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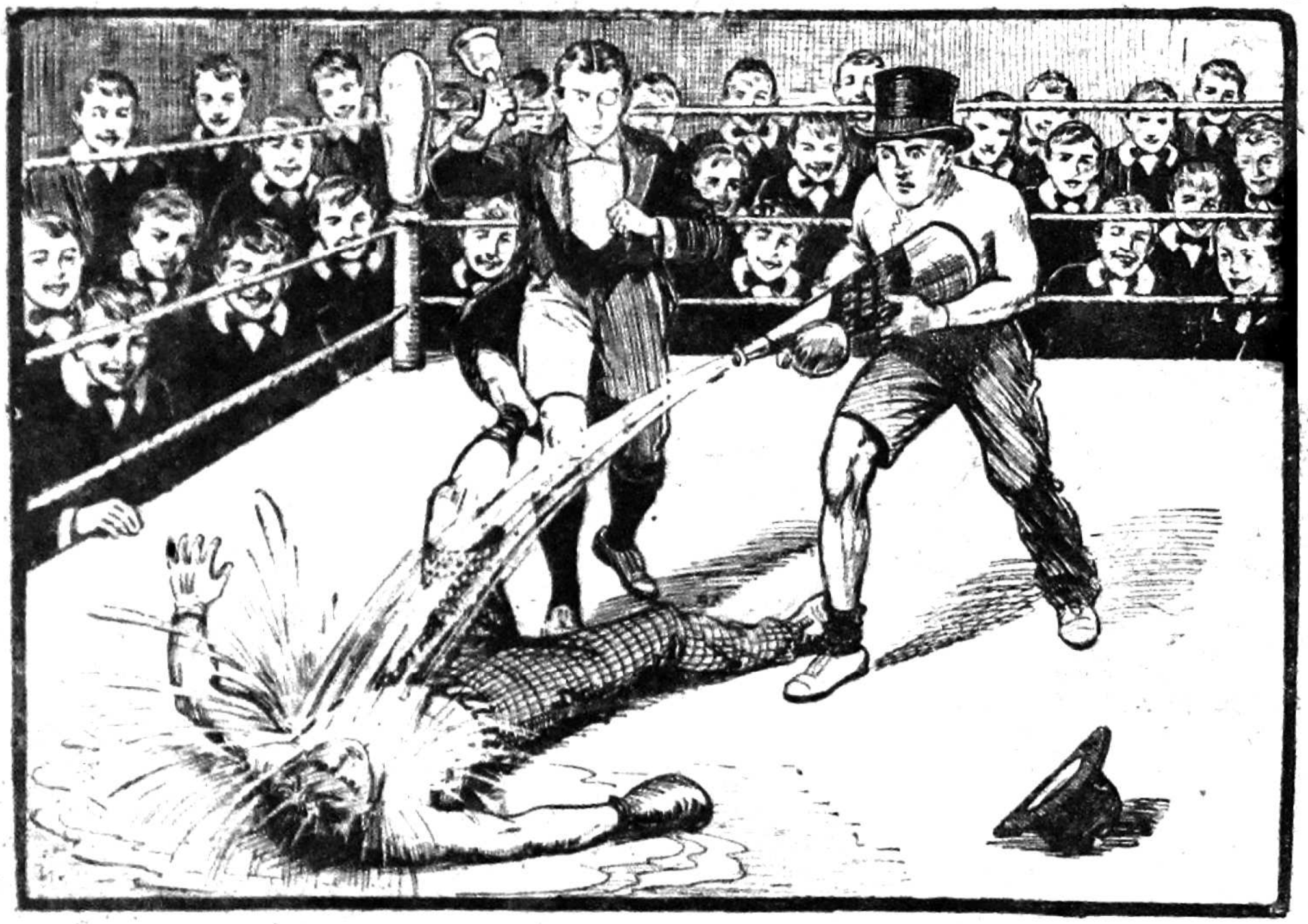
HANDFORTH ON ROLLER-SKATES.

THE SCHOOLBOY AGITATORS

A Story of School Life and Detective Adventure at St. Frank's, introducing NELSON LEE and NIPPER and the Boys of St. Frank's. By the Author of "Taking the Plunge," "On His Uppers," "A Lesson Well Learnt," etc.

March 20, 1920.



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(THE NARRATIVE RELATED THROUGHOUT BY NIPPER.)

CHAPTER I.

LOOKING FOR TROUBLE.

"HALLO! What's this?"

Edward Oswald Handforth had just entered Study C, in the Remove passage of the Ancient House at St. Frank's. He paused before the table, and stared at an object which lay upon the tea-cloth.

"Looks like a parcel," remarked McClure.

"I can see it's a parcel, you dotty ass!" said Handforth, picking it up. "By George! For me, too! I wasn't expecting anything."

"Well, it's not grub, anyhow," said Church. "I'm blessed if I can see the use of anybody sending a parcel like that. It's got iron inside, by the feel of it! And here we are, nearly all stony, and nothing appetising for tea!"

"Oh, don't grumble," said Handforth. "I can see a couple of sardines in the tin—they'll do for me all right."

"What about us, you greedy bounder?" demanded Church.

"Oh, don't be so jolly particular," said Handforth. "I don't want the beastly sardines—they look a bit squiffy, anyhow. My hat! I'm blessed if I can understand what this giddy package is!"

He proceeded to remove the paper, after examining the label. At first he encountered a quantity of shavings, and then came upon a cardboard box. The interior of this was filled with more shavings, and in the centre were two heavy white packages. Handforth, with much curiosity, pulled the paper off, and revealed an object of glittering nickel and enamel.

"A blessed roller skate!" ejaculated Handforth.

"My hat!"

"A pair of skates, in fact," went on Handy. "That is all serene, I must say! I wonder who could have sent them to me? Hold on—there's a note here."

He extracted a sealed envelope from the box, and was soon in possession of the fact that a generous uncle had purchased the skates for him, thinking that they would be an acceptable present.

"They're jolly good, I must say," remarked McClure. "But what's the good of them to you, Handy?"

"What's the good of 'em?" repeated Handforth. "I can skate, I suppose?"

"Can you?"

"You—you silly ass!" roared Handforth, glaring. "Are you suggesting that I can't skate?"

"I'm not suggesting anything," replied McClure. "But you know as well as I do that the last time there was ice on the river Stowe you made a horrible mess of your skating. I never mind telling the truth—— Hi, look out! Mind what you are doing with that plate——"

"If you insult me again like that, I'll punch your silly nose for you," said Handforth darkly. "I can skate as well

as anybody—and these roller things will do fine for practising on."

Church and McClure thought it unnecessary to point out to Handforth that roller skating was very different from ice skating, and that practising on the one type would not be beneficial for the other.

It was far the better policy when dealing with Handforth to let him have his own way. He generally came a fearful cropper in the finish—not that this had any effect. He never seemed to learn by experience.

"I can use these skates in the lecture hall," he went on. "There's plenty of floor space there, and I'll soon show you chaps a few tricks. Just as a start I'll take a trip down the passage."

"When—now?" asked Church, in surprise.

"Yes. Why not?"

"Well, I could tell you a dozen reasons why not—but you wouldn't listen," said Church. "But if you happen to meet a prefect or master, don't blame me. Skating in the passages isn't allowed."

Handforth sniffed.

"Do you think I care anything about that?" he demanded. "I don't take any notice of rules when I want to do a thing. Whether it's allowed or not, I'm going to try those skates in the passage."

"After tea, I suppose?" asked McClure.

Handforth did not reply in mere words. He proceeded to fix the skates to his boots. They were patent ones, and were easily fitted, and within a couple of minutes Handforth was ready for the adventure.

"Good!" he exclaimed. "We'll soon —— Hi! What the dickens——"

Handforth had stood up, but his feet proceeded to shoot towards the door before the rest of his person was ready. Handforth made a wild clutch at the table, but only succeeded in grasping the cloth.

This was not sufficient to pull him up, and he sat down on the floor with a terrific bump, and pulled the contents of the table over him in a wild cascade. Plates, cups, saucers rattled down in confusion, and the breakages were appalling.

And Handforth sat there, in the middle of it all, with the sardine tin upturned on the top of his head. A thin stream of oil was running down his forehead, and one of the sardines had fallen down the back of his neck.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Church and McClure roared. Their tea had vanished, and there was little prospect of getting any elsewhere—but they roared. The spectacle which Handforth presented was too ludicrous for words.

"Gug-gug-gug!" ejaculated Handforth incoherently.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, my goodness! I—I—I——"

Handforth hurled the sardine tin across the room, and wiped his face with a portion of the cloth.

"You—you grinning fatheads." he howled. "Look at me! Look what a mess I'm in!"

"Yes, we are looking!" yelled Church. "Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'll punch you until you can't see straight!" roared Handy, struggling to his feet desperately. "I'll—I'll—— Whoop! Look out! Yarooh!"

Handforth sat down again, and a crash followed, for he had bumped upon a cup. Church and McClure went off into further yells of laughter, and they knew they were safe in doing so, for there was practically no chance of Handforth reaching them.

"The best thing you can do is to take those giddy skates off," grinned Church. "You've done a terrific lot of damage already, and there'll be bloodshed if you'll go out in the passage. Be sensible, Handy——"

"Dry up!" bawled Handforth. "I'm going out, and, what's more, I'll make you chaps sit up later on! You'd better go round the studies and borrow some more things for tea. My only hat! I —I can feel something crawling down my back!"

Handforth wriggled convulsively as he sat on the floor.

"It must be that sardine," said McClure, grinning.

"Sardine!" shouted Handforth. "How the dickens can a tinned sardine crawl?"

"I expect it's sliding down—sardines are greasy, you know. Anyhow, I saw one drop down your collar not long ago!"

"Great pip!" said Handforth.

He made several wild attempts to recover the sardine, but failed. Then he gave it up as a bad job, and once more

attempted to find his feet. This time he succeeded, but only by clutching firmly at the table.

The skates were exceptionally good ones, the rollers working with extreme ease and facility. Any ordinary fellow would have been somewhat disheartened at such a bad opening, but Handforth was not an ordinary fellow.

He was all the more determined to carry out his intention.

"What you've got to do is to strike out boldly," he said. "It's no good going at it half-heartedly. The idea is to launch out, and make a good run. You watch me get to the door!"

"Hold on," said Church. "What about these crocks?"

"Blow the crocks!"

"But we borrowed 'em from Study E, and a few from Study L," said Church. "There'll be some jazz dancing when the fellows know what's happened to their things. Besides, we've got no grub for tea."

Handforth glared.

"All you think about is your giddy inside!" he snapped. "As soon as lessons are over, you want grub! Hardly an hour passes without one of you yelling out for something to eat! Can't you take a more serious view of life? When something important crops up I believe in giving it full attention."

"I've got nothing to say against that argument," remarked McClure. "But you can't seriously mean to tell me that it's important to go skating about the passages on those giddy things? You'll only get copped by a master!"

"Oh, rats!" said Handforth. "Now you watch me get to the door."

He swept forward, and it was a rather foolish thing to do, considering that the floor was littered with the debris from the tea-table. The left skate caught against a broken plate, and a second later Handforth pitched head foremost into the corner of the study.

His head disappeared into the coal-scuttle, and there was a terrific clatter. It wouldn't have been so bad under ordinary circumstances. But Church had been clearing out the fireplace shortly before, and as the scuttle happened to be empty, Church had half-filled it with ashes, finishing up with a layer of soot from the chimney. And Handforth's face disappeared into the soot.

"Great Scot!" shrieked Church.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Handforth was a weird spectacle when he reappeared. He wasn't hurt at all, but his face had vanished behind a covering of blackness which disguised him completely. Soot hung from his eyebrows, from his chin, and from his nose.

"Gug-gug-gug! Yoop!" he gasped lucidly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You fathead!"—splutter—"asses!" exclaimed Handforth thickly. "I'll—I'll make you"—splutter—"sit up for this! Yow! I'm filled with soot!"

"Why on earth did you put your head into the coalscuttle?" asked Church.

Handforth could find no reply to such a question, and he clutched at the table-cloth, which was still lying on the floor. It had been somewhat grimy originally, but by the time Handforth had finished with it now, it was in such a condition that it would be quite unfit to send to the laundry.

And Handforth was far from being cleaned. Most of the soot was off, certainly, but the result was frightful. His face was streaky with black, and he looked an extraordinary specimen of humanity.

"So that's the way you get to the door?" asked McClure politely. "I don't quite see how it's done; but I suppose you know best."

"You grinning rotters!" said Handforth thickly. "I'll show you how to skate before I've done! By George! I didn't think it was such a beastly job, though! But when I make up my mind to do a thing—I do it!"

His chums stared.

"You're not going out like that?" gasped Church.

"Like what?"

"Looking like a giddy nigger!"

"I don't care what my face looks like—I'm going," said Handforth obstinately. "And this time I'll crawl to the blessed door! There are too many obstacles in this room for a chap to do proper skating!"

"Take my advice, Handy, and get those things off your feet," said McClure. "Wash, have tea, and then try the skates afterwards. That's sound wisdom."

It was, but Handforth ignored it.

He had made up his mind—and that was enough.

Argument was useless, of course. As a matter of fact, it would only have made things worse—if that were possible. The very idea of Handforth appearing in the passage in his present condition made Church and McClure quite apprehensive as to his ultimate fate.

The leader of Study D reached the door on his hands and knees. Having got to his feet very gingerly, he turned the handle, and succeeded in getting into the passage without mishap.

It was a fairly wide passage, and the floor was smooth and solid—quite an ideal place for a run on roller skates. If anybody happened to come out of a study door, however, things might happen.

But most of the juniors were at tea, and the passages were quiet.

Handforth knew well enough that he was doing a foolish thing, but he had made up his mind, and for the sake of his own self-respect he couldn't back out. He started off down the passage with as much speed as it was possible for him to attain. He hoped to glide along fairly swiftly; but he certainly did not anticipate that he would swoop down the passage at the speed he actually achieved.

