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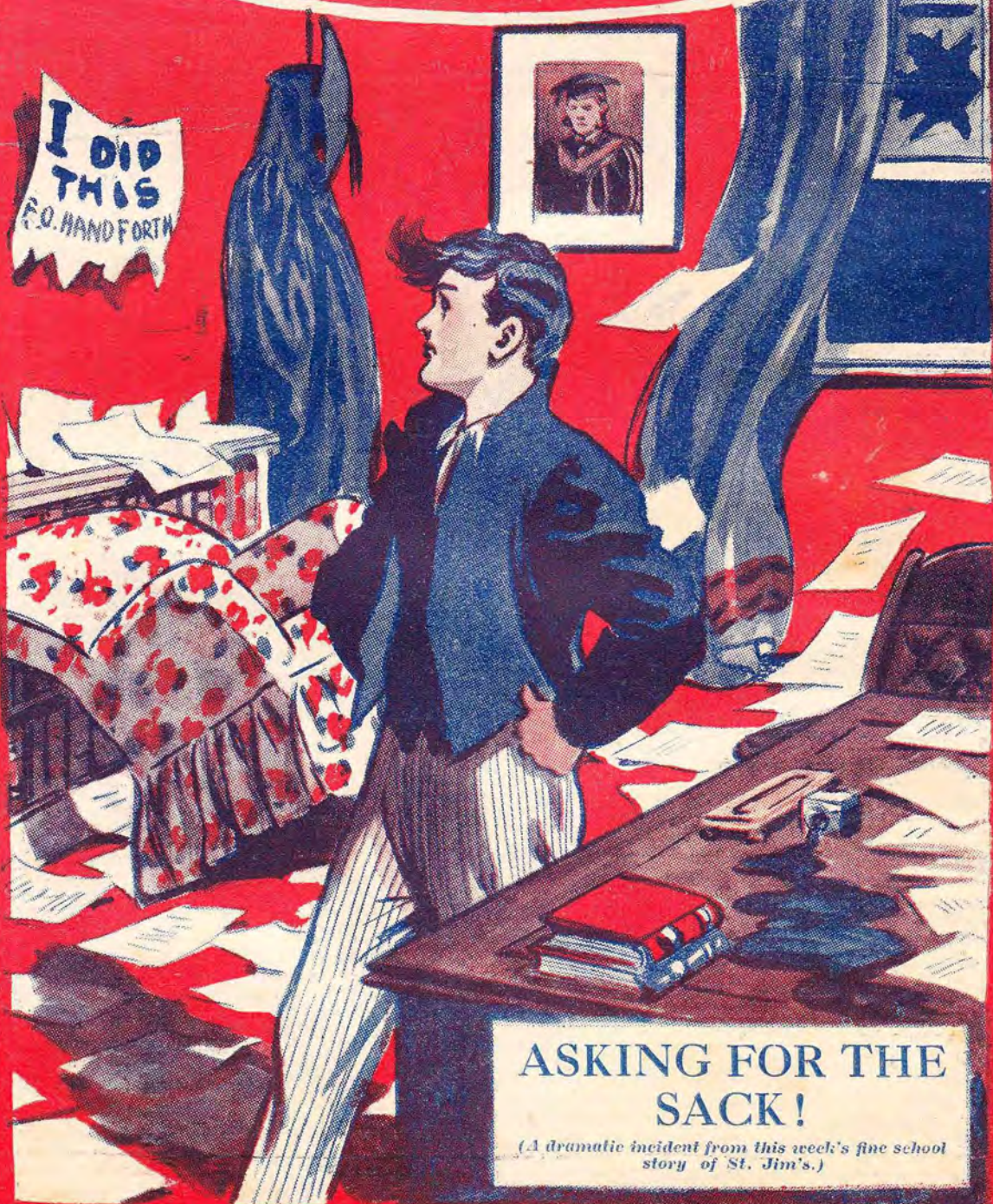
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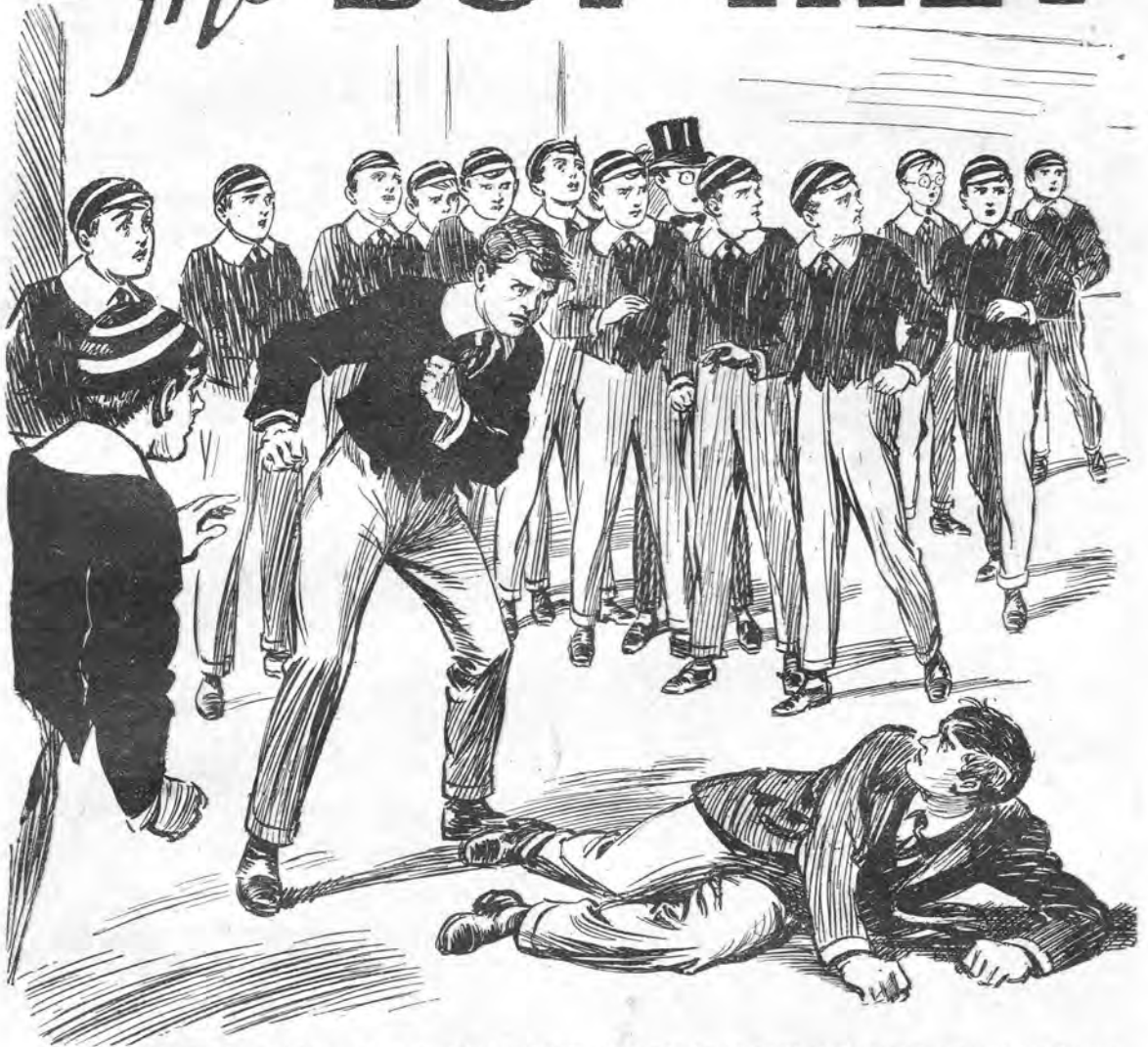


ASKING FOR THE SACK!

(A dramatic incident from this week's fine school
story of St. Jim's.)

ROLICKING LONG STORY OF TOM MERRY & CO., AT ST. JIM'S—

The BOY THEY



Handforth, of the Fourth at St. Jim's, is simply begging for the sack, but no matter what he does, expulsion simply won't come his way. Read about this extraordinary junior and his amazing antics in this week's rollicking yarn of school life and adventure.

CHAPTER 1.

The Guest of Honour!

"GENTLEMEN—"
"Hear, hear!"
"Gentlemen—"
"Bravo!"

"It's a fat lot of good addressing you as 'gentlemen'!" roared Tom Merry wrathfully. "Can't you let me speak, you fatheads?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There was a big gathering in the Junior Common-room of the School House at St. Jim's. Crowds of Shell fellows and Fourth-Formers were present; even Figgins & Co., of the New House, had been invited over. And the Common-room, in consequence, was packed.

A big feed had just been disposed of, and now the sunny captain of the Shell was attempting to make a speech. It was early evening, and the June day had been hot and sultry. In spite of all the Common-room windows being wide open, the atmosphere was close.

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"Gentlemen—" began Tom Merry again.

"Go it, old scout!"

"Pewwaps it would be bettah, Tom Mewwy, if I made a speech!" suggested Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, as he gracefully rose to his feet. "It wequials a fellow of tact and judgment—"

"Bow-wow!" said Tom Merry.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Gentlemen!" roared Tom. "We are gathered here this evening in honour of our friend on my right—the one and only Handforth!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Good old Handy!"

"We don't like to lose him, but we fear he's got to go—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And, as chairman of this gathering, I hereby call upon you to raise your foaming glasses—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"A toast!"

Teacups were raised, and the cheering was thunderous.

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—AND EDWARD OSWALD HANDFORTH OF THE FOURTH!

COULDN'T SACK!

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.



Edward Oswald Handforth, of the Fourth, looked rather uncomfortable, although he was glowing with pride. There could be no question of his popularity. When he had arrived at St. Jim's, the juniors had spoofed him up to the neck; but now that he was on the point of leaving the old school they were genuine in their enthusiasm.

"Before calling upon our guest of honour to make a little speech, I would like to say a few words on the subject of his sojourn amongst us," continued Tom Merry, after the toast had been drunk. "We all know that Handforth is a good fellow—"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Hear, hear!"

"He may be a chump, but he is certainly a good fellow!" said Tom Merry firmly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look here, you ass—" began Handforth, turning red.

"No offence, old bean!" grinned Tom. "Kindly remember that this is a speech of appreciation!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You came to St. Jim's in all your helpless innocence," said the Shell skipper. "We pulled your leg, Handy. We pulled it to such an extent that you undertook to fulfil four tricky tests. And we were idiots enough to believe that you would jib at each of the four hurdles."

"You silly ass!" said Handforth. "I thought you were serious at the time!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But even when we told you the truth, you swore that you would run the course!" said Tom Merry. "In that, gentlemen, Handforth proved his determination and his courage!"

"Hear, hear!"

"There is no need for me to describe those tests; you know them as well as I do," proceeded Tom Merry. "However, I would like to say just one word with regard to the final incident—"

"Down with the Grammarians!"

"Good old Handy!"

"Yes!" said Tom Merry, nodding. "Handforth, alone and unaided, raided the Grammar School. He fought Gordon Gay, and knocked him out. And he extracted a document from Gordon Gay, stating, in plain language, that the Grammarians are not fit to clean our boots!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It must be admitted that there was a certain amount of luck attached to the affair," continued Tom Merry, grin-

ning. "When Gordon Gay gave that document to Handy, he believed that it was a plain sheet of paper. But the invisible ink played a dirty trick on Gordon Gay, and came to life again!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It disappeared soon afterwards, worse luck—"

"Rotten!"

"But that doesn't alter the fact that Handy pulled off a task that only one fellow in a thousand would think of attempting!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Bravo!"

"Much to our regret, Handforth has decided to leave the fold," said Tom Merry. "Now that he has completed his four tests, and is, virtually, the leader of the School House Fourth, he has made up his mind to go. I can well understand the anguish of the Fourth, since it must now fall back once more upon Blake as a leader—"

"You burbling idiot!" roared Blake, turning red.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Let there be no unseemly language!" said Tom Merry, wagging an admonishing forefinger at the indignant Blake. "I now call upon our guest of honour to make a little speech."

Tom Merry sat down, and the cheering was loud.

"Good old Handy!"

"Get on your hind legs, old man!"

"Speech—speech!"

Handforth rose in his place, his eyes gleaming, his face flushed. This was the sort of thing he liked! The crowd was enthusiastic for him, ready to cheer him to the echo. He stood up, and cleared his throat.

"Well, you chaps, I'm going!" he said, with characteristic bluntness. "St. Jim's isn't a bad sort of school, but after thinking it over, I've decided to go back to St. Frank's."

"Don't do it, old man!"

"Stay here!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I'm sorry!" said Handforth firmly. "I'm thundering sorry—but I've got to go. I've been at St. Jim's for about a month—long enough to complete those four dotty tests, and to show you that I'm not a fellow to be messed about! I've won the leadership of the School House Fourth—"

"Yes, but that was only a bit of spoof!" objected Jack Blake. "When I told you that you could become leader of the Fourth, I never dreamed that you'd carry out those tests!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Besides," said Blake, "you told me that you didn't want to lead."

"That was because I had made up my mind to leave here," nodded Handforth. "After being at St. Jim's a month, and after comparing it with St. Frank's, I've come to the conclusion that St. Jim's can't be mentioned in the same breath as St. Frank's—"

"Rats!"

"Weally, Handay—"

"No offence, of course!" grinned Handforth. "But you've got to remember that St. Frank's is my real school. I've got lots of friends here, but I've got lots of friends there, too. Old friends. I'm afraid that things have gone badly at St. Frank's during my absence—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"In all probability, the junior sports have gone to pot!" continued Handforth, while the gathering grinned joyously. "So it's up to me to go back, so that I can pull things together!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There's nothing like modesty, old man!" murmured Monty Lowther.

"Fathead!" frowned Handforth. "I'm not boasting. Goodness only knows what's been happening at St. Frank's while I've been away. So I must go back. I've already written to my pater, and he's promised to be here this evening. So I shall be back in my old school to-night."

"Don't go, Handy!"

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"Now's your chance to make up your mind!"

"Yaas, wathah! Stay heah, deah boy!"

But Edward Oswald Handforth's jaw became firmly set. The St. Jim's juniors were genuine in their shouts. They really wanted Handforth to stay. Handforth was a bit of a comedian; he livened things up; he was a handy fellow to have about if there was any spoofing or leg-pulling to be done. But nobody thought of mentioning this aspect of the case to the guest of honour. He might not have liked it.

And the juniors themselves did not realise that they were going to work in the surest way to make Handforth harden his resolution. If they had been indifferent as to his going—if they had urged him to clear out—he would probably have made up his mind to stay. Perversity was one of his little habits.

"My pater ought to be here at any minute!" Handforth continued. "And when he comes I shall leave you all. It's only about an hour's run to St. Frank's by car, and so I shall be back amongst my old chums before locking-up."

He paused, and a dreamy look came into his eyes.

He had done well at St. Jim's, but at heart he was a St. Frank's fellow. And he was filled with joy at the thought of going back. He would leave many friends behind at St. Jim's, and it afforded him keen pleasure to realise that the two schools were comparatively close together. He would go back to St. Frank's as an ambassador; he would work his hardest to bring the two great schools into closer touch.

These sentiments he now proceeded to voice in his speech, and he waxed mightily enthusiastic as he proceeded.

"I may be going, but you haven't seen the last of me!" he declared firmly. "By George, no! I shall come back one of these days at the head of a St. Frank's crowd—"

"But I thought that a chap named Hamilton was the junior skipper over at St. Frank's?" asked Blake mildly. Handforth frowned.

"Hamilton?" he repeated. "Oh, you mean Nipper?"

"Yes, that's the chap!"

"Nipper is skipper of the Remove, I suppose," said Handforth grudgingly. "But there'll probably be a difference when I get back. There's not much doubt that I shall become the leader of all the St. Frank's juniors."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Good old optimist!"

Before Handforth could continue his speech, a loud thump sounded on the door.

"I say, you fellows—" came a voice.

"Clear off, Trimble!" shouted Blake.

"But there's a big car out here!" said Baggy Trimble through the door. "Handforth's pater has arrived!"

"What!"

"Open the door, can't you?" yelled Baggy complainingly.

Trimble had been excluded from the feast, much to his disgust and indignation. There were many fellows who believed that he was playing a trick now; but the door was opened. It wouldn't do to keep Sir Edward Handforth waiting if by chance he really had arrived.

"Well, you'd better go, Handy," said Tom Merry.

"Go?" repeated Handforth. "What for? Ask my pater to come here!"

"Better go easy, old man!" said Blake. "You'd far better trot out and go with your pater to the Head."

"Why should I go to the Head?" demanded Handforth, staring.

"Doesn't he know that you're leaving St. Jim's?"

"Not yet," said Handforth calmly.

"Bai Jove! Weally, Handay, it was vewy wemiss of you not to mention the mattah to the Head!" said Arthur Augustus, in astonishment. "I wathah think that he will be somewhat annoyed."

"I shouldn't be at all surprised!" murmured Blake, with a chuckle. "It's the usual thing, you know, Handy, to tell the Head when you're leaving the school."

"Oh, I'm leaving that to my pater!" replied Handforth, with a wave of his hand. "Why should I bother? I'm a St. Frank's chap really, and I shall just go to the Head, shake hands with him, and say 'good-bye.' Then I shall buzz off in the pater's car. Why make a fuss over trifles?"

There were more chuckles, for Edward Oswald Handforth's point of view was unique. It was news to them to hear that Dr. Holmes had not been informed of the plan. But nobody was greatly surprised. By this time they were accustomed to Handforth's little ways!

CHAPTER 2. The Bombshell!

"HERE he is!"
"Bai Jove!"

Footsteps sounded out in the passage, and a moment later Sir Edward Handforth strode into the Common-room. Sir Edward was big and bluff, with a

red, rugged, good-natured countenance. In a word, he was a larger, older edition of his son.

"What's all this?" he said boisterously. "Upon my soul! What's all this? Ah, so there you are, Edward! You appear to be having—ahem!—a celebration, eh?"

"That's the idea, pater!" said Handforth, as he strode forward and gripped his father's hand. "How goes it? Jolly glad to see you! These are all the chaps!" he added, waving carelessly towards the crowd.

"Pleased to meet them!" said Sir Edward, with a friendly smile.

"We're just giving your son a send-off, sir," said Tom Merry, by way of explanation. "We shall be rather sorry to lose him."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"We don't want him to go, sir—but he insists!"

"Oh!" said Sir Edward thoughtfully. "He insists, does he?"

"Well, the fact is, pater—" began Handforth.

"You have told these boys that you are leaving St. Jim's?" asked his father.

"Why, yes," said Handforth. "You see, St. Frank's is my real school, and although I wouldn't dream of saying a word against St. Jim's, it can't hold a candle to St. Frank's."

"Ass!" said about a dozen voices.

"Take no notice, boys!" said Sir Edward. "He has always been lacking in tact. Blunt and outspoken—that's my son. Sometimes too outspoken, by gad! Well, Edward, I came down here in response to your letter. I want to know what it's all about."

Handforth stared.

"But I told you in the letter, pater!" he replied. "I said that I had made up my mind to leave St. Jim's, and I asked you to come down here to take me away, and to fix things up with the Head. Well, you're here, so everything in the garden is lovely!"

"We are not interested in the garden!" replied his father. "I have come, Edward, because I want to learn the exact facts for myself. Your letters, in addition to being atrociously scrawled, are generally incomprehensible."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, I say!" protested Handforth.

"I want to know exactly how you have been getting on," continued his father. "Now, Edward, let me know the exact truth. You have been at St. Jim's for about a month, I believe. How do you like it here?"

"Oh, fine!" replied Handforth promptly. "I've had a great time, pater!"

"I am glad to hear it!" said Sir Edward. "And what progress have you made?"

"Heaps!" said his son confidently. "First of all, I had a scrap with a prefect, and knocked him flat—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ahem!" coughed Sir Edward. "Is it necessary to go into these incidents, Edward? When I ask about your progress I do not expect to hear stories of your quarrels."

"Well, as a matter of fact, pater, I've been getting on pretty well all round," replied Handforth. "I'm in the regular junior eleven, and I've played for the First."

"Yes, yes," nodded his father. "I heard about that, in one of your letters. A splendid achievement, Edward! I understand that you knocked up a hundred runs whilst playing in the First Eleven?"

"Yaas, wathah, sir!" said Arthur Augustus. "A wemarkable performance, bai Jove! Evewybody was staggered!"

"Rats!" said Handforth.

"Weally, Handay—"

"Rats!" repeated Handforth. "Didn't I tell you that I was going to score a century for the First?"

"Yaas; but we nevah thought that you would do it, deah boy!"

"That was before you knew me properly," grinned Handforth. "But when I say a thing, I mean a thing!"

"Bravo, Handy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

A round of cheering went up, and Sir Edward stood listening with approval. It pleased him immensely to find his son so popular.

"Anything else?" he inquired.

"Why, yes, pater," said Handforth. "In a way of speaking, I'm the leader of the School House Fourth."

