed.

"But before you go you're goin' to get the raggin' of your life for voting against me in the election," added Tracy.

"That's the game," said Howard, and he slipped round behind Bob Rake and closed the door of the study.

"I say——" began Durance, uncrossing his legs, and sitting up in the armchair. Tracy interrupted him savagely:

"None of your rot, Dick! He's goin' through it."

Durance shrugged his shoulders.

"Oh, all right!" he said; "might let him off, as he's a new kid. I expect it was Algy talked him into votin' for Wilmot. Algy could talk the hind leg off a mule."

"I'll make Algy St. Leger sit up, too, somehow," said Tracy. "And as for Wilmot, let him try to come the Form captain over us, that's all! We'll give him

something to think about. Now we're going to deal with this sneakin' cad who lost us the election. Collar him!"

Bob Rake did not seem alarmed, even then. The five juniors made a general move towards him, and he backed to the door, and stood against it, and put his hands up.

His genial face was still good humoured, but his blue eyes were glinting. As a matter of fact, he had fully expected trouble with the St. Kit's nits, and he was prepared for it.

"One at a time," he suggested. "Fair play's a jewel."

"It's not a fight—it's a raggin'," said Tracy loftily.

"That's how it stands, dear boy," said Durance. "I advise you not to hit out. You'll get it worse."

"Much worse," said Howard.

"My dear old tops, I shall hit out, hard, if you lay any paw on me," said Bob Rake coolly; "I'm not looking for trouble; but I don't specially want to dodge it. If you're spoiling for a fight I'll take the lot of you in turn. I can't say fairer than that."

"Collar him!" snapped Tracy.

There was a rush.

The five nits came at Bob Rake together, and the Cornstalk, true to his word, hit out—hard!

There was a yell from Tracy, as he caught a fist that felt like solid iron, with his chin.

Tracy went over backwards as if a mule had kicked him, and came down with a bump on the expensive study carpet.

It was Bob Rake's right that had jarred so painfully on Rex Tracy's chin. His left came with a crash on Durance's nose the next moment.

Durance staggered against the study table.

But five to one was long odds. Verney minor closed in under Bob's arms as he was hitting, and grasped him round the waist.

"Back up!" panted Verney.

The next moment Bob's right swept downwards, and Verney minor yelled as he felt it crash on his head.

But he held on, and his comrades came swarming to his aid. Lumley got hold of Rake's right arm, Howard of his left. They held on tensely—indeed, they held on for dear life! They were afraid of

what might happen if they let that sturdy junior's arms go.

Tracy was on his feet quickly enough, with a blaze of rage in his eyes. He rushed at the Cornstalk, as Bob struggled with three foes, and struck. Bob caught the drive on his chest without being able to defend himself, and he rolled over, with Lumley and Howard and Verney still clinging to him. The four of them sprawled and struggled on the floor.

Tracy bent over Bob, as he struggled furiously, and raised his clenched fist for another blow. His arm was caught and dragged back, and he turned his head and glared at Durance.

"Let go, you fool!" he yelled.

"Easy does it," said Durance. "You're not hittin' a chap when he's down, in this study!"

"You fool——"

"Raggin' is all very well, but there's a limit," said Durance. "You can give him the five's bat on his bags. But you're not punchin' him on the floor, old bean."

"Shove him across the table, then!" snarled Tracy.

"Right ho!"

Bob Rake was still struggling strenuously. But five pairs of hands were on him, and even the sturdy Bob could not deal with such odds. He was swept off the floor, and slammed face down on the study table.

"Pin him!" gasped Tracy.

"We're got him!"

"You rotters!" roared Bob. "I'll smash you for this!"

"Quiet, you cad!" said Lumley, giving his arm a twist.

"Ow!"

"Mind he doesn't get loose, while I get the bat," said Tracy.

"Hurry up, old bean."

With a pair of hands grasping each arm and leg, Bob Rake was spreadeagled on the study table, and he resisted in vain. Tracy picked up the five's bat and came back to the table, his eyes glittering.

"Go it!" chuckled Lumley.

Whack, whack, whack!

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Bob. "I'll—I'll smash you——"

Whack, whack!

"Yoooooup!"

Whack, whack, whack!

"Easy does it, old bean," murmured Durance.

Tracy snarled, and laid on with the bat with all the strength of his arm. And Bob Rake, helpless in the grasp of the nuts, wriggled and roared, as the shower of vicious blows descended.

CHAPTER 18.

Something Like a Scrap!

"THEY'RE goin' it!"

Algernon Aubrey St. Leger, the ornament of the Fourth Form at St. Kit's, made that remark in Study No. 5.

Bunny Bootles chuckled.

Harry Wilnot, the new captain of the Fourth Form, laid down his pen and rose to his feet, his face darkening.

Harry Wilnot—once known as Harry Nameless—had been elected captain of the Fourth that afternoon. He owed his election to Bob Rake's vote. And he knew what the uproar from the top study meant. Tracy & Co. were "taking it out" of the new junior for their defeat at the election.

Algy glanced at him as he rose.

"Chippin' in?" he asked.

"Yes."

"It's an awful bore," murmured Algernon Aubrey plaintively; "I hate raggin'. An' I'm quite exhausted with the yeoman's service I put into the election to-day. But I suppose it's up to us."

"Oh, let him alone," said Bunny Bootles. "That chap Rake is a bit cheeky. It will do him good."

"Shut up, Bunny!"

"Well, I think he's cheeky," said Bunny; "got too much to say for himself, you know. I'm not going to chip in."

Algernon Aubrey laughed.

"Don't!" he said. "It wouldn't be fair to the top study, Bunny, to spring such a terrific fightin' man as you on them."

"Oh, I say!"

"Come on, St. Leger!" said Harry.

Algernon Aubrey carefully disposed his celebrated eyeglass in his waistcoat pocket, and followed his chum from Study No. 5.

Several of the Fourth had come out of their studies, attracted by the din that was proceeding from Study No. 9. Nobody seemed inclined to enter the lion's den and interfere, however.

"That new chap's getting it," remarked Catesby, with a grin. "I rather thought Tracy would take it out of his hide."

"Somebody ought to stop him," said Stubbs.

Catesby laughed.

"I'm going to stop him," said Harry, as he came out of Study No. 5 quietly.

"Hallo! You're startin' pretty soon in your merry new duties as Form captain!" sneered Catesby.

Harry did not heed the end of the Fourth. He mounted the step at the end of the passage that led to the top study. Algernon Aubrey St. Leger followed him, pushing back his spotless cuffs. Algy hated scrapping, it was liable to soil his cuffs and disarrange his elegant attire. But he was quite a good man in a scrap when he set his noble mind to it.

The captain of the Fourth threw open the door of the top study.

A rather startling scene met his gaze.

Bob Rake, spread-eagled on the study table, was wriggling and struggling fiercely in the grasp of four of the nuts, while Rox Tracy was lashing him savagely with the fives bat. The smacking whacks could be heard at the other end of the Fourth Form passage.

"You rotters!" roared Bob. "Jawvor hear of fair play in this study? Yow-ow-uw!"

Whack!

"Yarooooh!"

Tracy had the bat raised again for another swipe, when Harry Wilnot burst into the study.

"Stop!"

The bat came down—but before it reached Bob, Harry's grasp was on Tracy's shoulder, and the chief of the nuts was dragged away. The fives bat swept down into space, and cracked on Tracy's knee. There was a yell from Tracy this time.

"Ow! Oh gad! Wow!"

Wilnot flung Tracy aside, and he fell helplessly into the armchair. Then the captain of the Fourth turned to the others.

"Let Rake go at once!" he said curtly.

"Yass, dear boys," said Algernon Aubrey, in the doorway. "The circus is over—ring down the merry curtain! Don't make me back my knuckles on your noses. I'm rather particular about my knuckles. Catch on!"

"Mind your own blincy!" yelled Lumley.

"Let him go, I tell you!"

Lumley and Howard and Verney looked uncertain. But Dick Durance was made of sterner stuff. He had been only half-hearted in the ragging of the new boy; but he was quite whole-hearted in delaying interference. He compressed his grip on Bake, and stared at Harry defiantly.

"Mind your own business," he snapped.

"I think this is my business," said Harry quietly. "As captain of the Fourth I think I'm bound to stop this sort of thing."

"How long have you been captain of the Fourth?" sneered Durance.

"Long enough to put a stop to a cowardly ragging," answered Harry. "But, anyhow, I should chip in here. Let him go!"

"Rats!"

"Is there goin' to be a fight?" murmured Algernon Aubrey.

"There is, if you interfere in this study," said Durance savagely.

Algy sighed.

"Isn't it just my luck to have my best waistcoat on when there's goin' to be a scrap!" he said. "I suppose you fellows wouldn't be willin' to hang on, in statu quo, while I go an' change my waistcoat?"

"Hu, he, he!" came from Bunny Bootles, in the passage. The fat junior had followed his study-mates; not to take a hand in the combat, Bunny was quite content to be a spectator when a combat was going on.

"Will you let Bake go?" snapped the captain of the Fourth.

"No."

"Then I'll make you!"

"Hear, hear!" said St. Leger.

Harry wasted no more time in words. Tracy had staggered to his feet, and stood with clenched hands and blazing eyes; but evidently hesitating to tackle Wilmot. The latter made a stride at Durance and grasped him.

Crash!

Durance's fist came into his face in a second, and Harry staggered for a moment. The blow was swift and it was hard.

But in another moment the captain of the Fourth had returned it, and the two were fighting furiously.

Tracy made a rush then, to the aid of his comrade; but he found Algernon Aubrey in the way.

"You're my motion, old bean!" said the dandy of St. Kit's genially.

"Get out of the way, you fool——"

"That's for your boko——"

"Yow-ow!"

Bob Bake, held now only by three, put up a sudden and strenuous struggle, but the of the Fourth rushed into the study and laid violent hands on Lumley, dragging him off. Howard and Verney found that their hands were too full with Bob. He wrenched himself loose and rolled off the table.

He landed on his feet, actively, and sprang round on the raggers with a blaze in his eyes.

"Now, then, you rotters!" he panted.

"Go it, old bean!" sang out Algy.

Algy, with all his dandified ways, was much too much for Tracy. That infuriated youth was penned in a corner of the study, Algy's fists keeping him there, and tapping and rapping incessantly. Stubbs was rolling on the carpet with Lumley punching away breathlessly. Harry and Durance were fighting fiercely; and Bob Bake had Verney and Howard to deal with. He dealt with them very effectively.

They faced him together—and Verney was swept off his feet with a terrific right-hander.

He landed on his back on the carpet, gasping; and he stayed there. He did not want any more.

Howard was driven across the study, towards the fireplace, till he stumbled on the fender. He was almost dazed by the shower of blows that rained on him. He dropped his hands at last in sheer desperation.

"Chuck it!" he gasped. "I—I give in."

"He, he, he!" came from Bunny Bootles.

"Lemme alone!" Lumley was howling under the hammering punches of Stubbs. "I give in, you beast! Oh, gad! Yarooch! Lemme gerrup! I chuck it! Peccavi!"

"Had enough?" grinned Stubbs breathlessly.

"Yow—wow—ow! Yes."

Lumley was hors de combat. And Tracy slid down to a sitting position in the corner, where he was penned up by Algernon Aubrey. He, too, had had enough.

"Of the happy family of nuts, only Durance was holding out. And good fighting men as Harry Wilmot was, Durance seemed to be holding his own.

Bob Rake looked round him breathlessly. "All down but one!" he exclaimed. "Thanks, no end, for backing me up like this, you fellows!"

"Don't touch, dear boy," said Algernon Aubrey. "Sure you won't have any more, Tracy?"

"Ow, ow!" moaned Tracy. "I don't want to persuade you, of course, old bean, if you'd rather chuck it," said Algy considerably. "But if you want any more——"

"Grooooooh!" "Then I'll sit on the table and watch the circus," said Algernon Aubrey, with a deep yawn.

