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ALL HIS OWN FAULT!

A grand long complete school yarn, featuring Edward Oswald Handforth and the Chums of St. Frank's.

New Series No. 103.

OUT ON WEDNESDAY.

April 21st, 1928



Handforth wormed his way out of the Form-room and dropped to the ground. The headmaster appeared at that moment, and the junior quickly hid behind some bushes. He had no particular desire to come in contact with Dr. Stafford—for Handforth was playing "truant."

Edward Oswald Handforth—Shunned by the Remove! But it's—

ALL HIS OWN FAULT!



By EDWY SEARLES BROOKS

Usually so sunny-natured and cheery, it greatly surprises the Remove to find Handforth in the vilest of vile tempers. As the day goes on he becomes worse; he does things which, ordinarily, he would never have thought of doing, things he would have been ashamed to do. And eventually he finds himself shunned by the Form, including even his two best chums.—Ed.

CHAPTER 1.

Getting Out of Bed the Wrong Side!

DRIP—drip—drip!

The cold water dripped slowly out of the sponge as Church, of the Remove, applied more pressure, and the drops splashed down right into Edward Oswald Handforth's wide-open mouth.

"Try it a bit harder!" grinned McClure.

Church applied more pressure, and a regular stream cascaded down into that cavity. It was, after all, a very simple little joke. Handforth wasn't even being wetted, and really, it was asking for trouble to sprawl there, on his back, with his mouth wide open.

Naturally, Handforth was fast asleep. The rising-bell had clanged out some little time earlier, and Church and McClure were already half dressed. Up and down the corridors of the Ancient House sundry cracklings and shoutings proved that the other inmates were preparing for the labours of a new day.

A strange and awe-inspiring gurgling noise was now coming from Handforth's open mouth. It was caused by the cold water mingling with his celebrated snore, and suddenly he opened his eyes, blinked, and then sat up.

"Good man!" chuckled Church. "We've got you awake at last!"

Handforth spluttered and gurgled, and for a moment he almost choked.

"What do you think you're doing?" he shouted, at last. "By George! You—you silly idiots! I'm drenched!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Handforth dragged the bedclothes over him, and lay down again. His face was angry-looking, and his eyes were blazing.

"I'll smash the pair of you for this when I get up!" he said hotly. "Of all the mean, contemptible tricks! Splashing water on a chap when he's asleep!"

Church and McClure lost their grins. They looked at their leader in some surprise.

"Well, there's no need to get shirty about it, Handy," protested Church.

"I'll get as shirty as I like!" roared Handforth. "I was fast asleep, and I'm jolly well going to make you suffer for playing a filthy trick like that!"

"Hang it, don't exaggerate!" said McClure. "It was my idea in the first place, so you needn't blame Churchy. We only splashed a little of the water into your mouth."

"And you're a fine chap to talk, anyhow!" put in Church. "How many times have you tipped the cold water jug over us, Handy?"

"I'm different!" said Handforth curtly.

"Oh, yes, of course!" snapped Mac. "You're lord and master, aren't you? You can do as you jolly well please—but we're only nobodies, and we've got to suffer! One law for you, and another law for us!"

"I don't think!" said Church. "Don't be such a chump, Handy. It's the first time I knew that you couldn't take a joke."

Handforth grunted, and he probably felt that he had been making a big fuss over nothing. He turned over in bed, and said no more.

As for Church and McClure, they went on with their dressing. It was obviously better to leave Handforth alone. On any ordinary morning, he would merely have flung a pillow at them, they would all have had a good laugh, and the incident would have been over. But the great Edward Oswald seemed to be unusually snappy this morning.

"Better buck up!" remarked Church, at length. "There's only about seven minutes, Handy."

"Mind your own business!" growled Handforth, from under the bedclothes.

"Oh, all right—do as you please!" said Church. "Keep your hair on! I was only telling you, that's all!"

"I don't need any telling!" retorted Handforth aggressively.