"Better and better!" smiled Sir Edward. "You are in the regular cricket eleven, you have played for the First, and you are the leader of your Form. That is, indeed, a splendid record after only one month in this school!"

"Your son is an energetic chap, sir!" smiled Tom Merry.

"Yes, when he likes, he can do well," said Sir Edward, with gratification. "However, much as I am interested in sports in general, Edward, I have yet to learn of your progress in your studies. And I had a ghost of an idea that

"It was your own desire to come to St. Jim's," said Sir Edward Handforth sternly to his son, "and, by gad, here you will remain!" "Then I'll tell the Head that I don't want to stay here——" said Handforth excitedly. "Silence!" thundered Sir Edward. "How dare you!" (See below.)



you had come to St. Jim's in order to gain a few trifling odds and ends of education.

There were many chuckles, and Handforth grinned. "Oh, I'm all right in the Form, sir," he said. "They made a mistake when I came here, and shoved me into the Fourth. Strictly speaking, I ought to be in the Shell. But I didn't like to make a fuss, and so I stuck there."

"Rats!"

"Cheese it, Handy!"

There were many catcalls, and many laughs. But Sir Edward was looking thoughtful and serious, and when he gazed at his son again his expression was a trifle grim. Not that Handforth noticed any change.

"I am very glad to hear all this, Edward," said Handforth senior. "It is perfectly obvious to me that you have done splendidly during your month at this school. You have gained popularity with your companions, and, generally speaking, there seems to be every reason why you should remain. Therefore, I should like to know why you are so anxious to leave?"

"Well, you see, pater, I made up my mind——"

"Never mind about that," interrupted his father. "You are on friendly terms with all your schoolfellows?"

"Why, yes."

"You have a good position in the Junior Eleven?"

"That's right, pater."

"And with regard to your studies you are also satisfied?" asked Sir Edward. "I take it that you like your masters?"

"Oh, rather, sir! Mr. Latham is a jolly easy-going sort—miles better than old Crowell, of the St. Frank's Remove. The Head's a sportsman, too. In fact, all the masters are jolly fine, with the exception of old Ratty."

"Ahem! We will not go into any close questions regarding—er—Ratty!" said Sir Edward diplomatically. "So far as I have been able to understand, you have absolutely no reason for desiring to leave St. Jim's."

"No reason?" repeated Handforth, staring. "But—but St. Frank's is my real school, pater!"

"Nonsense!" said his father. "You are at St. Jim's now, and St. Jim's is your real school."

Handforth stared at him, flabbergasted.

"But—but——" he began.

"Silence!" said his father sternly. "On your own show-

ing, Edward, you are doing excellently at St. Jim's. I am more than glad to hear it, and it affords me much gratification to know that you are happy here, and content. I see no reason why I should accede to your whims and take you away."

A buzz went round the Common-room, but Handforth did not hear it. He was staring dazedly at his father.

"Whim?" he repeated. "But—but haven't you come to take me away, pater? Haven't you come to take me back to St. Frank's?"

"I have not!"

"But St. Frank's is my real school——"

"I think I have already characterised that statement as nonsense!" snapped his father. "Let me remind you, Edward, that you left St. Frank's of your own accord. Now, tell me the truth! Did you, or did you not?"

"Well, in a way of speaking, I suppose I did."

"You suppose?" thundered Sir Edward. "You have the audacity to stand there and say to me that you suppose that you left St. Frank's of your own accord? Perhaps my memory is better than yours, Edward! Why, you positively refused to remain at St. Frank's!"

"Oh, but I didn't mean——"

"Never mind what you meant!" interrupted Sir Edward. "Before you left St. Frank's there was a little unpleasantness. You were accused of something that you did not do, and you were exonerated. In the eyes of the whole school your innocence was established. Therefore, as you know well enough, you could have remained at that school without a stain on your character."

"Yes, I know that, pater," said Handforth quickly. "That's—that's why I want to go back!"

"I was with the Headmaster of St. Frank's when you made your statement!" continued his father relentlessly. "Did you not say that you had no desire to remain in a school where you were distrusted? Yes, Edward, you did! You refused to remain at St. Frank's. It was your own wish that you should leave; it was your own desire to come to St. Jim's. Well, here you are, and, by gad, here you will remain!"

Dismay was written all over Handforth's flushed countenance. Blake & Co., and the Terrible Three, and Figgins, and all the other juniors, were looking on in

astonishment. Many of them were feeling a trifle uncomfortable. Sir Edward had apparently forgotten their presence.

"But—but I didn't mean it, pater!" gasped Handforth, clutching at his father's sleeve. "That—that was all bunkum, you know! I suppose I was a silly ass to leave St. Frank's, and to come here. St. Jim's is all right—one of the finest schools under the sun—"

"Hear, hear!" murmured many voices.

"But, after all, St. Frank's is my real school!" went on Handforth. "And so I've decided to go back—"

"Unhappily for your plans, young man, I have decided that you shall remain here!" broke in his father curtly. "Let me tell you, once and for all, that I am not going to submit to any more of your nonsense!"

"Oh, I say! I—I didn't mean—"

"Yes—nonsense!" insisted Sir Edward. "Sheer, arrant nonsense! You will find, Edward, that you cannot play about with me just as you like! Here you are, and here you will stay! I only came to St. Jim's this evening, so that I could knock all this rubbish out of your head. You elected to come to St. Jim's, and you have told me that you are progressing well. Very good! I see absolutely no reason why I should bring about any change!"

Never before had Handforth looked so taken aback.

"Do—do you mean that I've got to stay at St. Jim's for good?" he panted.

"Yes, I do!"

"And that I shall never go back to St. Frank's at all?"

"Never!" snapped his father. "I am determined. You shall not play fast and loose with me any longer!"

"Then—then I'll go to the Head!" said Handforth excitedly. "I'll tell the Head that I don't want to stay here—"

"Silence!" thundered Sir Edward. "How dare you? Good heavens! How dare you flout my authority? Remember, young man, that I am your father!"

"I—I'm sorry, sir!" muttered Handforth wretchedly.

"I am glad to hear you say so!" frowned Sir Edward. "It is my will that you shall remain at St. Jim's. If I choose to deny you the indulgence of this whim—this whim to go back to the school you left of your own accord—then that is the end of the matter."

"Oh, but pater, if you'll only—"

"Enough!" interrupted his father coldly. "I have spoken my mind, and that is my final word. Do not mention this subject to me again, Edward. You now belong to St. Jim's, and here you shall stay!"

And, without another word, his lips compressed, Sir Edward Handforth turned to the door and strode out.

An immediate hum filled the Common-room. Everybody was talking at once; but Handforth stood like a statue, staring dazedly in front of him. His dream had been shattered, and he was momentarily stunned.

CHAPTER 3.

By Hook or By Crook.

"IT'S very serious!"

Arthur Augustus spoke in a solemn voice. Blake & Co. were in Study No. 6, supposedly doing their prep. But their thoughts were more on Handforth than on their work.

"What's very serious, ass?" asked Blake, looking up.

"I refuse to be chawactewised as an ass!" said Gussy stiffly.

"Well, fathead, then!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"What's serious?" roared Blake.

"I fail to see the reason for this shoutin', deah boy!" protested D'Arcy. "There is no need to woaah at me. Weally, you appear to be in a fawtful tempah!"

"I'm worried," said Blake, gnawing at the end of his penholder. "In a way, it's rather a good thing that Handy is staying on at St. Jim's. But what about my position as leader of the School House Fourth?"

"Yaas, wathah! That is exactly what I was wefewin' to," said Arthur Augustus, nodding. "You are in a very serious position, deah boy. Handay will be only within his wights if he insists upon bein' wegaraded as leadah."

"That's what I've been thinking!" grunted Blake. "I can't get out of it, either, because I made the offer myself. I told Handy that if he pulled off those four tests he'd automatically be leader of the Fourth. Now I'm in the cart!"

"Well, it jolly well serves you right!" said Herries bluntly. "You shouldn't make such idiotic promises. As for Handy, he's worse. He makes up his mind that he's going to leave St. Jim's, and he takes it for granted."

"The frabjous chump!" said Digby. "We held that cele-

bration this evening, and everything. How were we to know that he hadn't fixed things up?"

"Well, that's just like Handy," said Blake. "And it strikes me that his pater is made of the same kind of stuff. They're both jolly obstinate. Just because Handy wants to go back to St. Frank's, his pater decides that he shan't go."

In this Jack Blake was right. He had read Sir Edward Handforth's character pretty well. But even Blake made a little mistake with regard to Edward Oswald. Blake accepted the situation, and believed that Handforth would remain.

But Handforth himself, who was mooning about in the quad, was in a very different frame of mind.

His desire to get back to St. Frank's was now a thousand-fold more intense. Indeed, it was more than a desire. It was an obsession. His father had obstructed him in his plan, and obstruction to Handforth was tantamount to a challenge.

And as the evening wore on Handforth's determination grew. He made no attempt to seek out his father, who, he discovered, was remaining at St. Jim's for the night. No, that wouldn't do. From long experience Handforth knew that his father was obstinate and pigheaded. He did not realise that he was a chip of the old block himself.

"So I'm not going back to St. Frank's—eh?" he muttered fiercely. "By George! We'll see all about that! Before this happened, I wasn't quite certain in my own mind. I still had a hankering to stay here. But not now. If I'm not back at St. Frank's by this time to-morrow evening, I'll fry my boots and eat 'em!"

And in this frame of mind he went to bed. Next day his father had gone, and, except for a few words of farewell, they had had no talk. Handforth, true to his father's command, did not again mention the subject of leaving St. Jim's. Not because he was obedient by nature, but because he knew that it would be worse than useless to revive the subject.

"Hard lines, Handy, old man!" said Tom Merry, coming up behind Handforth in the School House doorway, and clapping him on the back. "Sorry you've been dishd—but we don't mind. You're welcome here."

"Yaas, wathah!" said D'Arcy, who was near by.

Handforth grunted.

"That's very decent of you," he said gruffly. "I know you'll make me welcome if I stay. But, the fact is, I'm going."

"Bai Jove!"

"You're going?" repeated Tom Merry politely.

"Of course I'm going," said Handforth. "I've made up my mind to go back to St. Frank's—and I'm going back!"

"But your pater—"

"Bother my pater!" grunted Handforth. "I don't know what's come over him. He's obstinate—stubborn! Thank goodness I don't take after him!"

"Ahem!"

"He's gone away thinking that he's won," went on Handforth, his eyes glittering. "But he'll jolly soon find out that he's made a mistake."

"And how about your position as leader of the Fourth?" asked Blake casually.

"Leader of the Fourth?" repeated Handforth. "Rats! I'm not interested in St. Jim's now! Don't I keep telling you that I'm a St. Frank's chap? Blow the Fourth!"

"Then you don't object to me keeping my old position?"

"Why should I object?" said Handforth. "You're leader of the Fourth here, aren't you, Blake?"

"Yes; but I resigned my place in your favour."

"Then you're reinstated herewith," said Handforth promptly. "I don't regard myself as a St. Jim's chap. I'm not one. I'm only here as a kind of visitor. And before the day's out I shall be gone."

Blake smiled.

"Well, that's a load off my mind, anyway," he said. "Good man, Handy! This is about the most sensible thing you've done since you arrived here. And don't forget you've said this in front of witnesses. I'm leader of the School House Fourth, and that wipes out any claim that you might have had."

But Handforth wasn't listening.

"The trouble is, how am I going to wangle it?" he muttered. "How the dickens can I work things so that I can dish the pater?"

"Why try?" asked Tom Merry. "Why not make the best of a bad job, and stay here?"

"Stay here?" repeated Handforth, staring. "Stay here after my pater has treated me like this?"

"He hasn't treated you so badly, old scout," said Tom. "After all, it's the privilege of paters to have the last word, and the majority of 'em expect to have a say in these matters."

The gentle sarcasm was lost upon Handforth.

"By hook or by crook I'm going!" he insisted. "It's very

decent of you chaps to want me to stay. But I tell you plainly, nothing is going to keep me here!"

"Weally, Handay, I fail to see what you can do," said Gussy. "It is vewy diswespectful to oppose your patah. He has ordahed you to wemain, and that, in my opinion, is the end of the mattah!"

"Then your opinion is cracked!" said Handforth bluntly. "If it comes to that you're not chained, old man," said Blake. "You're free to go, if you want to."

"Fathead!" retorted Handforth. "I can't just walk out, can I? If I did, I should be running away from school, and I should be collared and brought back. That wouldn't do at all!"

"No, I'm afraid it would be a washout," agreed Tom Merry.

"And I shouldn't do any good by going to St. Frank's, either," continued Handforth, frowning. "Unless it's arranged by my pater, I'm done. I've got to leave St. Jim's definitely."

"Well, there are only two ways of leaving a school," said Blake. "A chap can be taken away by his people, or he can be sacked."

Handforth's eyes gleamed. "Yes!" he said fiercely. "I've been thinking of that. How would it be if I was bunked from the school? Then my pater would have to send me somewhere else, wouldn't he? And, naturally, he'd send me to St. Frank's!"

"But, my dear old ass—"

"Once I'm expelled, I shall be forced to go!" went on Handforth. "And after that my pater can't refuse to send

me back to St. Frank's. Yes, that's it! I'm going to get myself sacked!"

He spoke in a relieved voice, as though that decision had taken a great load off his mind.

By this time a number of other fellows had come up, and they were listening in astonishment.

"Kindly repeat that, Handy, old man," said Bernard Glyn politely. "Did I understand you to say that you're going to get yourself sacked?"

"Yes!" said Handforth coolly.

"Bai Jove!"

"My pater won't take me away in the ordinary manner, and so I'm going to get myself pushed out of the school," continued Handforth. "It's the only way. Of course, I shall have to be careful. I don't want to do anything disgraceful. But there are other ways of getting the sack."

"Gweat Scott!" ejaculated D'Arcy, jamming his monocle into his eye, and gazing at Handforth in amazement. "You are not weally sewious, Handay?"

"Yes, I am!"

"Then you must be off your wockah!" said Arthur Augustus. "It is a fiewtful thing for a fellow to be sacked!"

"Yes; you'll have to chuck it up, Handy," said Tom Merry, shaking his head. "You can't do a thing like that!"

"Can't I?" said Handforth. "Don't I keep telling you that it's the only way?"

"But you can stay on here, as your father wants."

"Oh, can I?" said Handforth fiercely. "By George! Do

(Continued on next page.)



Our Tame Oracle brings his powerful mind to bear on some interesting queries sent in by "Gem" readers, with the following result:

Q. What are Mother Carey's chickens?

A. These are a kind of sea bird sometimes known as stormy petrels. By using their wings in a curious way, it often looks as though they are walking upon the surface of the ocean, and old sailors still believe that they are the heralds of bad weather.

Q. What is the difference between Bruyere and Gruyere?

A. The first is a wood and the second a cheese. From the roots of the bruyere shrub are made a good class of tobacco pipe. The other is a cheese made at Gruyere in Switzerland. It is pale yellow in colour and full of holes which are the result of great air bubbles, and not caused by blasting with dynamite, as the comic papers would have us believe.

Q. What is a ship's fender?



To prevent a ship from damaging its sides against the wharf, a rope fender is used.

A. In nautical language to fend off is to push away one heavy body from another, as in the case of two boats that might come into collision. A fender, therefore, is a kind of cushion sometimes made of old rope weaved into a great bag that can be lowered to take the shock of two boats colliding and cause

them to rebound from one another without damage. Some boats such as a dinghy, which is often being taken alongside ships or wharves, wear fenders of rope, cork or rubber round the sides to prevent damage to the woodwork of the boat itself.

Q. Why did the chicken cross the road?

A. This question has been addressed to me by Ivor Renton. Undoubtedly, as Ivor himself suggests, it was to get to the other side, and probably it was assisted in this decision by one of the three million motorists that infest our English countryside. Still, to an extent, I can sympathise with the motorists, having just paid my first instalment on a secondhand Pan-Knockout two-seater. And as one of the new owner-drivers, a chicken crossing the road has become obnoxious to me—it reminds me of a burglary. It is a fowl proceeding.

Q. What is a jerboa?

A. This is a creature of the African deserts not unlike a kangaroo in appearance and yet very little bigger than a rat. They are pretty, timid things, and occasionally are kept as pets in England and other countries.

Q. What is braille?

A. This, Ethel M., is the system of writing and printing for the blind. It was invented by a Frenchman, Monsieur Braille, in 1834.

Q. What is a punkah?

A. A punkah is one of the necessities of life in hot countries such as India. It is usually a light frame of wood covered with some material like calico, from which is suspended a short curtain or mat. The whole of this framework and mat is moved to and fro near the ceiling

asleep!

Q. What is a griffin?

A. This, George Wilson of Yarmouth, is a fabulous creature with an eagle's head and wings, and a lion's body. There is a fine specimen in the Strand opposite the Law Courts that marks the boundary between the City of London and the



A very queer animal, the Griffin. It has an eagle's head, wings, and front claws, and the body and tail of a lion.

City of Westminster. A griffin is a word also applied to a newly arrived European in India—a greenhorn. Sometimes the spelling is griffon or gryphon. Incidentally, a griffon can also mean a coarse-haired terrier-like dog of foreign breed.

Q. Where is Runnymede?

A. It is a long stretch of green meadow on the right bank of the Thames about twenty miles west of London. Of course, you have all read about Runnymede in your history books, for it was either here, or at Charta Island a little way off, that Magna Charta was signed by King John on June 15th, 1215.

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"You think I'm going to knuckle under like that? I'm a St. Frank's chap, and I'm going back to St. Frank's!"

"Yes, I believe you mentioned that before!" murmured Monty Lowther. "At the same time, your pater seems to be a man of determination. The clashing of two great wills. And it strikes me that your pater is bound to win the day."

"I tell you, if I get the sack he'll be forced to give in!" argued Handforth. "And I can get expelled easily enough if I go to work in the right way. Of course, I shan't go pub-haunting, or anything like that. I don't want to be misunderstood."

"Then how are you going to get yourself disgraced?"

"I shan't be disgraced!" frowned Handforth. "How can I be disgraced if I don't do anything disgraceful?"

"This is getting a bit difficult!" chuckled Tom Merry. "Don't you see, Handy, that fellows are only sacked if they do something disgraceful?"

"Rats! There are plenty of other ways!" said Handforth stubbornly. "For example, what's the matter with knocking a prefect down?"

"My only sainted aunt!"

"Weally, Handay—"

"Yes, by George, I've hit it!" said Handforth excitedly. "If I knock a prefect down in the middle of the quad, where everybody can see me, I'm certain to be bunked!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Everybody roared. Handforth's logic was amusing. And the calm, cool manner in which he made up his mind was refreshing. At first, the fellows had believed he was just talking "out of the back of his neck"; but it seemed that he was in deadly earnest.

"You've forgotten something, old scout!" said Blake. "Knocking a prefect down is a disgraceful act."

Handforth waved his hand.

"It may be disgraceful in the eyes of the Head, but who cares?" he said. "It isn't really disgraceful, as all you chaps know. And my pater is a sportsman, and if he finds that I've been sacked for fighting a prefect he won't be down on me."

"But you'll never be able to get into St. Frank's again!" said Tom Merry warningly.

"Eh?"

"You heard me!" said Tom.

"I know I did!" frowned Handforth. "But what the dickens do you mean? Why shan't I be able to get back into St. Frank's?"

"Because the headmaster of St. Frank's won't admit you," replied Tom Merry. "You know jolly well that a chap who's been expelled—"

"That's only a detail!" interrupted Handforth. "My pater will be able to put that right afterwards, when I get home. He'll wangle it. As soon as he finds that I've beaten him at his own game, he'll be a sport, and see the joke. Then he'll go down to St. Frank's and fix things up for me."

Handforth dismissed all doubts from his mind. He concentrated upon the one subject. And, as though in answer to his desires, a figure was seen out in the quad at that moment. It was the figure of Knox of the Sixth!

A prefect—and, moreover, the most unpopular senior at St. Jim's!

CHAPTER 4.

Unlucky for Knox!

GERALD KNOX, all unconscious of the concentrated stares from the School House doorway, continued on his way across the quadrangle. He had a folded newspaper in his hand, and he was reading intently.

"Picking out a winner for the three-thirty!" murmured Monty Lowther.

"I shouldn't be at all surprised!" said Arthur Augustus. "Knox is a gambler! wottah! And I must say that if Handay is going to get the sack by knockin' a prefect down, he couldn't do better than try his luck with Knox!"

"Not much luck about it!" grunted Blake. "It'll be a cert!"

Handforth's eyes were still glittering as he gazed upon Knox. Why, the thing is going to be dead easy! He had made up his mind to attack a prefect, because it seemed to be a certain way out of his difficulty, and any prefect would do. But here was Knox of the Sixth waiting for him! And it would be a real pleasure to attack Knox.

"Yes. I'll do it!" muttered Handforth.