He simply shot down towards the lobby like an express train.

To make matters worse, he slightly overbalanced before he had covered half the distance. And, try as he would, he couldn't recover himself. The whole thing happened in a few seconds, but it seemed like hours to Handy.

He knew that he was going over on his back—nothing could avert it.

But instead of going over at once, the fatal moment was delayed. One foot came off the ground, and stood out straight, like a battering ram. And Handforth whizzed along on one skate—just on the balance.

And then the catastrophe occurred.

Morrow, of the Sixth, turned into the Remove passage suddenly, and quite unsuspiciously. He arrived at precisely the wrong moment—and the unfortunate prefect received Handforth's battering ram skate neatly in the waistcoat.

"Yoo-oop!" shouted Morrow wildly.

He went over backwards, collapsed along the floor, and Handforth flopped heavily on the top of him. The two were inextricably mixed up for a few seconds. Then Handforth managed to get clear, and he sat up, panting heavily.

Morrow was speechless. For one thing, all the wind was knocked out of him, and for another, he was staggered to find that Handforth could say nothing better than "sorry," after performing such an act of violence.

"Quite an accident, you know," went on Handforth. "But I must say it was a bit inconsiderate of you to dodge in my way like that, Morrow!"

The prefect had opened his mouth to speak, but no sound would come. This was certainly the last straw! The Removite actually had the utter nerve to blame Morrow! It was altogether past bearing.

"You confounded young sweep!" said Morrow, with a gulp. "I've got a mind to haul you before the Head for this! What the thunder do you think you're playing at?"

"I was only skating——"

"You know as well as I do that such a thing is forbidden in the passage," snapped Morrow. "You might have half-killed me with that elephant's hoof of yours! You'll write five hundred lines."

Handforth gasped.

"I—I'll do which?" he asked blankly.

"You'll write me five hundred lines!" exclaimed the prefect, with great anger.

"But—but what for?"

"There's no need for me to tell you what for," shouted Morrow. "And you'll take those skates off, and give them in my charge—understand? Take them off now! After that you'll go upstairs and have a bath! Don't you know you're looking like a confounded chimney-sweep?"

Morrow was usually quite good tempered. He was one of the nicest fellows in the Sixth, and a very popular prefect. He would stand a lot, but even Morrow had a limit. And that limit had been reached—and passed—on this occasion. He was hot all over with anger and pain.

"I—I say, you ain't serious?" asked Handforth. "You don't really mean that I've got to do five hundred lines?"

"Yes, I do."

"But it was an accident——"

"An accident, be hanged," said Morrow, curtly. "You ought to have known that using roller-skates in the passage would only lead to an accident. It's

a lucky thing I wasn't really hurt. In any case, you deserve lines for appearing in public in that horrible condition. Get those skates off."

"But—but——"

"Don't argue!" roared Morrow. "Get those skates off, I tell you!"

Handforth was still sitting on the floor—considering it wiser to remain in a place of safety—and he looked up with indignation.

"I didn't think you were a beastly bully, Morrow," he exclaimed warmly. "Just because I happened to bump into you, it doesn't mean to say that you've got to give me five hundred lines."

"If you don't like it you can go to the Housemaster," said Morrow grimly. "I'll go with you. I'll warrant that Mr. Lee not only gives you five hundred lines, but swipes you as well—with probably a gating at the top. You can take your choice, my lad. Will you accept my impot., or shall we go to Mr. Lee?"

Handforth glared.

"I'll do the lines," he growled. "But it won't take me long to show you that it doesn't pay to bully, Morrow! By George, just because I happened to bump into you! Rank injustice, I call it!"

Handforth removed the skates, and Morrow seized them and prepared to go.

"Remember," he said grimly, "I shall want those lines to-night."

"To-night!"

"Yes—before supper-time," said Morrow. "If they're not done I'll report you to the Housemaster. Perhaps it'll teach you not to be such a hopeless young ass!"

Morrow walked away, and within the next second half a dozen doors opened, and a crowd of juniors emerged.

"Great guns!" ejaculated Reginald Pitt, of Study E. "Who's this? Can anybody tell me where this thing escaped from?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Perhaps it's escaped from a menagerie!" suggested Hart.

"Egad!" exclaimed the Hon. Douglas Singleton, adjusting his monocle, and surveying Handforth with great interest. "It's awfully difficult to say what the thing is! I wonder if it can speak?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Handforth clenched his fists.

"It can punch, too!" he roared. "If there's any more of this funny rot, I'll wipe the lot of you up! Instead of standing there, grinning, you ought to be sympathising with me! I always thought Morrow was a decent chap—but now I know he's a rotten bully."

"Eh? What's that?" I asked, emerging from Study C. "Do my ears deceive me, or do I hear Handforth saying nasty things about Morrow?"

"Dear old boy, it can't be possible," said Sir Montie Tregellis-West. "Begad, what—what is that frightful-looking object standing there?"

"That," explained Pitt, "is Handforth!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But what's happened to him?" I asked. "He's not usually so dirty as this!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"That's right—cackle!" said Handforth, bitterly. "It's always the way—when I'm outnumbered, I'm sneered at! Morrow's a cad. Just because I happened to be using a pair of roller-skates in the passage, he's given me five hundred lines."

"A bit steep," I said. "But you did more than that, surely, Handy?"

"Well, I bumped into the ass——"

"Oh!" I said. "Hard?"

"I only caught him as he was coming round the corner," said Handforth, warmly. "He was knocked about five feet, I should think, and I collapsed on top of him. That's all that happened."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"All!" grinned Tommy Watson. "It's a wonder Morrow didn't give you a swishing. But how did you manage to get yourself into that sooty condition ——"

"Hi!" shouted Pitt. "Hold on a minute——"

But Handforth was as disgusted with us as he was with Morrow, and he stalked away to the bathroom with rage boiling within him. It was unreasonable rage, of course, but that made no difference to Handforth.

And Edward Oswald mentally decided that Morrow should be made to "sit up" before many hours had passed. Handforth was not vindictive, and it was not his way to seek revenge, but on this occasion he felt that he would be justified in getting his own back.

In the meantime he would be busily occupied with the five hundred lines.

And while he was doing them he would have time for reflection; and perhaps he would realise that the advice of his chums was quite sound.

On the other hand, he would probably realise nothing of the sort!

CHAPTER II.

BENT ON REVENGE.

McCLURE looked rather alarmed.

"You can't do anything like that, Handy," he exclaimed. "Besides, Morrow was only doing his duty——"

"Do you call it doing his duty to make me write five hundred rotten lines?" demanded Handforth tartly. "I've only just finished—and it's nearly suppertime. I've missed prep., and that will mean a thundering row with Crowell in the morning! I can tell you, I'm going to make Morrow squirm to-night!"

"You'll make him shiver, anyhow," remarked Church, grinning.

"I can't do anything openly, so I'm going to jape the rotter in secret," declared Handforth. "I've worked it all out, and the plan can't possibly go wrong. It's one of the best wheezes that was ever thought out, my sons."

"There's nothing like being modest," said Church.

"It's not a question of modesty," went on Handforth. "I know when an idea's good, and I'm not ass enough to run down my own wheezes. When Morrow get's that stream of water over him, it'll cool him down a bit—but he'll never be able to prove who did the thing. We shall be safe as eggs!"

"We?" repeated McClure.

"Yes—we shall all be in it."

"I don't see the need for us all to get up after lights-out," said Church. "You can do the job beautifully on your own, Handy. In fact, it'll be far safer. There won't be any risk of your getting collared if you do the trick on your own."

Handforth glared.

"You needn't think you're going to get out of it like that," he said sourly. "A fine thing when my chums desert me! By George! Don't you agree that Morrow ought to be scragged?"

"Yes," said Church and McClure resignedly.

Perhaps they didn't exactly think so in their own hearts, but it saved a lot of trouble to agree.

"What we've got to do is simple," went on Handforth. "I've planned everything. I've even got Warren's syringe in the box-room, ready. You know as well as I do that the box-room window is right over the window of Morrow's bedroom. He always sleeps with the window wide open, and the head of his bed is just beneath the window. So, if I lean out of the box-room window, and just point the syringe downwards, a stream of water will swamp Morrow out of his giddy bed!"

"It seems a bit steep," remarked Church doubtfully.

"Not so steep as giving me five hundred lines!" snorted Handforth. "It'll be as easy as pie to do, and Morrow will never be able to find out the culprits. You chaps will keep watch while I do the trick. See?"

Church and McClure saw all right, but they did not exactly like the project. However, it was useless to disagree, so when they all went up to the Remove dormitory to bed, they did so with the intention of keeping awake till ten-thirty.

Handforth's chums hoped that their leader would fall asleep before the appointed time—and this was quite possible. If so, his anger would be melted away by the morning, and the matter would drop.

But when the school clock chimed out the half-hour, Handforth sat up in bed promptly. He was fully awake—and the rest of the Remove was asleep. Even Church and McClure had dozed off.

"Wake up, you lazy bounders," whispered Handforth, shaking them.

"Eh? What's the matter—— Oh," said Church, blinking. "Is that you, Handy? I say, chuck up that potty idea ——"

"Get out of bed, and don't argue," hissed Handforth.

His whisper was not exactly silent, and I awoke almost at once. I gazed across the dark dormitory, and saw three figures moving about. At first I thought that Fullwood and Co. were about to leave on one of their Nuttish missions to the White Harp. But the three figures were

in the wrong part of the dormitory. Then I heard a voice.

"Buck up!" it said. "And don't make so much noise!"

"Handy!" I muttered. "What's the game, I wonder?"

I sat up straight.

"I say, you fellows, what's the idea over there?" I asked.

"My hat, Nipper!" muttered McClure.

"Well, supposing it is Nipper?" demanded Handforth. "You can go to sleep again, Nipper. This affair ain't your concern!"

"Going on the razzle?" I inquired politely.

"You—you silly fathead!" snorted Handforth. "It's a jape, if you want to know the truth! You can eat coke!"

"Thanks. I'd rather not," I replied. "Take my advice, Handy, and don't try any japes on. Remember what happened to you this evening——"

"That's just what I'm remembering," said Handforth grimly.

I grinned in the darkness.

"Oh, so that's the idea," I chuckled. "You're going to make poor old Morrow go through the mill, eh? If you try any tricks with him, my son, you'll get the worst of it. That's all I'm going to say."

"Good!" said Handforth.

I laid down to sleep again, and Handforth and Co. stole silently out of the dormitory. They passed upstairs to the top landing, and went some distance down the narrow corridor. At last they came to a halt outside the door of the small box-room.

Handforth went in first, and his chums followed. The room was nearly empty, and no mishap occurred as the trio passed across to the window. Up in the corner a large, brass garden syringe was standing, with a large enamel jug full of water near by. Moonlight was streaming in through the window.

"Nothing could be better," murmured Handforth. "Now, Church, you'll go to the door, and keep watch. And you look out of the window, McClure, while I do the trick. We don't want to be spotted by anybody in the Triangle—although it's nearly a cert that the masters will be in bed by this time."

Handforth opened the window, and leaned out. The Triangle lay beneath, the wide space of ground being flooded by moonlight. It was a delightful spring night, more like May than March.

Everything was still and quiet, and only one or two lights were gleaming in the innumerable windows. Far away, in the village, several cockerels were holding a crowing competition—having probably made an error in the time, for it was many hours from dawn.

Handforth gazed down at the window immediately beneath, and he grinned. It was Morrow's window, and the upper half was wide open. It was impossible to see inside, but Handforth knew that he could easily project a stream of water through the opening—and it could not fail to swamp the unfortunate prefect's bed.

Handforth dodged in again.

"Good!" he murmured. "Everything's all serene. You keep your eye on the window, my son, and I'll fill the syringe. As soon as we've done we'll dodge back to the dormitory like greased lightning.

McClure remained at the window while Handforth went to the corner to fill the syringe. He had only just touched it when Church uttered a low exclamation, and retreated from the window.

"What's wrong?" asked Handforth quickly.

"Somebody's just come out of the servant's doorway," said McClure. "Look! Well, I'm jiggered! I believe it's Mrs. Poulter."

"Rats!"

"Well, come and look for yourself!"

Handforth moved across to the window, and stared out into the moonlit Triangle. And there, sure enough, a figure was moving in the moonlight. It was the figure of a woman, and there was no doubt she was the House matron, Mrs. Poulter.

"Queer!" murmured Handforth. "She ought to have been in bed long ago. She seems to be walking stealthily, too."

"What's she got under her arm?"

"A parcel, by the look of it," said Handforth. "Why, hallo! There's another woman coming to meet her! Phew! This looks a bit rummy!"

The juniors watched with much curiosity. Church came over from the door, and joined the other two.

"What's the matter?" he asked.

"Blessed if I know," said Handforth. "But it seems to me that Mrs. Poulter is up to something shady."

"Rot!"

"Well, isn't it obvious?"

"Not that I can see," said McClure. "It's not midnight yet, after all, and there's nothing wrong in the House dame meeting a friend——"

"After everybody else is in bed?" asked Handforth keenly. "Nothing wrong? Look there! She's passing the parcel over now. By George! I've got it! I'll bet I know what the old girl's doing."

"You can't guess!"

"It's not a guess," said Handforth mysteriously. "Don't forget I've got a detective mind. I can deduce things. And just at present I'm keyed up to the right pitch. I can scent villainy!"

Handforth spoke with dramatic effect—not that his chums were surprised at this. Their leader had always had a delusion that he was keen at detective work. Quite the opposite, of course, was the case.

"Don't talk out of your hat," murmured Church. "Just as if Mrs. Poulter would be up to any villainy——"

"Look at her!" said Handforth. "She's just passed that parcel over, and it's as clear as daylight that she's done it in secret because she's afraid of anybody knowing. The solution of it is obvious."

