

# **The Rambler Club Afloat**

**BY W. CRISPIN SHEPPARD**

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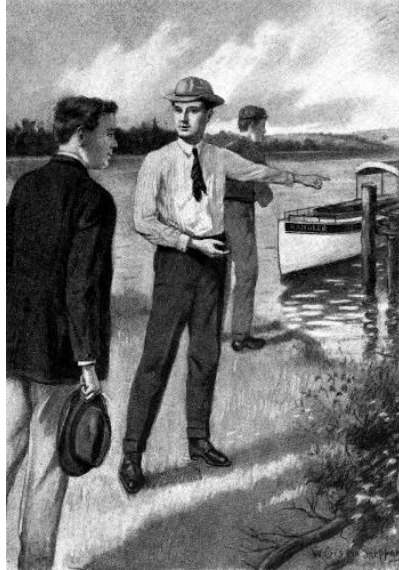
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# The Rambler Club Afloat



THE BOYS CROWDED AROUND THE BOAT

## Introduction

The author's purpose is a very unassuming one. He aims simply to present to the host of bright American boys a clean, wholesome story of sport and adventure. The Ramblers are a group of five jolly young fellows, who form a club for the purpose of hunting and fishing, but find their plans changed by circumstances.

In the course of their travels, the Nimrod Club, a rival organization, is often encountered. The boys are able to accept the unexpected and often trying situations in which they are placed with a reasonable degree of philosophy. They are disposed to be forbearing, yet are spirited enough to stand up for their rights when patience ceases to be a virtue. This story tells how, in spite of trials and discouragement, they are undaunted, bravely push on, and are finally rewarded by solving the mystery of the many strange happenings that have befallen them.

"The Rambler Club's Winter Camp," and "The Rambler Club in the Mountains," show the members of the club in outdoor experiences that any real live boy will envy them.

W. CRISPIN SHEPPARD.

# **The Rambler Club Afloat**

# CHAPTER I

## THE NEW CLUB

A stout boy of pleasing appearance lay indolently in the shade of a group of willows which fringed the bank of a small brook. It was one of those early summer days when nature is all aglow and the sweet scent of the woods and fields is in the air. On this particular day, the sky was flecked with a few white clouds, which remained almost motionless in the great expanse of blue. A faint line of hills, hazy in the distance, lay to the east, and the undulating country between was dotted by occasional farmhouses.

The stout boy basking in the shade looked to be the picture of ease and contentment. He seemed to be thoroughly enjoying the chatter of the birds and the musical murmur of the brook, as it joyously babbled along in its course.

"Oh, ho!" he exclaimed, half aloud. "How glorious to think of—no more school for two months; no dry books to make one's head ache, or lectures on the sins of idleness. I call this fine!"

A particularly large and inquisitive bee, buzzing unpleasantly near his head, caused him to shift his position slightly.

"Summer before us," he continued; "boating, fishing and all kinds of sport—it's the best time of the year."

He had closed his eyes, as if in contemplation of the glorious prospect before him, when the sound of a step arrested his attention.

"Hello, Dave Brandon!" exclaimed a cheery voice. "I thought I should find you here."

It was a boy of about sixteen who had stepped into view. He eyed the recumbent figure quizzically.

There was a striking difference between the appearance of the two boys, as the new-comer was lithe and his every movement denoted an active temperament.

"I say, Dave, were you born lazy, or did you acquire it by practice?" he inquired, good-naturedly.

David Brandon yawned prodigiously and stretched. "I don't know, Sam," he answered, with a twinkle in his eye; "but, at the present moment, I do feel most uncommonly like taking a nap."

"I don't doubt it," laughed the other; "but perhaps I have some news that will wake you up."

"Some news, eh?" echoed Dave, with provoking indifference. "Some news—perhaps that Professor Hopkins is going to have a summer school, and wants us to join."

He put on such a comical look of pretended dismay that Sam Randall burst out laughing.

"No, Dave, nothing like that, it's the finest thing. Why I—"

"Must be," yawned Dave. "Say, can't you chase that bee away? It keeps buzzing around my head and wakes me up."

"Yes, it's the best scheme that was ever thought of," continued Sam, without heeding the interruption. "What do you think—"



"That the afternoon will be over before you tell me," said Dave, lazily.

He once more moved a very short distance, this time because the rays of the sun were beginning to creep around the willows.

"Well, listen, Dave," persisted the other, and his voice was earnest; "I'm almost bubbling over with enthusiasm; Bob Somers is going to form—"

"Wish he was here, trying to catch that bee."

"Well, I must say—"

"Must say what?" repeated Dave, with provoking slowness. "It is an awful nuisance to have a great big insect buzzing close to your ear. Aren't you going to chase it away for me?"