"Hold on!" said Tom Merry, grasping his shoulder. "Don't be an ass, Handy! You can't do a crazy thing like this—"

"I've made up my mind!" interrupted Handforth, jerking himself away.

He strode down the steps, and walked out towards Knox.

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Tom Merry shrugged his shoulders helplessly, and looked at the other juniors.

"Why try to stop him?" asked Blake, grinning. "This is going to be funny."

"Weally, Blake—"

"The ass won't take any advice, so we needn't waste any sympathy on him," said Blake. "And you know what a determined beggar he is! Besides, if we try to stop him, it'll only make him worse!"

"Well, there's that about it," admitted Tom Merry.

Handforth approached Knox with a feeling of sheer exhilaration. Hitherto, he had avoided this particular prefect. Knox was a cad and a bully, and Handforth had not cared to get too near him, in case he acted rashly.

But now it was different. For once in his life Gerald Knox was about to hear the plain, unvarnished truth about himself. Handforth's eyes were gleaming with a joyous light. Getting himself sacked from St. Jim's was not only going to be easy, but it was going to be a pleasure.

Many a time had he longed for the opportunity of telling Knox exactly what he thought of him—just as many other juniors had had the same desire. But they had always been prevented, knowing, as they did, that Knox was a prefect, and that any plain speaking would result in dire consequences for themselves.

But in Handforth's case the plainer he spoke the more certain would he be of achieving his object.

There were quite a number of juniors out in the quad, strolling in the morning sunshine. Figgins & Co., of the New House, were there. Levison and Clive were chatting with Bernard Glyn and Harry Noble. And dotted about the quad, in all directions, were other groups of Shell fellows and Fourth-Formers. And, one and all, they started and stared as they beheld Handforth grasy Gerald Knox by the shoulder, and pull him up short.

"Great Scott!" ejaculated Bernard Glyn. "The silly ass is off his rocker!"

And there were many other comments of a similar nature. But Handforth knew exactly what he was doing. He faced the astounded Knox, and nodded coolly.

"Picking out the winners?" asked Handforth, in a loud voice.

Knox's jaw dropped. He was dumbfounded by the junior's action and by his words. Everybody else in the quad drew nearer, anxious not to miss a word. This was going to be a novelty.

"What—what did you say?" ejaculated Knox, after a deadly pause.

Handforth surveyed him with contempt.

"By George!" he said witheringly. "You're a fine kind of prefect, aren't you?"

"Why, you confounded young—"

"They must have been half asleep when they gave you your privileges," went on Handforth loudly. "I've often wanted to have a few words with you, Knox, and now I'm in the right mood for the job."

Knox stared in greater amazement than ever.

"You infernal young sweep—" he began.

"Oh, chuck it!" said Handforth contemptuously. "The fact is, Knox, you're a smoky rotter!"

"Bai Jove!"

"That's done it!" murmured Blake. "My only sainted aunt! What a nerve the chap's got!"

"He's a cough-drop!" said Figgins admiringly.

Knox was standing quite still, his unpleasant face pale, his lips curled in a savage manner. But, as yet, he was still practically speechless. He was thrown off his balance by the audacity of this junior.

"Yes, a smoky rotter!" continued Handforth, at the top of his voice. "Everybody knows you, Knox! It's a by-word throughout St. Jim's that you're the biggest cad in the school!"

"By gad!" panted Knox, with a gulp. "Why, you—"

"Shut up!" thundered Handforth.

"Wha-a-at?" gabbled Knox.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

It was a subdued chuckle from the juniors, who took care not to approach too closely.

"Don't interrupt me when I'm speaking!" roared Handforth. "You know jolly well, Knox, that you're a hypocrite and a blackguard! Besides that you're a bully!"

"Why, you—you—"

"When did you last have a gambling party in your study?" demanded Handforth magisterially. "Answer me that, you rotter! And what about your pals down at the Green Man?"

Knox jumped.

His amazement was now rapidly turning to consternation. It was bad enough to have this junior cheeking him in this blatant manner, but it was ten times as bad for Handforth to shout out these references to Knox's unscrupulous habits.

"Be quiet, you young fool!" snarled Knox in alarm.

He was so flabbergasted that he was helpless. If a junior had cheeked him in the ordinary way, he would have twisted the said junior's ear. But Handforth's offence was so staggering that Knox was bereft of his powers of action.

"I'm blown if I'll stop!" snorted Handforth. "Isn't it about time that you resigned your prefectship, Knox? You know jolly well that you're a gambler, and that you smoke, and that you bully the fags! If you don't know it, everybody else does!"

Handforth was beginning to get exasperated. His object was to goad Knox into attacking him, so that he would have a valid excuse for knocking him down. Handforth had very strict ideas on this subject. He did not like

"You young madman!" panted Knox.

"Oh, shut up!"

"Wha-a-at?"

"Shut up!" repeated Handforth curtly. "Your voice gives me the pip! You're afraid to hit me, aren't you? All bullies get the wind-up when they find themselves facing their betters! Goodness knows I don't want to boast, but if I was no better than you, Knox, I'd crawl into the first worm-hole, and do a good service for humanity in general!"

All in a second Knox changed.

The pallor left his cheeks, and they flushed purple. His eyes bulged, and glinted with fury. His brief helplessness had gone, and he acted. In fact, he acted so quickly that Handforth was not prepared.

"You infernal young hound!" snarled Knox.

He brought his fist round in a deadly swing.

Handforth saw it coming, but he had no time to dodge. Crash!

Knox's clenched fist struck Handforth on the side of the head, and the thudding of the blow could be heard all over the quad. It was the most terrific blow that any of those juniors had ever seen.



"You're a smoky rotter, Knox!" said Handforth contemptuously. "It's a by-word throughout St. Jim's that you're the biggest cad in the school!" Gerald Knox stared at the Fourth-Former in amazement. "Great gad!" he gasped. "You infernal little sweep —" "Rats!" Knox's jaw dropped. "What—what did you say?" he stuttered. (See Chapter 4.)

attacking a fellow without some definite reason. But Knox was only staring at him, his face as pale as a sheet, his eyes alight with fear and evil fury.

"Great gad!" panted Knox hoarsely. "Have—have you gone mad, you young fool? If you say another word—"

"Oh, don't worry!" broke in Handforth. "I haven't half finished yet!"

"Look here!" hissed Knox. "You'd better not—"

"Rats!"

"What—what did you say?"

"I said 'rats!' And I'll say it again, if you like!" roared Handforth. "I'm not afraid of you, Knox! You're only fit to bully the fags! You daren't stand up to a fellow who shows a bit of spirit! You ought to be booted out of St. Jim's! You're a disgrace to the school!"

Knox's jaw dropped again. All around, the juniors were listening with untold joy. How they had often wanted to say these very same things to the cad of the Sixth!

"My only Sunday topper!" murmured Blake. "This is worth quids and quids!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"This man deserves a medal for his good work," said Cardew languidly. "It's too good to be true."

Handforth stared at Knox with utter scorn.

"Well, why don't you do something?" he asked impatiently. "Afraid of me—eh? You don't forget the way I knocked you down two or three weeks ago, do you? But we're not out in the lane now, Knox. We're here in the quad where everybody can see."

The unfortunate Fourth-Former nearly turned a somersault.

He went clean over, his senses reeling, his head filled with noises, a blaze of light in front of his eyes.

"Oh, you cad!" panted Tom Merry impulsively.

There was a feeling of tense electricity in the quad. Handforth sat up, dazed and half stunned. Then, staggeringly, he got to his feet. He reeled on his heels as he passed a hand over his brow.

"I might have expected that!" he muttered. "Oh, you cad! You cowardly brute!"

Dazed as he was, he flung himself at Knox. The prefect backed away before that charge, and for the first moment or two he defended himself effectively.

But, with every second that passed, Handforth's brain was clearing. And now, in spite of his pain, he was filled with exultation. Knox had attacked him, and so he had a perfect excuse for fighting.

Unfortunately, there were no masters to be seen, and there was not even another prefect within sight.

"Come on!" shouted Handforth, shaking his head like a dog, as though to dispel the final remnants of his bewilderment. "Come on, you bully! I'm going to fight you now!"

"Get back, hang you!" snarled Knox. "I'm not going to fight you here, in the quad! I'm not going to brawl with a confounded junior! Stand back, you madman!"

Crash!

Handforth's answer was to get in a beautiful left-hander; THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,063.

a punch that struck Knox squarely on the nose, and sent him staggering back. In a flash, Handforth followed up his advantage.

Thud! Crash! Biff!

In swift succession, he punched Knox over the eye, on the chin, and in the neck. The prefect went reeling over, and he fell sprawling to the ground, panting and snarling. "Get up!" roared Handforth. "Get up, and take your gruel! I haven't finished with you yet, you cur!"

The quad was ringing with shouts now. The juniors were wild with excitement, and they gathered round, forgetting all else. But before Knox could get to his feet, and while Handforth was still standing over him, footsteps were heard, and a sharp command rang out.

"Stop!" came the stern voice. "Knox! Handforth! Cease this brawling at once!"

"Oh, crumbs!" gasped Blake. "Railton!"

The juniors fell back. Mr. Railton, the Housemaster of the School House, was on the spot, and his brow was as black as thunder.

CHAPTER 5.

A Bit of a Swindle!

EDWARD OSWALD HANDFORTH stood back, his face flushed, his eyes glowing with triumph.

During that first dread second, sheer habit had forced him to stand back, filled with consternation. But the next moment he had remembered. This was just what he had wanted! A master had witnessed the incident, and everything was all right! Expulsion was inevitable!

"It's all right, sir!" said Handforth breathlessly. "I've just knocked Knox down!"

"Silence!" commanded Mr. Railton angrily.

"I suppose I shall get the sack, sir?"

The Housemaster looked at him sharply.

"I will deal with you presently, Handforth!" he replied.

"Knox, stand up!"

He turned to the startled prefect, and Gerald Knox got to his feet, confused and dishevelled.

Knox was not a pleasant sight. One of his eyes was rapidly closing; blood was streaming from his nose; his collar was practically torn in halves; and he was dusty from head to foot. He stood in front of the Housemaster, quivering with rage.

"That—that wretched junior attacked me, sir—" he began.

"Fortunately, I witnessed the incident, Knox!" broke in Mr. Railton curtly. "Come with me! You, too, Handforth!"

"Yes, sir!" said Handforth serenely.

Mr. Railton gave him another sharp look. Obviously, he could not understand the cool, contented way in which Handforth was taking this affair. But all the other juniors in the quad understood perfectly, and they were more astonished than ever at Handforth's colossal nerve.

They watched in silence as the three figures went indoors. And a kind of long sigh went up as they vanished.

"Well, my only hat!" said Blake, scratching his head. "Did you ever see anything like it?"

"Nevah, bai Jove!" said D'Arcy.

"It beats everything!" agreed Tom Merry. "Handforth may be several kinds of an ass, but, hang it all, he's got plenty of pluck! And the home truths he told Knox were worth a term's pocket-money!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, deah boys, I fail to see the weason for this laughtah!" said Arthur Augustus severely. "We all know that Handay will be sacked."

"Well, why shouldn't we laugh, Gussy?" asked Herries. "Didn't Handforth ask for it?"

"Bai Jove! I had forgotten that!" admitted Gussy.

"Of course he asked for it—and he'll get it!" said Tom Merry. "There's not a doubt about it now. Railton saw the whole thing, just as Handy wanted. He'll leave St. Jim's under a cloud, and that will be pretty rotten. Still, we couldn't do anything, could we?"

In the opinion of the spectators, Edward Oswald Handforth's fate was sealed. Without question, he would be expelled. He had knocked a prefect down, and his Housemaster had witnessed the incident. The result, of course, would be inevitable. Expulsion was the only punishment for such a grave offence.

Indoors, Mr. Railton was looking very grim as he led the way to his study.

"Hold on, sir!" muttered Knox. "I'd like to have time to go to the bath-room, and wash—"

"You will do nothing of the sort, Knox!" interrupted Mr. Railton. "You will come straight to my study."

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"But, sir—"

"Do not argue, Knox!" said the Housemaster coldly.

And Knox became silent—startled, perhaps, by Mr. Railton's curt manner. And Knox was startled when he took a glance at Handforth, too. For that junior was smiling cheerfully, evidently at peace with the world. He did not seem to be in the slightest degree bothered by the prospect that awaited him.

The Housemaster's study was reached, and the trio went in, and the door was closed. Mr. Railton went to his desk, and sat down. And Handforth, with characteristic effrontery, sat down, too.

"Stand up, Handforth!" commanded Mr. Railton angrily.

"Eh? Oh, just as you like, sir!" said Handforth. "Sorry, sir!"

Knox leaned over the desk.

"I—I'm glad you came along, sir!" he panted. "You saw what happened, didn't you?"

Mr. Railton looked at him steadily.

"Yes, Knox; I saw what happened," he replied quietly.

"Then there's no need for me to say much, sir!" exclaimed the prefect. "This—this young scoundrel attacked me without provocation! He flew at me like a young tiger, and—"

"Oh, I say! Draw it mild!" protested Handforth. "I'll admit that I biffed you in the eye, and I'm jolly glad I did! And if I get the sack for it, I shan't mind. It was worth it! As a matter of fact, I expect to be expelled."

"Handforth, you will please remain silent!" said Mr. Railton curtly. "When I want you to speak, I will address you. Until then, hold your tongue."

"All right, sir; but I was only saying—"

"Silence!"

"Yes, sir!"

Handforth turned aside, and carelessly drove his hands into his pockets. He was so much at his ease that Mr. Railton stared at him in fresh wonder. He was about to speak when Handforth recollected himself, and took his hands out of his pockets.

"Now, Knox, I must tell you at once that I am fully acquainted with the facts," said Mr. Railton, turning to the prefect. "This junior boy knocked you down, and for that offence he is liable to receive the punishment of expulsion."

"Good egg!" murmured Handforth, nodding.

Mr. Railton stared at him.

"What did you say, Handforth?" he demanded.

"Eh? Nun-nothing, sir!" gasped the junior. "Sorry, sir!"

"This boy is impossible, sir!" exclaimed Knox savagely. "Ever since he has been at St. Jim's he has been uncontrollable. I am glad that he is going to be expelled—"

"I did not say that he is to be expelled, Knox," interrupted Mr. Railton quietly. "I told you that he is liable to receive the punishment of expulsion. But I have decided to deal with this matter myself. I shall not report it to the headmaster."

"Not—not report it to the Head, sir?" ejaculated Knox blankly.

"Not report it to the Head, sir?" repeated Handforth, parrot-like.

Senior and junior eyed Mr. Railton in a dazed kind of way.

"The circumstances are exceptional," said the Housemaster gravely. "If Handforth had attacked you without provocation, Knox, I should have had no alternative but to place the whole incident before Dr. Holmes. But, greatly as Handforth has offended you, yourself, are by no means guiltless."

Knox gave a gulp.

"I—I don't understand, sir!" he said thickly.

"I think you do, Knox!" retorted Mr. Railton.

"Here, I say!" broke in Handforth excitedly. "What's that you're saying, sir? Aren't you going to take me to the Head? What about getting the sack? I knocked Knox down on purpose—"

"Silence!" ordered Mr. Railton sharply. "Handforth, I can only assume that you are overwrought."

"I'm not, sir!" protested Handforth indignantly. "I've done something for which I ought to be expelled, and I think—"

"Another word from you, Handforth, and I will possibly change my mind!" exclaimed Mr. Railton angrily. "Now, Knox, I will deal with you first."

"D-deal with me, sir?" gasped Knox.

"Yes," said the Housemaster coldly. "I think I have already told you that I witnessed the whole incident. Without the slightest warning, Knox, you made a brutal attack upon this junior. I was at my window, and I saw you. You dealt him a blow on the side of the head in the most ruffianly manner."

Knox gulped.

"But—but he was cheeking me, sir!" he ejaculated frantically. "He was deliberately goading me—"

"You are a prefect, Knox, and your plain duty was to punish this boy in a rational manner, or bring him to me to be dealt with," said Mr. Railton coldly. "I do not wish to hear any excuses, for, as I have said, I was looking out of my window at the time. Handforth was facing you, and he made no attack until you brutally knocked him down."

"But—but—"

"I have seldom seen such a cowardly blow," said Mr. Railton gravely. "You tell me that Handforth was insolent. Perhaps so. That, however, does not excuse your own conduct. You may go now, Knox, but I shall expect to see you here again immediately after prayers."

"But you don't understand, sir!" burst out Knox. "This—this young rascal—"

"I have told you, Knox, that you may go!"

"But, sir—"

"And I meant it!" added Mr. Railton grimly.

Gerald Knox swallowed hard, clenched his fists, and then walked unsteadily to the door. After he had gone, Mr. Railton turned coldly to Handforth.

"Now, Handforth, I have a painful duty to perform," he said. "Hold out your hand!"

Handforth stared.

"M—my hand, sir?" he repeated blankly.

"Yes; at once!"

"You're not going to cane me, are you, sir?"

"That is my intention!" said the Housemaster sternly.

"Oh, but look here, sir!" protested Handforth. "I knocked Knox down, and that means the sack, doesn't it? I thought you were going to take me to the Head and report me, so that I could be expelled!"

Mr. Railton elevated his eyebrows.

"Upon my soul!" he said wonderingly. "One might almost think, Handforth, that you are anxious to be expelled!"

"Well, the fact is, sir—"

"I do not intend to argue with you, Handforth!" said Mr. Railton. "Hold out your hand!"

But Handforth backed away.

"I don't think you realise what happened, sir!" he said breathlessly. "I called Knox a bully and a cad! That biff he gave me was a cowardly one, but I provoked him, you know! It was my fault, really! And then, afterwards, I went for him baldheaded, and knocked him down."

"Quite so, Handforth," said Mr. Railton, looking at the junior very closely. "In ordinary circumstances I should undoubtedly take you to the Headmaster for punishment."

And there can be little doubt what that punishment would be. But as Knox struck you that cowardly blow, I am inclined to overlook your own offence. At least, I shall overlook it to the extent of dealing with you myself. Hold out your hand!"

"Just a minute, sir!" gasped Handforth desperately. "I don't mind the swishing, but—"

"Hold your tongue, boy!" shouted Mr. Railton, losing his patience. "Now, sir! No more of this nonsense! Your hand!"

In a kind of daze, Handforth held it out.

Swish!

"Ouch!" gasped Handforth breathlessly.

"Now the other hand!"

Swish!

Handforth received six of them—six slashing cuts, three on either hand. When the punishment was over his face was pale, but he had uttered no sound.

"Let that be a lesson to you, Handforth!" said Mr. Railton, breathing hard. "And if ever a prefect attacks you in that way again, report the matter to me personally. Do not dare to retaliate. You may go!"

Handforth goggled at him.

"Does—does this mean that I'm not going to be sacked, sir?" he asked, his indignation getting the better of his pain.

"It does!" said Mr. Railton. "I have decided to be lenient with you."

"Then it's a swindle!" said Handforth hotly. "By George! I don't want you to be lenient, sir! I knocked Knox down, and it's your duty to report me—"

"Either you are out of your mind,

Handforth, or the sense of your own guilt is weighing upon your conscience," said the Housemaster dryly. "However, the matter is settled. You may go!"

"But, sir—"

"Go!" thundered Mr. Railton.

And Handforth went, too disgusted for words.

CHAPTER 6.

Not So Easy!

"WELL, you've done it, old man!"

Blake made that remark as he and his chums of Study No. 6 met Handforth at the end of the passage. Handforth, whose hands were tucked under his armpits, stared at them.

"Eh?" he said bluntly.

"You've got yourself sacked!" said Blake. "A pretty piece of work, on the whole—particularly the way you hit Knox!"

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus, nodding. "You had a fidgetful nerve, Handay, to cheek Knox as you did."

"It was gorgeous to listen to!" grinned Herries.

Handforth grew red in the face.

"You fatheads!" he said witheringly. "What the dickens do you mean by congratulating me?"

"Were we?" asked Blake mildly.

"I haven't been sacked at all!" roared Handforth.

"Bai Jove!"

"Railton swished me, and let me off!" said Handforth indignantly. "I've never known such a swindle! I told him so, but it didn't make any difference."

"You—you told him so?" yelled Digby.

"Yes, I did!"

"Oh, my only aunt!" ejaculated Blake. "You—you told Railton— Ha, ha, ha!"

Blake broke off, and ended up with a yell of laughter. Tom Merry & Co., and a number of other juniors, had come up by now, and had heard the conversation. They all shouted with merriment. They wanted to be sympathetic towards Handforth, but his unique point of view tickled them. Here was this extraordinary junior grumbling because he had only been swished! He was indignant because he had not been expelled from the school.

"You cackling idiots!" shouted Handforth wrathfully.

"If you think it's funny, I don't!"

"But we do!" grinned Lowther. "By Jove! It's a scream!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

(Continued on next page.)