There was a yell from the passage. "Cave! Here comes Oliphant!" St. Leger sighed.

"I thought this dashed rumpus would bring a prefect up! Now there's goin' to be a row!"

CHAPTER 19.

After the Fray!

OLIPHANT of the Sixth, the captain of St. Kit's, strode into the top study with a frowning brow. Behind him the passage was swarming with juniors now—all the Fourth had turned out of their studies. Rows and rags were far from uncommon in the Fourth Form passage at St. Kit's; indeed, the Fourth rather prided themselves on being an unruly Form. But a battle-royal on this scale was rather out of the common; and it was not surprising that it had brought the head prefect on the scene.

"Stop that!" roared Oliphant. As Harry and Duranco did not seem to heed, the big Sixth-Former grasped them both, and dragged them apart.

Harry Wilmot dropped his hands at once. Duranco, breathless, with a red stream trickling from his swollen nose, leaned on the wall and gasped for breath.

Oliphant frowned at them. "What does this thumping row mean?" he exclaimed. "Do you know that you can be heard downstairs?"

"Yass, I shouldn't wonder," murmured St. Leger.

"A precious set of hoodlums you look," continued Oliphant. "What's the row about? Sharp!"

"That meddlin' cad——" gasped Tracy. "That nameless rotter——" panted Howard.

"A row over the result of the election, I suppose," said Oliphant.

"Yass, dear boy," said Algy.

"Well, stop it at once!" said Oliphant. "You fellows seem to have come into this study, so I take it you started the row——"

"Ahem!"

"Of course they did," said Tracy. "I know it's the custom for the top study to belong to the captain of the Form," said Oliphant. "But you might give the other fellows time to clear before you wade in to take possession, Wilmot."

Harry flushed. "It's not that!" he exclaimed. "I wasn't thinking of that when I came here."

"Then what did you come in here for? Just to pick a row with Tracy?"

"Just that!" snapped Tracy.

Harry closed his lips. But Bob Rake chimed in:

"Wilmot and St. Leger came in to lend me a hand, Oliphant. I was getting a ragging."

Oliphant understood then. "Oh, I see! You've been ragging this new kid for voting against you, Tracy—is that it?"

"Only—only a lark, really——" stammered Tracy.

"That will do. Have they hurt you," Rake?"

Bob made a grimace. He had been very considerably hurt by the thrashing with the fives bat. But he was not at all disposed to complain to a prefect. He was prepared to deal out Tracy's punishment himself, for that matter.

"Oh, I'm not made of putty," he said cheerfully. "I can stand a bit of a licking. I'm not complaining."

"Good man!" murmured Algy.

"Well, let there be no more of it," said Oliphant. "You hear that, Tracy?"

"Yes, Oliphant," muttered Tracy.

"If there's any more row in this study to-night, you'll hear from me," said the captain of St. Kit's. "You fellows that don't belong here, get out!"

"Come on, old bean," said Algy gracefully, to his chum. "We'll shake the dust of this merry study from our feet—till Monday."

Harry did not speak. He left the study quietly with his elms. Oliphant gave the dishevelled and gasping nuts a warning look, and followed them. Bob Rake was left alone in the lion's den.

But it was not much of a lion's den now. Tracy & Co. had been tamed. After the profuse warning they would hardly have cared to proceed with the ragging; and they were feeling far from fit for any more rags. There was not one of the noble army of nuts who was not showing very plain traces of the combat.

Bob Rake looked at them, and grinned, and dabbed his nose with his handkerchief. "Is it peace, my pippins?" he inquired. "Oh, go an' eat coko!" growled Tracy. "We'll make you squirm, some time!" muttered Lumley.

"Any old time you like," grinned Bob. Tracy & Co. left the study together, to clean up after that terrific scrap, in the dormitory. Bob Rake dabbed his nose again, and looked round him rather ruefully.

"Looks as if I shall have a merry time in this study," he murmured. "Nice, choxy study-mates—I don't think! But what's the odds so long as you're 'appy!"

And after attending to his damages Bob Rake found room for his personal belongings in the study, and proceeded to arrange them—an occupation that kept him agreeably employed till bed-time.

When he joined the Fourth on their way to the dormitory he was looking little the worse for his experiences in the top study. But Tracy & Co. were looking a great deal the worse—and they scowled at Bob in the dormitory. Only Durance did not seem bitter. He came over to the new junior, as he sat on the edge of his bed taking his boots off.

Bob looked up at him quickly, half-expecting assault and battery. Dick Durance smiled slightly.

"All serene," he said. "I'm not on the giddy war-path."

"Glad to hear it, old top," said Bob. "Your nose looks as if it wouldn't stand much more damage."

"Yours isn't exactly a beauty,"

Bob rubbed his rather swollen nose. "It doesn't feel one," he said good-humouredly.

"I want to tell you I'm sorry about the

raggie!" said Durance, in a low voice. "It was rotten reddish, and I'm sorry. That's all."

"Good man," said Bob, rather surprised. "It was a bit rotten, you know—a crowd piling on to one chap. But I don't bear malice. I hope we shall get on all right in the study."

"I hope so," said Durance.

And he walked away—to meet a savage stare from Rex Tracy.

"We're goin' to cut that end," said Tracy angrily. "What are you speakin' to him for, Durance?"

"Oh, rats!"

"Look here——"

"Go and eat coko!" said Durance impatiently.

Which was all the satisfaction that the chief of the nuts received from his rather unruly follower.

Bob Rake had had a rather exciting time on his first day at St. Kit's. Not he slept soundly in the Fourth Form dormitory; and when the rising-bell clanged out in the morning he was the first out of bed, in cheery spirits. And as Bunny Boetles seemed disinclined to rise, Bob obliged him by dragging off his bed-clothes and rolling him out, in sheer exuberance of spirits—a service for which he received anything but thanks from Bunny.

CHAPTER 25.

No Trade!

"JOLLY old show!"

Bob Rake made that remark to himself as he strolled in the old quad at St. Kit's on the following morning.

It was Sunday—and Sunday was a very quiet day at St. Kit's. "Good form" required that "rags" should be barred on Sunday. There were two classes that day, scripture with the Form-master, and Milton; but it was an easy day for the St. Kit's fellows. Generally, "Sunday walks" filled in the leisure time; though Tracy & Co. found solace also in surreptitious cigarettes and in Carton's time there had even been "nap" in the top study. Bob Rake walked round the quad looking about him, much interested in the grey old buildings, the ancient ivy that clung to them,

and the still more ancient cake—some of which had been standing when the Plantagenets reigned in England.

It was all new enough to the youth from "down under," and he liked it all. He thought that he was going to be happy at St. Kit's; but, as a matter of fact, the cheery, good-tempered junior would have been happy anywhere. Quite content with his own company Bob Rake was sauntering round when Bunny Bootles came along and joined him.

Bunny bestowed an amiable grin on him. "Bit dull to-day here," he remarked.

"Not at all," answered Bob.

"Awful bore, Sunday," said Bunny. "But there's no construe, you know—that's a compensation. 'Paradise Lost' is a frightful bore, and awful rot, but it's not so bad as construe, what?"

Bob laughed. "Feeling a bit lonely, I suppose?" said Bunny.

"Oh, no."
"You don't pull with your studymates, of course."

Bob Rake whistled a tune. He was not inclined to make a confidant of the fat junior.

"You'll have a new set to-morrow," said Bunny.

"How's that?" asked Bob, in surprise. "You see, top study always belongs to the Form captain," explained Bunny. "It's always been so, ever since anybody can remember. Carton had it when he was here—and Tracy would have had it, if he'd been elected. Now Wilmot's captain of the Fourth he will claim the captain's study."

"Oh, I see!" said Bob thoughtfully. "He chooses his own studymates," continued Bunny. "He won't let Tracy or Durasco dig in the study, you bet. They'll have to turn out into Study No. 5. If you make yourself agreeable to Wilmot he may let you stay."

"I'm not likely to make myself specially agreeable to Wilmot or anybody else for that sort of reason," said Bob dryly.

"Heily-toity!" said Bunny, with a grin. "You're a bit cheeky for a new kid, Rake. You'll get that taken out of you at St. Kit's."

"Fathead!" said Bob politely.
"Of course, Algy will be in the top study

with Wilmot," said Bunny; "and, of course, little me. Wilmot couldn't part with me. He's expecting me to back him up in the captaincy, and show him the ropes, and all that—in fact, I hardly think he could carry on without my assistance. I'm going to help him," added Bunny generously, "though really, with so many calls on my time, it will be a bit of trouble for me. But I'm the chap for standing by a pal."

"You look it!" said Bob.
"If you like I'll use my influence with Wilmot, and get him to let you keep on in the top study."

"Bow-wow!"
"It's the best study in the Fourth," urged Bunny. "You don't want to be turned out of it, I suppose?"

"No, I don't!" said Bob, rather shortly. "Well, you will be, unless Wilmot consents to let you stay. You see, as Form captain, he decides."

Bob Rake was silent.
He had seen little of Harry Wilmot as far, but he rather liked what he had seen of him. But he was conscious now of a feeling of annoyance. Perhaps it was not Bunny's intention to make mischief. But certainly he was succeeding in doing it, whether intentionally or not.

"If you'd like me to use my influence —"
"Oh, don't be an ass, Bootles," said Bob Rake, rather impatiently.

Bunny coughed.
"All the more room without you, of course," he said. "It practically depends on me whether you're turned out of the study to-morrow or not."

"Give us a rest, fatty."
Bob Rake walked away; but the fat Bunny trotted along by his side. Evidently Bunny was not yet done with the new junior. Although Bob was not yet aware of it, Bunny had a special regard for new fellows—they were Bunny's game, so to speak. New fellows did not know him so well as old fellows, and were naturally less on their guard against Bunny's wiles.

"There's another matter I want to speak to you about, Rake," continued the fat junior. "It's rather important."

"Go ahead."
"Like a silver penknife?"
Bob stared at him.

"A silver penknife?" he repeated.

"Yes."

"Are you giving silver penknives away?" ejaculated Bob.

"Practically," said Bunny. "You see, I'm selling some articles—"

"Selling some articles!"

"That's it! You send a postal-order to a firm, you know, and they send you ten articles to sell among your friends," explained Bunny. "You make a profit—I mean, I'm not doing it for profit. I wouldn't! My idea is to supply fellows with things they need, cheap. Now, I've got a silver penknife that is just the thing you want! Look!"

Bunny rooted in his pockets, and produced a penknife. Bob Rake looked at it.

It was a penknife, certainly; and equally certainly it was not silver. Bunny opened the blades, which looked as if they would cut cheese, provided that it was not a hard cheese.

"Ripping, ain't it?" said Bunny enthusiastically.

"It might rip butter," said Bob. "Looks as if it wouldn't rip anything else—except margarine."

"Hem! I'm selling this knife at seven and six," said Bunny.

"I hope you'll find a purchaser," said Bob cordially. "Bit sorry for the purchaser, though."

Bunny Doobles coughed again.

"You being a friend, I'm going to let you have it for five bob," he said.

"Your mistake," said Bob Rake. "You're not doing anything of the kind, old top."

"How much will you give me for it, then?"

"Nothing at all."

"Shall I say half-a-crown?"

"Say anything you like," said Bob cheerfully. "It's a free country; and speech is free. Say fifteen pounds if you care to."

"Look here, Rake," said Bunny, in a burst of generosity. "I like you! You're the kind of chap I can pal with. I'm going to let you have this splendid silver penknife for eighteenpence."

"I think not!" said Bob, with a grin.

"Dash it all," said Bunny. "I never was a chap for haggling. Make it a fob and the penknife's yours."

"Try again, old top."

"Don't you want this magnificent silver penknife?" demanded Bunny, in a tone more of sorrow than of anger.

"Nix!"

"Well, if you don't want it, don't have it. Don't walk away, Rake—I haven't finished yet. How would you like this ink-eraser? Sixpence."