"Well, what is it?"

"Pilfering!"

"Eh?"

"What?"

"Pilfering," repeated Handforth firmly. "It's as clear as anything. That parcel contains goods from the storeroom—see? The other woman is a pal of Mrs. Poulter's, and she comes here at night to get the parcels. And this time we've spotted them in the very act!"

Church and McClure looked doubtful.

"Mrs. Poulter wouldn't descend to anything like that," said McClure.

"People are always considered decent sorts until they are found out," said Handforth grimly. "It's the case with most crooks. Mrs. Poulter has been found out now. I expect the other woman sells the stuff, and they share the giddy profits!"

"Well, it's none of our concern," said Church. "Mrs. Poulter's gone in now, anyhow, and the other woman's gone too. The best thing we can do is to slip back into bed. Are you going to squirt Morrow?"

"Blow Morrow!"

"Then you're going to bed——"

"I'm going to do some detective work," said Handforth. "When an important thing crops up, I'm generally on it, my sons."

"But, look here——"

"I'm going downstairs—to the Housekeeper's room," said Handforth. "She might have another accomplice, and if I can obtain sufficient evidence, we shall have the whole bunch in our hands. Think of the glory! We shall be able to round up the crooks, and we shall be famous."

Church and McClure were not impressed.

"You might think they were coiners, or murderers, or something like that!" said Church. "After all, we don't know anything for certain. Perhaps Mrs. Poulter's been handing over some of the surplus, but I don't even believe that. Don't get wild ideas into your head, Handy."

"And it wouldn't be right to listen downstairs," said McClure. "I should think you'd draw the line at eavesdropping, Handy——"

"Eavesdropping! Rats!" interrupted Handforth. "A detective always listens at doors or windows for incriminating evidence. It's a different matter when it comes to a private conversation. I'm out for proof—see?"

"Well, you'd better get off," said Church. "If you don't hurry now, Mrs. Poulter will have gone upstairs. Come on, Clurey, we'll get back to the dormitory."

"Good!" said McClure.

"You—you faithless rotter!" said Handforth witheringly.

"Eh?"

"Ain't you my assistants?"

"Don't be dotty, old son——"

"A detective always needs an assistant," argued Handforth. "Assistants are necessary to—to keep watch, and to come and rescue if anything happens. It's always handy to have an assistant knocking about in the offing, so to speak. Haven't you noticed how these things happen in detective stories?"

"This isn't a detective story," said Church bluntly.

"Well, you chaps have got to come, so don't try to back out of it," said Handforth firmly. "You ought to be honoured to think that I'm willing to take you along. We might be dropping on a big criminal gang—there's no telling."

Church and McClure gave up their leader as hopeless, and followed him out of the box-room. They were thankful he had given up his wild idea about swamping Morrow. That, at all events, was one advantage.

But Handforth had forsaken the one scheme in order to embark upon a plan of even a wilder nature.

He went downstairs quietly, and the other two followed. Then Handforth passed along the passages until he came to the servants' quarters. He knew exactly where Mrs. Poulter's sitting-room was situated, and he paused before turning into the last passage.

"You chaps stop here," he murmured. "I'll creep forward. Be ready for action when you receive the signal."

"What signal?"

Handforth did not trouble to reply but slipped quietly forward into the little passage. Mrs. Poulter's room was some way down, and Handforth could see a light gleaming from beneath the door.

He was thrilled by the fact that a murmur of voices could be heard.

He concluded that further plots were being hatched, and he thrilled even more when he pictured himself as the detector of the whole conspiracy. At last, his heart beating fast, he arrived against the door.

Just for a moment he had a qualm. He wondered if it was right to listen. But, after all, he was only doing a public duty. He was about to unmask dishonest people, and reveal them in their true light.

"You oughtn't to work so late as this, Mrs. Poulter," came a voice, soft, but distinct. "It ain't doing you any good, you know."

Handforth recognised the voice as that of Ellen, one of the maidservants.

"You mustn't worry your head about me, Ellen," said Mrs. Poulter, with an audible sigh. "I've been doing it now for a good few weeks, and I'm still all right. I can keep it up."

"But ain't you coming to bed now?"

"No, girl, not for another hour."

"I came down especially to speak to you, Mrs. Poulter," said Ellen. "It don't seem right that you should be working here after everybody is abed."

"Maybe that's so, Ellen dear, but it can't be helped," said the House matron. "The wages we get here ain't what you would call generous, and I've got to get the money somehow. There, there, my girl, get off to bed."

Handforth felt rather guilty. He had heard nothing very incriminating. He had heard quite an ordinary conversation between two women. Certainly it was of no interest to him, but that last remark of Mrs. Poulter's made him pause. She had to get the money somehow!

It seemed to hint that Mrs. Poulter had resorted to dishonesty, so Handforth felt justified in remaining.

"Yes, I think it's a shame," said Ellen, with a touch of indignation in her voice. "It ain't fair that you should work so hard for so little money, Mrs. Poulter. There's Warren, too. He's been grumbling of late, and I hear that the gardeners and grooms have been getting together. We ain't paid enough."

"You mustn't grumble, Ellen," said Mrs. Poulter. "Perhaps our wages ain't what they ought to be, but we're fairly comfortable here——"

"Comfortable!" echoed the maidservant. "Is it comfortable when you have to sit up half the night doing dressmaking? It's a sin and a shame, Mrs. Poulter! We're all underpaid in this school. The cook was only saying yesterday——"

"You mustn't take much notice of what the cook says," said the matron. "She's always been discontented—her sort generally are. Things are going quite smooth now. I've got into a regular habit of things. I work from ten o'clock until two at night, and I get through quite a lot, which reminds me, you're hindering me every minute you're staying here. The dressmaking just helps me along nicely. Mrs. Holton comes up here of a night time and takes the things, then she goes to Bannington with them next day, to the dressmakers. So things are working all right."

"And you—what about you?" asked Ellen. "You ain't looking half so well as you used to, Mrs. Poulter. The

extra work's telling on you. You ought to be paid enough so that you needn't do this dressmaking."

Mrs. Poulter sighed.

"Perhaps I ought, my dear, but at my time of life I can't afford to be changing about from place to place. The money I get from the school is barely enough to keep me in decent clothing, and then I've got my poor old mother to look after. So I do the dressmaking, my dear. I must."

"Our wages ought to be increased by fifty per cent—them's the words cook used, anyhow," declared Ellen. "We were all expecting it, too. The cost of living has gone up so much, the cost of everything—that the same wages don't do. We've only had ten per cent. increase since the horrid old war ended, and it's not in proportion to everything else. All the household staff at St. Frank's is underpaid."

"You're simply repeating what cook says——"

"I know I am; and what cook says is right," said the maidservant. "Why, at the Bannington Grammar School—which ain't nearly so important as St. Frank's—the servants get nearly twice as much as we do. It's the same at other schools. It's a wonder we don't do something about it, instead of going on week after week like this. Warren was talking about a strike——"

"My dear," protested Mrs. Poulter. "A strike, indeed! We should all be dismissed—that would be the end of it."

"Well, I shouldn't care," said Ellen defiantly. "I'm thinking of leaving, anyhow, if things don't get better. I'm sure I could get double the wages at another place. So it don't worry me!"

"Well, well, my dear, you must get to bed," said Mrs. Poulter. "You've got to get up earlier than I have, you know, and you won't be ready to turn out of bed when the alarm clock goes off."

Handforth thought he had better shift.

He had heard sufficient to tell him that his first theory had been all wrong. There was nothing criminal going on here. Mrs. Poulter, it seemed, was merely doing dressmaking in her spare time in order to supplement her wages—which, it seemed, were insufficient for her needs.

Handforth was rather indignant.

It was news to him that the servants were discontented. If Ellen was right, the household staff had every reason to be discontented. A ten-per-cent. rise was totally out of proportion to the rise in everything else.

The junior was determined to investigate matters, and if he found conditions were bad, he would see what he could do. This wouldn't amount to much, of course, but Handforth was always willing to make himself useful.

He had turned away, and was about to creep down the passage, when the door of the matron's room opened suddenly. The passage was flooded with light, and Handforth was revealed.

He gave a gasp and fled.

Ellen, who was about to come out, screamed, and jumped back.

Handforth's flight was rather disastrous. His foot caught against something on the floor, and he went down full length. Before he could get up, Mrs. Poulter appeared, and stared down at him.

"Well, I never!" exclaimed the good lady. "It's one of the young gentlemen! Master Handforth, I do declare!"

Edward Oswald could only sit up and blink.

CHAPTER III.

HANDFORTH—AGITATOR.

ELLEN tossed her head indignantly. "It's a pity the young gentleman can't be in bed at this time of night," she said. "And what was he doing outside your door, anyhow, Mrs. Poulter? We might have been talking of the most private things!"

"We weren't, so it doesn't matter," said the House-dame. "Well, Master Handforth, I'm surprised to see you here like this. Don't you know it's nearly midnight? If one of the masters happens to see you——"

"I say," gasped Handforth. "Don't—don't report me, Mrs. Poulter! I—I was only investigating, you know."

"You were what, sir?"

"Investigating," said Handforth. "Two other chaps are just round the corner."

"The impudence!" murmured Ellen.

"But what are you doing here, Master Handforth?" demanded the matron.

"I'll tell you in a minute," said Handforth. "You chaps might as well come along," he added, raising his voice. "They know you're here."

Church and McClure appeared, looking rather sheepish. All three juniors were dressed hurriedly, and they only wore their trousers over the pyjamas, with coats thrown over the lot. They didn't boast a collar between them.

"It was Handy's doings, Mrs. Poulter," said Church. "We advised him not to come, but he was obstinate ——"

"I'm jolly glad I did come," said Handforth. "I've heard something that jolly well surprised me!"

"Were you listening outside my door, then?" asked Mrs. Poulter sharply.

"Yes, ma'am," said Handforth. "I'll explain——"

"And so you ought," declared the servant girl. "A nice thing, when young gentlemen come listening outside ladies' doors——"

"Oh, dry up," said Handforth. "You don't understand, you ass—— I mean ——"

"It's the first time I've been called that!" exclaimed Ellen, indignantly.

"I'm sorry," growled Handforth. "You shouldn't interrupt. Look here, Mrs. Poulter, I'll tell you the exact truth. I saw you in the Triangle, and I thought you had been pinching the stores, or something——"

"Master Handforth!" exclaimed the House-dame, shocked.

"I'm awfully sorry, and all that, but it looked suspicious," went on Handy. "You see, I'm keen on investigating, so I came along. But, of course, I didn't hear anything suspicious—so it's O.K. You're not what I thought. I mean, you haven't been nicking the stores."

Mrs. Poulter didn't know whether to be angry or amused for a moment. But she couldn't help smiling. Handforth, after all, was a very simple youth, and it was difficult to be angry with him.

"I don't rightly understand what you mean, Master Handforth, but you needn't explain any more," she said. "If I were you I'd get along to bed again. I'll promise not to tell on you."

"Oh, good," murmured Church.

"Just a minute, Mrs. Poulter," said Handforth. "I'd like to have a few words—on the subject you were discussing with Ellen, here. That is to say, about the wages. Do you mind?"

Mrs. Poulter looked doubtful.

"Well, Master Handforth, it don't seem right," she said. "Besides, I shall get into serious trouble myself if it's found out that I've been talking to you here. I'd rather you went off to bed, sir——"

"That's all right," said Handforth. "Don't you worry, Mrs. Poulter. We sha'n't be disturbed here. Masters never come into this part of the building. You were saying something about dressmaking——"

"Dear, dear!" exclaimed the matron. "I do hope you won't get talking about that, Master Handforth. If the governors got to hear that I'm doing extra work, I might be dismissed. I'm not supposed to take on any other work. And it would be a calamity if you got talking in that way."

"You can rely on me to be cautious, Mrs. Poulter," said Handforth. "I'm not the kind of chap to give secrets away. And I learned this one by accident, so to speak, so I'm in duty bound to respect your wishes."

"I'm glad to hear you say that, sir ——"

"But don't be in such a hurry," went on the leader of Study D. "Ellen was saying that the whole household staff is discontented because the wages aren't sufficient."

"It's true enough," put in the maid-servant. "We ain't none of us paid what we ought to be paid. I'm not one of those discontented sort, what's always asking for more, and I'm regular down on them people as is discontented with good wages. But I do say as we ought to have our rightful money."

"Nobody's going to deny that," said Handforth. "I don't want to be inquisitive, Mrs. Poulter, but how much tin do you get?"

"How much what, Master Handforth?"

"Tin—brass—money!" explained the junior."

"Oh, money, sir," said Mrs. Poulter. "Why, I get thirty pounds a year—and my keep, of course."

"And I get twenty-five," said Ellen. "It wasn't so much a year or two ago,

but what's twenty-five pounds now? Ten shillings a week—and less! At the price of things nowadays, it ain't enough to spend on sweets and pictures! And where am I going to get my new hats and things?"

Handforth whistled.

"Ten bob a week!" he exclaimed. "My hat! That's pretty rotten. Why, I was reading that some maidservants are getting a quid a week, and some thirty bob!"

"There you are!" said Ellen triumphantly.

"Yes, yes, my girl, but those places aren't easy to find—and I dare say there's lots of extra work to be done," said the House-dame, shaking her head.

"I think it's jolly off side," declared Handforth. "Why, you only get about twelve and six a week. Great pip! Twelve and a tanner! And you're the House-matron, with all sorts of responsibilities, and tons of work to do. It's a rotten shame. Are all the other servants paid in the same proportion?"

"Yes, Master Handforth," said Ellen, noting with satisfaction that the junior was in sympathy. "It don't seem right to us. We ain't like a big factory, where we could all go on strike. The staff of a school ain't so very large, after all—not like hundreds of thousands."

"That don't make any difference. Everybody ought to have a decent wage, and twelve and six for Mrs. Poulter is scandalous. What do you think of it, you chaps?"