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"Poor old Handy!" chuckled Blake. "You went to all that trouble to get the sack, and then Railton lets you off!"

"Bai Jove!" said D'Arcy. "How swiftness funny!" Handforth gave the shrieking juniors one look and stalked away.

"It's marvellous!" said Tom Merry, after the laughter had died down. "If any other fellow had cheeked Knox like that, he would have been sacked in about two ticks! But, because Handforth wants to get bunked, he's let off with a licking."

"That's just the way of things!" nodded Blake. "It'll be rather interesting to watch Handy's progress. If I know anything about him, he won't give in. He'll try to get sacked in some other way."

"Ha, ha, ha!" "Weally, Blake, I think we ought to gwab the sillay duffab, and knock some sense into him!" said Arthur Augustus. "It doesn't seem wight to let him go on in this wash mannah!"

"I don't see what we can do, Gussy," said Blake. "You know what an obstinate ass he is. Even if we give him some advice he won't take any notice of it. Once he's made up his mind, it's like the laws of the Medes and Persians."

Before lessons, several fellows attempted to give Handforth a friendly tip. But he scorned them all. He repeated, in the strongest possible terms, that he had no intention of giving in. He had made up his mind to get sacked, and he meant to have his way.

"I told you it was no good, Gussy," said Blake, shrugging his shoulders. "Handy's pigheaded and wilful. In some ways, he's almost as bad as you."

"Weally, Blake—" "Not quite, of course," continued Blake blandly. "You're our own prize ass, and we shouldn't like to think—"

"You uttah wottah!" said D'Arcy indignantly. "I have a good mind to give you a feahful thwashin'!"

But Blake was saved from this fate because the Fourth was obliged to go into the class-room. Handforth was looking sullen and disconsolate as he took his place.

But his determination was as strong as ever. He did not regard himself as a St. Jim's fellow any longer. He had no further interest in his lessons, and the general life of the old school no longer interested him. He was concentrating his mind upon the problem of getting away.

More than once during that day, he thought of defying Mr. Lathom in the Form-room. But he could not quite bring himself to do it. He respected the mild little Form master, and it hardly seemed to be playing the game. Besides, there was surely a better way of achieving his object.

When the evening came his hands had lost their soreness and were merely tender. But he knew that he would have to be cautious.

He did not want to make a mistake a second time. There wouldn't be much fun in getting another swishing. For, no

matter how many swishings he received, he remained a St. Jim's fellow.

"Thought of the great scheme yet, Handy?" asked Tom Merry, as he met Handforth on the School House steps. "Or have you resigned yourself to staying on?"

Handforth grunted. "No, I haven't!" he said tartly.

"Does that reply to both questions?"

"Yes!" growled Handforth. "I'm blessed if I can think of a way out! And I'm jolly well not going to stay here! My pater thinks he's got his own way, but he'll soon find out that he's made a mistake!"

"Don't be an ass, Handy," said Tom good-naturedly. "None of us want you to go, and you won't find it an easy job to get yourself sacked. You can't do anything downright disgraceful, because that sort of thing would go against the grain. So there seems to be no solution."

"I'll think of one!" said Handforth shortly.

And he marched indoors, and banged violently against Baker of the Sixth, who was on his way out.

"Steady!" said Baker, frowning. "Look where you're going, you young sweep!"

"Rats!"

"What?" gasped Baker. "Did you say 'Rats' to me?"

"Yes, I did!" replied Handforth recklessly. "Don't be so clumsy next time!"

The prefect could hardly believe his ears.

"Why, you cheeky young ass, I'll give you a licking if you talk to me like that again!" he said angrily.

"I'd jolly well like to see you do it!" retorted Handforth.

"You'd give me a licking, eh? You may be a prefect, but I'm not afraid of you!"

"Why, confound your nerve—"

"If you don't like my nerve, take me to the Head, and report me for being insolent!" said Handforth eagerly.

"Perhaps he'll give me the sack."

Baker breathed hard.

"The heat must have affected your head!" he said.

"Take five hundred lines, Handforth, for being cheeky!"

"Eh?" gasped Handforth, with a start. "Here, I don't want to write any lines—"

"I don't care whether you want to write them, or not!" said Baker wrathfully. "Either you bring me five hundred lines at midday to-morrow, or I'll swish you!"

And Baker walked on, leaving Handforth filled with consternation.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

A number of the juniors, who had been watching the scene, cackled appreciatively.

"There's nothing to laugh at!" hooted Handforth.

"No?" asked Levison. "Sorry, but we thought there was!"

"You won't get far like that, old scout!" said Kangaroo, shaking his head. "Cheeking prefects won't do you any good."

"You never know," said Handforth hopefully. "One of them might get thundering wild, and that will give me an excuse for biffing him!"

As it happened, Langton came along a moment later, and Handforth's eyes gleamed. Langton was a prefect, and quite a good fellow. But this was no time for being particular. As Langton passed, Handforth thrust his foot out, and the prefect tripped headlong.

Crash!

Langton hit the floor with a mighty thud, and he rolled over, and sat up.

"You little sweep!" he shouted angrily. "You did that on purpose!"

Handforth nodded.

"I know I did!" he said coolly. "I wanted to see how you'd go over!"

Langton picked himself up, amazed and furious. Blake & Co., and a few other juniors, stood looking on with great interest.

"I suppose you think it's funny, eh?" snapped Langton, as he seized Handforth by the scruff of the neck. "You cheeky young beggar! I might have hurt myself!"

"I hope you did hurt yourself!"

"What?" roared Langton.

"I haven't any quarrel with you, old man, and I think you're a good sort," said Handforth frankly. "At the same time, I'm rather keen on getting the sack, and—"

"You're keen on what?" gasped Langton.

Handforth suddenly pulled himself up. He realised that perhaps it wouldn't be wise to be so free with that information. If the prefects and the masters knew that he was deliberately trying to get himself expelled, they might thwart him.

"I'm going to give you something to remember!" said Langton curtly, as he pushed Handforth before him. "You tripped me up on purpose, and I don't allow juniors to do that sort of thing twice!"

THE BULLY OF THE REMOVE!



Every schoolboy dreads being relegated from his Form to a lower one, and Cuthbert Chambers, of the Fifth at St. Frank's, is no exception. Thus, when he finds himself put in the Remove, he does not take it kindly. He, a lordly senior, now a mere junior! It is terribly galling to the pompous, overbearing Chambers.

But once in the Remove, Chambers decides to "make hay while the sun shines." A mere nonentity in the Fifth, he determines that he shall be Somebody in the Remove. And so he gets to work. The Remove, for their part, naturally resent it, and then the fun begins to fly. There are some lively times in store for the Remove—as you will discover for yourself when you read "The Bully of the Remove!" which appears in this week's

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"Oh, dry up!" said Handforth. "You make me tired!"
 "Great Scott!" ejaculated Langton, in amazement.
 "And if you don't jolly well let me go, I'll biff you!"
 roared Handforth. "Lemme go, I tell you! I don't want to get violent, Langton, but I'm giving you fair warning. Are you going to let me go, or shall I knock you down?"
 For answer, Langton took a firmer hold, and ran Handforth into the Sixth Form passage with such energy and speed that the junior had no opportunity of struggling. A moment later he found himself in Langton's study, where Dudley and North, of the Sixth, were chatting over the cricket.

"Here, lend a hand!" panted Langton. "This kid has been cheeking me up hill and down dale, and I'm going to make him smart!"

"Anything to oblige!" said Dudley promptly. "What shall we do?"

"Help me to lay him across the table!" said Langton breathlessly.

"Hi!" howled Handforth. "You silly fatheads! Lemme go!"

"Would you like the ashplant?" asked North genially. "Yes!" said Langton.

The ashplant descended upon the struggling Fourth-Former with devastating effect.

Whack, whack, whack!

"Hi! Stop it!" hooted Handforth wildly. "I—I didn't mean you to do this!"

"But I did!" said Langton, as he paused. "And I mean to do some more, too!"

Whack, whack, whack!

"I'll fight the three of you!" yelled Handforth desperately. "You're all prefects, and if I knock you all down I shall get the sack!"

"He's mad!" said North.

"Clean off his chump!" agreed Dudley.

"Now you can get out!" exclaimed Langton, as he lifted Handforth bodily from the table, and propelled him towards the door. "And take five hundred lines as an extra punishment!"

"I won't!" shrieked Handforth.

"Oh, won't you? Unless you bring those lines to-morrow—"

"I won't write one!" roared Handforth indignantly. "You're three fatheads! Just because you're in the Sixth, you think that you're little tin gods!"

"Take five hundred lines from me, too!" said North angrily.

"Yes, and another five hundred from me!" said Dudley. Slam!

The door closed, and Handforth took a deep, deep breath.

"Oh, what's the use?" he asked disgustedly.

As a net result of his efforts, he had received a further corporal punishment, and he was faced with the task of writing two thousand lines!

His campaign, taking it all in all, was not progressing very satisfactorily.

CHAPTER 7.

No Luck!

"HARD lines, old man," said Levison sympathetically.

Handforth was in Study No. 9, and he had just been telling Levison and Clive and Cardew all about it. They had listened with grave expressions on their faces, and Handforth failed to see the twinkles in their eyes.

"Of course, I'm not going to do those rotten lines!" said Handforth fiercely. "Two thousand! I'm not going to write one!"

"Dear man, why should you?" drawled Cardew. "As you're leavin' St. Jim's so shortly, a few odd imposts make no difference. But why don't you sit down, old scout?"

"I'd rather stand, thanks!" said Handforth coldly.

"Ahem! Pardon my forgetfulness!" murmured Cardew.

"I cheeked those prefects like the dickens!" said Handforth wrathfully. "But instead of taking me to the Head, and reporting me for expulsion, they shoved me across the table, and swished me with an ashplant!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Clive.

"It's no laughing matter!" snorted Handforth.

"Ahem! Nun-no, of course not!" said Clive hastily.

"Sorry, Handy!"

"But I'm not done!" continued Handforth, clenching his fists. "By George, no! I'm getting desperate now, and I don't care what happens! I shall do something violent soon!"

"Why not leave it until after lights-out?" suggested Levison.

"Breaking bounds after lights-out is a pretty serious offence, and it generally means the sack."

Handforth's eyes gleamed.

"That's not a bad wheeze!" he said eagerly. "I needn't do anything disgraceful, need I?"

"Perish the thought!" said Levison. "The very fact of breaking bounds will be enough—especially if you create a din. Of course, we don't want you to do it," he added.

"We'd rather you stayed here, Handy. We've got used to you by now."

"We shall be desolated, dear man, if you go," said Cardew earnestly.

"Then you can jolly well be desolated!" retorted Handforth. "I'm sorry, but I can't help it. St. Frank's is my school, and I'm going back there! Blow St. Jim's—and blow these silly prefects who won't get me the sack!"

He sat down on the edge of the table, and then leapt up about two feet into the air, yelling.

"What's the matter?" asked Clive in astonishment. "Did you sit on a tack?"

"No, I didn't!" snapped Handforth.

He strode out of the study, fuming. And for the rest of that evening he munched about, his brow puckered.

He made no attempt to do his prep, and he spent most of the time out in the quad.

When the Fourth went up to bed Handforth was more desperate than ever. And the Fourth, by this time, had got past the sympathetic stage. Handforth's efforts to get into serious trouble were becoming comical, and the Form was beginning to treat the whole thing as a joke.

"Poor old Handy!" remarked Blake, with a wink at the others. "So you're still with us?"

Handforth sniffed.

"I shan't be with you much longer!" he said calmly.

"If I don't get the sack to-night you can call me a duffer!"

"That's easy!" said Blake. "We can call you a duffer now."

"Weally, Handay, I think you had better give up this widiculous ideah!" observed Arthur Augustus, jamming his eyeglass into his eye and surveying Handforth with disapproval. "Pway wemembah that the honah of the Fourth is involved."

"Rats!" grunted Handforth.

"Weally, Handay—"

"Go and eat coke!"

"I uttably wefuse to eat coke!" said Gussy indignantly.

"Then go into your corner and coil up!"

"Bai Jove!" said D'Arcy frigidly. "Are you suggestin', Handay, that I am a dog?"

"Bow-wow!" retorted Handforth.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I wefuse to have anythin' more to do with you, Handay!" said Arthur Augustus coldly. "I wegard you as a wank outsidah! I was goin' to wemind you that it is wathah a frightful thing if a fellow is sacked fwom the school. It weflects wathah disgwacefully upon ewevy membah of his Form—"

"Oh, do dry up, Gussy!" interrupted Handforth pleadingly. "Can't you see I'm worried?"

"Bai Jove! You deserve to be wowried!"

"But this state of affairs won't go on much longer!" went on Handforth. "The whole thing's so jolly silly! It ought to be as easy as winking to get the sack!"

"It usually is—when a fellow doesn't want the sack!" said Cardew.

"There are heaps of ways!" muttered Handforth, as he paced up and down. "Checking the prefects doesn't seem to be much good, so I shall have to try something else!"

"Why not get undressed, old man?" asked Blake. "It'll be lights-out soon, and Rushden will be along—"

"Bother Rushden!"

"Just as you like!" said Blake. "In fact, I agree with you—bother Rushden. But as the rest of us don't want to be sacked we've got to be cautious."

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And with one solitary exception the Fourth got undressed and climbed into bed. The evening had become rather windy, and light clouds were scudding across the heavens. The wind seemed to be rising with every minute, and the juniors could hear it howling round the old buildings. It was unusual for such a gale to spring up on a summer's night. But then, as Blake remarked, an English summer is generally full of surprises.

When it was time for lights-out Handforth was still fully dressed—still marching up and down the dormitory with a frown upon his brow. All the others were in bed, highly amused.

"Here he comes!" murmured Dick Julian.

A footstep sounded out in the passage, and a moment later the dormitory door opened and Rushden of the Sixth appeared.

"Hallo! Not in bed yet?" he said briskly, as he glanced at Handforth. "Buck up, kid!"

"Keep your hair on!" said Handforth coolly. "I don't feel like getting into bed yet."

"Still playing the goat, eh?" said Rushden. "Well, I can't be bothered with you, Handforth. I'm in a hurry. Take two hundred lines, and get into bed. Good-night, everybody!"

The Fourth chorused "Good-night," and Rushden departed. There was no actual turning off of lights, since at this time of the year full darkness had not descended.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" said Handforth indignantly. "He didn't seem to care a snap!"

"They're getting used to you, old man!" chuckled Blake. "I'm afraid you'll have to do something more drastic."

Handforth strode towards the door.

"By George! I'll do it now!" he said fiercely. "I'll show you fellows whether I can get the sack or not!"

"What are you going to do?" asked Levison curiously.

"I'm going downstairs, and I'm going to sing at the top of my voice!" replied Handforth. "I'm going past Mr. Lathom's study, and then I'm going past Mr. Railton's study! I'm going to bawl out the latest song as loudly as I can! And when I'm pulled up I'm going to cheek the masters!"

"Bai Jove!"

"When they tell me to go back to bed I'll tell them to go and eat coke!" said Handforth coolly. "And if they try any more of their swishing games I'll do a bolt. If that doesn't get me the sack nothing will! So long, you fellows—see you later!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Handforth marched out of the dormitory, and a good many fellows hopped out of bed and ran to the door. They waited there, with the door ajar, listening for the coming rumpus.

"Well, he ought to do it this time!" murmured Blake, with a chuckle.

"It isn't always so easy, dear man!" said Cardew, shaking his head. "Life is full of contradictions. The more one wants a thing, the less chances there are of getting it. It's a hard, cruel world!"

"Listen!" murmured Kerruish.

They all became silent and attentive.

"Bai Jove!" whispered Arthur Augustus, after a moment.

"The wind is howlin' and moanin' in a most frightful mannah, deah boys!"

"That's not the wind, ass!" said Blake. "That's Handy, singing!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"My only sainted aunt!" grinned Herries. "I believe he's right!"

From somewhere down below came a throbbing volume of sound. It was different from the whistling of the wind, and the two sounds mingling had a most peculiar effect.

Handforth, as a matter of fact, was strolling past Mr. Lathom's door with his hands thrust deeply into his trousers pockets. His head was thrown back, and he was giving voice, with full gusto, to the latest song.

"Ain't she swe-e-et? See her coming down the street;
Now, I ask you, very confidentially, ain't she sweet?"

he sang.

Very possibly Handforth was behind the times. Most of the other juniors at St. Jim's would have regarded this particular song as dead and buried. It was, in fact, a back number. But Handforth held the view that one song was just as good as another. It was the noise that really mattered. And he was certainly making a noise!

"Ain't she nice? Look her over once or twice.

Now, I ask you, very confidentially, ain't she nice?"

he roared, bending down and placing his mouth close to the keyhole of Mr. Lathom's door.

If this was Handforth's idea of being confidential, then it

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was high time that somebody enlightened him. The blast of sound that swept through Mr. Lathom's keyhole was far worse than the howling of any gale.

Strangely enough, however, nothing happened.

Handforth remained alone in the passage. He looked up and down, but, like the prophet of old, he saw no man.

"Oh me, oh my, ain't she perfection?

Just cast your eye in her direction.

I repeat, don't you think she's kinder neat?

And I ask you, very confidentially, ain't she sweet?"

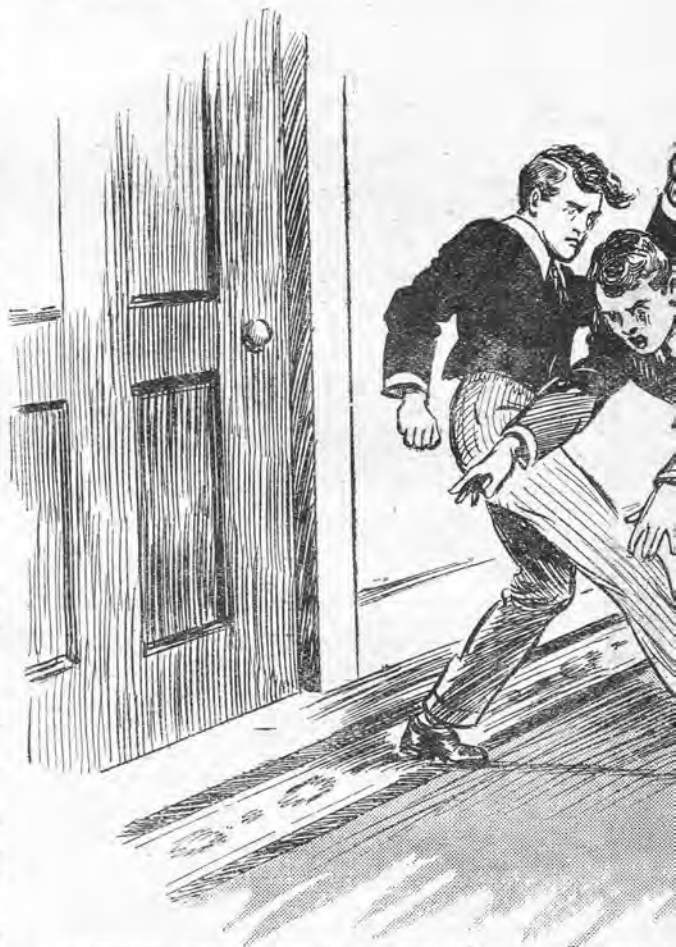
he sang desperately.

By this time Handforth had wandered on, and he was now outside Mr. Railton's door. And in that confidential way of his he belloved the refrain with such effect that it seemed to strike the passage wall like something solid, and hit back at him.

And now he paused, breathless from his exertions.

"Rats!" he muttered. "Why the dickens doesn't somebody come out? What's the good of me marching up and down here singing? Where are they all?"

It really was uncanny.



Handforth's eyes gleamed as Langton of the Sixth passed him. Langton hit the floor with a mighty thud. "You little sweep!"

If Handforth had not been so anxious to secure expulsion the very fact of his singing down here at this time of the evening would have brought masters and prefects round his ears like hornets. They would have come from all directions, indignant and outraged.

But now it was different. Handforth's alleged singing went for nothing. He remained serenely alone. It was the way of things.

Perhaps the song was wrong. He frowned, and tried to think of another ditty. An appropriate one came to his mind.