"I shouldn't like it at all."

"As a pal you can have it for three D."

"Take it away and bury it!"

The ink-eraser disappeared into Bunny's pocket. But the St. Kit's merchant was not finished yet. He dived a fat hand into another pocket and produced a corkscrew.

"That's what I call a bargain," said Bunny, holding up the corkscrew with an ecstatic expression. "That's only two shillings."

"I hope you'll meet somebody who wants to buy a corkscrew," said Bob, who was beginning to be rather entertained.

"Every fellow needs one of course," said Bunny. "You can have it for eighteenpence."

"I'll wait till I feel the need."

"I say, Rake, you're jolly hard to please, you know. But I've got a musical-box here. Look—"

"My hat! You are a sort of walking Whiteley's!" said Bob.

"It plays Elgar's 'Pomp and Circumstance' march," said Bunny. "Tinker Smith was delighted with it—Smith's musical, you know. He offered me seven-and-six, but it couldn't be done. But I'm letting you have it for five bob."

"You're not," said Bob, shaking his head.

"I am, really—"

"I may be mistaken," chuckled Bob Rake, "but I really think you're not."

"Well, look at this fountain-pen—"

Bob Rake walked away instead of looking at the new article produced from Bunny's capacious pockets. The fat junior shouted after him.

"Don't you want this splendid fountain-pen, Rake?"

"No thanks," said Bob, over his shoulder.

"Only four bob—"

"Four rats!"

"Look here, you cheeky cad—"

Bob Rake chuckled, and walked off. He was growing fed-up with the St. Kit's

merchant, and the many articles he had for sale.

"Rotter!" roared Bonny, in great wrath.

And the fat junior wandered away disappointedly—doubtless seeking another purchaser for his many valuable "articles."

CHAPTER 21.

Quite a Good Stunt!

"**A**FTER you with that match!"

Tracy was the speaker.

The nuts of the Fourth were gathered in the top study, after going through the pains and pangs of Milton with Mr. Rawlings. Perhaps they felt that they were entitled to a little relaxation after exploring the beauties of the great blind poet. Their relaxation was after a form that would have earned them a severe censure from Mr. Rawlings if he had beheld it. Probably Dr. Chenies, the reverend Head of St. Kit's, would have almost fainted if he had seen Tracy & Co. smoking cigarettes round the study fire on a Sunday afternoon.

Durance passed the match to Rex Tracy, who lighted his cigarette and scowled over it. Tracy was not in a good temper. His nose was a little swollen, and one of his eyes had a "mouse" under it—relics of the scrap in the study on Saturday evening. He was not feeling at peace with himself or with the universe; and the Head's eloquent sermon that morning in school chapel had had no effect whatever on Tracy—probably because he had slept through it.

So Rex Tracy smoked and scowled, and Durance smoked and smiled cynically, and Verney minor, Howard and Lumley smoked and looked vacant—as they generally looked whether they were smoking or not.

"That cad's leavin' the study alone, anyhow," Lumley remarked. Apparently he referred to the boozey youth from "down under."

"He'd better," growled Tracy.

"Just like him to butt in," said Howard.

"Fellows do butt into their own studies," remarked Durance.

Tracy turned on him with a snap.

"You're bound to have something to say for the fellow," he said. "You spoke to

him in the dorm last night. You know we're goin' to cut him."

"Yes, rather!" said Verney emphatically.

"Dear men," said Durance. "Let your Uncle Dick address you for your own good. Are we givin' up this study to-morrow in the cheery new captain of the Fourth?"

"No!" himed Tracy.

"Can you help it?" asked Lumley. "Top study has always belonged to the Form captain. It's the rule. I remember old Carion collared it fast enough when he was elected, and you backed him up, Durance, and you, Tracy. I don't see—"

"Lots of things you don't see," yawned Durance. "The fact is, this is the most comfy study in the Fourth. I don't want to turn out."

"I don't, either," said Tracy.

"It's so nice to have a decent study to ask our pals into—dear chaps like these fellows," Durance nodded towards Lumley and company. "The fact is, I think it's time a new rule was made about the top study. Harry Wilmot is Form captain right enough. But he's practically a new fellow at St. Kit's. I rather admire the chap."

"Oh, you do, do you?" snarled Tracy.

Durance nodded with irritating coolness.

"I do! I detest him like poison, personally. But from a reasonable point of view, as a reasonable chap, I rather admire him. And I'm determined that he's not goin' to bag this study if I can help it."

"You're a queer fish, Dick," said Tracy. "Give me half a chance to keep the study, and see how I'll jump at it."

"We'll back you up," said Howard dubiously. "But—but—if the prefects are called in—"

"Nameless—I mean Wilmot—isn't the kind of chap to go howlin' to the prefects," drawled Durance.

"Well, that's so," assented Howard.

"He's the kind of chap to stick up for his rights—I mean, what he may be pleased to consider his rights," remarked Verney.

"Quite so! But he's the kind of chap to depend on himself to get them."

"He's rather hefty," suggested Howard.

"You don't feel inclined to take him on with the mittens, old nut?"

"No, thanks," said Howard very hastily.

"I was fightin' him last night," said Durance. "I give him a bit of a lesson."

But if Oliphant hadn't interrupted us he would have knocked me right out."

"Oh, no!" said Howard. "You could lick him!"

"Rubbish! I couldn't," said Durance calmly. "And I'm the only chap present who'd got the nerve to tackle him at all—"

"Look here——" roared Tracy.

Durance waved his cigarette at his exasperated chum.

"Shush, old man! Let's deal in facts," he said. "Now, last evenin' that Cornstalk covey, Rake, put up a terrific scrap against us."

"We're goin' to make him squirm for it," said Tracy savagely.

"Listen to the merry voice of wisdom," said Durance amiably. "We're not goin' to make Bob Rake sit up. We're goin' to take him to our manly bosoms and treat him as one of the happy family."

"We're not!" yelled Howard, rubbing his nose.

"We are!"

"You silly ass——"

"You chunky clump——"

"Hold on, you fellows!" said Tracy.

"Dick's got some stunt in his queer brain—you know him. Go ahead, you ass, and tell us what you're thinkin'."

"I'm thinkin' of keepin' the top study," said Durance. "Don't you see? Bob Rake is the hottest fightin' man who ever happened at St. Kit's. There are fellows in the Shell, and even in the Fifth, who couldn't stand up to him. Under the peculiar circumstances, Bob Rake is goin' to be an asset to this study. We don't want him here. Granted! But we'd rather have Rake here than turn out and leave the study to Harry Nameless—I mean Wilmot. See the wheeze? We take up Rake an' make much of him—treat him as a pal—and we use him to knock spits off anybody who tries to bag captain's study from us."

Tracy whistled.

"Well, you've got a head on you, Dick," said Lumley admiringly. "I always said you had."

"Thanks!" yawned Durance.

Tracy wrinkled his brows in thought. He disliked Bob Rake—as he disliked any fellow who was heavy and wholesome and thoroughly decent. But his dislike of Rake was meek and mild compared with his

bitter hatred for Harry Wilmot. He would have been willing to greet Bob as a long-lost brother for the sake of a score over the captain of the Fourth.

He nodded his head at last.

"Good man!" he said. "You're no fool, Dick!"

"Sorry I can't say the same for you, old sonnet," said Durance genially.

"Oh, don't be an ass! Rake's a new fellow and probably won't know about captain's custom," said Tracy. "If he does we can tell him it's all rot. Stands to reason he'd like to dig in this study, and will regret bein' turned out. We'll rub that in."

"Hard!" grinned Lumley.

"I think very likely he could lick Nameless in a stand-up fight!" continued Tracy.

"Anyhow, I'd like to see them at it, confound them both!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Dick's right about Nameless bein' unlikely to call in the prefects," said Tracy thoughtfully. "He's a chap to stand up for himself. If he's chucked out of the study—and kept out—he will have to knuckle under. Form captain can't go whinin' to the prefects about his wrongs, really."

"That's it!" said Durance. "Bob Rake will be no end of an asset."

"Sort of bulldog to guard the study," said Howard; and the nuts chuckled.

"So that's why you spoke to him in dorm last night," said Tracy. "Of course, I couldn't guess that, Dick!"

Durance flushed.

"That wasn't the reason," he said curtly.

"Then what was it?"

"Nothin' you'd understand," said Durance. "I've thought of this stunt to-day—this mornin', in fact, while the Head was wheezin' to us in chapel. I rather think that with Rake to back us up we can keep the study. It's worth tryin' anyhow."

"Yes, rather!" said Verney.

Tracy's eyes glistened.

"What-ho!" he said. "We'll have the ruffian here, talk to him nicely, stand him a spread, and enlist him fairly on our side. The beast hits frightfully hard—all the better if he's hittin' Wilmot. How are we goin' to ret about it, Dick? Give us the programme."

"Easy enough! He's not a suspicious

chap—you can see that in his face. Tell him you're sorry for the misunderstandin', and ask him to let bygones be bygones. Make him one of us."

"I'll do it. After all, I can find a chance of lakin' it out of him later on," remarked Tracy thoughtfully.

Duramen set his lips.

"There's a limit," he said icily.

"Oh, rot!"

"I mean it, Tracy. I'm up against Harry Nameless all the time, an' I want to keep the study, but if Bob Rake is taken in here to be one of our crowd, it's goin' to be honest Injun."

"You're gettin' jolly particular," sneered Tracy.

"Perhaps. But I mean what I say."

Tracy shrugged his shoulders.

"Oh, have it your own way," he said.

"Anyhow, we keep the study. Dash it all, if we keep the study through Rake I shall feel quite nice to him. I'll go and look for the beastly prize-fighter now."

"Do!"

And Rex Tracy quitted the top study in search of Bob Rake of the Fourth.

CHAPTER 32.

Ben Joins Up!

BOB RAKE was surprised. After his reception in the top study the previous evening he had expected war to the knife with his study-mates.

Tracy & Co. were still showing signs of the combat, and they had not impressed Bob as being fellows of a very generous and forgiving disposition. But they had, apparently, quite got over that early disagreement.

Bob had been walking in the quad by himself that afternoon—perhaps beginning to feel a little lonely. He knew hardly anybody at St. Kit's so far. Certainly he had been received in a rather friendly way by Study No. 5. But Study No. 5 did not seem to be bothering any further about him. Algernon Aubrey St. Leger was wrestling with Milton, and Harry Wilmet was helping him as it happened, so if they thought of the new boy they had no time to give him. Bunny's fascinating company certainly could have been purchased along with his "articles." But Bob greatly pre-

ferred solitude to Bunny's society. He began to realise how lonely a fellow could feel in a crowd—there were over two hundred fellows at St. Kit's, and nobody for him to speak to except a chance word in passing to a fellow or two whom he barely knew.

So when Rex Tracy came up to him in the quadrangle with a cordial air Bob was more than disposed to meet his advances halfway. Bob never bore malice for his own part, and if his study-mates were disposed to be friendly, Bob certainly did not feel inclined to refuse the olive-branch. And Tracy's manner was quite friendly.

"Where are you havin' tea?" was his first question.

"In hall, I suppose," answered Bob.

"We all feed in our studies here," said Tracy. "I hope you're not goin' to keep up that rather unfortunate quarrel. Rake. We're all ready to admit that we were rather hasty."

At which Bob stared.

"You see, I was feelin' no end sore at bein' chucked out in the election," said Tracy, with an air of great frankness. "I called you some names I was sorry for afterwards. I admit I was ratty. But I'd had a dashed big disappointment, you know."

Bob nodded.

He hardly knew what to make of this; but he was not a suspicious fellow, and he had no malice or ill-feeling in his composition.

"We're study-mates," said Tracy. "If you feel inclined to let bygones be bygones, come along to the study and feed with us."

"My dear chap," said Bob cheerily, "that's just what I should like. We had a scrap yesterday but there's no harm done. Let's forget all about it."

"Then come along, old fellow. We're goin' to make it a bit of a house-warmin', to greet you as a new member of the family circle," said Tracy.