"Rotten!" said Church and McClure.

"And Mrs. Poulter has to do dressmaking, so that she can earn enough money to live on properly," went on Handforth warmly. "I think it's a beastly shame. You see, Mrs. Poulter, we've never taken any interest in these household matters, and we didn't know anything about it. But it'll be different in future——"

"Oh, Master Handforth, we don't want you to interfere for us——"

"It's not a question of interfering," said Handforth. "The Head ought to know about it, and I think it's jolly queer of him not to do something. I always thought Dr. Stafford was one of the best. I had no idea he was mean ——"

"But listen, Master Handforth," interrupted the matron. "The Head doesn't decide our wages at all. I know for a fact that he wants to give us more, but can't. It's not in his power."

"Not in his power!"

"No, sir."

"Then who the dickens decides these things?"

"The school governors, Master Handforth," said Mrs. Poulter. "Everything's decided by them. That's just the trouble. They ain't here, and we can't do anything. Perhaps they'll give us more money some day. Let's hope so, anyhow."

Handforth and Co. looked at one another.

"You ought to get a rise to-morrow," said Church. "Why, there are heaps of chaps in the Remove who spend quids a week in pocket-money. Perhaps we shall be able to do something."

"I'm sure you can't, Master Church," said Mrs. Poulter. "It wouldn't be right, neither. Some of the servants were talking about asking for fifty per cent. rise—that means half as much again, I believe. I dare say we ought to have it, but I don't suppose we shall. Another five shillings a week would be very acceptable."

"You wait," said Handforth mysteriously.

"Yes, that's about all we can do," exclaimed Ellen. "But waiting isn't good enough. If things don't improve by the end of the week, I'm going. I don't see why I should stay on here at starvation wages."

Handforth and Co. decided to get back to bed, and they slipped away shortly afterwards. Church and McClure were very glad, for they were feeling sleepy. But Handforth was very much on the alert, and his jaw was set grimly.

"Yes, there'll be something doing to-morrow," he declared. "By George! Things can't last like this for long."

"Like which?"

"Oh, don't be an ass, Walter Church," said Handy. "Look at all these servants—the people who attend to all our needs. Is it right that we should be comfortable while they're getting such rotten wages? In the morning I'm going to make a fuss about it, and perhaps that'll call attention to the beastly conditions."

"Perhaps we'd better not say too much," remarked Church. "After all, it ain't our business——"

"That doesn't matter a snap," interrupted Handforth. "Sometimes it's

right to interfere in the business of other people—if they haven't got pluck enough to do anything themselves."

"They don't deserve more money if they don't ask for it," said McClure.

"What's the good of asking, if they don't get it?" demanded Handforth. "I expect they've asked right enough—but in the wrong way. They ought to get up a deputation, representing the whole crowd."

"Oh, well, let's get to bed," said Church practically. "I'm feeling jolly sleepy. The question of wages can wait."

So the chums of Study D retired to rest, and Morrow—thanks to Mrs. Poulter—did not receive the ducking which Handforth had planned for him.

In the morning Handforth jumped up among the first, in spite of the fact that he had had two hours less sleep than most of the other fellows.

I could see in a moment that something special was afoot.

Handforth always gave the game away. There was a look in his eye which could not be mistaken. The look which meant grim business. And he jumped out of bed with great alacrity, and stared round the room.

"Well, old son, what's the trouble?" I asked. "Who's going to be slaughtered this morning? You seem to be in a pretty dangerous mood."

"Begad!" exclaimed Sir Montie Tregellis-West. "I hope the dear fellow isn't going to start on me! I don't feel quite up to a scrap just now. You were glarin' at me in the most shockin' manner just now, Handy."

"Don't try to be funny," said Handforth. "There's some serious business to attend to. I suppose you fellows don't know that all the giddy servants are thinking about going on strike?"

"What!"

"Don't talk out of your hat!"

"Handy ain't far wrong, although he's exaggerated it," said Church. "There's no actual talk of a strike. The servants are discontented, and they want more money. There might be a strike, of course——"

"I don't think!" exclaimed Pitt. "What the dickens should we do if a strike happened? Who'd cook the food, and do the cleaning, and make the beds, and a thousand-and-one other things? The servants had better go on strike—that's all! We'd soon show 'em a thing or two!"

"Rather!"

"The grasping beggars!"

"They've been infected with the general fever, I suppose," I said. "Everybody wants to strike nowadays—whether they've got any case or not. It's just a habit. The workpeople of to-day seem to have one sole idea, and that is to get as much money as they can——"

"And do as little work as possible!" growled De Valerie.

"Hear, hear!"

"And the servants here have got the same beastly fever, perhaps," said Tommy Watson. "If they went on strike they'd be sacked—the whole job lot. And a good riddance to 'em! A lesson like that would do them good!"

"Rather!"

"They wouldn't get any sympathy from us, anyhow," remarked Reginald Pitt. "If they start any agitating we'll bust up their meetings, and hoot 'em, and generally muck up their game."

"That's the idea!" said Jack Grey, nodding.

Handforth looked round him pityingly.

"You poor, deluded asses!" he exclaimed. "You go against the household staff without hearing any of the facts. Personally, I'm in favour of a strike, and I'm with the servants wholeheartedly!"

"What!"

"You're in favour of a strike?"

"Yes!"

"You must be dotty!"

"Rats! I know what I'm talking about," said Handforth. "I'm willing to back up the servants all along the giddy line. In fact, I'm going to organise meetings, and advocate a strike!"

"My only hat!"

"I'm in favour of the servants having more wages!"

"Great Scott!"

"You—you idiot!"

"I believe in liberty and justice!" roared Handforth. "Down with the capitalists, I say! Down with this rotten system of sweating and driving! Every man and woman ought to have a fair wage! It's a rotten shame that the servants at St. Frank's should be downtrodden and underpaid——"

"Have we had enough of this?" asked Pitt grimly.

"Yes!"

"Shall we take action?"

"Yes, rather!"

"Good!" said Pitt. "Collar the Bolshevik!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We can stand Handy the detective, we can stand Handy the ass, we can stand Handy the nose-puncher," said Pitt; "but we can't stand Handy the agitator!"

"Bump the silly ass!"

"Grab him!"

"Hi! Look out, you dotty lunatics!" roared Handforth. "If you touch me —— Oh, my hat! Yaroooooh! Yow! Yooooooop!"

The agitator was seized by many willing hands. He was lifted off his feet, and carried solemnly out of the dormitory in his pyjamas. He was carried down the corridor, and into one of the bath-rooms.

Then, in spite of his yells, he was hurled into a bath full of cold water.

"Oooooooh!" gasped Handforth. "Gugggghh! Oooooop!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You—you s-s-s-silly id-id-idiots!" spluttered Handy, with chattering teeth. "I—I w-w-was gug-gug-going to ex-explain! I believe in the sus-sus-servants gug-gug-going on strike!"

"Well, my only aunt!" said De Valerie. "He hasn't had enough yet! Give him another ducking!"

"Good!"

Handforth was immersed in the icy water again. He roared and struggled and gasped, but it made no difference. He was ducked thoroughly, the juniors fondly believing that this would dampen Handforth's ardour.

It didn't!

By the time he was dressed, Edward Oswald was more determined than ever to press the deserving cause of the St. Frank's household staff.

CHAPTER IV.

SUPPORTERS IN PLENTY.

TIMOTHY TUCKER nodded in his own peculiar way, with his head on one side.

"I must admit, my dear sir, that I am impressed—vastly impressed!" he said, in his high-pitched voice. "Your arguments are not only sound, but thoroughly in accordance with my own views. Admitted—admitted! It is high time that the downtrodden masses were uplifted and allowed to take their own place in the scheme of things."

"Good!" said Handforth. "I've always thought you were several kinds of a fathead, but you do seem to possess a grain of sense now and again."

"I am highly honoured," beamed T. T. "Your kindness is unbounded, my dear sir—unbounded. The position is this. If the servants of this establishment are really underpaid, their only course is to strike. I agree with strikes. I am, in fact, highly in favour of strikes. Admitted. When you consider the fundamental basis of an argument —— H'm! H'm! But we will deal with that later—later, my dear sir. What do you know, Professor Nutblossom?"

"Eh?" said Handforth, staring.

"H'm! No matter!" mumbled Tucker. "Pray proceed with your wonderful speech. I am interested—vastly interested. But what do you think of things in general, my dear professor? Eh? What do you think of the general situation? Don't you think it is bad?"

"I think you're eligible for admission into a lunatic asylum!" said Handforth.

"Dear, dear, dear!" exclaimed T. T. "You think that, do you? You dare to suggest that I am a lunatic? How dare you, M'sieur de Luxe? How dare you? I shall be compelled to use violence. H'm! Disgraceful!"

Handforth and Co. couldn't help grinning. Tucker of the Remove was a curious junior; and although he seemed to be peculiar at times, he was really "all there." He was sharp enough when he wanted to be. But he was somewhat eccentric in his habits, and in his method of speech.

The chums of Study D had got down before the majority of the Removites, and Handforth was grim and in earnest. He had had no chance to explain, and the fellows thought that he was slightly mad that morning.

Finding Tucker in the lobby, Handforth had proceeded to unfold his arguments to the curious junior. And T. T., to Handforth's surprise, was thoroughly in agreement with the idea of a strike.

"You believe in the servants taking matters into their own hands?" asked Church.

"Certainly, my dear sir."

"But you don't know the facts——"

"Admitted!" said Tucker. "But that is a matter of no importance whatever. I am quite sure that the servants of this establishment are underpaid. In a proper state of society there would be no servants——"

"What!"

"We should all work amicably together," said T. T. "But the position is this. Under the present capitalistic system it is impossible to even approach the ideal. That will be out of the question until vast changes come about ——"

"Look here, I'm doing the talking!" interrupted Handforth. "You can dry up, you super-Bolshevik!"

"Dear, dear!" exclaimed Tucker mildly. "A Bolshevik! You are mistaken, my dear sir—you are mistaken! I am totally opposed to Bolshevism. Bolshevism is a system which is doomed to meet with failure. Violence is never any use. My idea of freedom and justice is quite different. If you will read the great works of Professor Drinkbottle you will realise——"

"Hallo! What's the argument?" inquired Pitt, descending the stairs. "Great Scott! Is Handy still talking about strikes? There'll be a strike soon, I can tell you. My fist will strike his nose!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, you can be funny!" sneered Handforth, glaring at the juniors who had followed Pitt down. "You don't understand the position. I'm thoroughly in favour of the servants declaring a strike. Church and McClure are with me——"

"Rats!" said Pitt.

"It's a fact!" roared Handforth.

"I don't believe it!" exclaimed De Valerie. "Church and McClure have got more sense than to agree with your dotty ideas."

Handforth laughed.

"Ask 'em!" he shouted. "If you don't believe me, ask 'em! They'll soon tell you whether they agree with a strike or not!"

"Oh, dry up!" said Church. "What's the good of arguing? McClure and I certainly think that the servants have every reason for striking——"

"What!" yelled Pitt.

"There you are!" said Handforth triumphantly.

"You must all be mad!" exclaimed Somerton. "Hang it all, it's a queer thing when the fellows begin to support strikes and——"

"My dear chap, you don't understand," put in Handforth. "I've been dipping into the question, and I know. I know lots of things. Everybody here is aware that the cost of everything has gone up two and three hundred per cent. during the last two or three years. Is that a fact?"

"Well, yes," admitted Hart.

"And do you know how much the servants are getting—in wages?" went on Handforth, glaring round. "Do you know how their pay has been increased?"

"In proportion, I should think—like all other wages," said Pitt.

"Ah! That's just where you're wrong!" said Handforth warmly. "That's just where you make a large-sized bloomer, my sons. The staff of St. Frank's is horribly underpaid. The servants here have only received a ten per cent. increase since the war ended! Do you realise what that means? It amounts to this—the staff is getting just about half the money it got before the war! That's what it comes to in actual fact. And it's a shame! It's rotten! It ought to be altered without a second's delay!"

"I don't believe you're right!" declared Pitt.

"I don't want you to believe me!" roared Handforth. "Ask the servants—ask any of them! Ask Mrs. Poulter—ask Warren—ask Tubbs—ask the gardeners! They'll tell you the truth! There's a pretty warm feeling going about, I can tell you—and I'm in favour of determined action."

"Hear, hear!" said McClure.

"What's more," went on Handforth, warming to his work, "some of the servants haven't got enough to live on. They're living under starvation wages. What's the good of a ten per cent. increase in wages when the cost of everything has gone up two hundred per cent.? The Governors ought to be boiled in oil for grinding the school staff like that! And if there isn't a strike before long I shall be jolly surprised. Something ought to be done, anyhow."

The juniors were beginning to listen now.

"If that is right, there may be something in Handy's rot, after all," re-

marked Hart. "I'm not a Socialist, or a Bolshevist, or any 'ist' at all, if it comes to that, but I believe in people having a fair wage."

"That's my argument, exactly," shouted Handforth. "And you won't find a chap more opposed to strikes than I am—because many strikes are mad things. But this kind of strike is a strike in which every decent chap will assist. The staff at St. Frank's is underpaid to such an extent that the money isn't sufficient for giddy clothes! They're underpaid—they're sweated, and it's only right that every worker should have a fair wage. Therefore I reckon there ought to be an agitation at once."

"For a strike?"

"No!" roared Handforth.

"But you just said——"

"Never mind what I just said. There ought to be an agitation against the existing conditions," went on the leader of Study D. "The workers, I believe, want a fifty per cent. increase of wages, and I think it's up to us to help them in their campaign. We ought to agitate until the Governors agree to meet the staff's demands. If they grant the extra wages, all well and good; but if they refuse, then we shall agitate for a strike. That's my programme."

"Hear, hear!"

"Jolly good!" said De Valerie. "I didn't think Handy could talk so sensibly, by gad! I'm with him heart and soul, because it's rotten to think that the school staff is underpaid."