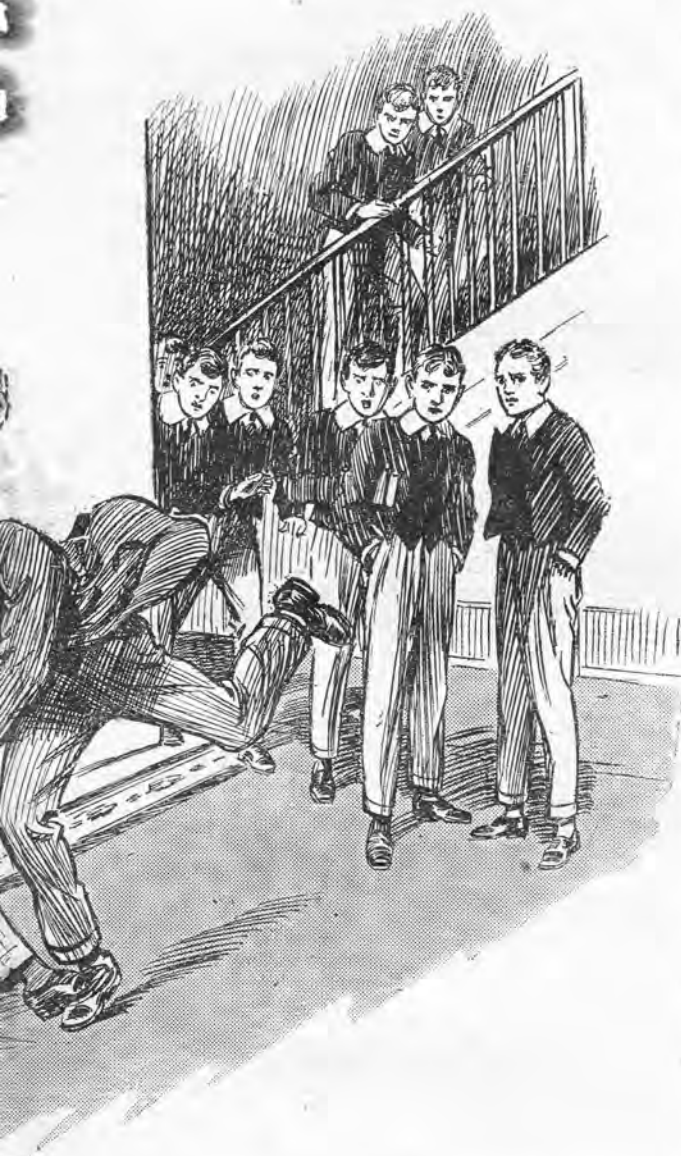
He repeated his previous manoeuvre, and bent down so that his mouth was opposite Mr. Railton's keyhole. And then he gave voice, in a full-throated bass-baritone, to the following masterpiece:

"I ain't got nobody, and there's nobody cares for me."

There were no half-measures about it; Handforth's voice was like a super loud-speaker, rather badly tuned in.

"I'm so sad and lonely, won't somebody come and take a chance with me?" he roared.

Unhappily, nobody accepted the offer. It really seemed that Handforth, on this particular evening, was certainly nobody. And not a master or a prefect thought it advisable



His foot shot out and the prefect tripped headlong. Crash! he shouted angrily. "You did that on purpose!" (See Chapter 6.)

to come and take a chance with him. He remained utterly and absolutely alone.

Which, considering all the circumstances, was pretty exasperating.

CHAPTER 8.

Too Funny for Words!

"RATS, and blow, and bother!" Handforth spoke with deep feeling. Five minutes had elapsed, and he had sung two other songs, one closely connected with lard and the other dealing, in a mysterious way, with the spelling of the word Constantinople. But even these had had no effect.

Thoroughly desperate, Handforth thrust open the door

of Mr. Railton's study and marched in. As he might have expected, the Housemaster's study was empty. There was still sufficient light left to inform him of this fact.

And it was just the same with Mr. Lathom's study. Handforth grunted, and waxed indignant. All his efforts wasted! How was he to know that practically all the masters were over in the New House, listening to an address by Mr. Ratcliff on the politics of St. Jim's? How was Handforth to know that all the prefects, having seen everything shipshape, had retired to the lecture-hall for an important debate?

It was just unfortunate for Handforth that such events should be taking place on this particular evening.

Handforth went upstairs again, disgusted and fed-up. He found a grinning crowd of juniors awaiting him in the upper corridor. Tom Merry & Co. were there, too, having been attracted out of their dormitory by the chuckles of the Fourth-Formers.

"No luck, old man?" asked Lowther sympathetically. "I'm sick of it!" said Handforth, in a fierce voice. "I've been yelling for all I'm worth, but nobody's taken any notice. The masters aren't down there!"

"Bai Jove! How remarkable!" "It only goes to show, Handy, that Fate has decreed your destiny," said Blake, shaking his head. "Fate has decided that you shall stay at St. Jim's."

"Rot!" retorted Handforth. "I've made up my mind to go, and I'm going! If it had been any other fellow he would have been spotted in about five seconds. But because I want to get the sack nobody even notices me."

"Hard lines, old scout!" murmured Tom Merry. "I'll wait a bit, and then have another try," said Handforth, as he pushed his way into the Fourth Form dormitory. "And I don't care how much you fellows grin, either. The sooner you get to sleep the better. I don't want to involve you in my affairs!"

"Don't worry!" said Blake. "We shan't get mixed up in them."

Handforth's efforts to get sacked were now regarded as a standing joke. The more he tried the more difficult it became.

And as he steadfastly refused to take any advice he lost any sympathy that the juniors might have felt for him.

For about half an hour there was a good deal of talk in the dormitory, and Handforth received all manner of suggestions—the majority of them impracticable.

"You needn't bother!" he said at last. "I've got my own ideas, and I shall use 'em."

"What are you going to do?" asked Levison, yawning.

"You'll find out later on!" replied Handforth. "Anyhow, I'll break bounds, and if you hear a terrific din out in the quad you'll know what it means."

"Then, dear man, I'm going to sleep," said Ralph Reckness Cardew drowsily. "Awfully sorry, but my manly beauty might be impaired if I lost an hour of my beauty sleep."

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus. "I weally see no reason why we should remain awake because of this cwass ass."

And in less than ten minutes the Fourth Form dormitory was slumbering. With the exception, that is, of Edward Oswald Handforth.

He remained awake. Outside, the wind was increasing in violence, and it was now buffeting round the old school with tremendous force. At times it rose to a wild howl.

As Handforth lay in bed a fresh idea came to him. It was the wind that put it into his head.

"By George!" he muttered. "That's it! The more noise the better. And there's the very thing I need in the study cupboard!"

Clang, clang! The school clock solemnly chimed out the hour of eleven, and Handforth jumped out of bed. He could not wait any longer. By this time the prefects would be in bed, and probably the masters, too, would have retired to their bed-rooms.

Handforth was still fully dressed. He had only been lying on his bed in order to while away the time.

Silently he crept out of the dormitory and made his way to Study No. 9.

It was the work of a moment for Handforth to secure the square lid of a biscuit tin from the cupboard, and then he went downstairs and got out into the open by climbing through the passage window. Now he stood out in the quad, with the wind whistling about him.

He looked closely at the buildings, and could see only one or two lights gleaming in the upper windows. For the most part, the great school was dark.

"Now I shall be all right!" muttered Handforth. "I shall be caught red-handed—breaking bounds after lights out. And that's good enough for the sack!"

His foot kicked against something, and he found that it was a piece of stick. It was just what he wanted.

Clatter, clatter! Bang, bang!

With the stick he caused the most unholy noise on that tin lid. He marched up and down, past the School House, and then past the quad, to the New House.

Clatter, clatter, clatter!

It was certainly a tremendous din, and Handforth's satisfaction was complete when he saw light after light appearing in the upper windows. He was awakening the whole school!

"Well, that's good enough!" he grinned. "They're bound to come out now, to make an investigation. I've done the trick at last!"

He tossed the tin lid away, considering that it was no longer necessary. He caught a momentary glimpse of the shining tin as it went sailing off, caught by the strong wind. But he was too excited to notice where the tin lid fell.

What did surprise him, however, was a continuance of the din.

Clatter—clatter—clatter!

It was almost the same noise as he had made with his stick; only not quite so loud, not quite so aggressive. And as Handforth spun round, startled, it seemed to him that the clattering came from one of the old elms.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" he muttered. "What the dickens is that?"

But his attention was suddenly attracted by the opening of the School House door. He hurried forward, his heart thumping rapidly. This was easy! He would simply give himself up, confess that he had been breaking bounds, and everything would be all serene.

Darrell of the Sixth peered out into the darkness of the quad. Darrell was in his dressing-gown, and he was evidently down well in advance of anybody else, for he was quite alone.

"Who's there?" he called sharply.

"It's all right—only me!" said Handforth, as he coolly strolled into the gleam of light that came from the School House doorway.

"Oh, it's you!" said Darrell, recognising the junior. "You silly young ass! Cut indoors before anybody else sees you!"

Darrell was a good-natured fellow, and he knew that Handforth had been causing some trouble that evening. He assumed, without thinking very deeply on the subject, that Handforth, too, had been attracted by the unusual noises and had come outside. And Darrell, being thoroughly decent, did not want to see the junior in any further serious trouble.

"I'm breaking bounds!" said Handforth boldly, as he faced the prefect.

"I know that, you young donkey!" said Darrell. "Take five hundred lines and get back to your dormitory!"

"Five hundred lines!" gasped Handforth. "But—but—"

"No arguments, young 'un!" snapped the prefect. "Cut!"

"I'm blown if I'll cut!" roared Handforth indignantly. "I'm going to get the sack for this!"

"It's no good trying to be funny with me!" said Darrell, as he grasped Handforth by the shoulder. "You're a reckless young idiot, and you ought to have a keeper!"

He propelled Handforth indoors, grinning to himself. THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,063.

Darrell had not forgotten Handforth's extraordinary performance in that famous First Eleven match, when the junior had taken Darrell's place and had scored a century. In consequence, Handforth occupied a special sort of niche in the esteem of the Sixth-Formers.

Darrell really thought that Handforth was trying to be funny, and he felt that an implot of five hundred lines met the needs of the case. But if Handforth was found out there by the masters the consequences might be more serious.

"Now then—go to bed!" said the prefect, making his voice as curt as possible. "I'm fed up with your nonsense, young 'un!"

"But I tell you I did this deliberately——"

"That's enough!" said Darrell.

He pushed Handforth upstairs at top speed, and almost before the junior could be aware of it he was shoved into the Fourth Form dormitory, and the door was slammed. And Darrell took the precaution of locking it.

"If any of you kids try to get out, I'll see that the whole dormitory is gated!" he sang out, as he departed.

"The—the rotter!" gasped Handforth. "By George! He wouldn't listen to me——"

"We won't listen, either!" said Blake grimly. "You're not going out of this dormitory again to-night, my lad!"

"Rats! I'm going downstairs——"

"You're not!" put in Levison. "Darrell said that if anybody tried to get out of this room the whole dormitory would be gated! We're not taking any chances! Grab him, you fellows!"

And while Handforth was grabbed Darrell went downstairs and joined Kildare and Mr. Railton and Mr. Linton, and one or two others in the School House doorway.

Clatter, clatter, clatter!

The noise of the tin lid still sounded loudly, although it was now erratic. For a few moments there would be silence, and then the noise would break out with tremendous effect.

"Do you know what it is caused by, sir?" asked Darrell, as Mr. Railton peered out into the night.

"I haven't the faintest idea!" said the Housemaster, frowning. "Somebody appears to be deliberately hammering a can of some kind."

"Hey, out there!" shouted Kildare. "What do you think you're trying to do? Come here at once!"

Clatter, clatter, clatter!

It continued with supreme indifference to the command. And at last the masters and the prefects made a careful search. The noise was tracked down to one of the elms, and they all stood under the tree, staring upwards into the dark branches. The high wind was causing those branches to lash about wildly in the air.

"There must be somebody in the tree!" said Mr. Railton wonderingly.

"I'll shin up, sir," said Darrell.

He did so, and five minutes later the explanation was forthcoming. That biscuit-tin lid, flung carelessly away by Handforth, had been carried by the wind into the branches of the elm-tree. By pure chance, it had become jammed in a crotch. And the broken end of a neighbouring dead branch had been banging against it in the high wind, thus causing a continuance of the original noise.

"It's nothing, sir!" grinned Darrell, as he shook the branch and finally dislodged the tin lid. "Some careless junior must have thrown it up there, I suppose. We shouldn't have known it but for the wind."

"I am glad to find that the explanation is so simple," smiled Mr. Railton. "Upon my word! When I awoke and heard that clatter, I thought that some of the boys were perpetrating what they call a rag."

After that everybody went indoors, satisfied.

But Handforth, in the Fourth Form dormitory, was very far from satisfied. The school had quietened down again, and Blake & Co. howled with merriment when Handforth explained the details of his great scheme.

Once again he had been defeated!

The more he tried to get the sack, the more difficult was the problem proving!

CHAPTER 9.

Making Certain of It!

ONE—two!

Solemnly two strokes rang out from the school clock, and the notes died away, mingling with the sound of the wind.

In the Fourth Form dormitory, Handforth sat up in bed with a violent start.

"My hat!" he muttered, gulping. "Only a dream!"

Earlier, he had made up his mind that he would not go to sleep. But it was quite obvious that he had been soundly slumbering for at least two and a half hours. It was now 2 a.m., and St. Jim's was still and silent. Only the wind disturbed the peace of the summer's night.

Handforth fell back on his pillow with a sensation of relief. He had dreamed that he had gone into Dr. Holmes' study and had challenged the Head to a fight.

Curiously enough, the Head had instantly accepted this challenge, and had peeled off his jacket in a businesslike way. Then he and Handforth had gone at it hammer and tongs.

Round and round the study they had careered, smashing everything to atoms. And in the end Handforth had delivered a terrific drive, and had knocked the unfortunate Head senseless. He had just realised the fact that this would surely lead to his expulsion when he had awakened.

But that fantastic dream had put an idea into his head.

"By George!" he said tensely. "Why not? I mustn't do anything vindictive or caddish, but there's no reason why I shouldn't raid the Head's study!"

The more he thought of the idea the more it gripped him.

And Handforth was not the kind of fellow to consider for long. He was generally impulsive. And long before the school clock chimed out the quarter-hour he was out of bed and had dressed. Nobody else in the dormitory heard his movements. All the other juniors were slumbering soundly.

Quivering with eagerness, Handforth crept out of the room and made his way downstairs. His dream had shown him the way! He would raid the Head's study, and there wasn't the slightest possible doubt that he would get the sack for playing such a trick.

As before, he got out by the passage window, and the blustering night wind whistled round him as he stole across the quad in the direction of the fatal window. He knew exactly where the Head's study was, and he marvelled at the simplicity of this plan. Why hadn't he thought of it before?

For, in addition to being simple, it was certain.

The moon was shining occasionally as the scudding clouds swept across the heavens. The wind was half a gale, more reminiscent of October than of midsummer.

When Handforth reached the window of the Head's study, he could have laughed aloud. A big tree-branch was lying on the ground immediately beneath the window. Apparently it had been torn from one of the neighbouring trees and had fallen just here, where it was very handy.

Picking up the branch, Handforth recklessly smashed the broken end of it into the window panes.

Crash—crash!

The window shivered to atoms, making a truly appalling din. And Handforth grinned as he dropped the broken branch.

"Well, that's done it!" he said complacently. "If they didn't hear that, they must be dead!"

He went to work quite coolly now. The die was cast, and he was filled with triumph. Reaching up, he thrust his hand through the broken window and slipped the catch back. Then he raised the sash. A moment later he was within the Head's study, with the curtains blowing about him in billowy folds.

"Might as well shove the electric light on!" he muttered.

He felt his way across the room, found the switch, and turned it. The Head's study became flooded with light. And Handforth stood there, calmly waiting.

"They can't be long!" he told himself. "And when they find me here in this giddy room it'll mean the sack! Of course, I shall confess that I raided the

Head's study for a lark. And if I'm not bunked, I'll eat my hat!"

Unfortunately for his plans, nothing happened.

Five minutes elapsed—ten minutes. But still nobody came. And it was becoming obvious to the startled Handforth that nobody had heard that shivering of glass! He marvelled at it. If he had broken that window by accident, the entire school would have swarmed down, like a pack of hungry wolves.

But because he had broken it deliberately, not a soul had heard!

"Oh, well, perhaps it's all for the best!" muttered Handforth. "There's no real reason why I should disturb the Head in the middle of the night. As long as I make certain of getting the sack, I shall be satisfied!"

He looked round the study, and considered. He couldn't do any damage; no, that was right off the rails. But there was no harm in causing some disorder. And as he was going to confess to the crime, there was really no need for doing any actual damage.

The Head's desk was piled with papers. Some of them had already been scattered about by the wind which was blowing through the window.

(Continued on next page.)

CLOSE-SEASON ADVENTURE

ABROAD!



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"Yes, that's it!" murmured Handforth, grinning.

He took the Head's papers, and systematically strewed them all over the floor. By the time he had finished the study was a sight for sore eyes. The Head's papers were everywhere—in every corner of the apartment.

As an afterthought, Handforth seized a big bottle of ink on the desk and tipped it over. The ink came pouring out, forming a big pool. But Handforth took care that the ink did not soil any of the Head's books.

"Well, that ought to do the trick!" he chuckled. "When the Head comes down and finds all his papers chucked about and his ink overturned, he'll be like a raving bull. I shall be pitched out of St. Jim's at an hour's notice! Good egg!"

He dived a hand into the wastepaper-basket and produced an old newspaper. He tore the front sheet off and pinned it to the wall. Then, grinning afresh, he dipped his finger into the pool of ink and proceeded to daub some words on the sheet of newspaper.

When he had finished, he had the satisfaction of reading the following legend:

"I DID THIS.—E. O. HANDFORTH."

It was crude, but to the point. And it promised to be effective. Naturally, the Head would find that paper, and he would send for Handforth. Then the junior would arrive and boldly confess to having made the raid. Nothing could have been sweeter.

He took a final look round, gave another chuckle, and then switched off the electric light. He went to the window, climbed out, and pulled the sash down after him. He didn't realise it, but this was a fatal mistake.

He went back to bed, serene and happy. And his head no sooner touched the pillow than he fell into a sound, undisturbed sleep. His problem was solved. Now he only had to await the natural consequences. In the morning the storm would break, and Handforth was ready for it.

Clang, clang!

It seemed to him that he had hardly closed his eyes before the rising bell sounded. He was wakeful on the instant, and he sat up, blinking. Blake and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, and one or two others were sitting up, too.

"Blow!" grumbled Blake. "The rising bell always goes too early!"

Handforth leapt of bed.

"Rats!" he said happily. "My sons, I've done the trick!"

"Bai Jove!" said Gussy. "Whatever do you mean, dear boy?"

"This morning," replied Handforth, "I'm going to get the sack!"

"Yes, with knobs on!" retorted Blake sarcastically.

"You silly ass—"

"We've heard your yarns before, Handy!" said Blake, as he sat up in bed. "Sorry, old man, but in future you can tell them to the marines!"

"The marines?" said Handforth, staring.

"Yes."

"What have the marines got to do with it?"

"Oh, never mind!" said Blake, shrugging his shoulders. "I've never known such a literal ass in all my life! It's a wonder you don't take us at our word when we tell you to go and eat coke!"

"Can't you fellows dry up?" asked Clive complainingly. "The second bell hasn't gone yet—"

"Blow the second bell!" interrupted Handforth. "Wake up, everybody! I want to tell you what I did at two o'clock this morning!"

"Two o'clock?" repeated Levison. "Do you mean two a.m.?"

"Yes," said Handforth. "I went to the Head's study and raided it!"

"Great Scott!"

"This is interesting!" said Blake. "So you raided the Head's study, Handy?"

"Yes—and I did it thoroughly!"

"Weally, Handay, I twust you did no wilful damage?" asked D'Arcy, with concern. "As a member of the Fourth Form—"

"I smashed the Head's window," said Handforth. "My hat! You ought to have heard the crash! Didn't any of you fellows wake up?"

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"No!" said Herries bluntly. "You don't think we believe this yarn, do you?"

"I don't care whether you believe it or not!" retorted Handforth. "I tell you I went to the Head's study at two o'clock in the morning, and I smashed the window to smithereens, and then turned the light full on, and strewed the Head's private papers all over the room."

"Bai Jove!"

"After that I upset an ink bottle and scrawled a note on a piece of newspaper."

"And what did you say in the note?" asked Cardew mildly.

"Not much," replied Handforth. "I just said: 'I did this.—E. O. Handforth,' and left it pinned on the wall."

"Wonderful!" said Blake. "I didn't know you had such an imagination, Handy!"

"Imagination? What do you mean?"

"Oh, nothing," yawned Blake. "Only that you've been dreaming!"

"Yaas, wathah!" agreed Arthur Augustus. "Weally, Handay, you do not expect us to believe this widiculous stowry, I suppose?"

"You can suppose what you like, but it happens to be true!" said Handforth, as he commenced dressing. "I smashed the Head's window, and I—"

"Yes, we heard that before," broke in Blake hastily.

"But it's a bit too tall, Handy."

"But it's true!" roared Handforth.

"Keep your hair on!" grinned Levison. "Is this honour bright?"

"Honour bright, blow you!"

Everybody in the dormitory was now wide awake, and they were staring at Handforth in wonder. They could no longer doubt his word. And when they remembered his activities of the previous evening they could readily believe that he had done this thing.

"I twust you did no weal damage, Handay?" asked Gussy. "Bai Jove! It will be a disgwace to the Fourth if—"

"Oh, don't worry," said Handforth. "I didn't do any damage. I only threw the papers all over the room and upset the ink bottle. As for the window, I'll offer to pay the damage, so there can't be any grumbling."