He flung the bedclothes aside, and sat up. Obviously, there was no further sleep for him. He got out of bed, stretched himself, and avoided looking at his chums. Probably his conscience had smitten him. He knew that he had acted like a boor, but he was still very irritable. He wasn't in the mood to be pleasant just then. He had been disturbed once or twice during the night by queer internal rumblings—a most unusual thing for him—and this attack of indigestion had obviously affected his usually sunny temper.

He went across to the window, rubbing his fingers through his unruly hair. He looked out upon the April morning, and a grunt escaped him.

A vista of wet tiles met his gaze on the other side of the West Square. Dripping trees were in that view, too, and a scurrying rain was beating against the window panes, causing little rivulets to run down the glass.

"Raining!" said Handforth disgustedly.

"Go hon!" exclaimed Church. "You don't say so!"

"I tell you it's raining!" snapped Handforth. "My hat! What rotten weather! Of all the beastly— By George! And to-day's Wednesday, too!" he added, with a start. "Wednesday, you know!"

"Well, we can't control the weather," said McClure. "It's no good grousing—"

"It's a half-holiday!" broke in Handforth, in a flurry of irritation. "What about

to-day's cricket match against the River House School?"

"Well, it seems to be off," said Church, with a grin.

"That's right—laugh!" snorted Handforth, making a lunge at Church. "You silly idiot! I'm down to play in that match against the River House! And now this rotten rain's going to spoil it!"

He was in such a bad temper that Church and McClure backed away from him. They were rather taken by surprise. It was so unusual for Edward Oswald Handforth to act in this way.

"Oh, blow you!" said Church. "You got out of bed the wrong side this morning, Handy! We can't help the weather, can we? If it rains, it rains, and there's an end of it. It only makes it worse if you growl and grumble!"

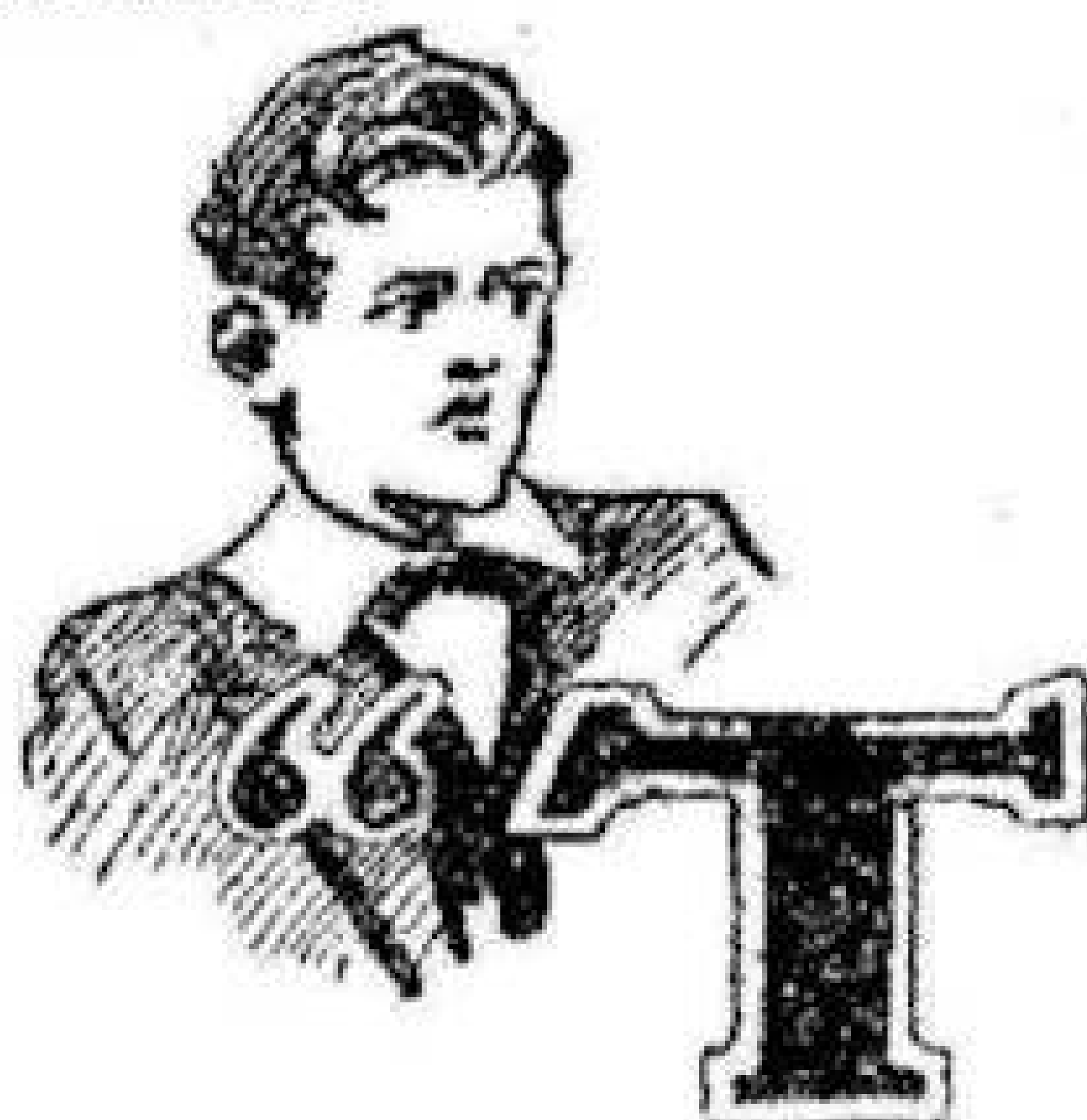
Handforth gave another of his snorts. Inwardly, he felt that he was making a lot of fuss over trifles, but for the life of him, he couldn't help himself. He felt wild with his chums, with the school, with the weather, and with everything in general. The sight of this rain had put a real, ragged edge to his irritability.