"I declare! You seem to take an intense interest in what I am going to say; here I've been waiting all afternoon to find you, and can't get in a word edgewise."

Dave rubbed his eyes, and looked as if he didn't hear a word. "Do you know, Sam," he drawled, "this brook always makes me think of Bryant's poem, 'The Green River.'

"Yet pure its waters—its shallows are bright  
With colored pebbles and sparkles of light  
And clear the depths where its eddies play  
And dimples deepen and whirl away.'

Ever read it, Sam? I'd advise you to; then it goes on like this:

"And the plane tree's speckled arms o'ershoot—"

"Well, Dave Brandon, I've a good mind not to tell you."

"Then don't," said the stout boy, in pretended anger.

"The swifter current that mines its root."

"This is the last attempt I'm going to make," was Sam Randall's rejoinder. "You are certainly not lazy when it comes to interrupting a fellow—now listen; Bob Somers—mind you, Bob Somers, is going to form a club, a hunting and fishing club. I'm in it; so is Dick Travers and Tom Clifton—and you're going to join, of course!"

"A hunting and fishing club!"

Dave forsook his recumbent position and sat up with an alacrity that showed how fast he could move if the occasion demanded. "Am I going to join? Well, I guess so." Then he added, after a moment's hesitation, as he again settled languidly on the greensward: "Provided there isn't any hard work connected with it. A fellow can't keep going like a steam engine both winter and summer. Sam, I feel most uncommonly like taking a nap."

"Well, it is just what you are not going to do," declared his friend, emphatically. "I told Bob Somers that we would both be on hand at three o'clock this afternoon to talk the matter over."

"It seems I can never get any rest," grumbled Dave. "I could just lie here all day and listen to the birds. They make me think of the line—"

"Dave Brandon," said Sam, hastily, as he seized his friend's coat sleeve, "get right up! The club is about to be organized, officers elected and—"

"Leave it till to-morrow," said Dave, coaxingly.

"No, sir!"

"Very well, I suppose I'll have to go. It was the bee that made me sleepy, by spoiling a nice little nap."

The stout boy sighed, yawned twice, and then, with exasperating slowness, arose to his feet. "Listen to that brook," he said. "What better music could you want than that? I certainly do like to just ramble around."

"That's it! Hurrah! hurrah!" cried Sam.

"That's what?" demanded Dave, staring at his companion in surprise.

"Hurrah! To ramble around—that's good—we'll call it the Rambler Club!" and Sam gave vent to his enthusiasm by another shout.

"Oh, yes, it's a capital name," admitted Dave. "Come on; what did you make us lose such a lot of time for?"

Sam smiled at this attempt at humor, and the two started off. By means of a rustic footbridge they crossed the stream, stopping to gaze for a moment into its crystal depths. The vegetation along the banks was rich and luxuriant, and, at this point, a low-hanging branch, with its myriad leaves of bright fresh green, was reflected in the running water.

Across fields covered with buttercups and daisies the boys took their way, until a road was reached.

The town of Kingswood, situated in the state of Wisconsin, included among its population some very wealthy gentlemen, and

none were more respected than Mr. George Somers, the father of Bob. His residence, a handsome colonial mansion, known as Pembroke Hall, lay well toward the southern end, where most of the fine estates were situated.

The surrounding country formed a charming combination of wildness and cultivation, rugged hills, heavily timbered tracts and long stretches of undulating fields.

As the two boys approached the town, a youth of about their own age, who was seated on the flat top of a boulder just off the road, caught sight of them and stopped idly drumming his heels against the side of the rock. His appearance was rather striking. He had a dark complexion, rich, wavy brown hair and eyes of the same color. A lurking smile played around the corners of his mouth, giving to his face a peculiar, sarcastic expression.

"There's that 'Oh ho' fellow," he muttered; "always reading and reciting poetry when he isn't asleep." He put his hand to his mouth and shouted, "Oh ho!" several times. Then his smile deepened, as he saw the two turn.

"Oh ho! Birdie," he continued, putting all the sarcastic emphasis of which he was capable into the call: "Oh ho, oh ho." If he sought to vex the good-natured Dave Brandon, his effort was in vain.

"Hello, Nat Wingate," greeted the latter, cheerily; "I suppose you wish you were back in school?"

Nat slowly climbed down from his elevated perch, and sauntered forward. "Where have you been?" he asked, rather bluntly. Then, as his eye fell upon a book in Brandon's pocket, he added: "Over by the creek, I'll wager, reading poetry."

"Quite correct," laughed Dave.

"And I'd like to know what good it does you," observed the other. "Laziness is a frightful thing to encourage. Where are you going now?"