"Well, there's nothing like doing the thing thoroughly!" chuckled Blake. "You're a born idiot, Handy, but this time you've certainly done the deed."

"No doubt about that!" agreed Levison. "Raidering the Head's study is a pretty serious offence—in fact, there couldn't be a more serious one. You'll get expelled on your neck, Handy!"

"After being publicly flogged," nodded Blake.

"Eh?" said Handforth, with a start.

"After being publicly flogged," repeated Blake obligingly.

"My only hat!" gasped Handforth. "You—you don't think I shall get a public flogging, do you?"

"My poor, deluded child!" said Blake kindly. "Of course you'll be publicly flogged. What else did you expect?"

The expression on Handforth's face was so funny that everybody in the dormitory yelled with laughter.

"That's right, cackle away!" he said tartly. "But you'll jolly soon see whether I'm going to be publicly flogged or not. I shan't let them do it. The sack will be enough for me!"

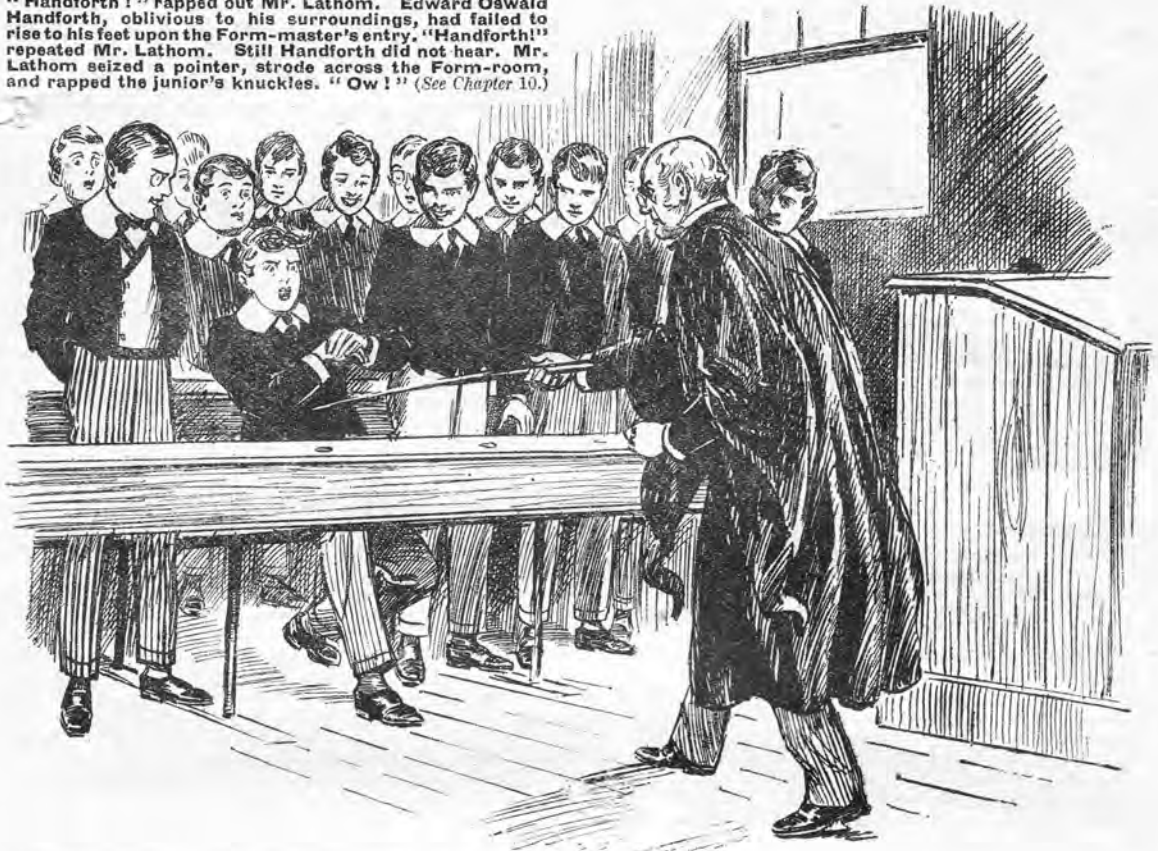
Dressing quickly, Handforth lost no time in getting downstairs. The other Fourth-Formers were down usually early that morning, too, for they were anxious to hear of the developments.

Handforth strolled about openly in the quad, so that he could be readily found by the prefects, when they were sent on the trail by the Head. And the story spread to the Shell, and then throughout the New House. Handforth was looked upon as a sort of curio, and fellows stared at him in wonder.

But, strangely enough, the summons from the Head did not come.

Breakfast-time arrived, and Handforth was beginning to look worried. All his serene confidence had gone. He couldn't understand it; for he had expected to be seized by the prefects long before this.

"Handforth!" rapped out Mr. Lathom. Edward Oswald Handforth, oblivious to his surroundings, had failed to rise to his feet upon the Form-master's entry. "Handforth!" repeated Mr. Lathom. Still Handforth did not hear. Mr. Lathom seized a pointer, strode across the Form-room, and rapped the junior's knuckles. "Ow!" (See Chapter 10.)



When breakfast was over he came out, and he mounded up and down like a cat on hot bricks. Whenever a prefect came near him he half ran up, but nobody seemed to notice his existence.

"You must have dreamed it, after all, Handy!" said Tom Merry smilingly.

"Ass!"

"But, my dear chap—"

"I didn't dream it!" said Handforth fiercely. "Why, you chump, haven't you seen the smashed window?"

"By Jove!" said Tom, scratching his head. "That's right! The Head's window is smashed, all right! Well, it's a rummy thing that nobody has come for you!"

"They'll come!" said Handforth confidently. "If they don't I'll jolly well go to the Head and confess. I'm not going to be messed about much longer!"

The juniors chuckled, and Handforth continued to await that long-expected summons.

But the minutes still rolled on, and still nothing happened.

CHAPTER 10.

Handy gets Desperate!

"I SAY, you fellows—"

Baggy Trimble, bursting with importance, approached a group of juniors on the School House steps. But they seemed quite indifferent to Baggy's approach. They went on chatting, just as though they hadn't heard.

"I say, you fellows!" said Trimble. "Have you heard the latest?"

"No; but I'll tell you something even later," said Blake obligingly. "There's an ugly, fat junior who's just going to get a thick ear!"

"Here, I say, cheese it!" gasped Trimble, as he backed hastily away. "Keep your hands to yourself, Blake!"

"I'll keep them to myself if you'll buzz off, and take your tittle-tattle to somebody who wants it," roared Blake aggressively.

"But it's not tittle-tattle!" protested Baggy. "It's about the Head's study."

"What?"

All the juniors turned, and they stared at Baggy Trimble.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus. "What have you heard about the Head's study, you fat wascal?"

"I happened to overhear Cutts of the Fifth," said Baggy eagerly. "Cutts had it from Lefevre."

"And where did Lefevre get it from?" asked Tom Merry, with interest.

"I think he heard Langton talking about it," replied Baggy. "Langton got it from Kildare, who had just been talking to Mr. Railton."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There's nothing to laugh at!" roared Trimble.

"Well, you can clear off!" said Blake curtly. "We don't want to hear the story, Trimble, and if you start telling it we'll bump you!"

"Hold on!" said Bernard Glyn, as he joined the crowd. "I've heard this story about the Head's study, too. Everybody's talking about it!"

"There you are!" shouted Baggy triumphantly.

"Mind you, I'm telling the story as I heard it," said Glyn, with a grin. "All the seniors have got it off pat. It seems that a tree branch smashed into the Head's window during the night—"

"Wha-a-at?" babbled Handforth, his eyes fairly goggling.

"A tree-branch smashed into the Head's window during the night," repeated Bernard Glyn coolly. "And the wind, blowing through the smashed window, tossed the Head's papers all over the room."

"But—but I smashed that window myself!" gasped Handforth.

"And left the broken tree-branch just underneath, eh?" asked Blake. "That was thoughtless of you, Handy. The Head's jumped to the conclusion that the wind did it. And who can blame him, considering what a gale there was during the night?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

It seemed possible that Handforth was to be "dished yet again!"

"Yes, but that's not all!" continued Bernard Glyn. "It seems that the maid who generally dusts the Head's study got a bit of a shock this morning. When she went into the room she found a stray cat lurking in one of the corners."

"Bai Jove! A stway cat, deah boy?"

"And the cat had been pretty busy," said Glyn. "It had knocked over a big bottle of ink, and—"

"But I did that!" howled Handforth.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And the poor cat gets the blame!" sighed Cardew. "Dear man, I fear that your proverbial luck has turned against you!"

"It strikes me that it's still with him!" said Blake. "It's protecting him, as usual. Never knew such a man! It's uncanny!"

Handforth felt positively dizzy.

Before long that story was being told throughout the school. The juniors knew, of course, that Handforth had been responsible for the raid. But Dr. Holmes and everybody else connected with him believed that the affair had been an accident. The tree-branch had blown into the window, the wind had blown the papers about, and the stray cat, getting through the broken window, had upset the ink-bottle and had added to the confusion. Nobody thought, or dreamed, that the havoc had been purposely done.

"But—but what about that paper I left on the wall?" panted Handforth breathlessly. "I daubed a note and—"

"On a piece of newspaper?" asked Tom Merry.

"Yes."

"Then that explains it."

"Explains what?"

"My dear old fellow, it's obvious," said Tom Merry.

"The maid in clearing up, must have found your precious piece of newspaper on the floor."

"But I left it on the wall!"

"The wind blew it off," said Tom. "And I expect it turned upside down, and the maid thought it was just a plain sheet of old newspaper, and she screwed it up and put it into the wastepaper-basket. That's the most likely theory. Anyhow, it's very certain that it was never found as you had intended it to be found. Fate's against you, Handy!"

Handforth breathed hard.

"I'm going straight to the Head!" he declared thickly. "By George! I'm not going to be diddled like this! I'm going to the Head, and I shall confess—"

"Hold him!" said Blake grimly. "Don't let him go!"

"Take your hands off!" hooted Handforth, as many fellows gripped him. "Lemme go, you fatheads!"

"Not likely!" said Blake. "Cool down, Handy! Can't you see that the Head would only think that you had gone off your rocker?"

"He wouldn't think far wrong, then!" said Lowther.

"The Head believes that his window was broken by accident—and if you went to him and confessed, he would think you were mad!" continued Blake. "He wouldn't believe a word of it, Handy. Be sensible, and chuck it up!"

"Oh crumbs!" groaned Handforth. "Everything seems to be going wrong!"

"Doesn't it prove to you that Fate is against you?" asked Levison. "Give it all up, Handy. Make up your mind to stay here at St. Jim's. It's the finest school under the sun—"

"So it is," agreed Handforth—"next to St. Frank's!"

"Wats!" said Gussy. "Pway do not be so widdle, deah boy!"

Handforth went off, almost dazed by all these failures. When it was time for lessons, he went into the classroom like a fellow in a dream.

He could hardly believe that his exploit during the night had fizzled out.

He had made so certain of it, too! Single-handed, he had raided the Head's study, had done all that damage, and had even left a note confessing that he was the author of the "crime." And now the wind and a stray cat got the blame!

Words could hardly have described his feelings just then.

"Handforth!"

Mr. Lathom's voice was unusually sharp. Handforth was sitting at his desk, looking dreamy and abstracted. He, of all the juniors, had failed to rise to his feet upon the Form master's entry.

"Handforth!" repeated Mr. Lathom sternly.

Still Edward Oswald Handforth did not hear. He sat there, oblivious of his surroundings. He was buried in his own thoughts, immersed in his own imaginary troubles.

But he awoke quickly enough when Mr. Lathom seized a pointer, strode across the Form-room, and rapped his knuckles.

"Ow!"

"Now, sir!" said Mr. Lathom angrily. "Are you being deliberately insolent, or—"

"Eh?" gasped Handforth, staring. "Why, what— Oh, sorry, sir! Did you speak to me?"

And as he looked at Mr. Lathom, another idea came into his head. Yesterday he had decided not to defy the mild Form master.

But now, with a sudden resolve, he decided that it was the only possible way! He had tried to get himself sacked by circumstantial evidence, and he had failed.

Now he must adopt open defiance!

CHAPTER 11.

All Serene!

"THERE seems to be something on your mind, Handforth!" said Mr. Lathom, not unkindly. "I have noticed that your manner is pre-occupied and abstracted. What is worrying you, my boy?"

"Oh, nothing, sir!" said Handforth gruffly.

"If you will not confide in me, then I can do nothing to help you," said Mr. Lathom. "But while you are in this class-room, Handforth, I must insist upon attention."

Handforth took a deep breath and prepared himself. He had decided that he would refuse to construe; but why wait until then? There was no time like the present.

"I'm afraid I shan't be very attentive this morning, sir," he said boldly. "I don't feel like work."

"Bai Jove!"

The Form sat listening, very interested, and half suspecting that Handforth had something up his sleeve.

"Indeed!" said Mr. Lathom, in astonishment. "I am gratified at your frankness, Handforth. So you do not feel like work?"

"Not a bit, sir," said Handforth. "In fact, I'm not going to do any."

"Good gracious!"

"I'm going on strike!" said Handforth coolly.

"On—on strike!" gasped the Form master.

"You've got it, sir!" said Handforth, warming to his work. "I hadn't thought of that stunt before, but it's a good one. I am jolly well going on strike until I'm kicked out!"

"Good heavens!" said Mr. Lathom blankly.

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NOW ON SALE!

He turned red, and then he turned pale. Finally, he strode to his desk and picked up a cane. It was not often that Mr. Lathom lost his temper, but he had lost it now. He pointed the cane quiveringly at Handforth.

"Come out here, Handforth!" he said, very sternly.

"Sorry, sir, nothing doing!"

"Do you refuse to obey me?" shouted Mr. Lathom, as if he could hardly believe his ears.

"Yes, sir."

The tension in the air of the Form-room, as Blake described it afterwards, could have been cut with a knife. This open defiance was a novelty, and even if Mr. Lathom wasn't enjoying it the Form was.

"Weally, Handay, I must pwotest!" murmured

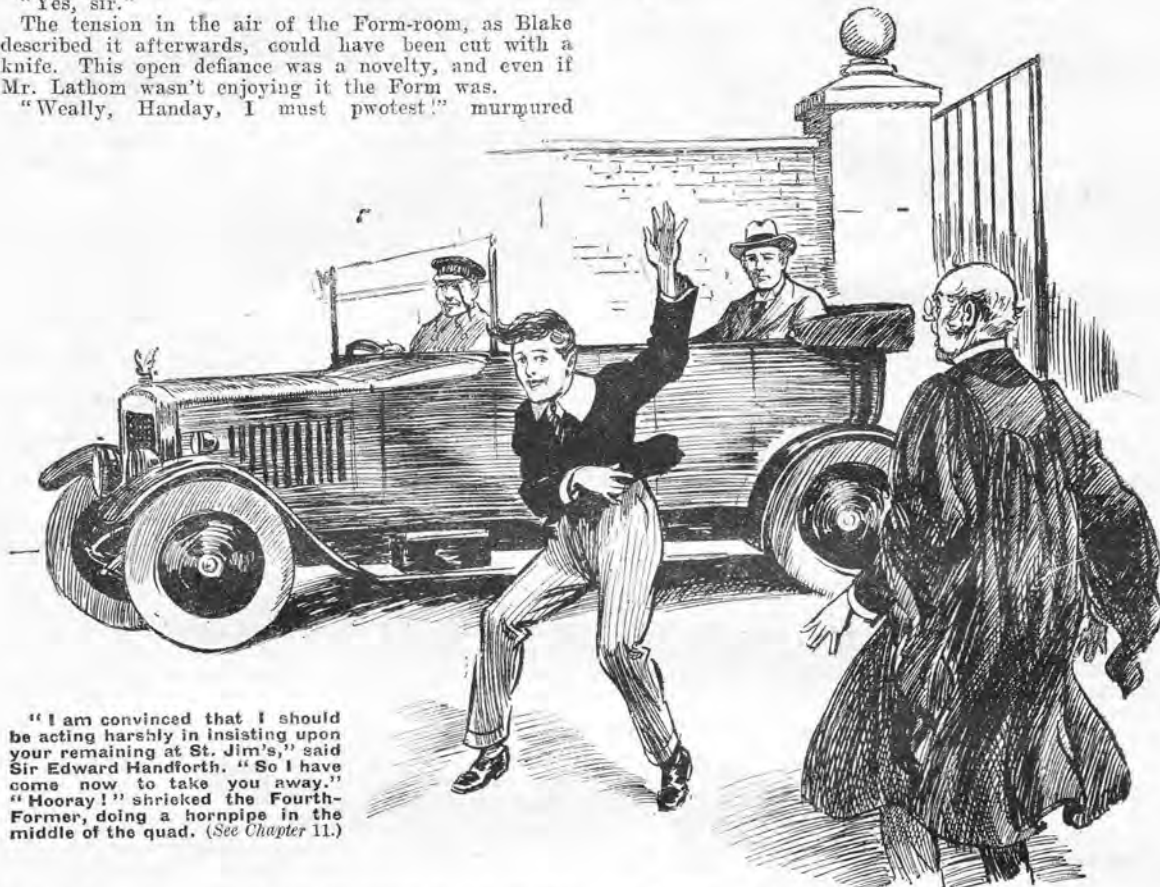
"I have not the slightest doubt that he will do so," replied Mr. Lathom curtly.

"Then let's go, sir!" said Handforth, stepping out eagerly in front of the class. "By George! This has done the trick, you chaps!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Form roared with laughter.

"Silence!" thundered Mr. Lathom. "How dare you laugh at this wretched boy? Hold out your hand!"



"I am convinced that I should be acting harshly in insisting upon your remaining at St. Jim's," said Sir Edward Handforth. "So I have come now to take you away." "Hooray!" shrieked the Fourth-Former, doing a hornpipe in the middle of the quad. (See Chapter 11.)

Arthur Augustus. "It is utterly wrong to act in this manner—"

"D'Arcy!" rapped out Mr. Lathom.

"Bai Jove! Ya-a-as, sir?"

"Be silent, D'Arcy!" commanded the Form master. "I am dealing with Handforth, not you!"

Arthur Augustus was silent.

"Never have I been so grossly affronted!" fumed the Form master. "Handforth, I am amazed at your conduct!"

Handforth coloured.

"Oh, I say, sir, I didn't mean any disrespect," he said uncomfortably. "Please don't think that. It's—it's just a matter of principle."

"Principle?" thundered Mr. Lathom.

"Yes, sir. No disrespect to you at all, sir. You're a—a thingummy!"

"A what?"

"An innocent victim, sir," said Handforth, finding the words he needed. "You know, sir, a necessary evil. No; I—I don't mean that," he added hastily. "I don't want to cheek you, sir, but I've got to."

"I think you must be out of your mind, Handforth!" said Mr. Lathom, aghast. "Once more, I order you to come out before the class!"

"I'm not going to be caned, sir!"

"Upon my soul!" gasped Mr. Lathom. "Unless you come out this instant, Handforth, I will take you straight to the headmaster!"

"Good egg!"

"What—what did you say?"

"If you take me to the Head, do you think he'll expel me, sir?"

Handforth staggered.

"But—but I thought you were going to take me to the Head, sir!" he said blankly.

"I do not wish to be unduly harsh," replied the Form master. "I believe that you are temporarily unbalanced, and if a severe caning will bring you to your senses—"

"But it won't, sir!" put in Handforth quickly. "I've defied you in a pretty awful way, and I think I deserve to be taken before the Head!"

"I am amazed!" said Mr. Lathom dazedly. "Upon my word! Do—do you realise what you are saying, Handforth? If I report your conduct to the headmaster it is quite possible that he will deem that expulsion is not too serious a punishment—"

"I can't help it, sir!" said Handforth stubbornly. "If I'm sacked, I'm sacked! Anyhow, I'm on strike, and I'm not going to be caned by you, and I'm not going to do any lessons. So if you like to take me to the Head, the sooner we start, the better!"

The unfortunate Form master seemed to fight for breath.

"This—this is too much!" he gasped.

"No offence, sir, of course!" said Handforth. "No disrespect to you, as I mentioned before. But I'm a conscientious chap, and I don't want to be treated leniently. I deserve expulsion for my cheek, and I don't want to get out of it!"

The mild little Mr. Lathom was, for once, like a raging tiger. Throwing his cane down, he made a rush at Handforth, and seized him by the scruff of the neck.

"Now!" he said grimly. "Come with me!"

"All right, sir; you needn't maul me about!" said Handforth gruffly. "I'll go willingly enough if you mean to take me to the Head."

"I do!" declared Mr. Lathom. "Never in my career have I been so treated! Either you are out of your senses, Handforth, or you are deliberately insolent!"