And Bob followed Tracy into the Selmol House, his heart considerably lighter. That feeling of being "left" alone in a crowd had quitted him, and he was feeling quite cordial towards Tracy & Co.

It did not even cross his mind that Tracy had an "axe to grind."

He came up the staircase with Tracy, and two or three of the Fourth stared at them, surprised to see them together, and apparently on amicable terms.

In the top study, Rake was greeted with great politeness by Durance, who was Tracy's study mate there; and by Howard and Lumley and Verney minor, who were honoured guests.

He was soon chatting away quite cheerily with the miss—the cigarette having been laid aside for the occasion—and when Bunny Bootles rolled in, and Tracy helped him out with an elegant host, Bob Rake grinned, as Bunny had reported so indignantly in Study No. 5.

When the tuckshop opened in the afternoon, Verney minor departed for supplies, and Durance and Tracy set the table. Bob Rake was not allowed to help—he was a distinguished guest.

"You're our guest for to-day, old fellow," Tracy said to him; "to-morrow you begin as a regular member of the study. But just at present you're the merry honoured guest."

"Right you are," said Bob, with a smile. And he sat in a comfortable armchair, and warmed his toes at the bright fire, while the other juniors were busy.

Verney minor returned with the good things for tea. Then talk switched round to the customary evacuation of the study.

"What's this talk about this study belonging to Wilmot?" Bob Rake asked, looking round. "Isn't it our study?"

"Yes, rather!" said Tracy.

"Tracy's and mine and yours," said Durance.

"But what sort of a claim has Wilmot to it?" asked Bob. "Elephant was saying something about that here last evening."

"You see, this study belonged to the Form captain in Carton's time," said Durance blandly. "Now Wilmot is Form captain he's puttin' in a claim to it."

"That doesn't seem very reasonable."

"It isn't."

"Wilmot struck me as being rather a sensible chap," said Bob. "Of course, I haven't seen much of him. He treated me rather decently last night, though. If he's got a genuine claim to the study—"

"Let me tell you exactly how it stands," said Durance, while Tracy poured out the tea and Lumley buttered the muffins. "There's been a sort of custom for the captain of the Form to choose his own study. This study bein' the best in the passage, he naturally chooses this one."

"I see."

"But it's only a custom—nothin' in it.

Of course, when old Carton was captain he was a friend of ours, and we let him in without makin' a fuss. It's different with Wilmot, who's no friend of ours. Besides, he would want to bring Algy St. Leger and Bunny Bootles with him. That means we should have to clear. Now, why the thump should we clear out of our own study?" said Durance.

Bob Rake nodded.

"Blissed if I see why," he said. "It seems to me not."

"Of course!" said Tracy, with a wink to his comrades which Rake did not observe.

"But if it's an old custom—always observed—" said Bob; with a doubtful glance at his study-mates.

"More or less of a custom," explained Durance. "It comes to this—that the Form captain bags the study if the chaps in it will let him. Now, Bunny Bootles had an idea of puttin' up as captain—"

Bob chuckled.

"Suppose, by a giddy miracle, he had got in," said Durance; "think anybody would have turned out of his study at Bunny's order?"

"It's, ha! Not likely!"

"Well, then, if they wouldn't for Bunny why for Wilmot?" said Durance. "I don't see why we're to be bullied out of our study."

"That's what it comes to," said Tracy. "Another lump of sugar, Rake? Try those lemon patties—they're good."

"Fact is, we're stickin' to the study," said Durance. "We're not goin' to be evicted without a fight for it, anyhow. It's been our study for terms, and we're keepin' it."

"Well, I must say it's pretty thick for fellows to be turned out of their study," said Bob. "Of course, I don't know much yet about St. Kit's manners and customs. But I think that seems rather thick. What will happen if you refuse to turn out?"

"Oh, a row, I expect," said Durance carelessly. "Study No. 5 has always been up against this study, and there will be some more of it. That's all. I don't like Wilmot much—though he's all right in his place. But his place is his own study—not ours. If he tries to built in here I'm goin' to resist."

"Same here!" said Tracy. And he looked at Bob Rake.

"If the whole study stands together they

can do nothin'," said Durance. "But we won't persuade Rake into it. He's a new chap, and we don't want to set him backin' up against his Form captain. If there's a fight, Rake can remain neutral, and leave it to us."

Durance could not have worded it more cleverly.

"I'm not likely to do that!" exclaimed Bob warmly. "If there's going to be a scrap for this study, you can bet your Sunday socks that I shall have a fat in it."

"Well, the more the merrier," said Durance amiably. "A chap is expected to back up his own study—but we don't want to drag you into a row—"

"Not at all!" said Tracy, with another ussueen wink.

"You can count me in," said Bob at once. "Dash it all—if there's an old custom about the study, we'll start a new custom—and a new custom is at good as an old custom any day."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the nuts.

Even Tracy beamed on the sturdy Cornstalk. There was no doubt that the recruit had been secured—and that he was an extremely valuable recruit. Tea in the top study that Sunday afternoon was a great success.

CHAPTER 23. Trouble Ahead!

ALGERNON AUBREY ST. LEGER were a thoughtful look in class on Monday morning.

If Mr. Rawlings noticed it, and supposed that St. Leger was giving unusual thought to his lessons, Mr. Rawlings was mistaken. Algy was thinking of a matter much more important than lessons.

That day Wilnot & Co. were to take possession of "Captain's study."

But so far, the top study had shown no sign of moving.

Harry Wilnot had told Tracy he expected to take possession that evening; and Tracy had shrugged his shoulders.

That was all, so far.

But when the party came in from their ramble after dinner that day, they found a paper pinned on the door of the top study. It was evidently the composition of Bunny Bootles—the spelling alone proved that. It ran:

"NOTIS!

"You nuts have got to clear. Anybody fownd in this study after six o'clock will be clucked out on his neck.

"Signed,

"CUTHBERT A. BOOTLES."

The orthography left much to be desired, but Cuthbert Arrnhald Bootles had made his meaning clear.

"Message from the enemy!" grinned Durance.

"Cheek!" said Bob, frowning.

"We'll send a message back."

Durance pocilled across the paper, in large letters:

"Any checky cad wedging into the top study without permission will be kicked out.

"Signed,

"R. DURANCE."

"You fellows sign after me," said Durance.

"You bet!" said Tracy.

And he signed "Rex Tracy" to the paper and handed it, with the pencil, to the new junior.

"R. Rake" was written as a third signature at once.

Then Durance pinned the paper on the door of Study No. 5. It was left there to be discovered by the captain of the Fourth at his leisure.

It was not till after lessons that Harry Wilnot came up to his study. Then he found the defiance of the nuts on his door.

He knitted his brows as he looked at it.

Algernon Aubrey St. Leger carefully screwed his celebrated eyeglass into his eye and scanned the paper.

"By Jove! Rake's backin' them up!" said Algy.

"They will have to turn out!" said Harry quietly.

"Yes, no doubt about that. It's our study. Why, when Carton became captain, a term or two ago, he collared the study fast enough. Durance and Tracy backed him up, and turned out the chap there."

Harry took down the paper and tore it across.

A few minutes later there was a new paper pinned on the door of the top study, in Harry's handwriting. It ran:

"This study is required by the owners at six o'clock.

"H. WILNOT."

That brief notice was found by Tracy & Co. when they came up to tea.

"Short and sweet, what?" said Durance. "The dear man doesn't waste any politeness on us."

"Apparently not!" said Bob frowning.

"We'll give him his answer."

"What-ho!" said Tracy.

Without removing the paper, Durance wrote on it:

"GO AND EAT COKE!"

Then the nuts went in to tea.

At six o'clock the top study was fairly crowded. Tracy and Durance and Bob Rake were there, as owners; Lumley and Howard and Verney minor and Melton were there as guests. There were seven juniors present to deal with any attempted invasion—and among them was the "baffled" new fellow that had ever come in St. Kit's. As six o'clock struck from the clock-tower Tracy & Co. prepared for trouble.

CHAPTER 24.

War!

WAR!

The last stroke of six had died away when there came a tap at the door of the top study.

Tracy looked round quickly at his comrades, and called out:

"Come in!"

Harry Wilmot entered.

"Hallo! What may you happen to want, Nameless?" yawned Tracy. "I don't remember askin' you here."

"You saw my notice on the door?"

"Yes. You saw our answer to it?"

"You are pretty well aware that the top study belongs to the captain of the Form," said Harry.

"Not the least little bit in the world," answered Tracy. "It happens to be our study."

"Are you clearing out?"

"No."

"I'm not looking for trouble," said Harry patiently. "If you want time to change out, I'm willing to wait."

"You'll have to wait a good many terms."

"We're not goin'!" said Durance lazily. "Too much of a lag to change studies, for one thing."

"If you mean that——"

"Honest injun."

"We shall take possession of the study," said the captain of the Fourth. "I hope you are not roused up in this, Rake."

Bob Rake hesitated.

"The fact is, it seems a bit of a cheek to turn fellows out of their study," he said.

"You don't know how the matter stands. It's the St. Kit's custom for the Form captain to take the top study. It's never been disputed that I've heard of."

"We don't go much on old customs down under," said Bob, with a grin. "New customs are good enough for us."

"Are you backing up these fellows in sticking to my study?" asked Harry rather sharply.

Bob looked grim. He did not like the tone in which the question was asked, and his back was up.

"I don't see that it's your study," he rapped out. "And I'm backing up my study-mates, certainly."

"Hear hear!" said the nuts.

"Then there's nothing more to be said," said Harry Wilmot, his eyes glinting. "I will give you fellows half an hour to get out."

"And then there'll be an earthquake—what?" asked Durance insolently.

"Then I shall take possession."

"How do you propose to do it?" sneered Tracy. "There's three of us, and four chaps here to back us up."

Harry shrugged his shoulders.

"At half-past six we take possession," he said.

"Go an' eat coke!"

"Get out, you nameless bounder!"

"Rats!"

"Go and chop chips!"

It was a chorus of defiance from the nuts. Harry Wilmot walked out of the study without heeding it, and closed the door after him.

Algernon Aubrey St. Leger gave him an inquiring look as he came back into Study No. 5.

"Trouble?" he asked.

"Yes."

Alcy sighed deeply.

"Life's a tough proposition," he said. "Trouble's always croppin' up. I haven't settled yet about the sofa, and now we haven't settled about the study. Wince we got to thrash these diffurs all round!"

Harry smiled.

"I think there'll be a scrap," he said.

"Oh dear!"

"Count me in," said Bunny Bootles valiantly. "You can leave that new chap, Rake, to me. I owe him one or two!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Algy.

"You silly ass! What are you chortling at?" howled Runny.

"Don't be in a hurry, old bean!" said Algy thoughtfully. "They may change their minds and walk out."

"I've given them half an hour."

"Good! That will give me time to change my clothes."

St. Leger strolled out of the study.

Stubbs of the Fourth looked in a few minutes later, and gave the Form captain a nod and a grin.

"Tracy sticking to the top study—what?" he asked.

Harry nodded.

"We're ready to back you up," said Stubbs cordially. "Tracy's got a crowd in there—six or seven, I think."

"Seven," said Harry.

"Then we'll jolly well get a crowd," said Stubbs, with a war-like look. "Let's see, you and Algy, that's two; me, that's three; Bootles is no good—"

"Yah!" from Bunny.

"Scott and Wheatford, that's five," said Stubbs. "Myers and Jones minor, that's seven. I say, is Rake backing them up?"

"Yes."

"He's a bit hefty," said Stubbs. "You'd better take him on, Wilmot—you're the fighting man of the Fourth, you know. You can leave Durance to me—he's the best man. The others ain't worth much at scrapping."

Harry Wilmot paused before replying. A fight with Bob Rake was about the last thing he desired.

But he realised that it was inevitable now.