"Why, the servants at Bannington Grammar School get nearly double," shouted Handforth. "It's just the same at Helmford College. St. Frank's seems to have been left behind, and it's a wonder to me that the servants haven't taken action before."

"They're not like the workers in a big industrial concern," said Pitt. "They haven't got unions to look after their interests. The servants here are a peaceful lot, and they've rubbed along without much grumbling. But a limit arrives even with peaceful people, and it seems that a crisis is rapidly approaching."

"Exactly," said Handforth. "And we're going to hurry matters. I want everybody here to support me——"

"Good!"

"We're with you, Handy!"

"Good luck to the staff!"

"Quite so—quite so," said T.T., rubbing his hands. "I am deeply impressed, my dear sir, very deeply impressed. H'm! Admitted. Somehow or other, I've got an idea that we shall have some excitement. It's my intention to give a speech this evening——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There is no necessity for hilarity," exclaimed Tucker severely. "How dare you? Is it possible that you are laughing at me? I intend to give a speech—a powerful speech, in favour of this great strike. H'm! Exactly!"

"Good for you, T.T.! shouted Handforth. "We'll all turn up—and I'll help you to make that giddy speech."

"Which means to say that Handy will do all the talking," said Watson bluntly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Handforth will do no talking," exclaimed Tucker. "It is I who will give the speech, my dear sir. Exactly. The position is this: I believe that the household staff of this school is grossly ill-treated in the matter of wages, and I intend to champion their cause. H'm! It will be quite interesting."

"It seems that we're in for some exciting times," observed the Hon. Douglas Singleton. "I don't usually figure as an upholder of strikes, but I don't mind saying that I agree with this one—always providing that Handforth is right. Of course, he may have got hold of a wrong yarn——"

"Rats!" said Handforth. "Ask the servants—they'll tell you."

Before the morning was over half the Remove had pestered the staff with questions regarding wages. And the result was a complete victory for Handforth. For every member of the household who was approached gave evidence to the effect that the pay was totally inadequate.

Warren, the school porter, waxed quite indignant. He had been at St. Frank's for years, and was practically a part of the institution. Yet he had only received a very slight increase of wages during the past three years, and was barely able to exist on the money he received.

It was the same with the other servants.

Owing to the enormously increased cost of living they were all feeling the effect. Their wages had not increased in proportion, with the result that they were far worse off than they had been a year or two earlier.

1. "Yoo-oop!" shouted the prefect as he collapsed on the floor with Handforth on top.
2. Handforth is determined to investigate into the strange conduct of the matron.

Personally, I was all in favour of helping the staff in their appeal for better conditions. They were a peaceful lot, and would never have dreamed of striking under ordinary circumstances.

They had no intention of striking now, for many of them feared that they would lose their jobs permanently. Moreover, they were not the kind of people to indulge in strikes.

Their plan was to send a deputation to the Headmaster, and to request, politely but firmly, that wages should be increased fifty per cent all round. It was only on account of the encouragement given by the juniors that this deputation idea actually took definite shape.

It had been a mere suggestion, hitherto—just talk, with very little prospect of materialising. But, knowing that the boys were completely on their side, the school staff decided to take its courage in both hands, so to speak.

That afternoon there was considerable activity. Word was passed round from servant to servant, a kind of vote was taken, and by tea-time it was positively arranged that four members of the staff should seek an interview with the Headmaster.

And this had come about only because of the Remove's urging. The four delegates chosen were Warren, Mrs. Poulter, Jane, the cook of the Ancient House, and a gardener named Broome.

Just before tea Warren was observed in the Triangle, and he was surrounded by a crowd of juniors. Handforth was prominent.

"Well, Warren, how goes it?" he was asked.

"I ain't so sure, Master Handforth," said the porter, shaking his head. "These 'ere troubles ain't to my likin'. I'm a peaceable man, an' I prefer things to go on smoothly. 'Owever, something's got to be done, an' it's real good to know that you young gents are supportin' us. We've asked the Head to see us at six o'clock."

"And has the Head agreed?"

"'E 'as, Master 'Andforth," said Warren gloomily.

"You don't seem very bucked about it."

"Very which, young gent?"

"Bucked — cheerful — hopeful," explained Handforth

"Well, the fact is, Master 'Andforth, I ain't so sure that we shall do ourselves any good," said Warren. "This 'ere business ain't as it should be. We servants ought to 'ave enough money, without askin' for more. Like as not we shall all be dismissed——"

"Rats!" said Handforth. "We'll see that you're all right, old son. If there's any talk of dismissing you the Remove will take a hand!"

"Hear, hear!"

"That's all very well, young gents ——"

"The Remove will see you through, Warren," I put in briskly. "You have every right to ask for more money, and there's going to be nobody sacked. The Head will agree with you, probably. Anyhow, go into his study with plenty of confidence, and you'll be all serene."

"I ain't goin' to do no talkin', Master Nipper," said the school porter. "Broome, the 'ead gardener—he's the spokesman, in a way o' speakin'. He's goin' to put the facts before the 'Ead in a nutshell. Broome has a rare way with him, I must admit. 'E can do wonders when it comes to arguin'."

"So Broome is the leader?" said Handforth. "Well, let's hope he makes a clean sweep while he's at it! Ha, ha, ha!"

"I suppose you call that funny—about Broome sweeping clean?" said Pitt. "I noticed that nobody except yourself laughed at it! Well, it'll be interesting to learn the result of this deputation to the Head."

It wasn't long before Broome appeared. He was a man of about forty—a very capable gardener, and a sober, hard-working man. He was rather superior, too, and was entering into this agitation because he knew he had a good case. He was quite an able leader, and the other servants were anxious for him to be the spokesman.

At six o'clock precisely the four delegates presented themselves at the Headmaster's study. Broome was confident, Mrs. Poulter was also confident: Jane, the cook, was nervous; and Warren seemed on the point of backing out at the last moment. But he pulled himself together, and marched in with the others.

The Head was sitting at his desk.

"Ah, Broome, I understand that you have some little grievance to put before

me," said Dr. Stafford, removing his glasses. "I am quite prepared to listen to anything of a reasonable nature which you wish to state."

"Thank you, sir," said Broome. "We represent the whole school staff——"

"Everybody, sir," put in Mrs. Poulter. "The maids, the boot boys, and the whole staff of both Houses. It don't seem right to us that we should have to ——"

"Quite so, Mrs. Poulter—quite so," said the Head gently. "But I was under the impression that Broome was the spokesman of the party."

"That's right, sir," said the head gardener. "It's this way, sir——"

"Our wages aren't sufficient for our needs, sir," said Mrs. Poulter stoutly. "I'm the last one to say anything——"

"Ahem!" exclaimed the Head. "So I have noticed, Mrs. Poulter. But, really, you must allow Broome to speak. I cannot undertake to listen to both of you at the same time."

"The 'Ead won't listen to any of us, if you ain't careful," said Warren nervously. "Too much talkin' ain't good for nobody."

"Now, Broome," said the Head quietly.

"I haven't got much to say, sir," replied Broome. "For some time past all the staff here has felt that the wages have been too small. I don't want to say anything disrespectful, sir, but it's a fact that the wages all round aren't enough. With the cost of things being double and treble—boots, clothes, hats, shirts——"

"Mr. Broome!" exclaimed Mrs. Poulter, shocked.

"It's a fact, Mrs. Poulter," said Broome firmly. "A man has got to wear shirts, all said and done, and they're a terrible price nowadays. The cost of everything has increased, and our wages haven't increased—that's just the difficulty. I dare say the fees of this school have been increased, too—fees for the boys, I mean, sir. And we think it's only right we should be given a fair wage. That's all, sir."

The Head adjusted his glasses again.

"Well, Broome, I quite agree with what you say," he exclaimed. "It's only right and proper that you should have a fair wage in return for your services—and in saying that I embrace every employee in this establishment. I do not think you have cause to complain of my administration——"

"Not at all, sir," said Broome quickly. "All of us have the greatest respect for you, sir, and we hate having to come here now. We've only come because it's a matter of sheer necessity."

"I understand, Broome," said the Head. "I only wish that I could give you a definite answer at this moment, but that, unfortunately, is impossible. Have you come to any decision—that is to say, are you prepared to say what increase you require?"

"Well, sir, I think half as much again wouldn't be far wrong," said the head gardener. "We're all asking for fifty per cent. rise."

The Head nodded.

"And your request is by no means unreasonable," he said. "I am entirely in sympathy with you, Broome. In fact, it may interest you to learn that I have been trying for some weeks past to persuade the Governors to grant the very increase you have mentioned. But, so far, nothing definite has been settled."

"But can't you give us the rise, sir?" said the cook.

"No, my good woman, I'm afraid I can not," replied the Head. "It's not within my power to grant such requests. The Governors of St. Frank's have the matter in hand, and I hope your reasonable demand will be met. Sir Roger Stone will himself be at St. Frank's to-morrow."

"Who's Sir Roger Stone, sir?"

"Sir Roger is the chairman of the Board of Governors—having been elected to that position after General Ord-Clayton resigned," explained Dr. Stafford. "Unfortunately, Sir Roger is somewhat conservative, and he may not see eye to eye with you in this matter. I am seriously afraid you will not obtain the increase you desire, but I will do my best to further your cause."

"Thank you, sir," said all the delegates.

"I suggest, therefore, that you should leave the matter till later on," continued the Head. "I will put the matter to Sir Roger to-morrow, and it would be as well, perhaps, if you could come to my study again to-morrow evening at six o'clock. You will then receive your final answer."

The deputation retired, having nothing further to do. The four members were not feeling particularly cheerful, for the Headmaster had clearly indicated that there was little prospect of a fifty per cent. increase being granted.

Dr. Stafford himself was in favour of the servants' request, but, unfortunately, it would be left to Sir Roger Stone, Bart., to decide the issue.

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CHAPTER V.

TIMOTHY TUCKER'S GREAT SPEECH.

"COMRADES——"

"Eh?"

"Comrades and fellow-workers ——"

"What the dickens——"

"I'm addressing you to-night on a most important and essential matter, which affects the fundamental basis of present society——"

"You—you silly ass!" roared Pitt. "What's the matter with you? What's the idea of jawing into your tea-cup like that?"

Timothy Tucker looked up and blinked.

"Really, my dear sir, I dislike these interruptions," he said severely. "I dislike them intensely."

"But what's the idea of talking about fundamental basins?" demanded Pitt.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Grey. "He said basis, not basins!"

"How was I to know?" said Pitt. "He was mumbling in his tea-cup, and ——"

"My dear sir," said Timothy Tucker, "I am merely practising my great speech for to-night——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I am unaware of the fact that I was talking aloud," proceeded T.T. "The position is this: At seven-thirty I am due to address a great meeting in the Triangle. H'm! Quite so. A great meeting, my dear sir. I shall put the facts clearly and concisely, and when I have finished there will be a spirit of revolution and revolt in the breasts of all the honest workers who grace this establishment with their labours."

"You dotty lunatic!" grinned Pitt. "A spirit of revolution, eh? If you're going to spout any Bolshevist rot you'll be ducked in the fountain. Somebody said you were going to make a speech, but I thought it was a joke——"

"It will be a joke!" chuckled Grey.

"On the contrary, my dear sir, it will be a very serious matter," declared Tucker. "A very serious matter indeed. Admitted. Quite so, my dear sir. You do not seem to realise that this is a matter of paramount importance—a matter which affects the well-being of all workers in this great establishment. You've got to realise, also, that great changes are coming about in the minds of the toiling masses——"

"A great change will come about in the shape of your face if you bring out any more of that rot," interrupted Pitt. "We're having tea now, and we're not going to have Study E converted into a lecture hall. Dry up, my son—dry up until you make your beastly speech. Take my advice, and go easy, or you'll be ragged to death. That's just a tip."

"Is that so?" exclaimed Tucker mildly. "H'm! h'm! I must admit that I am somewhat impressed, my dear sir. However, we will not argue. I am subject to moods at times, and when I do not feel like arguing, I do not argue. When I do not feel like reading, I do not read. When I do not feel like being pleasant, I am unpleasant. When I do not wish to talk, I am silent——"

"And when you do not wish to receive a black eye, you will probably get one!" put in Grey sweetly. "So that's that, my son."

T.T. decided it would be better to say no more at the moment. But after tea he became very active. He had seldom been seen so active before, in fact. As a rule, he wandered about aimlessly, with never any definite object in view.

He had a great partiality for visiting Mrs. Hake's tuck-shop, and indulged in a special brand of fizzy lemonade, which the good lady sold at a penny a glass.

Tucker, in fact, was so struck on the "fuzzy," as he insisted upon calling it, that he purchased a supply for the study. Pitt and Grey were compelled to put their foot down at last, for T.T.'s "fuzzy" was constantly found staining copybooks, blotting pads, and almost every other article in the study.

This evening he was not thinking of

lemonade; he was not thinking of organising a whist drive—another of his favourite topics—he was devoting all his energies to the one subject of delivering a speech.

Most of the juniors had thought nothing of it at the time; they had not believed that Tucker would actually make the speech. But T.T. was determined. He not only set the Remove agog, but he made it known throughout the servants' quarters that the speech would be delivered at seven-thirty.

All the members of the staff off duty determined to be there. They had an idea that a big disappointment was awaiting them on the morrow, and they had sense enough to realise that the Remove's support was a valuable asset to their cause. One or two members of the staff thought otherwise, but they were short-sighted.

Broome, for example, knew well enough that much would depend upon the attitude of the boys themselves. If they supported the strike—if it actually came to a strike—the position would be vastly improved. For, with the boys on the strikers' side, the Governors would be compelled to surrender sooner or later. On the other hand, if the school decided against the strike, it would be bad for the staff.

It was only right, therefore, to listen to this speech by the youthful agitator. He would probably talk a lot of rubbish, but, at the same time, it would all be in favour of the discontented servants.