"I'm neither, sir," protested Handforth. "It's just a matter of principle—"

"Come!" thundered Mr. Lathom.

Blake very obligingly left his place and opened the door. After they had gone the door closed again, and a faint echo of laughter came down the passage.

The Fourth was enjoying the "joke" immensely.

And, in a way, the juniors were admiring Handforth's determination, too. He was allowing nothing to stand in his way. His folly was incredible, but his pluck was beyond question.

Outside in the passage Mr. Lathom relaxed his grip somewhat.

"I am taking you to the headmaster, so that he can give you a sound flogging, Handforth," he said breathlessly.

"A—a flogging, sir?"

"Yes," said the Form master. "On second thoughts, this conduct of yours hardly warrants expulsion. But a flogging, no doubt, will bring you to your senses!"

"Here, I say!" gasped Handforth in dismay. "A—a flogging won't do me any good. I've done this on purpose—"

But at this point, just as they were passing a window that looked on to the quad, Handforth's heart leapt. A big car was rolling up the drive to the School House doorway. And in that second Handforth recognised that car as his father's!

"Hurrah!" he yelled, breaking himself away.

"Good gracious!" shouted Mr. Lathom. "Handforth! Come back! How dare you—"

But he might just as well have addressed his remarks to the empty air. For Handforth, taking the stairs three at a time, had already disappeared from sight. Almost before the big touring-car had come to a stop in the quad he had leapt to the running-board and was gripping his father's hand.

"Hallo, pater!" he said eagerly.

"Ah, Edward!" said his father, with a smile. "I hardly expected to see you so quickly as this!"

"I—I happened to see you by accident, sir!"

"Splendid!" said Sir Edward Handforth dryly. "Well, young man, I have changed my mind."

Handforth gave a gasp.

"You've—you've changed your mind, pater?" he stammered. "Do—do—do you mean that?"

"I believe in being blunt," interrupted Sir Edward.

"I have been to St. Frank's, and your friends there have convinced me that I should be acting harshly in insisting upon your remaining here, at St. Jim's. So I have come now to take you away."

"Hurrah!" yelled Handforth, leaping off the foot-board and doing a hornpipe in the middle of the road.

Then, recollecting himself, he made a dash for Mr. Lathom, who had emerged from the School House doorway.

"Handforth!" thundered the Form master. "You impertinent young jackanapes—"

"Please, sir!" panted Handforth, grasping Mr. Lathom's arm. "I apologise, sir!"

"I cannot possibly accept—"

"Oh, sir—really and honestly!" urged Handforth. "I apologise tremendously, sir! I didn't mean to cheek you, sir! I respect you too much, sir!"

"Then—then what was the meaning of your extraordinary defiance?"

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"I was trying to get the sack, sir."

"Trying to get the—the sack?" repeated Mr. Lathom, dumbfounded. "Really, Handforth, I think that you are quite out of your mind—"

"No, sir!" insisted Handforth. "I wanted to go back to St. Frank's, but my pater insisted that I should stay here. And so I was doing everything I could to get the sack! But now my pater has come back, and he says that everything is all right. He's come to take me away—so I don't need to defy you any longer, sir. I'm awfully sorry, sir. Please forgive me!"

Mr. Lathom, who was really very kind-hearted, did not fail to note the earnest tone in Handforth's voice. He could tell, too, that the junior was repentant. And Mr. Lathom softened.

"Well, upon my word!" said Sir Edward, who had heard the conversation. "You young rascal, Edward! Do you mean to tell me that you have been trying to get the—ahem!—get yourself expelled?"

"Yes, sir—all yesterday, and this morning, too!"

Sir Edward threw his head back and burst into a roar of laughter; and Mr. Lathom, after a moment, was compelled to join in. He had just seen the humorous side of the affair.

"Ahem! Perhaps I had better say no more about it!" he murmured, recollecting himself. "In the circumstances, Handforth, I will forget this regrettable incident."

And without another word he walked off, leaving father and son together.

"Oh, pater," said Handforth, his eyes gleaming. "you're a brick! Thanks awfully for coming back for me! It's great to know that I'm going back to St. Frank's!"

"Apparently I've returned just in time to prevent you from disgracing yourself, you unmitigated young rascal!" said Sir Edward grimly.

"Well, I was going to rely upon you, pater, to get me out of it!" grinned Handforth. "But everything's all right now. Everything in the garden is lovely!"

"I had quite a long talk with your two chums, Church and McClure," said Sir Edward, nodding. "They are particularly anxious for you to return. I cannot quite understand why, since you generally knock them about in the most shameful manner."

"Oh, they like it!" said Handforth promptly. "It does 'em good!"

Soon afterwards Handforth went back to the Fourth Form class-room as happy as a sandboy. And his father, chuckling, went off to the headmaster. Sir Edward had taught his son a much-needed lesson—for in all probability he had never intended to leave Edward Oswald at St. Jim's.

And later on in the day Handforth was given a great send-off by Blake & Co., the Terrible Three, and Figgins & Co., together with almost all the rest of the Shell and Fourth.

"It's not good-bye, you chaps!" said Handforth happily. "After all, St. Frank's is my real school—my proper place. But you'll see me again!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Good old Handy!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

Handforth's ears were ringing as the car glided away. He was leaving St. Jim's without a stain on his character—in spite of his desperate and futile attempts to get himself sacked. And he was leaving, too, with the gratifying knowledge that he had made many friends.

As for his promise that he would return one day—well, time alone would show.

THE END.

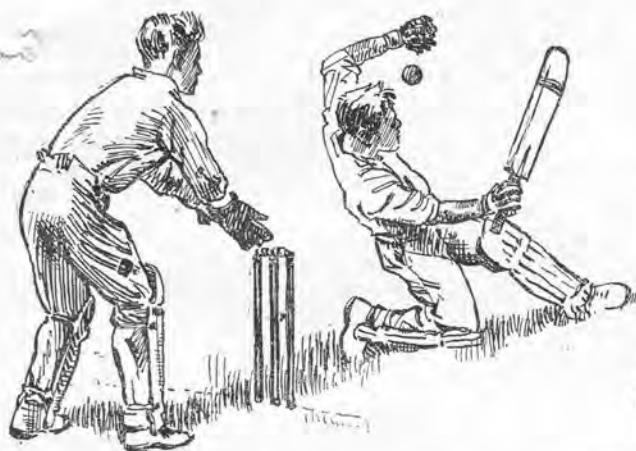
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WHAT! NOT MET DICK DARE? GEE, BOYS; HE'S SOME LAD WITH THE
WILLOW! MEET HIM BELOW!



The LUCK of the GAME!

by
RICHARD RANDOLPH

A GRAND NEW CRICKET STORY, DEALING WITH THE ADVENTURES OF A BOY WHO LOVES THE GREAT
SUMMER GAME, AND IS A MASTER AT IT, TOO.



WHAT HAS GONE BEFORE.

Driven to rebellion by the tyranny of an overbearing manager, young Dick Dare is sacked from his job in an insurance office and decides to apply at the Markshire County Cricket Club ground for a place on the staff. A born cricketer, he is engaged by Mr. Ansley, the man who has brought Markshire to the forefront of cricketing counties, and whose life Dick had saved a few days before. In his new job at the county ground, the youngster makes two bitter enemies in Leonard Urwine, the Markshire captain, and Herbert Blair, who are determined to prevent him from getting a place in the county eleven. Despite their plotting, however, Dick plays against Warwickshire at Edgbaston and justifies his inclusion by taking five wickets. With their opponents all out for 319 runs, Markshire, with their injured captain absent, start their innings well. Then, suddenly, a slump sets in, and things look black for the visitors. Dick takes his stand at the wicket, determined to do his best to pull the game out of the fire.

(Now read on.)



No. 11 to the Rescue!

NEVERN joined Dick at the wicket. The veteran had any amount of pluck. There had been a time when he was regarded as a coming batsman. But that was long ago. The fact was recognised now that he must not be looked to for consistent scoring, or for orthodox batting; but was all there when badly needed.

Twice in the five balls he had from Wyatt he was all but out. One practically grazed his stumps, and he put another over short-leg's head—a chance to a taller man, and touched by the finger-tips of the man who could hardly be said to have missed it, as he could get no nearer than that to reaching it. That stroke counted 4 to Peter. The 4 pleased him; the two narrow escapes did not trouble him in the least.

Now Dick faced Mayer again. The young Warwickshire pro had been bowling in fine form all through the match, even while the Markshire men made runs in plenty; and the success he had met with since had dispelled any feeling of fatigue he may have had. His first ball of the over might have bowled Hobbs or Phil Mead.

A sharp little hiss came from Nevern. He felt certain Dick was beaten.

But Dick, watching keenly and playing late, came down on the ball hard and sent it up the pitch a few yards.

"Come on!" yelled Peter; and Dick made his first run for Markshire off a purely defensive stroke.

Then Nevern smote Mayer for a lusty 3, and Dick, getting one a trifle short, sent it through the covers to the boundary.

"It's all right now," said Walter Toplady to some of the others watching by the pav. "The boy won't let us down, and after Peter's made one 4 he always makes a few more."

Runs did not come fast after that. The bowling was too

good. But Dick was batting really well now, and Nevern stayed with him and got his share. They added 45 before the old hand went for 22.

"Don't run the boy out, Tom," said Toplady, as Armley whipped in.

"Rats!" retorted the slow bowler rather crossly.

He had run out three men in the last two matches, and his comrades knew his weakness, though he would never admit it. He had made up his mind now not to be betrayed by it, for he was as keen as anyone to see Dick make a decent score, and the side needed more runs.

But it is always easier to make good resolutions than to keep them. Armley forgot his resolve within five minutes. He had made a couple of singles, and Dick had added a 4 and a 3 when Armley put one just past short leg and bolted up the pitch, calling to Dick to come.

It was rather Dick's call than his; but it seemed too late to send him back, and Dick reckoned he had just a chance to get home. He would have managed it had Smith had to handle the ball. But the fieldsman, whipping round, threw straight and hit the stumps, and Dick was out by a yard.

"I say, I'm sorry, old chap!" said Armley, as they walked in side by side.

"Couldn't be helped," answered Dick, with a smile. "It's just the luck of the game."

Toplady did not think it was, and said what he thought, reminding Armley that he had warned him. Nevern was silent, but Armley could see he agreed with the big fast bowler. But the words and the smile that Dick had given Armley took the sting out of their disapproval and made Tom Armley more than ever the boy's friend.

"Oh, it's not so bad!" said Westland. "They lead us on the first innings, but the game isn't over yet. We must go all out for a win."

He put Dick on first with Balkwill. The crack had not bowled at all on Saturday, owing to a slight strain. He said he was all right again now, and proceeded to show it.

Balkwill was just over medium pace. He could bowl the wrong 'un, but did not believe in overdoing it. His theory was that to send down a googly once in a way, keeping the batsman watching for the mystery ball, worked better than to bowl it often. The long fellow had brains.

Dick's ordinary pace was much the same as his; but, for all that, there was sufficient variety in the bowling. And, having to look out for the colt's occasional fast one and the crack's occasional wrong 'un, the batsmen were rather tied up. Bates tried to break the spell by hitting hard; but Bates did not last long at that game, and, with only 50 up, he and Kilner and Smith were all out, and Markshire had recovered some of the lost ground.

The prestige of a winning team was theirs. They had done so well thus far that no side could afford to hold them cheaply, even with their captain crooked and Toplady away.

So the game pursued a slow and sedate course till a little before the drawing of stumps, when Calthorpe enlivened it by some crisp driving. At the end of the day Warwickshire

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were 253 on with three wickets to fall—a very open state of affairs.

On Tuesday morning Urwine arrived. He still limped a bit, and he was plainly not in the pink of condition; but he said he was fit to play, and no one wanted to dissuade him. He might make his 50, even though below the mark. Even those who loved him least did not deny his brilliance as a batsman.

But Dick was sensible of a change of atmosphere. No one said it; but all felt that they would rather have had Reggie Westland still in command. Westland's genial words had bucked them up yesterday. Urwine's scowls depressed them to-day.

Urwine did not put on either Dick or Balkwill, though the crack had had four for 62, and the colt three for 53 on the Monday. Armley and Ferguson did most of the bowling. However, the three wickets outstanding only realised 42, and they might have made as many had Dick and Balkwill been bowling.

Markshire were faced with the task of making 295 to win. It was still anyone's game. They were good for that number as a rule, even in the last innings of a match, provided the pitch was still in decent order. And there was nothing the matter with this pitch.

Urwine wrote out the order of going in. Westland saw him post it, and went at once to see how it ran. It was not that he was curious as to his own place. He always went in first. But he wanted to see how Urwine had dealt with Dick.

It was as he had expected. Dick was again down as No. 11.

Westland hated anything in the way of argument. But he was as keen as anyone could be on Markshire's success, and he felt that the time had come for him to speak out.

"I say, Urwine," he remarked quietly, "did you notice what young Dare did in the first innings?"

"He made a few runs, I believe. What of it?"

"He made quite a decent score, and he made his runs well."

"What of it?"

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"It occurred to me that you might not mind my suggesting that he should go in earlier."

"If he's as good as you reckon him he'll be quite useful to have in reserve at a pinch. Anyway, I'm captaining this side, and I'll thank you to remember it, Westland!"

"I am not likely to forget it again," replied the old Cambridge Blue quietly.

He helped to give Markshire a fair start—47 for the first wicket. But the bowling was good, and the fieldsmen on their toes, and a cloud seemed to hang over the Markshire men.

Toplady, always outspoken, voiced what others felt when he said:

"Tell you what it is, you fellows—we shouldn't have lost much if Urwine had been crooked for a month or two."

When five were out for 121 the captain went in. A good deal depended on what he did. The other leading batsmen had all gone, and not one of them had reached forty. On the face of it Warwickshire had got on top.

Jenyns was his partner. Urwine had Rayner to run for him. Calthorpe had made no objection to that, though he might have done, as the Markshire skipper's injury had not been sustained in the game.

When a man has a runner he must keep within his crease while runs are being made. If he forgets and runs, he may be run out, although both he and his runner have reached the opposite crease and the other batsman has made good his ground in that which they have left.

From the first both Jenyns and Rayner were bothered by Urwine's forgetfulness. Though Urwine limped a bit, he was quite capable of running, and time after time he started to run. Rayner felt inclined to ask to be relieved of his job, and Jenyns got very nervous.

"Come on!" roared Urwine, driving past mid-on. And both he and his runner started.

Jenyns started, too. But he saw what might happen, and stopped dead.

"Get back, sir!" he yelled.

Then Urwine realised what he was doing. Rayner called to Jenyns to go back. While the captain and Rayner ran for the crease they had left, Jenyns turned to see his bails whipped off by Wyatt. The ball had not travelled far, and the fieldsmen had grabbed it and thrown to the bowler.

Jenyns made his way to the pavilion with hanging head. It was not his fault; but he had failed twice in this match, and he was unable to take failure cheerily.

Yeoman was next. Urwine had sent Rayner in, telling him that he could do better without him. It looked as though this was correct, though the blame for it was not Rayner's. Urwine could only run two, where at an ordinary time he might have run three; but even so he was no slower than a good many of the game's veteran players.

And while Yeoman stayed he had no great amount of running to do. Yeoman, broad of chest, strong of arm, quick on his feet, was a hitter. He made most of his runs in fours, and Markshire's skipper also got the ball to the boundary with all his accustomed skill.

The partnership of these two gave Markshire a fresh chance. In under eighty minutes they added 102, of which Yeoman made 59. Then he was caught at the wicket from a skyer, mistiming the ball and sending it almost straight up instead of over the ropes.

Forty-eight were now wanted, with three wickets to fall.

But Armley and Nevern both got balls too good for them before they had broken their ducks; and there were still 44 to be made when Dick brought up the rear.

He wished that it had been anyone but Urwine at the other wicket. The scowl on Urwine's face was far from encouraging.

But one must take the luck of the game as it comes; and Dick refused to be discouraged.

Remembering what promising form he had shown in the first innings, the Warwickshire men did not look upon their task as all but ended. Even yet they could not be sure what the end might be.

Urwine was batting as well as ever, and he was good enough for a century against any bowling. Dick started cautiously, concentrating on defence. In forty minutes they added 32, and Dick had made only 5. Yet he had played a capital innings. Even Urwine could not have denied that. No. 11—who should never have been No. 11—had come to the rescue at a critical moment.

Only 12 were wanted when the captain slashed at a ball and started to run, believing that it had passed cover-point.

Dick started, too, but saw that the fieldsmen had shot out his hand and grabbed the leather.

"Get back!" he cried.

But Urwine came on, limping a little. The man at cover threw to the wicket-keeper, expecting that both batsmen would be at the same end.

Dick saw that the only chance was that he should run for all he was worth, and at that he could not hope to get home if the throw was straight, and Smith did not fumble. Smith was not likely to do that. But Urwine would not turn; and even if he had turned now it would have been too late. The desperate chance failed. The throw was true, and "Tiger" Smith whipped off the bails! Markshire had lost by 11 runs!

A Twentieth Century Bravo!

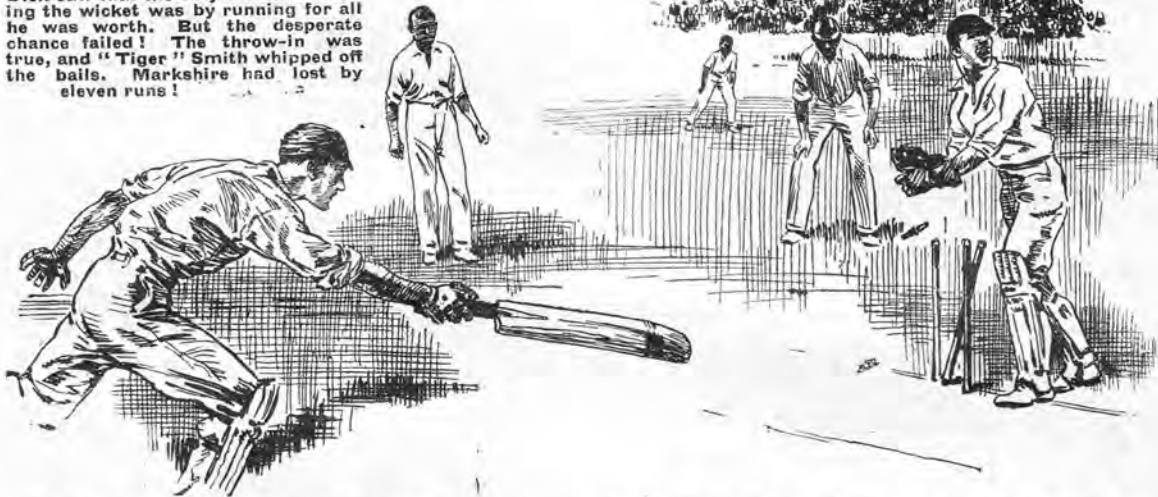
IN the pavilion Urwine turned upon Dick and began to tongue-lash him abominably.

Westland caught Dick by the arm.

"Don't go for him, Dare!" he said. "It will only mean a worse scandal, and this is bad enough."

"Mr. Urwine," spoke an official of the Warwickshire County Club, a man of over seventy, whose name was well known to all followers of county cricket, "you will be so good as to cease using that language at once! We will not permit it here! Moreover, though it may be no business of mine, I'm going to say this. Your partner was not in fault. He did all that a man could do to retrieve your mistake."

Dick saw that the only chance of saving the wicket was by running for all he was worth. But the desperate chance failed! The throw-in was true, and "Tiger" Smith whipped off the bails. Markshire had lost by eleven runs!



"Hear, hear!" chorused the crowd around the two.

All the players were in that crowd, and the sympathy of them all was with Dick. Urwine simply had not a supporter.

He saw it. He knew that he had gone too far. But he would not utter a word of apology or excuse. He strode towards the dressing-room, using his elbows to make a way for himself, and risking a punch of the head from more than one man by his rudeness.

As he sat back in his car half an hour later, while his chauffeur, told to drive like blazes, let her rip once he was clear of the environs of the great town, Urwine's mind was festering with spite against Dick Dare.

There would be trouble about this, he knew. It might be nothing less than positive disaster to his hopes of being John Ainsley's chief legatee. Urwine could see no way to avert trouble from himself. But he thought he could see a way of making it for Dick, and getting at least an instalment of the revenge he longed for.

The Markshire skipper knew that the other members of the team would not be back in Marchester for at least an hour and a half after he was there. He had time to see Slogger Batts, if Batts was to be found.

Leonard Urwine had a good many undesirable acquaintances. He was a patron of the Turf and the Ring, as well as of the gambling-dens, and wherever he went he seemed to gravitate naturally into the company of wrong 'uns. The Slogger was one of these. He had lost his chance of making a big name as a boxer by reason of his ferocious and ungovernable temper, and he had taken to "following the races." He was the kind of man who could be hired for anything short of murder.