Bob was obviously the most dangerous fighting man in the top study crowd, and it was up to the captain of the Form to "take him on." Indeed, it was not only up to him, but essential, for there was evidently nobody else in the Fourth who was able to stand up to Bob Rake. Even Harry Wilmot was likely to have his hands full with that stalwart youth.

"Queer that Rake should back them up, after the way they treated him," said Stubbs. "I suppose they've talked him

round. That chap Durance could talk the hind leg off a mule. But you can handle him, Wilmot."

"I hope so."

"We'll mop 'em up," said Stubbs confidently; and he departed to rally the forces for the attack.

Algernon Aubrey came back into the study, and Harry grinned as he saw him. Algy had changed his elegant clothes for the oldest suit he could find. The old clothes had apparently been routed out of some dusty corner; they looked decidedly dusty and crumpled. Nobody would have taken Algy at the present moment for the best-dressed and most fastidious fellow at St. Kilda.

"Ready for the giddy fray," announced Algy. "Is it half-past?"

"Just on," said Harry.

Bunny Bootles rolled rather hastily out of the armchair.

"I've got to see a chap about—about selling him an article," he said hurriedly. "I'll be back by the—the time you start."

"Hold on!" exclaimed Algy.

"I'm in rather a hurry—"

"Hold on, I tell you!" But Runny disappeared hastily out of the study.

"Here we are!" exclaimed Stubbs, appearing in the doorway, with Wheatford, Scott, Myers, and Jones minor in the rear.

"Ready, you chaps?"

"All ready," said St. Leger.

"This way, you chaps!"

Algernon Aubrey led the way into the passage.

Harry Wilmot & Co. moved on towards the top study. But doubtless Runny's engagement proved a prolonged one—for he did not come back, and the campaign was waged without Runny's valuable assistance.

CHAPTER 25.

The Fight for the Study!

HARRY WILMOT threw open the door of the top study.

He stepped in, with St. Leger at his side. Stubbs & Co. brought up the rear.

Rex Tracy gave the newcomers a bitter look. He was not quite prepared for Harry's following. Only half of the Form had voted for Harry at the election. But his supporters were evidently prepared to

stand by him, not only in voting, but in dealing with recalcitrant members of the Form. And Tracy's supporters were not quite so keen on offering support. A number of the fellows who had voted for Rex Tracy in the election had prudently decided to keep clear of the struggle for the possession of the captain's study. In the first place, Tracy was palpably in the wrong; the custom of captain's study was old and well-established, and well-known; and in Carton's time Tracy himself had helped the Form captain to enforce the custom. Bob Rake, in fact, was the only fellow who did not realize that Tracy & Co. were hopelessly in the wrong—owing to his inexperience of St. Kit's ways and manners and customs.

Lumley and Melton, Verney minor and Howard were all the supporters Tracy and Durance had been able to muster. Lane and Leigh had found an engagement elsewhere—O'Donoghue plumped tea with a prefect, and Catesby shrugged his shoulders and merely laughed, when he was requested to join up. It would have been easy for Harry Wilmot to raise odds against the nuts; but he had disdained to do that. It was a match of seven a side, as Algy expressed it—but there was no doubt that Harry's seven were tougher than the opposing septette.

With the exception of Bob Rake, and perhaps Durance, there was not much good fighting material in the top study.

"Here we are!" announced Stubbs, over Harry's shoulder.

Tracy scowled at him.

"What do you want?" he asked. "You've no bloney here, Stubbs."

"As much as your pals," answered Stubbs. "Count them out and you can count us out, if you like. We've only come to make it a fair game."

"I'd rather take possession peacefully, you fellows," said Harry Wilmot, looking at Tracy & Co.; "but you can't expect us to back down. This is our study, and we want it—on the principle of the thing."

"Go and eat coke!" scowled Tracy.

"You're not getting out!"

"No," said Tracy desperately.

"Then you'll be put."

Wilmot made a step forward—his followers pressed on behind. Harry's lips were hard set. Possibly, at that moment, he would have retreated—but matters had

reached a point at which retreat was scarcely possible.

All the nuts realised that they were "in for it" now, and they screwed up their courage to the sticking-point.

"Play up, you fellows," said Durance.

"Back up, Rake!"

Bob Rake seemed a little dubious. But it was too late for him to consider the rights and the wrongs of the matter.

The study was invaded; and his study-mates called on him to back up. There was only one answer that Bob could make.

He strode forward to meet the invaders. And his undaunted front encouraged Tracy & Co.

"Get out!" rapped out Bob.

"Can't be done, dear old bean," said Algy. "May I gently suggest your gettin' out yourself?"

Harry Wilmot pushed Algy gently aside.

"You attend to Durance," he said.

"My dear old bean—"

"Rake's my man," said Harry. "Now then, you chaps. Back up!" shouted the captain of the Fourth.

"Hurrah!" roared Stubbs & Co.

And there was a rush to collar Rex Tracy & Co.

CHAPTER 25.

Mr. Rawlings Chips In!

HARRY WILMOT and Bob Rake singled one another out, naturally. Each was conscious of being the best fighting man on his side—obviously so, Algy and Durance closed in strife.

Stubbs & Co had easier tasks. Stubbs started on Tracy, and they fought furiously.

Myers and Wilmot and Jones minor were not called upon to show much prowess. For Verney minor, Melton, and Howard defended themselves very feebly. Scott had rather a harder task with Lumley, but he had the upper hand from the beginning.

In the Fourth Form passage outside, the rest of the Form were crowded—looking on breathlessly.

Melton was the first "out."

He went whirling out of the top study, tripped over the step, and plunged headlong into the crowd in the passage, who greeted him with loud laughter.

Verney minor came next, like a stone from a catapult.

Howard was the third; he came staggering out, and a heavy boot planted behind him accelerated his departure with great suddenness.

The three nuts picked themselves up in the passage, amid loud laughter—and did not return to the top study.

Evidently they had had enough.

They limped away, nursing their injuries, and gasping for breath, deserting their great chief in his hour of need.

In the top study three of the invaders stood idle; fair play restraining them from joining in the combat after each had disposed of his adversary. Myers and Wheatford and Jones minor sat on the study table and cheered on their comrades.

Tracy was fighting hard, putting up a fight that rather excited the surprise of the Fourth. But for chance's sake Tracy could not give in without doing his utmost.

But it suited not, as a poet would say. Stubbs was not nearly so elegant or fastidious as Rex Tracy, but he was a much surdier fellow, and in much better condition.

He cornered Tracy by the fireplace, and hammered him till Tracy, at last, dropped his hands, breathless and spent.

Then Stubbs picked him up with a grasp round his waist, and fairly carried him to the door of the study, and deposited him in the passage, amid yells of laughter from the onlookers.

Tracy sat there and blinked.

Stubbs remained on guard in the doorway, quite ready for Tracy if he should venture back; but Tracy was too spent to make a further attack. He sat and gasped for several minutes, and then picked himself up and leaned on the wall, still gasping.

He was joined at length by Lumley.

Scott and Lumley came reeling out of the study together, in desperate combat, and it was Lumley who went sprawling to the floor. The Scottish junior stood over him breathlessly.

"Any more?" he panted.

"Ow!" gasped Lumley. "No! Ow, ow!"

Scott turned back and joined Stubbs in the doorway.

"Looks like our win," grinned Stubbs. "I say, St. Leger, do you want a hand with Durance?"

"Thanks, no, dear boy."

Durance looked like keeping Algernon Aubrey busy; but as he glanced round the

study, and saw that only Bob Rake remained, Durance dropped his hands.

"Call it off, old top," he said.

"Certainly, dear boy," said St. Leger. "It is rather exhaustin' work, punchin' your silly head! But you've got to go."

Durance laughed breathlessly.

"Leave it to the giddy palestins," he said. "I'll go if Rake goes—you go if Wilmot goes."

Algy nodded.

"That's not a bad idea," he assented. "Saves trouble, begad! But, anyhow, we're not givin' up the study."

"Take a rest, old top, and give your chin a rest," said Durance.

The two juniors were glad to sit down. Only Harry Wilmot and Rake were still engaged in combat now. But that looked like a battle of the giants.

Both of them looked much the worse for wear; but neither showed the slightest inclination to yield.

"By gad!" murmured Durance. "That Cornstalk can scrap!"

"So can Wilmot, dear boy."

"Yes—it's worth watchin'. Two to one on the Cornstalk, in quids, Algy."

St. Leger shook his head regretfully.

"Nothin' doin', dear boy. Under the benign influence of my pal Wilmot I've given up such naughty things."

"Fathead!" said Durance.

"Shall we begin again?" asked Algy politely.

"What's the good, ast? Let's watch."

"Oh, I don't mind!" yawned St. Leger.

"There'll be a prefect or a Form-master along soon," remarked Stubbs. "Go it, you fellows!"

Wilmot and Rake were going it, there was no mistake about that. Outside the study Tracy and Lumley bared with rage. But they did not venture to attempt to return. Melton and Howard and Verney minor had quite disappeared from view. Bob Rake, the new recruit, was the last of the champions of the top study—and the most redoubtable. Had Wilmot's followers lent him their aid, Bob would indubitably have been ejected from the study with ignominy. But Harry did not want help.

How the fight would have ended no one present knew—but a warning cry came from the passage.

"Cave!"

"Mr. Howlings!"

There was a scattering of the juniors. The master of the Fourth came rustling

into the top study. Harry Wilmot and Dick stopped fighting at once, and stood breathless and considerably bruised and battered—and Mr. Rawlings stared at them in something like horror.

"Upon my word!" exclaimed the Form-master.

"Now look out for the giddy fireworks!" murmured Algy to Durance. "Why the dickens couldn't Oliphant come instead of Rawlings? Can't argue the point with a merry Form-master?"

"Wilmot! Rake!"

"Yes, sir!" gasped the two horses.

"How dare you fight in this manner—without gloves, too? I am shocked—I am disgusted! What are you fighting about?"

No answer.

"Wilmot, you have just been elected captain of the Fourth," exclaimed Mr. Rawlings severely. "Is this how you take up the position?"

Harry bit his lip, but he did not answer.

"I am surprised at you, Wilmot!" said the Fourth Form-master. "Very much surprised and shocked! What quarrel can you possibly have with Rake—a new boy in the school? This is scandalous!"

The captain of the Fourth crimsoned.

"I shall report this to the Head, Wilmot."

"Very well, sir!" said Harry quietly.

"I think it is probable that Dr. Chenies will deprive you of your position as captain of the Fourth, in view of this, as it appears to me an unjustifiable attack on a new junior—"

"Oh, gad!" murmured Algy.

Tracy, in the passage, looked at Lumley, and his eyes gleamed.

But Bob Rake spoke out at once.

"Wilmot wasn't to blame, sir."

"Indeed!"

"We're fighting for the study, sir," said Bob loyally. "Wilmot thinks he ought to have it, and we think we ought to keep it—and so—"

"Bless my soul!" said Mr. Rawlings.

"So that is the case, Wilmot?"

"Yes, sir."

"You should have told me so."

No answer.

"That alters the matter very much," said the Form-master. "Am I to understand, Rake, that you and the others refused to give up the study?"

"Just that, sir," said Bob, dabbing his nose.

"As a new boy, you are excusable, Rake—doubtless you do not know our customs yet. But you, Durance—you were perfectly well aware that this is the Form captain's study."

Durance did not speak.

"This study will be given up to the captain of the Fourth immediately," said Mr. Rawlings. "You should not have taken the matter into your own hands in this way, Wilmot. But undoubtedly the rule must be observed. Durance—Tracy—Rake—you hear my command? This study is to be given up immediately to the proper owners. It should have been given up on Saturday. I will send up the page to remove your belongings. And if any further fighting takes place I will report every participator in it to the Head for a flogging."

And with that Mr. Rawlings swept away.

CHAPTER 27.

IN POSSESSION!

"OUR win!" yawned Algernon Aubrey—St. Leger.

Durance shrugged his shoulders. "Can't back up against a Form-master," he said. "You shouldn't have had the study otherwise. I'm not so sure you'll have it yet."