Therefore, at seven-thirty, a big crowd gathered in the corner of the Triangle.

Handforth, of course, was prominent. He had elected himself the chairman of the meeting. His "chair" consisted of a block of masonry—a portion of the old monastery ruin.

For the meeting was to be held in the most secluded corner of the Triangle. Here, with the trees hiding the crowds from the two Houses, there was little prospect of an interruption.

Many of the servants turned up. Warren was there, and Tubbs, and Broome, and a good few maidservants had managed to slip out. All the stablehands and all the gardeners were present. In fact, the servants numbered twenty or thirty.

In addition, the Remove was there to a man almost—to say nothing of crowds of fags, and a sprinkling of Fifth Formers.

I had come along with Sir Montie and Tommy Watson. We did not intend to do any speech-making, but we were amused by the whole proceeding. Handforth was worth listening to at any time. He was always funny—even when he thought he was deadly serious.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he roared. "I am addressing you——"

"Hear, hear!"

"Go it, Handy!"

"I am addressing you on a most important subject," shouted Handforth. "The servants of this school—many of whom are present, I observe—are being treated in a rotten, beastly manner. They don't have enough to eat——"

"That ain't quite true, Master Handforth," shouted one of the grooms.

"Well, you don't have enough to live on comfortably," went on Handforth. "It's a beastly shame that you should be allowed to live under starvation wages, just because the old fossils who call themselves Governors choose to be mean. I am making this speech for the benefit of society at large——"

"Good!"

"I intend to talk on the subject for at least an hour," roared Handforth. "I have my programme cut and dried ——"

"Rats!"

"What about T.T.?"

"We came here to hear Tucker do the spouting!"

"Sit down, Handy!"

"You're only the giddy chairman!"

"Let T.T. speak!"

"Hear, hear!"

The juniors approved in a roar.

"Go it, lunatic!"

"On the ball!"

"Look here, you silly asses!" bawled Handforth, glaring round. "I'm the chairman of this meeting, and I'm going to see that order is maintained. What's more, I'm going to do the jawing——"

"Rats!"

"Get down!"

"If you start any of your rot, I'll make the speech longer!" roared Handforth defiantly. "I mean to—— Yarooh! What the—— Hi! Leggo!"

Handforth was treated with the due respect which all chairmen are supposed to demand. The audience hurled themselves at Handforth, and Handforth was

deposited on his back on the grass.

Pitt and Co. thoughtfully sat upon him while other juniors carried T.T. to the chair, and sat him down. By the time Handforth was free, Tucker was well away.

T.T. blinked round at the crowd mildly.

"Go it, Tucker!"

"Let it rip, old chap!"

"Mr. Chairman, comrades, and fellow-workers," began Tucker, in a loud, but high-pitched voice. "Mr. Chairman, comrades, and fellow-workers——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Good old son of toil!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"As you realise, after listening to the chairman's remarks," shouted T.T. "this meeting is held with a specific purpose in view. Exactly. I repeat, a specific purpose."

"The position is this!" roared Tommy Watson.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Precisely!" agreed Tucker. "The position is this: We are faced with a serious state of affairs, not only in this school, but in this whole neighbourhood, and in the country in general. That being so, you will realise how essential it is that we should settle this problem in a definite and conclusive manner."

"Hear, hear!"

"Good for you, T.T.!"

"That's the stuff to give 'em!"

"This meeting is not a meeting to discuss detail matters," proceeded Tucker; "we are not here to discuss palliatives——"

"To discuss which?"

"We don't want any bad language, T.T."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Palliatives!" exclaimed Tucker, gazing round him with a superior kind of air, and standing with one thumb tucked in the armhole of his waistcoat. "By that I mean to say, we do not intend to pass mere resolutions of no tangible effect. But, instead, we are here to discuss and decide a matter affecting the whole status of society. That is so. Exactly!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Who wound him up?" asked De Valerie.

"Where did he pinch this speech from?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Let him go on, you asses, and don't keep interrupting," I shouted. "He may be talking rot, but it's interesting. Go it, Tucker!"

T.T. coughed.

"I much regret to observe that a few of our friends on the right are inclined to be somewhat senseless," he exclaimed severely. "Interruptions and absurd interjections are not to be tolerated. If our said friends in the audience only realised the serious nature of the affair, we would soon have a change."

"Cut the cackle and get to business!"

"What about the grievances?"

T.T. nodded.

"Well, comrades and friends, this is my intention," he proceeded. "The position is this——"

"Hear, hear!"

"The servants in this establishment, who are really the basis of St. Frank's," said Tucker, "are not only in the position of being mere wage labourers, but they are even less than that. That is so. And I make that statement in this respect: the wage labourers in other industries, for example, while they have been getting increases of wages up to two hundred and three hundred per cent., these downtrodden fellow-beings, through not having any organisation of their own, though relying upon the human nature of the Governors of St. Frank's, now find themselves in a most deplorable position."

"'Ear, 'ear!" roared Warren, the school porter. "That's the right word, young gent! Wot with beer at fivepence a glass—an' 'arf water at that——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"An' bacca four times wot it used to be!" shouted Warren.

"Dear, dear!" exclaimed Tucker. "I must be allowed to digress for a moment, and express my disapproval of this misguided person's views. Beer and tobacco do not enter into the question. They are not essential to the well-being of the community. Therefore it is idle to bring them into the discussion."

"Hear, hear!"

"That's one for you, Warren!"

"Get on with the speech, Tucker!"

"That is so," agreed Tucker, nodding. "What I mean to suggest is this. As regards ordinary commodities, the price has gone up in many cases three hundred per cent. In other cases, even more

than that. And whereas every other organised worker has got a decent increase to meet the cost of living, these honest and industrious workers, through their ignorance, are in the position of being left in the cold. They are far worse off than ever they were before the war. And, comrades and friends, you realise what that means. That is so."

"Hear, hear!"

"Imagine to yourself the poverty-stricken condition in which they must live," continued Tucker, waxing indignant. "I am now addressing my schoolfellows, and drawing their attention to the plight of these unfortunate toilers. Think what a terrible effect it must have upon their moral and physical well-being. This appalling state of affairs, taking place in the richest and noblest empire in the world, where the sun never sets——"

"Rats! It's dark now," put in Owen major.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Who said T.T. wasn't a poet?"

"Good old Shakespeare!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I deplore these constant interruptions," said Tucker warmly. "However, I will continue. Missionaries tell us of the shocking condition of the natives of tropical countries, but the condition of these deplorable wage-slaves is infinitely worse. No person here dare deny that fact!"

"Rot!" shouted Pitt. "The servants may be out for more money, but they ain't slaves. Talk sense, Tucker!"

"Which it is, we ain't savages neither!" declared Warren stoutly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, as regards that," continued Tucker, "I am not prepared to give detailed proof of my statements, as I have such a lot more to discuss——"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Ain't you finished yet?"

"My friends, I have scarcely begun," declared Tucker, mildly. "I was almost saying that I have hardly opened my speech. My remarks, so far, have been purely introductory. That is so!"

"Great Scot!"

"And he hasn't got any notes, either!"

"He's got a head like Bonar Law!"

"But not the politics!" grinned De Valerie. "Wouldn't you like some fizzy lemonade, Tucker?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Purely introductory, I repeat," shouted Tucker. "As I was saying, I have a lot more to discuss. Firstly, let me state that the servants are demanding an increase of wages which is reasonable and just—indeed, far too reasonable from my own personal view. Their demands are not only moderate, but quite tame. Notwithstanding that, they have not received any satisfaction. When the four delegates interviewed our respected Headmaster they were given to understand that their demands have little prospects of being granted. Although they received every sympathy from Dr. Stafford, it is fairly certain that the Governors themselves will turn a deaf ear to this honest appeal. However, it is highly probable that when they hear of this agitation, they will endeavour to victimise the ringleaders in this affair."

"That wouldn't be fair!"

"Of course not."

"We sha'n't let the Governors victimise anybody!"

"I am glad to hear you say that, comrades and friends," shouted Tucker. "It will be a sad thing if the members of the delegation, through their loyalty to their fellow-workers, are made to suffer unjustly."

"We sha'n't allow anybody to be sacked!" yelled Handforth.

"If there's any rot from the Governors the Remove will have something to say," declared Watson. "Good luck to the staff!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Notwithstanding that, my friends, mere words from you will have little effect," proceeded T.T. "We must decide on a plan of action right now—at once. Action that will not have a temporary effect, but action of a character that will preclude any possibility of a similar occurrence in the future. I will now pass on to a survey of the general situation——"

"Look out!" hissed Owen major. "Here's old Crowell!"

"That doesn't matter," said Handforth. "We're allowed to hold a meeting, I suppose? Tucker's had his giddy say, so I'll have a jaw——"

"Rats!"

Mr. Crowell approached the front of the crowd.

"Dear me! What is this?" he asked mildly. "Tucker, what are you doing up there. Is it possible that you are addressing the members of the school staff, and inciting them to strike?"

The audience, strange to say, had faded away. The servants, not wishing to get into trouble, had discreetly retired; and the juniors, scenting danger, had melted quietly away. Only T.T. and Handforth, and one or two others remained, and T.T. was determined to continue.

"The position is this," he exclaimed. "I do not advise violent action. Although I strongly advocate firmness and determination, I deprecate hasty and ill-considered violence. A strike will be justifiable if the Governors refuse to listen to the clear voice of reason——"

"Dry up, you lunatic!" whispered Church urgently.

"Furthermore, I will do my best to help the strike," continued T.T. "I realise that this cause is a just and honest one, and——"

"Tucker!" shouted Mr. Crowell sharply.

"Dear me!" said the junior. "Surely I heard the voice of Mr. Crowell?"

"You did!" exclaimed the Remove master. "Tucker, you will cease this absurdity at once—this very instant! I am shocked and astonished that you, a junior boy, should stand here giving utterance to a speech which is calculated to incite the servants to——"

"Really, sir, I am merely assisting them in their splendid cause," said T.T. firmly. "They are only demanding a fifty per cent. increase of wages——"

"Whatever they are demanding, Tucker, it is no concern of yours," interjected Mr. Crowell. "You will go into the House at once."

"But, my dear sir——"

"Go this instant!" shouted Mr. Crowell. "And let me point out that I am not 'your dear sir,' Tucker. I am aware that you are a curious, eccentric boy, so I will not punish you. But you must obey me at once."

"Really, this is most extraordinary," said Tucker wonderingly. "I am quite at a loss—quite. Most remarkable. H'm, h'm! Dear me! I sincerely regret that this should have happened."

T.T. walked towards the Ancient House in a dreamy kind of way, and was met in the lobby by Reginald Pitt and Jack Grey. Other juniors were hanging about, most of them grinning.

"Good for you, Tucker," said Pitt heartily. "I didn't know you could jaw like that, you know. Toned down a bit, your speech was first class."

"Speech!" echoed T.T. "But, my dear sir, I made no speech!"

"Eh!"

"I merely made a few introductory remarks——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I fully intended developing all my points in detail," said Tucker. "I had material for a powerful speech—and then Mr. Crowell came along and spoilt everything. Most inconsiderate of him. I am disappointed—greatly disappointed."

"Well, I think the crowd was fairly satisfied with your spouting," grinned De Valerie. "We weren't prepared to stand reams of it, you know. There's a limit to all things, old son."

Tucker shook his head.

"The position is this," he said. "I wished to continue my arguments in favour of a strike, and I am unable to understand why Mr. Crowell came along and interrupted. It was most unsportsman-like of him, and I am not impressed. Most decidedly, I am not impressed. Had it been any other person I should have been compelled to use disciplinary treatment."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It was my intention to quote the famous Professor Drinkbottle on many points," said T.T. "However, I shall probably have another opportunity——"

"Not to-night," grinned Pitt. "You'll come along to Study E, my son, and get ahead with your prep. For the time being we'll forget the servants and their giddy troubles—or we shall find troubles of our own!"

However, it was generally considered that Tucker's speech had been of great value. It had put heart into the servants, and they were determined to stick to their guns. They were out for a fifty per cent. increase, and they would get a fifty per cent. increase—or there would be ructions!

CHAPTER VI.

SIR ROGER STONE IS OBSTINATE.

"HERE they are!"

Church made that remark as he lounged on the Ancient House steps on the following afternoon, just before tea.

A big motor-car had just rolled into the Triangle.

It contained four sedate-looking gentlemen, all of them elderly. One, a rather stout, well-fed individual of about fifty-five, was no less a person than Sir Roger Stone, Bart., the chairman of the Board of Governors.

He was a man who looked important, and who knew he looked important. As he descended from the car, in front of the Head's private door, he swept the Triangle with a gaze which seemed to say: "Look at me, bow to me, for I am he."

The juniors in the vicinity, however, only stared with curiosity.

The other Governors were ordinary gentlemen, and looked—just Governors. They were not distinguished in any way.

"Let's give 'em a cheer—just for appearances," suggested McClure.

"Rats!" suggested Handforth. "They don't deserve a cheer."

"But it will look impressive, and it might put the old fossils in a good humour," argued McClure. "Come on!"

So the juniors raised their voices.

"Hurrah!"

"Welcome to the Governors!"

Sir Roger Stone adjusted his pince-nez, and nodded.

"H'm! I am glad to find we have been recognised," he grunted. "The boys appear to be singularly stolid here—not to say rude. The way they are staring is positively embarrassing."

"No boys possess manners," grunted one of the other Governors. "If I were here permanently, I should impress upon the young mind the fact that—— Ah, here is Dr. Stafford."

The Head appeared, and gravely welcomed his visitors, and ushered them into the privacy of his own study. Sir Roger got straight to the point, once he had refreshed himself with whisky-and-soda.

"I understand, Stafford, that there is some little trouble here," he said bluntly.

"The servants, I believe, have had the astounding impudence to ask for an increase in wages?"