Urwine found the Slogger at the Bird in Hand, the most disreputable public-house in Marchester. He talked with the broken-nosed ruffian for ten minutes or so in a private room, and then made a cautious exit. No one but the landlord and the Slogger knew of his presence in the place; and he had not gone thither in the car.

"Dare will hardly be fit to play against Lancashire to-

morrow, if the Slogger doesn't miss him," Urwine muttered, as he limped away.

The Slogger had his instructions. He was to hang about the neighbourhood of Kingsland Street till Dick Dare, whom he knew by sight, came along. Then he was to pick a quarrel with the boy, and knock him as nearly into the middle of next week as was possible.

With three pounds paid in advance, and the prospect of receiving seven more when the little job was put through, the Slogger considered himself on velvet.

But Dick did not come alone. Dusk was gathering as he turned the corner of the street, and Andy Whelan and Edmead were with him.

Dick was on the outside. The Slogger would have pre-

ferred to have him alone; but he felt he must accept things as they were. He had no doubt that he could knock out all three of these youngsters if it was needful. Both Andy and the young pro. were slight, though neither was a weakling.

The Slogger lurched heavily against Dick.

"Who the thump do you think you're knockin' about, kid?" he snarled.

"No one. You barged into me," answered Dick.

"You're a liar! Now jest you apologise, or I'll knock your blessed teeth down your blessed throat!"

"Stop that, Batts!" said Edmead. "I know you!"

"I don't, and I don't want to," Dick said. "But I'm certainly not going to apologise."

"Then I'm goin' to—"

"If you try anything on you'll have all three of us to reckon with!" cried Andy.

"No; I'll deal with him alone!" Dick said resolutely.

"But the chap's a pug, and a tiger at that!" protested Edmead.

Before Dick could answer that the Slogger punched hard at his stomach.

"Don't meddle!" cried Dick.

Next moment he and Slogger Batts were mixing it good and hard.

More Trouble For Dick!

IT would have been a very unequal combat had the Slogger been in training. He had the strength of a gorilla, was as tall as Dick, and longer in the reach.

As far as skill was concerned, possibly Dick's good grounding in the art of self-defence counted as much as Batts' knowledge of the ring. The Slogger had never been conspicuously clever. His victories had been won by tigerish attacks upon men who were not expecting anything so sudden and savage.

But the Slogger was far from being fit. The life he had led of late did not conduce to fitness.

He found his opponent exasperatingly elusive. Dick punched hard and got away. The Slogger punched even harder, but that did not count for much when it happened so seldom that he got home.

In the gathering dusk they fought it up and down between two lamp-standards in a quiet street, and no one but Andy and Edmead saw that fight.

Dick's chums exulted.

"Give him another, Dick! Oh, that's the style!"

"Now hop away, or—"

"Oh, good!"

Then the Slogger staggered from a hefty punch very near the mark, slipped, tried to recover himself, and came down with a crash, the back of his head on the edge of the kerb, and the lamplight gleaming on his gross, battered face.

He lay still. It was the impact with the kerb, not the blow, that had knocked him out; and in that fact lay the danger.

From the blow, even though it had got fairly home on the mark, he would have recovered in a few minutes at most.

But this was a different matter. Dick was down on his knees by his enemy's side in a moment. Andy and Alan Edmead, with faces gone suddenly white, helped him to lift the Slogger's head.

"Pretty bad!" said Dick. "He's smashed his skull against the kerb. Look!"

The back of the bruiser's head had suffered badly. He was unconscious.

"What's to be done?" asked Edmead, rather helplessly.

"There's only one thing for it," answered Dick. "You two stay by him. I'll go and fetch the nearest bobby."

"I say, that's like giving yourself in charge!" protested Andy.

"What of it? We can't leave him here. I don't admit that it was my fault, whatever's happened though I hope the damage isn't as bad as it looks."

He went off at once.

"My word! If I was in his place I should be frantic!" said Edmead.

"You don't catch old Dick getting frantic. He never funks anything," replied Andy. "But this is pretty ghastly. I wish the fellow would stir a leg. It's no good us touching him; we don't know what to do."

"I wouldn't touch him for a hundred quid," admitted Edmead.

In a few minutes Dick was back with a very stolid and very grave constable.

"Inwood has rung up for an ambulance," Dick told his chums. "The fellow will have to be taken to the hospital."

"Or the mortuary!" growled Constable Inwood. "I wouldn't be surprised if he's dead. Now, I know you, sir, so I won't be asking who you are. But you'd better tell me how this happened, and I'll make a note of it."

Dick told, briefly and plainly.

"Did he force you to fight him?" asked the constable. "It would have been a heap wiser if you'd taken no notice of his threats. He was the worse for drink, I dare say; he mostly is by this time of day. Or the three of you could have mastered him and given him in charge."

"That would have been better," answered Dick candidly. "I'm not sure that he was intoxicated. I should say he wasn't, from the way he fought. No doubt he'd had some drink, though I can't see why that should make him pick a quarrel with me. I don't remember that I ever saw him before."

He regretted now that he had not accepted his chums' offer of aid. But it had never been his way to ask others to fight his battles, and the Slogger's arrogance had stirred the fighting blood in him.

"Well, at the worst they can't bring it in more than manslaughter," said Constable Inwood. "It may come to a trial, you know, Mr. Dare. I should say it's about an even chance he'll peg out. There's concussion of the brain by the look of it, and the back of his head's broken. If the bone presses on the brain— But, there, it ain't any use looking at the worst side of things."

He had said quite enough for Edmead, who felt sick at the thought of Dick's danger. Andy was not quite so badly shaken as he, and Dick took it more coolly than Andy.

"It's as well you've witnesses to prove that he struck the first blow," said the constable.

At that moment the motor-ambulance drove up. The Slogger, still insensible, was lifted into it, and hurried off.

Edmead came along with Dick and Andy to No. 51. He

had been asked to supper, but he could eat nothing at first.

"Even if nothing worse happens, there will be trouble with Mr. Ainsley over this, Dick," he said. "Maybe you don't know as well as I do how he hates anything in the way of what he calls brawling."

But Dick did know something about that. He realised that it would be hard to clear himself in the eyes of the man who held the county club in the hollow of his hand. Mr. Ainsley might see it, there was no excuse at all for his fighting Slogger Batts. The three of them could have mastered the ruffian and have called the police in to deal with him.

That was not all! The fight with Blair had angered John Ainsley. Dick had never discovered how it was he had been cleared of blame for that. Then Mr. Ainsley knew of his man-handling of the office tyrant, and it was by no means certain that he might not have heard of his knocking his skipper heels over head out of the train.

Mr. Ainsley could not but think the boy he had befriended a quarrelsome fellow.

Dick squared his shoulders.

"Can't be helped," he said. "I've got to face it."

And he sat down to his supper. Andy joined him; but Alan Edmead still refused.

"Wonder whether you'll be playing to-morrow, Dick?" he said.

"I don't suppose so," Dick answered. "Toplady thinks he'll be fit."

"But that's not the question. Walter's down to play. So are you, but there are thirteen on the list. Both the captain and Mr. Ferguson are doubtful. The other fellows say that you'll get your place, anyway, even if Jenyns has to stand down."

"I'd hate to take his place," answered Dick.

"Just how I feel. I shan't get a chance to prove myself till Peter Nevern is crooked or ill, and I do want my chance, but I don't want it at Peter's expense. He's been no end decent to me."

Then, as if the talk of matters other than the cloud that overhung Dick had steadied him, Edmead cut himself some bread and cheese and poured out a glass of lemonade.

"You go to bed, Andy," said Dick, when supper was over. "Alan and I will look in at the hospital and inquire. It's on his way home."

But Andy insisted on coming along.

They heard nothing definite. The Slogger was still unconscious, and the surgeon who had examined him had not pronounced any opinion on the case.

"Looks bad, Dick," said Andy, after they had said good-night to Edmead.

"Oh, stop croaking!" snapped Dick. "That's just why I didn't want you to come. Keep your tongue still on the way home, will you?"

Andy obeyed, though with difficulty.

Dick did not sleep any too well that night. He woke at least a dozen times, more than once from a dream in which he stood in the dock accused of the killing of Batts. But at breakfast he seemed his usual cheery self, and Andy went off to the office feeling that everything must surely come right—which was not at all what Dick felt.

The Lancashire Match.

AT the ground, which he reached early, Dick had a surprise. This was not his own inclusion in the team; he had been prepared for that, though even now he wondered whether Mr. Ainsley might not turn up before the match began and insist on his being stood down.

The surprise was that Edmead was in. Peter Nevern had been all right the night before; but he had sent word to the secretary by one of his numerous family that he had been forced to take to his bed with a sudden attack of influenza.

"Dad's got a temper of 120 or 102, or something," announced Master Edward Nevern. "I heard the doctor say so, but I forget which it was."

"For dad's sake we'll hope it was 102," answered Mr. Frost dryly.

Urwine was not playing. Ferguson, whom business claims hampered, had found himself unable to turn out. Another amateur, Colin Reeve, of Yarnley, came in, and Westland captained the side.

The loss of Urwine was a big one, on the face of it; but more than one member of the team held it less than it seemed. Reeve was hardly the equal of Ferguson; but he

was distinctly promising. Whether Edmead could fill Peter Nevern's place remained to be seen.

Lancashire were at full strength—Leonard Green, P. T. Eckersley, Ernest Tyldesley, Hallows, Makepeace, Watson, McDonald, Sibbles, Iddon, Richard Tyldesley, and Duckworth. They had to make Malcolm Taylor, a bat good enough for any county side, twelfth man. They had all the prestige that clings to a team that has twice won the championship, and is going strongly for it again.

But the Manchester folk, in spite of the defeat from Warwickshire, were not disheartened, or ready to believe their side beaten in advance.

All round the ropes there was talk of Dick Dare. His doings at Edgbaston had not been wonderful, on figures; but word had gone round that he had both bowled and batted well. The crowd did not exactly expect him to beat Lancashire single-handed; but they seemed to have made up their minds that big help towards victory was to be hoped from him.

Tom Armley told him what they were saying. Armley always seemed to have his finger on the pulse of the crowd. He was particularly anxious that Dick should get runs.

"I shan't be in with you this time, so there'll be no danger that I shall run you out, boy," he said.

"How do you know?" asked Dick, smiling.

"Because I'm sure Mr. Westland will give you a chance high up. Oh, well, even so, you might stay till I come in. But I'll be careful."

"You'd better!" snorted Walter Toplady.

But it was Green who had to make out the order of going-in. He won the toss, and had no hesitation about taking first innings.

Balkwill and Toplady were the first pair of bowlers. But the big fast bowler found that his strain still hampered him somewhat, and with the score at 31, and Hallows and Watson, the opening batsmen, at the wickets, Dick got his chance.

His third ball dismissed Hallows, l.b.w. The spectators roared applause.

Ernest Tyldesley came in, and drove the first ball he had to the boundary. The next, looking just the same, but yards faster and pitching farther up, beat him and lowered his middle stump.

Here was excitement indeed! It was at this moment that Mr. Ainsley arrived, looking ill and worried.

Dick was strung up to do his utmost. He had the notion that it might be his last match for Markshire; perhaps, if Slogger Batts died, his last game. That thought would have taken all the vim out of many fellows. It merely put vim into Dick.

Makepeace came in, and the crowd yelled to Dick in encouragement.

Old hand as he is—a very difficult wicket to get—the former footer crack succumbed. He had looked for some such ball as had dismissed Tyldesley, and he played far too soon at the slow Dick actually sent him down, without change of run or action. He cocked the tail up, and Edmead ran round and took the catch quietly and neatly.

"Dare!"

"Well bowled, boy!"

Such shouts as these sounded from all quarters of the ground. In the pavilion there was positive exultation. But Urwine scowled, and John Ainsley's face did not lose its look of trouble.

Balkwill's turn came now. Watson stayed, maintaining a strong defence, but scoring few runs, while in quick succession Eckersley, Iddon, Green, and Sibbles were dismissed by the crack, aided by Edmead, who stumped two batsmen in a style that Peter Nevern could not have bettered.

It was one of those bad days that happen at times to the best of teams. There was nothing at all the matter with the pitch; and, good though the bowling was, it was not so superlatively good as to account for the slump. Just the luck of the game!

McDonald lit out hard, while Watson still played steadily; and when McDonald had gone Dick Tyldesley took up his role. But neither stayed very long, and at lunch-time nine wickets were down for 97.

The first ball after lunch settled Duckworth; and the innings was over. Dick and Balkwill had identical analyses—five for 47. The other three runs were leg-byes, and young Edmead had contributed at least his share to the getting out of the County Palatine for about a quarter of what the side might have been expected to make.

The Markshire men trooped in, while the crowd cheered them to the echo.

Hardly were the pros in their dressing-room before a messenger came to Dick, Matthews, of the ground staff.

"Mr. Ainsley wants to see you at once, Dare," he said.

The story of Dick's encounter with the Slogger had not got into the papers. Manchester itself had no daily except

an evening sheet. But tongues had been busy. Dick's comrades knew what had happened; and their sympathy was with him as he strode, with chin up, to face the wiggling that he and they believed certain to come.

They were not wrong about that. Dick found Mr. Frost, the secretary, with John Ainsley; but Mr. Frost's face lacked the look of reproof, almost of condemnation, that the other wore. It expressed nothing in particular, yet somehow gave Dick the notion that the secretary was on his side rather than against him.

"This is a bad business, Dare," said John Ainsley heavily.

"I know it is, sir. I'm very sorry about it," answered Dick. "But the quarrel was not of my making."

"Do you know that the man is in peril of his life, and that if he dies you will be hauled up on a criminal charge?"

"Yes, sir."

"Dare, why were you so foolish?"

It was on the tip of Dick's tongue to say that he really did not see what else he could have done. That was how the situation had struck him at the time. But he knew that the friendly constable and Andy Whelan and Alan Edmead had all seen it otherwise. He could not wonder that Mr. Ainsley, who hated fighting, should see it as they did.

So he answered:

"I can see now, sir, that there was another course open to me. I couldn't see it at the time, somehow; and I didn't want to drag either of the fellows with me into trouble. I've always been used to fighting my own battles."

Now he was sure that he read in Mr. Frost's eyes a gleam of approbation. But the secretary did not speak.

"Had you any reason to doubt that Edmead and your other friend would have stood by you?"

"No, sir. But—well, it isn't unfair to them to say that neither is exactly a fighting man. And I thought I could handle the fellow alone."

"It would appear that you were only too capable of handling him alone!"

"As far as that goes, it might just as easily have been I as he who came down thwack on the kerb," Dick replied, meeting the dark eyes, half-angry, half-sorrowful, fairly and squarely. "And I was in the right of it, anyway."

"I don't question that. But I fear that your readiness to use your fists has brought upon you heavy trouble. I should have thought that what happened on Saturday would have been a warning to you!"

So Mr. Ainsley knew of that! Dick wondered how he had heard, and thought that Urwine must have told him. He was too proud to give any explanation of his action then. There might be room for a difference of opinion in the matter of the Slogger; there was none, to his mind, in the matter of Urwine.

The anonymous letter—Blair's work—which had told John Ainsley what had happened on the journey from Birmingham had not done its work as effectively as its writer had hoped. Mr. Ainsley had questioned Urwine, and had gathered that Dick was really not to blame, though that was hardly the impression Urwine had striven to give. He had been hampered in making out a case for himself by fear of Balkwill, who knew all about the matter.

"I am not calling you to account for that," the great man said. "I can believe that you were justified. But I do think the knowledge of how narrowly you had escaped the burden of manslaughter then might have made you more careful when so soon afterwards you were tempted."

Perhaps it might have done. But when the Slogger had threatened Dick there had not been much time for Dick to balance matters in his mind; and even if there had been he could hardly have anticipated what was to happen to the Slogger.

Dick kept silent.

"I have no more to say, except that I do earnestly hope that this affair may not lead to police court proceedings," said John Ainsley. "I am told that it is not likely to do so unless the man you injured dies."

He gave an abrupt gesture of dismissal, and Dick went. "I think you were too hard on the boy, John," said Mr. Frost, when the door had closed behind Dick.

"I don't know. He is a fine fellow; but I fear he is quarrelsome."

"No more than you and I were at his age. Now our blood has cooled, but not so far that we would submit tamely to insult."

John Ainsley's only answer to that was a sigh of deep trouble.

(What's going to happen to Dick now, chums? Does this regrettable affair with Batts, the tough, spell the end of Dick's association with Mr. Ainsley and the Manchester club? See next week's powerful instalment.)



Your Editor is always pleased to hear from his chums. Address your letters to: The Editor, The "Gem" Library, The Fleetway House, Farrington Street, London, E.C.4.

FAULT FINDING!

SUNNY JIM, of Manchester, thinks that it's high time somebody gave him a new nickname, for to quote from his letter, he says that he's the "most miserable chap in the world." Now, for a fellow with such a cheery nickname that sounds mighty bad. It's like this: my Manchester chum has just started business, and it appears that he earns the displeasure of his "boss" every other day in the week. Jim says that this is not deserved; he does his work carefully and enthusiastically, but it avails him nothing. Along comes the boss and picks holes in everything. If this is true my Manchester chum has cause to feel miserable, although that unhappy state won't help him any. If his boss is so fault-finding that all the joy in life has departed, my chum would do well to scout round for another job. If a chap's not happy in his work something is radically wrong. On the other hand, Sunny Jim, just give half an hour of your leisure time to a little self-analysis. Ask yourself, do you really do your best? Do you concentrate on your job? Or are you concentrating on an imaginary grievance? I add this latter, because it seems strange that if your boss finds so much fault with your work that he keeps you on. Just think it over, old chap, in an honest way and drop me a line again. Meantime, don't forget the nickname of "Sunny Jim" is far preferable to "Misery."

LENDING BOOKS!

"Why is it," writes Harry Greenways, of Liverpool, "that so many fellows in this world will borrow books and forget to return them?" Ah! That's a sore point with lots of us. Really, it is extraordinary how people, usually so well principled in other matters, are casual when it comes to borrowing, or, rather, returning borrowed books. There's only one remedy, Harry. Don't lend your books to doubtful borrowers. I know just how you feel about it. Your collection, in which you take a natural pride, has been thinned down considerably. Rough luck! Take a bold step. Next time these thoughtless borrowers apply for a book tell 'em there's nothing doing. That'll make them sit up and take notice.

YOUR BIRTHDAY!

Now, this is something that will interest all of you, for a birthday is one of those things every man jack of us has. Some of us, alas, don't always receive a birthday gift when the great day comes round each year. And that's where

our companion paper, the "Popular," comes in. A great Birthday Gifts' Club has just been inaugurated in this topping paper, which entitles members to receive a splendid 1928 Annual should the date of their birth coincide with the birth dates published in the "Popular" each week. To become eligible to this club all you fellows have to do is to sign a registration coupon on which you declare yourself to be a regular reader of the "Popular" and GEM. After that you just sit back and watch the list of birthday dates published in the "Pop" every week, and when you see your own date of birth send in a claim for an Annual on the special "Claims" form provided. Simple, isn't it, boys? Trot round for a copy of the "Popular" to-day, and then sign the registration coupon toot-sweet!

SPEAK OUT!

"Loyal Reader," of Swansea, wants to know if I can cure him of "Humming and Herring." At first glance I wondered what he meant, then a closer perusal of his letter told me what the trouble was. My correspondent finds putting a few words together in a coherent fashion a matter of difficulty. He "hums and hars and ers" until he finds himself blushing in great confusion and wishing at the bottom of his heart that the earth would open and swallow him. Now, "Loyal Reader," you're evidently a very sensitive fellow. That, you can't help, nor do I suggest that it is a detrimental trait in your character. But where you tumble—mark you, I'm judging by the way you've put your letter together—is that you lack concentration. Now, when you're talking, just fix your mind on the subject under discussion, keep your eyes from wandering about the place, for that sort of thing tends to distract you, and speak slowly and distinctly. As a sort of "home lesson" make a practice of reading aloud a chapter of a book, or a column of news from the paper. You'll find your confidence growing, ditto your powers of concentration.

ON TRAMP!

I have a jolly letter in front of me from a London reader who has just returned from a week's tramp over the Sussex Downs. He's experienced glorious weather; he's as fit as a fiddle and brown as a berry. This reader chum camped out just wherever he was at the end of each day, and a novel experience he found it. His only pal on the tramp was his terrier dog Jacko, and apparently Jacko enjoyed the trip just as much as his master did. One can do a lot worse, when the weather is favourable, than tramping over the countryside. It's healthy surroundings are ever on the change, and something is added at every step to one's store of knowledge.

CALL IT OFF!

Two "Gemites" have been indulging in a mild dispute over the figure 2. One says that 2 and 2 make 4. The other Johnny declares that 2 and 2 make 22. Now, what do you think of that? They've asked me for a judgment on the subject. I think it would be better to call the whole thing off. Those of you who are interested could perhaps arrange a debate on this absorbing topic—and let me know the result. Thanks!

Your Editor.



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