"I rather think so, dear boy."

Harry Wilmot and Bob Rake were eyeing one another grimly. Both were excited, and both had received hard knocks. Both were quite prepared to go on with the combat, but for the Form-master's command.

"I suppose we've got to chuck it!" said Bob.

"I suppose so," said Harry.

"No reason why we shouldn't finish somewhere else."

"No reason at all."

"I'll see you later, then," said Bob grimly.

"You'll find me ready."

Bob Rake nodded, and left the study. Dick Durance followed him out, with a shrug of the shoulders.

Algernon Aubrey looked at his chess with a grin.

"Our win!" he said.

"Looks like it," said Harry cheerfully. "I wish Rawlings hadn't dipped in."

though. We could have settled the matter for ourselves."

"Yess. These Form-masters never will scind their own himcy!" said Algernon Aubrey. "Wilnot, old bean, come and get a wash. You look as if you want one—and I know I do! Lucky I thought of changin' my clobber, wasn't it?"

And Algernon Aubrey quitted the disputed study with his chum, Bunny Bootles looked round him with great satisfaction.

Having been too late for the scrap, Bunny was at least in time to share the fruits of victory. He had a strong suspicion that Algy and the captain of the Fourth would have been pleased to leave him behind in Study No. 5 when they changed studies. But Bunny had no intention of being left. When Tackle, the page, came up for the "moving job," Bunny gave him jolly directions. After the belongings of Tracy & Co had been taken out of the top study, Algy's expensive carpet was laid there, and then Bunny Bootles' possessions were transferred. Bunny saw to that first. When Wilnot and Algy returned from attending to their personal damages, he intended them to find him installed in the study as an inmate.

They came back and found Bunny ensconced in the study.

Algy stared at Bunny.

"Wilnot," he grinned, "do you think you can stand Bunny in the study, if I can?"

"Yes," said Harry, laughing. "I'll leave it to you."

"Then we'll let him stay on one condition—that he never tries to sell us any articles," said Algy.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Done!" said Bunny at once.

The "moving job" was over at last, and Tackle was satisfactorily tipped and dismissed.

Harry Wilnot & Co. settled down at once in their new quarters.

They started prep in the top study—though Harry found prep rather painful that evening. His scrap with Bob Rake had told on him. His nose was swollen, and one of his eyes persisted in winking. And he had a good many aches and pains in various parts of his person.

He was glad when prep was over.

After prep there was a supper in the top study—a sort of house-warming, presided over by Algernon Aubrey St. Leger.

Supplies were ample; and there were many guests.

Stubbs & Co., of course, came, and Lane and Leigh looked in, and stayed—and several other fellows. Only Tracy and his immediate pals stayed out. Tracy & Co. were nursing their injuries in Study No. 5, and vowing vengeance.

But their wrath was quite unheeded in the Fourth; it was only too evident that the star of the nuts was on the wane.

When Bob Rake came into his new study—No. 5—for prep, he found Tracy & Co. there scowling and savage.

The Co. left to go to their own studies, and Tracy and Durance remained with the Cornstalk.

Tracy was in a savage temper, and only prudence restrained him from quarrelling with Rake. Durance was in his usual mood of cynical philosophy. Bob Rake was quite good-tempered. He was damaged quite as much as Harry Wilnot, but it did not seem to affect his high spirits.

"You fellows have been pulling my leg," he said.

"How's that?" yawned Durance, while Tracy scowled without replying.

"About the top study," said Bob quietly. "After what Mr. Rawlings said, I've been asking some questions round about. I've asked Oliphant. It seems that it's the regular rule for the Form captain to take that study—it's called 'captain's study,' in fact."

"You knew that!" sneered Tracy.

"Well, I'm new here," said Bob, "and I took you fellows' word for it that we had a case for keeping the study. But—" He broke off. "Well, Wilnot's got it now, and he's only got his rights."

"Then you're not thinkin' of pushin' the matter any further?" asked Durance.

"No!" said Bob curily.

Tracy broke into a sniggering laugh.

"Are you afraid of Nameless, then?"

Bob's eyes glinted.

"If you mean Wilnot, I'm not afraid of him, nor of anybody," he said. "And if you don't want trouble on your hands, Tracy, you'd better keep a civil tongue in your head."

"They're standin' a spread in the top study," sneered Tracy. "You'd better go and ask to be allowed to come in. If it suits you to crawl to that nameless cad—"

"That's enough!"

"Choose it, Rex!" murmured Durance. But Tracy's temper was too sore and

savage for him to heed his good adviser. He broke out passionately.

"Oh, let me alone, Durance! What good have you done with your dashed diplomacy? What good has that fellow been to us, after all?"

"Shut up!" said Durance, as Bob looked up quickly.

"Rot! We took him up, and made much of him, and he was goin' to help us keep that nameless end out of the top study!" shouted Tracy. "And now he's licked, and we're licked, and we're turned out of the study all the same. What good has he been to us I'd like to know? Just like you, with your clever stunts, that come to nothin' in the long run."

Bob set his lips.

"So you took me up, as you call it, simply to get me on your side in a scrap with Wilnot?" he said.

Tracy curled his lip.

"What the thump do you think we took you up for?" he sneered. "Think you're the sort of chap we'd care to associate with?"

"I think *you're* a rotten end," said Bob Rake; "and the same to you, Durance, and the rest of the crowd."

Durance reddened.

"Tracy hasn't got it quite right, so far as I'm concerned," he said awkwardly. "But—"

Bob gave a grunt.

"I've dropped into a precious crowd," he said. "Pulling my leg, and buttering me simply to get me to help you chase Wilnot out of his rights. I'm fed-up with the whole crowd of you. Do you call it playing the game with a new fellow who hasn't been here three days? I don't!"

"You're goin' to be cut in this study," said Tracy.

Bob eyed him contemptuously.

"Go and eat cake, the pair of you!" he said. "The less you have to say to me the better I shall like it!"

And Bob did not utter another word.

CHAPTER 25.

Diplomacy!

HARRY WILNOT and Bob Rake eyed one another rather grimly for a moment when they met in the Fourth Form dormitory that night. But neither spoke.

Both were looking and feeling damaged; and both would have preferred the inconclusive fight in the top study to have gone on to an end. The two juniors, who seemed formed for friendship seemed to have been made into enemies by the peculiar circumstances. But for the intervention from outside, however, it is probable that the dispute would have died away.

But it was not allowed to die.

Then there was the fact that Tracy had certainly put his foot in it by his outburst of temper in Study No. 5, and lost the valuable assistance of the big fighting man. Bob was not likely to listen to him again. His inexperience had been taken advantage of; but Bob was no fool, and he was not to be used twice.

Bob Rake frowned in the Form-room that day.

He would have changed out of Study No. 5 gladly enough; but, naturally, he did not care to go up and down the Fourth asking for admission to another study. But on such terms with his study-mates and their friends his life in Study No. 5 was not likely to be a very happy one.

Durance sat beside him in class, and spoke once or twice, Bob answering with monosyllables or grunts.

After morning lessons Durance joined him in the passage.

"Come on, Dick!" called out Tracy, from a distance.

Durance did not heed.

"Comin' along for a stroll, Rake?" he asked genially.

"No," said Bob bluntly.

"Still on the high horse?" yawned Durance.

Bob coloured.

"Look here, after what's happened, I'd rather not talk to any of Tracy's pals!" he said bluntly. "I'm fed-up!"

"You hit straight from the shoulder, and no mistake," remarked Durance. "But you're not goin' to live like a sort of Robinson Crusoe in the study, I suppose. Won't you let me be Man Friday?"

Bob burst into a laugh, in spite of himself.

"You've treated me badly," he said.

"I haven't, really," said Durance, with unusual seriousness. "It's true that my friends took you up to use you against Wilnot—Tracy's lot that out. But, really,

that wasn't my game—not wholly, anyhow. The fact is, I rather like you, old nut!"

"Oh!" said Bob dubiously.

He did not quite make Durance out; and, as a matter of fact, there were a good many fellows at St. Kit's who could not make Durance out. Durance had a rather complex character; and the average Fourth-Former was not disposed to worry over problems.

"Besides, I want you to back me up," said Durance.

"More rows?" asked Bob.

"No; a fight."

"With whom?"

"Wilmot."

Bob stared a little.

"Excuse me," he said. "I don't want to offend you, Durance—but you'd be well advised not to pick a row with Wilmot, man to man."

"You think he would lick me?"

"I know he would."

"I suppose he would have licked you yesterday if Mr. Rawlings hadn't butted in—what?"

"I don't know about that! But I had my hands full with him."

"Well, I'm takin' him on," drawled Durance. "You see, the way the affair of the study was settled isn't satisfactory to us or to Wilmot really. He didn't want the Form-master to butt in any more than we did. He's a dashed unpleasant fellow from my point of view, but he's got plenty of pluck. I think he would be willin' to fight it out."

"I'm sure he would," said Bob. "But I don't see—you're not thinking of raiding the study again, I suppose. Your crowd will never stand up against Wilmot and his crowd."

Durance laughed.

"Quite so," he assented. "Our crowd is a bit too soft for a rough-and-tumble like that. We scored a big defeat yesterday, and I fancy that if the merry paladins were called on for another battle there would be a whole swarm of conscientious objectors. I'm goin' to take on Wilmot personally, bein' the only member of the crowd with grit enough to do it. If I lick him he will have to clear out of the study after all. See?"

"You can't lick him."

"I'm goin' to try. Will you be my second?"

Bob hesitated.

"I'm not askin' you to do any more fightin'," said Durance satirically. "You'll only have to look on, an' throw up the sponge for me when I'm licked, as you seem to expect will happen."

"That's all rot," said Bob, flushing red. "If anybody's going to tackle Wilmot—"

He paused. "My fight with him wasn't finished—"

"I remember you said you'd see him later," assented Durance. "But you seem to have thought better of it."

"It's not a case of funk, if that's what you mean—"

"Oh, I know it isn't! But you don't want to keep it up for reasons of your own," said Durance blandly. "Well, I admit you're the best fighting man in our crowd. If you back out, it comes to me—and I'm goin' to do my best."

"I'm not backing out," growled Bob.

"Well, don't let's argue. You'll be my second, I suppose, and watch me gettin' a record lickin', what?"

Bob looked as he felt—extremely uncomfortable.

He had left off the fight with Wilmot at his Form-master's order, with every intention of finishing it at a more conventional time. If he did not do so he realized that it would look a good deal like "cold feet." That Durance could stand up to the captain of the Fourth Rake did not believe for a moment. And something irked him very much in the idea of Durance taking his place, as it were, in the post of danger.

"I'll tell you what," suggested Durance: "let's toss up for it. Loser takes on Wilmot and puts up a fight for the study."

Bob laughed uncomfortably.

"But Wilmot has a right to the study," he said.

"If he chooses to let it be settled by ordeal of battle it's his look-out."

"Yes, that's so."

Durance took a shilling from his pocket. "Heads you fight Wilmot, tails I fight him," he said. "That's a sportin' offer!"

"If you like," said Bob at last.

"Good; you're a sportsman!"

Durance tossed the shilling into the air and let it fall on the floor. The two juniors followed it, and bent to look

"Head!" said Durance.

Bob granted.

"You're the giddy champion," said Durance, with a smile. "I'll be your second. Let's go and tell him."

"Oh, all right!" said Bob. And Durance picked up his double-headed shilling and slipped it into his pocket.

CHAPTER 23.

Man to Man

HARRY WILMOT was going down to Little Side, with a football under his arm, with several of the Fourth, when Durance and Bob Bake came up.

"Got a minute to spare, Wilmot?" asked Durance.

"Yes, if you like," said Harry.

"About the study—"

Harry held up his hand.

"That's done with!" he said.

"Not quite," said Durance. "Mr. Rawlings is no end of a big gun, but not quite a giddy czar. We're not takin' his side in the matter. If you want to keep the top study, you've got to prove that you're the best now."