"To a meeting."

Nat showed signs of becoming interested, and did not hesitate to declare that he would like to know all about it.

"A club is going to be organized," said Sam Randall, with some hesitation.

Nat Wingate stuffed his hands in his pockets, leaned against an electric light pole and put on a quizzical expression.

"What's the club going to do when it's formed?" he asked.

"Oh, have a good time, hunting, fishing—"

"Well," said Nat slowly, "I wouldn't mind joining myself." His sarcastic expression gave place to an eager look.

Dave and Sam exchanged swift glances. "Bob Somers is managing the whole affair," said the latter; "it was his idea."

A rather curious twinkle shone in Nat Wingate's brown eyes, and for a moment he hesitated. Then he said with apparent frankness: "Well, I guess the club could stand the two of us."

"We don't know yet just what is going to be done," replied Sam, evasively, for, to tell the truth, he was not anxious that Nat Wingate should join.

At this juncture, the two, realizing that they had barely time to reach the meeting place, bade Nat good-bye and started off.

The latter slowly made his way back to the boulder, and resumed his former position.

"They don't want me, eh?" he said, half aloud. "Well, I think I'll have some fun with them yet. It's a soft crowd, and they need to be stirred up."

The thought seemed to give him satisfaction, and he laughed quietly to himself.

Within twenty minutes, Dave and Sam reached their destination. Passing between two ornamental gate-posts, they passed along the broad, graveled road past Pembroke Hall and toward a large barn in the rear. There they found three boys awaiting them.

Bob Somers was a sturdy, brown-haired lad of about sixteen, with pleasant blue eyes and a frank manner. His companions, Dick Travers and Tom Clifton, were lively, keen American boys, the latter being the younger and smaller.

"Boys," said Bob Somers, with mock gravity, as he mounted a bale of hay, "we have assembled here to form an organization, the object of which is to pass the vacation months in as pleasant a manner as possible. Hunting, fishing and camping out will form a part of our enjoyments, which I feel that we deserve, after a hard season of study."

"If only those who have passed a hard season of study may join, I'd better leave," remarked Dave Brandon, comically.

"No, we'll let you in because your natural attainments are such that hard study isn't necessary," declared Bob, with a smile. Then he continued: "And, boys, I propose that this shall be an organization without officers."

"No—no!" came in chorus. "Bob Somers is president."

"Now don't protest, for it won't do any good," said Tom.

"And I elect myself unanimously poet laureate," laughed Dave Brandon.

"I propose that the name of the organization shall be the Rambler Club," shouted Sam, and everybody agreed to this with enthusiasm.

They had scarcely begun to talk in an animated fashion about their plans, when a figure suddenly appeared at the barn door. It was Nat Wingate. He sauntered forward, and his usual rather sarcastic smile broke into a broad grin, when he observed that his presence had created something of a sensation.

"Sam said that you were going to form a club," he began, by way of explanation; "so I thought I'd drop in,—all proceedings over?"

"Yes," replied Bob, pleasantly. But he did not evince any desire to supply his visitor with information.

"From what Sam said, I wouldn't mind joining, myself," pursued Nat, coolly, and evidently enjoying the embarrassed looks of the boys. "It's a good idea."

There was an interval of silence. Then Bob spoke up. "I'm sorry, Nat," he said, quietly, "but it's just a little club that the five of us have formed among ourselves."

"Would one more do any harm?"

"No, only that—"

"Only that you don't want me, eh?"

Nat Wingate's eyes flashed, but his voice betrayed no feeling of anger. He seated himself on an empty box, and continued, with extraordinary coolness: "I shouldn't think that it would make any difference whether there were five or six members in the club."

The others understood Nat's nature well enough to know that he was really amusing himself at their expense. When thwarted in anything, he had a way of making it so unpleasant for those who were responsible that his wishes were often regarded in order to avoid trouble.

But the members of the Rambler Club did not wish to have among them a strife-making spirit, and they firmly but politely declined all overtures.

"Very well," said Nat, carelessly, as he arose; "just as you fellows say—'Oh ho.'"

He stretched, glanced slyly at Dave Brandon and moved toward the door. Then, in a mocking manner, just as he had seen a comedian on the stage do, he bowed and took his departure.

"I suppose Nat will find some way to show us what he thinks of our outrageous conduct," observed Tom Clifton, resignedly.

"Better have him making trouble outside the club than in it," said Bob Somers. "That seems a philosophical way to look at the question. Now, boys, let's talk over our plans."



The afternoon passed quickly, but before Bob was left to himself the Ramblers had decided upon a plan of action, and even selected a site for their first camp.

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