The Head nodded.

"That is so, Sir Roger," he replied. "I cannot altogether agree that their request is an impudent one. I have been urging for a considerable time that the rate of pay should be increased all round. It is a long while since the staff had a general increase——"

"That makes no difference at all, sir," interrupted Sir Roger. "These people are servants—menials—and it is not their place to dictate or to state their terms. I am totally opposed to such methods. It was the staff's duty to wait until we raised the wages, and because of this agitation I shall certainly make the increase smaller than otherwise would have been the case. I agree that an increase is necessary. Not for a moment do I deny that fact."

"I am glad to hear you say that, Sir Roger," exclaimed the Head.

"We are all agreed, Dr. Stafford," said one of the Governors. "The matter has been under consideration for some little time. Owing to the high cost of living, it is necessary that the staff of this establishment should receive additional remuneration for their services. There was some talk at first of a ten per cent. increase——"

"My dear sir!" protested the Head. "You are surely not serious? Ten per cent! It is totally inadequate——"

"Quite so, Dr. Stafford, quite so," interrupted Sir Roger. "I am well aware of that. It is inadequate under the existing conditions. But you must remember that the servants are already receiving higher wages than they received before the war. Do not forget that fact."

"I really fail to see the point of your argument, sir," said Dr. Stafford coldly. "The mere fact that wages are higher now than they were before the war is quite beside the point. One must look at things broadly; one must realise that the cost of living nowadays is enormously increased—appallingly increased, I may say."

"Perhaps so—perhaps so!" snapped Sir Roger. "But you are overlooking one fact yourself, my dear sir. You totally ignore the fact that the staff of this school is fed and housed free of charge in addition to the wages given."

"I did not overlook that point at all, if you will pardon me," said the Head. "But food is not the only commodity which has risen in price—every article, almost everything you can mention. I can honestly assure you that some of the servants here can scarcely make ends meet. May I ask what increase you propose to adopt?"

"We have decided, after much consideration, to be liberal," said Sir Roger. "We have looked at this matter from the humane point of view, and, as a result, we have come to the conclusion that the household staff is deserving of a general increase to the extent of twenty-five per cent."

The Head frowned.

"I am sorry, Sir Roger," he said. "I thought——"

"Good gracious!" interjected the baronet. "Is that not sufficient?"

"Most decidedly not."

"Ridiculous!" snapped the chairman of the Governors. "An increase such as I suggest——"

"But please remember, Sir Roger, that five shillings in the pound is a mere nothing," said the Headmaster. "Every worker who is now receiving two pounds per week, for example, will henceforth receive two-pounds-ten. It was my hope—and my wish—that the increase should consist of ten shillings in the pound—that is to say, fifty per cent. It is by no means liberal."

Sir Roger Stone laughed.

"Nonsense, sir—nonsense!" he exclaimed. "You're talking in the most preposterous manner."

"Really, sir!"

"You compel me to speak in these terms, Dr. Stafford. I am hasty tempered, and you must excuse me if I appear rude," said Sir Roger gruffly. "But I cannot see eye to eye with you in this matter. A fifty per cent. increase is not necessary. I have no intention of putting forward such a proposal to my fellow Governors. We have come to a decision, and we will stand by it."

The Head sighed.

"Very well, Sir Roger," he said. "It is not for me to raise any objection, or to protest. I can safely assure you, however, that there will be trouble among the servants. This decision might lead to a strike——"

"A strike!" ejaculated one of the Governors, in alarm.

"Phew! Impossible!" exclaimed Sir Roger. "A strike is utterly impossible, Dr. Stafford. I am surprised at you suggesting such—— Oh, just a moment, sir, we are engaged with the Headmaster."

The last remark was addressed to Nelson Lee, who had just entered the study.

"Come in, Mr. Lee—come in," said the Head. "I think you have met Sir Roger Stone before? Also these other gentlemen? As you are aware, Sir Roger, Mr. Lee is the Housemaster of the Ancient House."

"To say nothing of being famous in other directions, eh?" said Sir Roger, smiling. "I am glad to meet you again, Mr. Lee."

Nelson Lee shook hands with the Governors, and took a seat.

"Now that you are here, Mr. Lee, I should like your opinion on this point," said Sir Roger. "What, in your estimation, would be a fair increase of wages to grant the general staff of the school—that is to say, the household staff?"

Nelson Lee's eyes twinkled.

"You wish me to be perfectly frank?" he asked.

"Yes, sir, I do."

"Very well, then, I will give you my honest opinion," said Lee. "Considering all the facts, I believe that an increase of one hundred per cent. would be liberal, but not extravagant; and an increase of seventy-five per cent is absolutely necessary."

Sir Roger raised his eyebrows.

"You are joking, sir, surely?" he gasped.

"No, I am quite serious."

"Serious when you suggest that the servants should receive an increase of fifteen shillings in the pound?" demanded Sir Roger excitedly.

"Exactly."

"Then all I can say is that your ideas are not only extraordinary, but bizarre in the extreme," said the chairman curtly. "We have decided to grant twenty-five per cent.—and in this we consider that we are being very generous."

Nelson Lee shrugged his shoulders.

"You asked me my opinion, and I gave it," he said. "I'm afraid there will be trouble unless you reconsider your

decision. I may as well point out that the boys themselves are fully on the side of the staff—and if the staff is not satisfied there will be trouble generally."

"I will deal with any trouble, if it arises!" said Sir Roger grimly. "And now we will settle the matter at once. Who is the leader of these servants—who is the spokesman for the whole staff?"

"My head gardener, a man named Broome," replied the Head.

"Very well. Please send him to me."

Within ten minutes Broome was ushered into the Headmaster's study. He saluted respectfully, and looked at Sir Roger with calm confidence. Broome knew well enough that he and his fellow-workers were not money grabbers—they were not threatening to strike in order to tyrannise their employers. They were asking for moderate terms, and they had every right to receive them.

"You are Broome, the gardener?" demanded Sir Roger.

"Yes, sir!"

"And your are the chosen representative of the school staff?"

"Yes, sir."

"Very well, Broome, I will deal with you briefly," said Sir Roger. "I understand that an increase of wages is desired—and I appreciate the fact that an increase is necessary. Therefore the school Governors have decided that, commencing with this week, every servant of St. Frank's will receive an increase of twenty-five per cent."

Broome looked rather surprised.

"Thank you, sir," he said politely. "I will convey your message to the others, but I doubt if it will be satisfactory."

"What—what did you say, my man?"

"I am afraid there will be trouble," replied Broome grimly. "We all consider that we deserve ten shillings more in the pound. The pound is only worth eight or nine shillings nowadays——'

"Rubbish — nonsensical rubbish!" shouted Sir Roger. "The pound is a pound, and I do not wish to hear you talk nonsense to me. If you are not satisfied with an increase of twenty-five per cent, you have your own remedy—you can hand in your resignation this minute, if you please."

"None of the servants want to do that, sir," said Broome. "But we do think we deserve ten shillings in the pound after waiting so long. I don't want to be impertinent, sir, and I don't want to utter threats—but I'm afraid there'll be a lot of trouble if you don't grant the fifty per cent. increase."

"You may go, Broome," exclaimed Sir Roger curtly. "And you may convey my final decision to the others. We have considered this matter for several days, and we are not prepared to give it any further consideration. That is all."

Broome saluted again and departed.

"Infernal impudence!" said Sir Roger warmly. "The grasping greediness of the working classes nowadays is positively appalling!"

"I am sorry, Sir Roger, but I must disagree with you," said the Head. "There is nothing grasping——"

"I have no wish to argue, Dr. Stafford!" said the baronet. "I have stated my final word on this subject. And now we will talk on more pleasant topics. For example, I could do with a cup of tea——"

"I was about to ask you to honour me with your presence, Sir Roger," said the Head, quietly. "I only hope there will be no demonstration to mar our repast."

The Headmaster's fears were not very wide of the mark. For the news soon got round that the Governors were only prepared to grant exactly one half of the increase which was desired.

And it fell upon the school like a bombshell.

The staff had been confidently expecting that they would receive their fifty per cent. increase without the slightest hitch. And now the Governors had given their final decision—and the result was far from satisfactory.

"We ain't going to stand it—not likely!" declared Warren, addressing one of the elm trees in the Triangle. "A fine thing, I must say! Five bob in the quid! And the cost of things going up by leaps an' bounds all the bloomin' time! We ain't accepting no twenty-five cents increase!"

"Hallo! What's the trouble out here?" asked Pitt, appearing out of the gloom. "Having a chat with yourself, Warren?"

The porter grunted.

"I was just a-speakin' of my mind, Master Pitt," he said firmly. "I ain't

the kind of man to cause trouble—not me! But when these 'ere Governors set their backs up agin us—well, I reckon it's time to do something. 'Ave you 'eard the decision? We're only goin' to receive twenty-five cents increase!"

"Shocking!" said Pitt. "In the pound, do you mean?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, it's not enough," put in Grey. "Twenty-five cents only comes to one and a ha'penny, and that's not very much use——"

"Wot's that, Master Grey?" said Warren, in alarm. "Only a bob? A bob in the pound?"

"That's all," grinned Pitt.

"But Broome said it was five bob—not that five bob's much use," declared Warren. "Ten beers—that's about wot it is! Ten half-pints!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It ain't no laughin' matter, young gents," said Warren gloomily. "Only a bob increase! It'll mean a strike ——"

"The increase is twenty-five per cent.," explained Grey, "not twenty-five cents, old son."

"I can't see no bloomin' difference," grumbled Warren, moving off. "Anyow, there's goin' to be a lot of trouble. I do know that!"

And Warren was undoubtedly right!

CHAPTER VII.

THE MOMENTOUS DECISION.

"GOOD!" exclaimed Handforth heartily.

"Eh? What's good?"

"The news," replied Handy. "The Governors have refused to grant ten bob in the pound. The mean bounders have only allowed half the amount."

"And is that what you call good?" asked Church, staring.

"Yes, rather!"

"You silly ass——"

"Are you calling me a silly ass, Walter Church?" roared Handforth.

"Yes, I am!"

"Well, if you want a thick ear, you'd better say so," went on Handforth. "I know what I'm talking about, my son. This decision of the Governors is good—because it'll mean a fight!"

"Oh!"

"A fight to the death!" said Handforth dramatically. "The servants aren't prepared to stand any bunkum. They're not going to put up with a measly five bob in the pound. Not likely! It'll mean a strike, at the very least. And a strike will mean all sorts of excitement to us. Think of it! Just think what the school would be like without any giddy servants? Why, if the staff strikes, we shall probably be sent home."

"My hat!" said McClure. "I hadn't thought of that!"

"Yes, but I had," said Handforth. "If the Governors granted the full demand it would have been pretty rotten—tame, in fact. But now it's different. It means that we're going to have some excitement."

The other juniors thought the same, too.

The junior school, in fact, was all agog that evening. I was as interested as anybody, and when Tubbs put his head into Study C in a mysterious manner, I knew that something special was afoot.

"What's wrong, Tubby?" I asked genially.

"Ain't you 'eard the news, Master Nipper?" asked the pageboy. "We ain't going to get the increase wot we're asking for——"

"Yes, we know all about that," I interrupted. "It's rather a pity, Tubbs. It'll mean that an unpleasant feeling will get about. It's a pity the Governors couldn't act sensibly—without being forced to do it."

"Yes, Master Nipper," agreed Tubbs. "Some of the servants down in the kitchen are regular excited about it—and that's a fact. They want to go on strike at once—they're urging that we should down tools within the hour."

"That's silly," I said, shaking my head.

"That's what I says, Master Nipper," agreed Tubbs. "Anyhow, we're goin' to hold a meetin' at half-past eight—down in the servants' hall. There's going to be as many of us there as can be spared, and it's going

to be put to the vote—whether we shall strike or not."

"Begad!" remarked Sir Montie. "It'll be a frightfully rash step to strike, dear old boy."

"I know it will, Master Tregellis-West," said Tubbs. "But what else are we to do? We ain't agreeable to acceptin' only twenty-five per cent.—it ain't right that we should. An' it's no good arguin', because the Governors' decision is final. We've either got to accept it, or go on strike."

"So you're going on strike?" asked Watson.

"We don't knew yet, sir," replied Tubbs. "It's to be decided at the vote to-night."

"And what will your vote be?" I asked.

Tubbs hesitated.

"I don't know, Master Nipper," he replied. "That's what I come to you about. I don't want to do nothin' rash—an' I don't want you young gents to think that I'm one of these discontented rotters who ain't worth a salt. What would you do, Master Nipper, if you was in my position?"

"I'd vote for a strike," I said promptly.

"Hear, hear!" agreed Watson.

"Dear old boy, I'm quite with you," observed Sir Montie.

Tubbs brightened up.

"That's fine, sir," he said. "You advise me to vote for strikin', then? But what if we do all go on strike? How will you young gents get on? That's what's worryin' me——"

"We shall get on all right, Tubby—don't you concern yourself," I interrupted. "If the strike really happens, you can rely upon the support of the Remove. Upon the support of the whole school, in fact. We're all with you."

Tubbs prepared to go.

"That's fine, sir," he said. "Thanks very much——"

"Hold on!" I broke in. "What about this meeting?"

"It's going to be at half-past eight, Master Nipper."

"Shall we be allowed to come?"

"Broome said that it would be an honour to have one or two of you young gents present," replied Tubbs. "It'll be fine if you come along, sir."

"Good!" I said promptly. "We'll be there."

Tubbs departed, and we looked at one another grimly.

"A strike—eh?" I exclaimed. "Things are going to liven up, my sons. Well, the Governors have asked for trouble, and they mustn't grumble if they find it. It'll teach them not to be so jolly mean and pigheaded."

The door opened, and Handforth appeared.

"Heard the news?" he asked.

"What news?"