Harry's lip curled.

"You're welcome to get the study away, if you can," he answered. "After the show your crowd put up yesterday, I fancy you'll find it a job rather above your weight."

"Oh, we're not goin' to rush the study," said Durance. "Too many meddlin' prefects and masters about for that. We're goin' to put up a man to fight you for it. You'll accept if you're not a lunk?"

Stubbs of the Fourth burst into a snuckle.

"Have you got a man in your crowd?" he asked. "You were all kicked out of top study jistly easily yesterday."

"Do you accept, Wilmot?" asked Durance, without heeding Stubbs, though his eyes gleamed.

"Yes," said Harry at once. "I'll meet any man you choose to put up."

"Here's our man, then," and Durance indicated Bob Bake.

Harry looked at the Cornstalk.

"We didn't finish yesterday," he said. "Do you want to go on?"

Bob nodded.

"Very well. Any time and place you like," said the captain of the Fourth

coolly. "If you can lick me, you can turn me out of my study. I'm willing to take the chance."

"Done!" said Bob.

"Behind the chapel, at six," said Durance.

"That will suit me."

"Settled, then!"

Harry Wilmot and his companions went on to the football ground. Durance walked away with Bob Bake.

Before dinner-time all the Fourth Form at St. Kit's knew that the fight was arranged between the new junior and the captain of the Fourth.

The news created considerable excitement.

Every fellow in the Fourth determined to be present; even Tinker Smith and Licks, the bug hunter, intended to see that "snail." As the news spread it reached the Third and the Shell. And a crowd of fags of the Third and Babbie & Co. of the Shell determined to be on the scene. Harry Wilmot was known as a redoubtable fighting man, and the new fellow looked very "hefty." It was going to be worth watching, Babbie told his friends in the Shell.

Algernon Aubrey St. Leger, of course, was the Form captain's second. Algy was not wholly pleased at the prospect, though he had no doubt of his chum's ability to pull off a victory.

"This has been wangled, old bean," Algy remarked sagely to his chum. "Tracy & Co. are pullin' that new chap's leg, you know."

"I shouldn't wonder," said Harry.

"They're just making use of him—a giddy outpaw to pull their chestnuts out of the fire," said the dandy of St. Kit's. "Anyhow, you'll lick him."

"I hope so."

"You'll have to go all out, though," said Algernon Aubrey. "He's the toughest proposition in the Fourth."

"I'll go all out, then," said Harry, with a smile.

Harry Wilmot gave the matter little thought during the afternoon lessons. But the rest of the Fourth fairly simmered with excitement.

Bunny ceased from troubling, as Algernon Aubrey took him by the collar and bumped him into the armchair.

At a few minutes before six Harry Wilmot and Algernon Aubrey St. Leger

left the School House and strolled away towards the rendezvous. Bunny Bootles rolled after them.

Members of the Third, the Fourth, and the Shell were converging in the same direction, in twos and threes and fours.

Behind the chapel was a quiet spot, shaded by old oaks, out of view of any of the school buildings, and unlikely to be visited by masters or prefects. For which reasons it was often chosen as the scene of combats that were too serious to be settled in the gym.

Quite a crowd had gathered there before the principals had arrived.

A row of Third Form fags, headed by Judson minims, adorned the old rails of the chapel green. Fourth-Formers and Shell fellows stood around in groups.

There was a buzz as Wilmot appeared.

"Here he is!" sang out Stubbs.

"Yaas, here we are, those boys," said Algernon Aubrey. "Did you bring the gloves, Stubby?"

"You bet," said Stubbs; "and a sponge; and a basin."

"Good man!"

"Here come the merry nuts!" said Wheatford.

Tracy & Co. arrived in a body, with Bob Rake. The nuts seemed to be in a rather thoughtful mood.

The two champions removed their jackets and caps and neckties and collars. Then the gloves were donned.

Babbie of the Shell volunteered to act as referee, as a disinterested party. Babbie's offer was accepted, and he took out his watch.

"Now, then!" said Babbie, in a business-like way. "Ready? Seconds out of the ring!"

Algernon Aubrey and Durance retired. Wilmot and Rake were left facing one another.

"Shake hands!" said Babbie. "Time!"

"Go it, ye cripples!" murmured Algernon Aubrey.

Babbie of the Shell looked on, watch in hand. Fifty fellows at least stood in a crowded ring, gazing on breathlessly.

The first round was exciting enough. It showed up both the combatants as splendid boxers, and as Babbie had splendidly predicted, it was worth watching.

Both the combatants were very wary of first, taking one another's measure. Bob

Rake pressed a heavy attack towards the end of the round, and Harry Wilmot retreated before it. Then came the call of time.

Durance gave Tracy a smile and a nod. "What do you think?" he murmured.

"I fancy he'll win," said Tracy, with great satisfaction.

"Time!" rapped out Babbie. And the rivals of the Fourth stepped up briskly for the second round.

CHAPTER 20.

The Great Fight!

A LGERNON AUBREY ST. LEGER looked a trifle anxious as the second round of the fight proceeded. Bob Rake was bigger and heavier than his opponent, and he seemed to be carrying things before him. The captain of the Fourth gave ground a good deal, and several times only a quick side-step saved him from being cornered. The nuts looked more and more cheerful. They did not like Rake personally—but all their hopes were on him.

A PAIR OF SPARKLING SCHOOL STORIES!

THE SCHOOLBOYS' OWN LIBRARY

Nos. 137 and 138.

The Complete Outsider!

By FRANK RICHARDS.

The 'Ghost of the Priory!

By OWEN CONQUEST.

Keep Your Eye on the Date:

THURSDAY, DEC. 4th,

But Book Your Order Now!

"Good man!" sang out Lumley. "Go it, Rake."

"Let him leave it!" chirruped Howard.

"Duck up, Wilmot!" howled Stubbs.

Alfredon Aubrey was silent; but he looked on with keen and anxious eyes.

"Time!"

Harry Wilmot came back to his corner, and Algy made a knee for him. The dandy of the Fourth summoned up a cheery smile; but Harry could read his thoughts easily enough.

"I think it's all right, old chap," he said.

"But he's a good man—a jolly good man."

"Yass, he looks it," said Algy. "But you're going to beat him."

"I'm going to try!" said Harry quietly.

"Think of the top study, you know," urged Algy. "I've ordered the sofa."

Harry Wilmot laughed.

"If only for that, I'll put all my beef into it," he assured his chum. "It's going to be a stiff proposition, but we've hardly begun yet."

"Time!" sang out Babbie.

Harry Wilmot came up promptly, but not more promptly than Bob Rake. The third round was hard and fast.

Bob Rake seemed to have the advantage; and there was a buzz of excitement as he came through Harry's guard, and landed a straight right fall on his chin. Wilmot staggered back, and Bob followed it up with his left, and Harry came down on the turf with a crash.

"Man down!" roared Lumley.

"Horrah!"

"Two to one on Rake, in quids!" said Tracy loudly.

Babbie began to count.

But Harry was on his feet quickly enough, and he stalled off the Australian's attack pretty successfully, till the call of time gave him relief.

In the fourth round, Bob pressed the fighting hard, and again the captain of the Form was driven round the ring.

"All over bar shoutin'!" said Tracy.

Durance nodded; but he looked dubious. And his doubts were soon justified. The retreat suddenly stopped as Bob pressed on, and the captain of the Fourth woke up to new life, as it were. He closed in on his adversary, and drove home his right with terrific effect.

Crash!

Rake caught the blow on the point of

his chin, and it fairly lifted him off his feet and crashed him to earth.

There was a deep buzz in the crowded ring.

"My hat! What a drive!" murmured Durance. "If the chap stands up after that, he's got grit."

"Get up!" roared Tracy savagely.

"Shut up, Tracy!"

"By gad, he's goin' to be counted out!" said Lumley blankly.

Babbie was taking the count.

He had reached seven before Bob Rake moved, and the eyes of the eager crowd were riveted on the fallen champion.

"Eight—nine—"

Algy caught his breath.

But at nine Bob Rake dragged himself to his knees, his head swimming, but his courage undaunted. He scrambled to his feet.

"Time!"

Bob Rake almost staggered back to his corner. Durance made a knee for him, and sponged his scorching face.

"Bad, that!" Durance remarked.

Bob nodded, but he did not speak. He needed all his breath.

"Fifth round, and last!" said Stubbs confidently, when Babbie of the Shell called time once more.

But Stubbs was mistaken.

In the fifth round Bob Rake showed a remarkable recovery, and he stalled off attack while he recovered further. It was Harry Wilmot who was pressing the fighting now; but he found the Cornishman as good at defence as at attack. Two minutes of good sparring elapsed, and then Babbie called time.

"To be continued in our next!" grinned Catesby, and some of the juniors laughed.

"Sixth round!" said Wheatford. "They're stickers—good men both!"

"Time!"

The sixth round started, and it was hammer and tongs. Both the fighting-men were a little excited, though they held their excitement well in check. The fighting was hard now, and a good deal of punishment was given and taken. One of Wilmot's eyes was almost closed, and Bob Rake's nose looked an enlarged edition of itself.

There was a sudden yell from Judson of the Third, seated on the chapel railings.

"The Head!"

Judson turned backwards over the rail-

ings, picked himself up on the green, and fled. Round the corner of the chapel came an awe-inspiring figure—the figure of Dr. Chenies, Head of St. Kit's.

"Ob, gad!" whispered Algernon Aubrey. "The merry fat's in the fire now!"

Some of the juniors bolted; but the rest realized that it was too late, and stood still. And an awed whisper ran round as the battered combatants dropped their hands and separated.

CHAPTER 21.

The Head Comes Down Heavy!

DR. CHENIES stopped and looked at the crowd of juniors over his pin-cener.

The Head, in taking his gentle stroll round the quadrangle that fine evening certainly had not expected to come upon such an Homeric scene.

It surprised him.
He came rustling on, and his expression grew grimmer and grimmer, sterner and sterner as he beheld the two champions—who assuredly were not in a fit state to meet their headmaster's eyes just then.

Wilmot and Rake stood unsteadily, with blood streaming from their noses, each with a black eye, and with the other eyes shadowed. It was no wonder that the reverend old gentleman was shocked.

"Upon my soul!" ejaculated Dr. Chenies. He stood and looked at them.

Wilmot and Rake dropped their eyes. Their faces were red enough already with exertion. But they grew redder now.

"What is all this?" exclaimed the Head. It was really a superfluous question. The Head did not need telling that it was a fight.

"You have been fighting!" said the Head, in his most magisterial tone.

"Yea, sir!" gasped Harry.
"Bless my soul! Have you any idea how you look—what a loathsome and disgusting appearance you present to the eye?"

"Nunno, sir."
"Your eyes are blacked!"
"A-aw: they, sir?" stammered Bob.
"You look like—like—" The Head paused for a comparison, but apparently

did not find one, for he went on: "This is disgraceful."

The delinquents stood silent. Fellows were detaching themselves from the crowd and slipping away in ones and twos. The Head was evidently in a terrible "was," and there was no telling upon what devoted heads his wrath might fall. The fags of the Third had vanished helter-skelter round the chapel; Tracey & Co. were walking off as quickly as they could. Of the noisy crowd, only Durance remained on the spot.

"It—it—it's only a fight, sir!" stammered Algernon Aubrey.

"Silence, St. Leger!"

"Ob, yaaa, sir!"

The Head surveyed the culprits grimly. "I am not opposed, in principle, to a few rounds, provided that gloves are worn," he said majestically, "but this—this—this is a prize-fight! You are injured—you are disfigured! This dispute has been carried on with—with ferocity."

"Oh, sir!" murmured the two combatants, looking anything but ferocious now.

"With unexampled ferocity!" said the Head impressively.

Silence.

"I am ashamed of you both!"

"Ob, sir!"

"But for the fact that you are both very seriously damaged, I should consider it my duty to inflict a very severe caning!" said Dr. Chenies.

The delinquents felt some solace in that remark for their serious damages!

"But you will certainly be punished," said Dr. Chenies sternly. "I shall set you an imposition of a thousand lines each."

"Oh dear!"

It was agreed at St. Kit's that a hundred lines was better than a caning; but a caning better than two hundred lines. Any caning, however severe, was better than five hundred lines. A thousand lines was almost unheard of—even a flogging would have been better than that. The unhappy recipients of that tremendous imposition stood in blank dismay.

"To-morrow" continued the Head, "is a half-holiday. Both of you will be detained in your Form-room to write out your lines."

"Oh dear!" murmured Bob.

"Very well, sir" said Harry resignedly.

"I shall request your Form-master to see that this imposition is written out to

the last line," said Dr. Chenies. "And now I require you to give me your word of honour that this disgraceful struggle will not be resumed."

Grim silence.

Wilmot and Rake looked at one another, and they did not speak. Dr. Chenies compressed his lips.

"You hesitate to reply?" he said, in his ponderous manner. "Very good! Unless that promise is given—and unless it is kept when given—I shall send you both away from school to-morrow morning."

"I'll!" murmured Durance.

The Head was "coming down heavy" with a vengeance.

"Now your answer!" rapped out the Head.

Wilmot and Rake exchanged glances again. Neither wanted to be the first to speak.

"Wilmot! Answer me!"

"I give my word, sir," said Harry quietly.

"And I mine, sir," said Bob, at once.

"Very good. I think I can trust you both to keep your word," said Dr. Chenies. "Now go at once, both of you, and remove, as far as possible, the disgraceful aspect which is an offence to the sight."

And the Head sailed majestically on, and disappeared round the further end of the chapel railings, much to the relief of the juniors.

"My noly hat!" said Babbie of the Shell, with a deep breath. "The old sport was in an end of a bait. Glad he didn't drop on me."

Wilmot looked at Rake. He smiled—a rather twisted smile, for his features all felt as if they were in the wrong places.

"That settles it, Rake," said the captain of the Fourth. "We can't go on after that."

Bob chuckled.

"Blamed if I specially want to," he said. "I'm feeling like a hospital case, and I dare say you feel the same."

"I do," said Harry frankly. "But we've been fighting for the study—"

"Oh, rot!" said Bob. "It's your study."

And Bob Rake began to put on his jacket. Durance helped him; he needed help. Maureen Aubrey ministered to his chin; and the principals in the historic struggle departed, and the crowd broke up—full of excited comments upon the terrible fight, and agreeing that the Head ought to have

sense enough not to "butt in" before the finish.

"Rotten, the Head droppin' on us like that," Durance remarked, as he walked away with Rake. "You'd have licked him."

"I'm not so sure of that," said Bob simply. "He's quite as good a man as I am with the mittens on."

"Feel pretty bad?"

"Yea."

"You'll have to rest over for a few days," said Durance, eyeing him in a side-long way. "Next time you'll have to tackle him somewhere outside the gates, to a finish."

Bob turned on him.

"I've given my word to the Head!"

"Oh, my dear old nut, that doesn't count! The Head shouldn't have butted in. Pullin' the Head's leg is fair play, you know."

Bob's lip curled.

"My word counts," he said. "I'm pretty certain that Wilmot intends keeping his. I'm keeping mine."

Durance shrugged his shoulders.

Bob Rake went into a bath-room to clear up after that combat. But when he had done all that he could, he surveyed the result in the glass with something like dismay. One eye black, and the other discoloured, and a swollen nose and cut lip did not make for beauty. It was likely to be a long time before Bob looked his sunny self.

"My hat!" he murmured, as he blinked at the reflection in the glass. "No wonder the Head said it was disgraceful! It is—a bit."

He grinned when he met Wilmot in the Fourth Form passage a little later. The captain of the Fourth looked every whit as damaged as Bob Rake.

Wilmot stopped as he saw him. He was looking unusually thoughtful.

"Rake!" he said suddenly.

"Well?" said Bob, rather gruffly.

"Don't you think we've been a pair of duffers to row like this?" said Harry, with a smile. "You seem to have been made use of by that set of cads—you can see, don't you?"

"Not much doubt about that!" growled Bob.

"You can't like it much in the study with Trasy and Durance."

"I know I shan't ever speak a word to either of them again."

"That won't be agreeable——"

"I know it won't!"

"I owe you this black eye," said Harry.

"You owe me that one! Did you really want a fight to a finish, old scout?"

Bob's clouded face relaxed.

"I don't know that I did," he answered.

"Oh, dash it all, I never really wanted to scrap with you, anyhow. I've been made a fool of."

"I might have done a bit more thinking," confessed Harry. "But—after all, there's no harm done." He rubbed his eye, and smiled. "Is there any reason why we shouldn't be friends?"

Bob's face brightened.

"None at all, if you care to," he answered.

"I would!" said Harry frankly. "And if you'd care to change studies, there's plenty of room for one more in the top study. I never wanted to turn you out of your quarters. Will you dig with us in the top study, and let bygones be bygones?"

"My hat!" said Bob.

"St. Leger will be pleased, I know—and as for Bunny, whether he's pleased or not doesn't count. If you can stand Bunny——"

"Better than Tracy or Durance, anyhow," grinned Bob. "If you really mean it, Wilmot——"

"With all my heart."

"Then it's a merry go!"

Harry Wilmot held out his hand frankly,

and Bob Rake gave him a grip. And that settled it.

And it is much to be feared that more time, during that afternoon's detention, was spent in cheery talk than in transcribing Virgil.

Algernon Aubrey St. Leger woke up with a start, from a nap on his new sofa in the top study.

"Hallo, dear old bean!" he yawned, as Harry Wilmot came in with Bob Rake. "I think I almost dropped off. Tea-time, what?"

"Yes," said Harry.

"Bunny! Where's Bunny? Why hasn't that fat boulder got tea ready?" exclaimed St. Leger indignantly. "Bunny, you fat blighter—Bunny, you ravenous rabbit——"

"Oh, I say——"

"Get a move on, you slacking barrel, or you shan't have any tea. "Can't you see we've got a guest?"

"A new study-mate!" said Harry.

Algy jumped up.

"How good! Delighted, old bean!" he exclaimed. "Welcome to the top study! Kick Bunny for me, will you?"

"Certainly," chuckled Bob.

"Yaroooooh!"

And quite a happy party sat down to tea in the top study—and the hatchet was buried for ever between the two juniors who had helped to solve that burning problem at St. Kit's—who shall be captain?



THE AMAZING ESCAPE OF JACK SHEPPARD.

A Slippery Customer!

OF all the famous escapes which have figured in history none, perhaps, has gained the notoriety of the escape of Jack Sheppard from Newgate Prison in the year 1724.

He was a slippery customer—he had already jumped once—so the valeters handcuffed him, put on foot-locks, loaded him with irons, and chained him to a stout staple in the floor of the strongest room of the prison, which was known as "The Castle." To escape from such a position was deemed impossible—but Jack Sheppard managed to do it. He had no outside help whatever, his only aid being a small nail he found in his cell.

First of all he twisted and turned his wrists until he had managed to slip them from the handcuffs. Then with his small nail he attacked the floor staple, and eventually succeeded in loosening his chain. He tied up his fetters as best he could with his garters, and then made his way to the chimney.

This chimney, however, was crossed by a transverse iron bar, which prevented him climbing up it. Nothing daunted, however, Jack set to work and succeeded in loosening the bar with a piece of his broken chain. But the chimney led to the roof, from which there was no escape, and Jack decided to break into the room—known as the "Red Room"—immediately above "The Castle" from which he had escaped. He had found another nail—a larger one—and with this he made a hole through the wall between the chimney and the "Red Room." This room had been locked and bolted for seven years—it took Jack less than seven minutes to open it and get out into a passage which led to the Chapel!

Five Doors Forced!

But his task had only just begun! He next forced five more doors before he had only gained the upper leads which run right round the outer part of the prison.

In those days many houses were built up alongside the prison walls, and Jack could look down upon the roofs of these houses. Unfortunately for him, however, the distance was

100 feet to drop, and it seemed that all his exertions had gone for nothing. He needed a rope with which to lower himself, and a rope was a thing which he had not the slightest opportunity of getting.

Then he remembered that there was a blanket in his cell which he had quilted, and that, perhaps, could be torn into strips from which he could fashion a rope. It meant, however, going all the way back—and any thing might have happened in the meantime! Had his escape been discovered? Jack could not tell, but to remain where he was meant certain capture.

There was nothing else for it but to return by the way he had come. Jack did so, and to his delight found that his absence was still unnoticed. Picking up his blanket, he once again made his way by his devious route to the upper leads, and there tore his blanket into strips and made a rope.

A Narrow Escape!

One end of this rope he fastened to a spike which he had wrenched from one of the doors in forcing it, lowered the rest of the rope over the wall, and weighed the spike so that it would bear his weight. Then slipping over the parapet of the prison wall, he slid down to the roof of a house beneath.

A garret window presented no difficulties to him. He entered the house and began silently to steal downstairs. Once he hesitated, for his fetters had clinked and aroused a sleeping woman. Jack hardly dared to breathe until the woman, thinking the noise had been made by the cat, went back to bed.

Then Jack let himself out and made his way to a cow-house near Tottenham Court. In the morning he bribed a shoemaker to obtain him a hammer and a punch, and with these he rid himself of his fetters and walked away—a free man at last!

But that was Jack's final escape from any prison. Having returned to his incorrigible ways, the young highwayman was seized and thrown once more into Newgate, from which he never succeeded in escaping again.

ANOTHER TIP-TOP SCHOOL TALE TO
READ!

GET IT TO-DAY!



Starring Harry Wharton & Co., the well-known chums of
Greyfriars, and Herbert Vernon-Smith, the "Bounder."

On Sale Now!

Price 4d.

ASK FOR THESE POPULAR BOOKS!



THE

SEXTON BLAKE LIBRARY

- No. 261. **THE DEATH TRAP.**
A startling long complete novel of gripping detective adventure in London and the country.
By **ANTHONY SKENE.**
- No. 262. **THE CROOK OF PARIS.**
An amazing narrative of the Parisian underworld, featuring **GEORGE MARSDEN PLUMMER**, the notorious international adventurer, and his female accomplice, Vail Mata-Vail.
By **G. H. FREED.**
- No. 263. **THE GANG'S DESERTER.**
A thrilling drama of crime and adventure, introducing **SEXTON BLAKE** in a cast of engrossing mystery and excitement.
By **COUTTS BRISBANE.**
- No. 264. **THE LAW COURTS MYSTERY.**
A sensational story of a baffling murder, involving **SEXTON BLAKE** in a problem of astounding complexity.
By **ALLAN BLAIR.**

THE

BOYS' FRIEND LIBRARY

- No. 261. **BOSS O' THE BLUES.**
An amazing yarn of the Blue Crusaders.
By **E. E. BROOKE.**
- No. 262. **KLONDIKE BOUND.**
Fertile and adventure in the Yukon gold-rush.
By **BERNARD BULEY.**
- No. 263. **RIVALS OF THE RAMPANT.**
A breezy tale of life in the Navy.
By **STANTON HOPE.**
- No. 264. **BIRDS OF BATTLE.**
A whirlwind story of air-thrills in the Great War.
By **ALFRED EDGAR.**



NOW ON SALE AT ALL NEWSAGENTS. Price 4d. per volume (10c. in Canada).

Printed and published on the first Thursday in each month by the Proprietors, The Amalgamated Press, Ltd., The Fleetway House, Farringdon St., London, E.C.4. Advertisement Offices: The Fleetway House, Farringdon St., E.C.4. Subscription Rates: Inland and Abroad, 4d. each. Registered for transmission by Canadian Magazine Post. Sole Agents for Australia and New Zealand: Messrs. Gordon & Gotch, Limited, and for South Africa: Central News Agency, Limited. S.S.