"About the staff," said Handforth. "Sir Roger has refused to grant their demands——"

"You ass! That's stale," put in Watson. "We heard it hours ago. There's going to be a meeting in the servants' hall at half-past eight——"

"Shush!" I murmured.

"Eh? What's that?" said Handforth suspiciously.

"Oh, nothing!"

"Rats!" said Handforth. "You were talking about a meeting——"

"I suppose we'd better tell the ass, now that you've let the cat out of the bag, Tommy," I explained. "The servants are holding a meeting, Handy, and it's to be decided to-night whether they should go on strike or not."

Handforth's eyes glistened.

"Good!" he exclaimed. "Fine! That's just what I was waiting for! Can we go to that giddy meeting?"

It was useless to tell Handforth that he wouldn't be allowed there. And when eight-thirty came, fully a dozen juniors sneaked down into the servants' hall—to give their moral support to the servants' meeting.

Broome, on this occasion, was the speaker.

"We're not here to waste any time," said the gardener, in matter-of-fact terms. "The Governors have refused to grant our demands——"

"Shame!"

"We're not going to accept the Governors' terms."

"No!"

"We're going to strike!"

"Good!" roared Handforth. "That's the style!"

"Hear, hear!"

"It won't do to shout too much!" said Broome warningly. "We want this meeting to be secret—we don't want any of the masters to know about it.

So the less shouting you do, the better. It's only going to be short, and we've got to come to a decision quickly."

"That's right!" shouted the cook. "We're going to strike."

"Well, that's got to be decided by the vote," said Broome. "You all know the position, so there's no need for me to outline it. The Governors have given their final answer—and that answer is not satisfactory."

"We're not going to put up with it."

"No!"

"We demand a strike!"

"Very well, we'll put it to the vote at once," said Broome grimly. "All those in favour of accepting the twenty-five per cent. increase, hold up their hands."

Only four hands were raised.

"I think that's good enough," said Broome. "Now the others."

Nearly everybody in the room raised their hands. There was an overwhelming majority in favour of a strike. And five minutes later a messenger came from the College House to say that a similar decision had been arrived at there.

The school staff had decided to strike!

Some of them wanted to down tools on the instant, but Broome was against this idea.

"It won't do," he declared. "I suggest that we all go on with our duties, exactly the same as usual. We shall give no sign of what is going to happen—the Governors will have no warning."

"A lightning strike!" exclaimed Handforth. "Good!"

"Yes, that's it," said the head gardener—"a lightning strike, sir. And we'll all walk into the Triangle at twelve o'clock to-morrow—midday. We'll leave our different jobs as the clock strikes twelve."

"Good!"

"It's settled!"

"And we're going to gain the victory!"

There was plenty of enthusiasm—not only among the servants, but among the juniors. It was agreed that none of the other members of the Remove should be told, except a few who could be trusted.

The secret was to be well kept—until the morrow.

Then, on the stroke of twelve, the blow would fall!

THE END.

TO MY READERS.

The prevailing discontent among the servants at St. Frank's and the attitude of the governors, headed by Sir Roger Stone, can only lead to one result—a strike! Though Sir Roger must have been aware that the demands of the servants were quite reasonable and that the school was well able to meet those demands, he bitterly opposed them because, in his old-fashioned manner of dealing with employees, he thought they had no right to make any complaints whatever, and that in airing their grievances they were insubordinate. The servants, however, did not quite see it in this light, and, with the sympathy of boys and masters on their side, they are determined to establish their rights by a strike. In a large establishment like St. Frank's, a sudden cessation in the domestic work would sooner or later seriously interfere with the smooth running of the school. Not that the boys minded very much, for they foresaw some excitement and fun to relieve the monotony of lessons.

Next week the servants' strike will be in full swing, and a lively account of it will be told in "THE SCHOOL ON STRIKE!"

THE EDITOR.

YOU CAN BEGIN READING THIS FINE NEW SERIAL TO-DAY!

A Tale of Life and Adventure in the North-West.

INTRODUCTION.

JACK ROYCE, *returned from Canada, has called to see his brother,*

TEDDY ROYCE, *a clerk in London. While the brothers are together, they are aroused by a loud summons at the door.*

GERALD TELFORD *has been set upon by roughs and seeks assistance of the Royces. The roughs are driven off. Later, Gerald is informed by his guardian, Mr. Cardone, that the money which the lad was to inherit is lost, with the exception of £50. The three lads agree to try their luck in Canada. They set sail for Montreal, and eventually reach Winnipeg. Throughout the journey they are shadowed by a man named Obed Snaith, one of the ruffians who had attacked Gerald in London, and who is believed to be in the pay of Mr. Cardone. While in Winnipeg, the chums rescue a man, nicknamed the Mad Prospector, from ruffians. The man, however, dies of his injuries, but gives the lads a secret chart of a rich gold discovery. The three lads proceed to Medicine Hat, south of Alberta, where they are offered work at St. Pierre, 150 miles further N.W. Jack is put in charge of the train taking them there and observes Obed Snaith with the party. When they near the end of the journey, Jack discovers that Gerald is missing from the train and suspects foul play.*

(*Now read on.*)

Devil's Falls.

"YOU brought this lot up?" the black-shirted man asked Jack, consulting a sheet of paper he held in his hand. "How many?"

Jack told him the number he had on his roll.

"But I'm one man short," he explained. "My name's Royce. Sanderson sent me up as a grading foreman here, you know."

"Correct. I got the wire," said the black-shirted one. It somewhat surprised Teddy Royce to hear that here, in this apparently wild part of the country, they should be in telegraphic communication with Medicine Hat. Perhaps the younger Royce was a trifle disappointed. He was romantic, and had come up here looking for adventure; and he had cherished the impression that adventure cannot be met with where civilisation is developed to the extent of telegraphs. "My name's Woodson," the speaker went on. "I'm head boss o' this gang. Glad they've sent a grading foreman up. Understand horses?"

"Sure," said Jack promptly. "So well that I want to borrow one—or two—right now. Got a couple of mounts?"

"You're some pal o' Sanderson's, ain't ye?" said the head foreman of the camp. "Waal, if you are, I guess we can spare ye a couple o' plugs. What ye want 'em for?"

"The fellow I left behind is a pal, and I'm anxious about him," said Jack Royce. "I want to ride back down the line and look for him. I'm rather afraid there's been an—accident."

As he spoke, he half-turned his head, and a half-smothered exclamation of anger burst from him. Obed Snaith was standing so close to him as to be almost touching him, and the light from the head foreman's lantern was full upon Snaith's face, showing up a grin that, for some reason, maddened the stalwart young Britisher. Jack clenched his fists, and met the man's gaze with

his own clear, steady eyes. Snaith, with a sneer, edged away.

"Friend o' yours, that?" the foreman, who had noticed the exchange of glances, asked, with a grin. "Pleasant-looking beauty, anyhow."

"One of the gang I brought up with me," said Jack shortly. He would have liked to add other things, but deemed it wiser not to do so. "Well, I'd like the horses as soon as possible. I'm afraid my brother here and I won't be able to start work to-morrow, but that can't be helped."

"Guess the stable boss is still about in the dining-camp," said the foreman. "Tackle him. Better tell him you're a pal o' Sanderson's, though, or he mightn't like the notion o' turnin' out a couple o' plugs this time o' night."

"What d'you want two for?" asked Teddy. "Taking me with you?"

"Wanted one for Gerald to ride on, of course," said Jack. "You won't want to come back this time of night. You'll be too tired; you're only green, you know."

"Oh!" said Teddy. "Green, eh? Well, old man, I want to remind you that I'm just as anxious about Gerald as you are. However, if you're going to talk rot about being green——"

"Come on, kid!" Jack interrupted, good-naturedly. "We'll see if the stable boss will be good for three horses. He ought to be. Looks as though there are plenty here."

Indeed, there were plenty of horses in that construction camp. As Jack and Teddy moved towards a huge marquee in the centre of the camp, they had to pass on their left a great open space where almost innumerable horses seemed to be picketed out, as they picket out horses in the Army. There were hundreds of them.

The stable boss turned out to be a bad-tempered fellow with the manners of a regimental sergeant-major, who did not look at all kindly on the notion of allowing any of his beloved horses to turn out at that time of night. 'But mention of Sanderson, the great superintendent's name seemed to mollify him to some extent.

"Oh, all right," he growled. "Go and pick out three. Take 'em off the west line; they're fresher. No saddles, of course. I guess it's somethin' to have a pull with the top-notchers," he added, sourly.

Teddy perhaps began to regret his former eagerness to accompany his brother, now that he knew he would have to ride for hours on a barebacked horse. The contemplation of that ordeal, however, did not appear to worry Jack, who grinned, thanked the stable boss, and went straight out to the horse lines.

Though the Army system had been followed in the matter of picketing the animals, the semblance of Army management seemed to have ended there, for the lines were very dirty, and there was no night stable guard posted. Jack was unchallenged as he walked up to the horses on the west line, and quickly he picked out three likely mounts. He found bridles amongst the heaps of forage that were scattered about. These he donned; leading two and handing the third over to Teddy, he walked away from the lines. Then he mounted a horse, and seized the reins of his spare.

They were walking the beasts out of the camp, and were passing the huge marquee where the hundreds of men employed at Lac St. Pierre fed themselves, when, in the light that fell from a naphtha lamp that was flaring before the entrance to the tent, they saw two men standing together, talking. As they passed these two Jack recognised them, and muttered something as he saw they paused in their conversation to look at him and his brother.

"The big Swede and Johnson!" Jack growled. "Always tumbling up against Johnson. Teddy, I'd give five years of my life if I could get hold of Johnson well enough to send him to clink for a spell—the brute! I'm sure——"

But he did not air the thought that would persist in recurring to him.

They let their mounts trot as soon as they were clear of the camp. They kept the track to their left for the first few miles, and found there was good going for the horses—soft, springy turf; for the trees of the woods they were in had been cleared away for a good many yards at each side of the rails. Then they came to swampy ground, and it was necessary for a while to turn their horses on to the track and make them pick their way along the sleepers—or ties, as they are called in Canada—

(Continued on page iii of cover.)

between the steel rails. Here the going was sufficiently treacherous for horses to compel Jack to keep to a walk, and, as they slowed down, Jack's quick ears distinctly caught the sound of horses' feet behind him. He looked back, but the track was dark, and he could see nothing.

It was a long, dreary ride; on the whole, fortunately, the going was good. Their horses were fresh, and, although it caused Teddy considerable discomfort to have to trot for such a long spell on a barebacked horse, they did more than half the distance of twenty-five miles in something like an hour and a half. Then it was that Jack and Teddy began to look ahead, hoping to meet their friend coming towards them, probably limping and fatigued.

But as they followed the track for mile after mile, and Gerald was not met, fear began to grow in Jack's heart. When they had ridden twenty miles, Jack was sure that harm had come to Gerald, for otherwise he must have met them long ago. After twenty-three miles or so, Jack drew rein.

"Wonder what happened to the chap?" he asked huskily.

They were now in open country; prairie stretched out on either hand. As they halted, the beat of hoofs behind them came to their ears again. Jack looked backwards, and certainly saw two mounted shapes not very far behind them. They also, it appeared, halted when Jack and Teddy did.

Jack was too worried and anxious now about Gerald to give the men behind a second thought. He set his horse off again, at a reaching canter this time, and Teddy bumped and jolted behind him. Soon their ears were filled with a roaring sound, as of mighty running waters.

It was now nearly four o'clock in the morning. Teddy was fatigued to the point of tears almost, and was badly chafed with his barebacked riding. Still, however, it was dark, though a very faint streak of dawn could be seen in the sky to the east.

"The Devil's Falls," Jack said. "It was somewhere about here that the train halted. Just ahead must be the bridge, and the forward part of the train was pretty well on the bridge when it stopped. I think we'll dismount here, lad, and scout round a bit on foot. Anyhow, we can't ride the nags across that bridge. We are just ordinary British boys, not cinema stars."

They dismounted, and left their horses to nibble the succulent grass at their feet. They knew the brutes would not stray far, tired and hungry as they must be. As they did so, Jack idly turned again, and again saw the two mounted figures in his rear.

"Somebody else riding about," he said. "Now, lad, walk along, and be careful how you step over the bridge.

(*Continued overleaf.*)

It's a trestle bridge, and I know something about them. If you miss your step, you go right bung through, and I don't think the Devil's Falls would be pleasant to fall into; they're so far down, for one thing."

He set off to walk. Soon, almost deafened by the roar of the turbulent waters beneath, they were stepping gingerly over the irregularly spaced stringers of the bridge. Teddy shuddered when he looked down the first time. There was sheer space beneath his feet, and below the waters roared and boiled.

The boy began to get giddy. Jack, more used to this sort of thing, noticed him, and placed a strong arm beneath his. Teddy was glad of the support, but, with eyes closed, struggling to keep his head, he stood still for several seconds, while Jack allowed him to do so. Jack understood the feeling.

And as they waited two other figures, following them, came to the bridge. They did not seem to be troubled by the giddiness, but stepped out surefootedly, and soon overtook the two brothers.

When abreast with Jack and Teddy, they halted. They took up their positions, one on each side of the lads. Jack looked at them and bit his lips. He felt uncomfortable, knowing the position he and his brother were in, and knowing who these two men were.

"I think we just about have you where we want you, eh, my young cubs?" said an unpleasant voice.

The other man—a giant of a man—laughed coarsely, and laid a hand on Teddy's arm.

The big man was Hendrik Olesen; the other was Obed Snaith.

(To be continued.)

Printed and Published every Wednesday by the Proprietors, The Amalgamated Press, Limited, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C 4. Subscription Rates: Inland, 11s. per annum, 5s. 6d for six months. Abroad, 8s. 10d. per annum; 4s. 5d. for six months. Sole Agents for South Africa: The Central News Agency, Limited. Sole Agents for Australia and New Zealand: Messrs. Gordon & Gotch, Limited; and for Canada: The Imperial News Company, Limited.