"Get out of this room!" he said rudely. "Clear out, before I chuck you out! I'm fed up with the sight of you! I'm fed up with everything!"

Church and McClure were ready to go, in any case.

"We'll go," said Church tartly. "And jolly good riddance to you! We'll speak to you again when you're in a better temper."

They went out, and slammed the door after them. But they didn't know that this was to be one of Handforth's bad days—indeed, the worst day that he had ever known!



CHAPTER 2.

No Improvement!

"OUCHY fathead!" said McClure indignantly.

"Oh, he'll soon get over it," said Church,

with a grin. "For goodness' sake, Mac, don't you catch his bad temper."

McClure cooled down.

"You're right," he said gruffly. "It's bad enough for one member of Study D to be like a bear with a sore head! What the dickens is the matter with him this morning?"

"Oh, I suppose he's ratty because we squeezed that sponge over his face."

"But he's done the same thing to us scores of times!" protested Mac. "Besides, practically all the water went into his great big mouth. It wasn't that, Churchy. We've done it before, and he hasn't kicked up such a fuss."

"The rain made him wild, too," said Church, as he looked out of the window.

"If it comes to that, it's enough to make anybody wild. Fancy! A half-holiday, with an important cricket match on, and it's raining like the dickens!"

The two juniors were in one of the bathrooms, just completing their toilet. Nipper came in, accompanied by Tregellis-West and Watson.

"Lovely weather outside—for ducks!" said Nipper, by way of greeting. "Hallo! Where's the mighty Handy? Not up yet?"

"Oh, he's ratty," said McClure, with a sniff. "Got out of bed the wrong side. Didn't like the look of the weather, and let his temper out on us."

"He'll soon be better," chuckled Nipper. "Handy isn't the kind of chap to keep up a thing for long."

This was perfectly true. Whenever Handforth had a "spell," it was generally of very short duration. Although he was quick-tempered, he soon got over his tantrums, and his disposition was genuinely sunny.

"Pretty rotten for the match this afternoon," remarked Church.

"Oh, I don't know," said Nipper cheerily. "I'm not looking very glum, am I—and I'm Junior skipper."

"Why, you don't suppose that we shall be able to play the match, do you?" asked Tommy Watson.

"My dear chap, we're in April," said Nipper. "You can't take any notice of the weather in April. In half an hour's time the sun will probably be shining in full glory."

"But what about the wicket?"

"The wicket may be a bit sticky, and if there's a drying breeze it will be more interesting still," said Nipper genially. "After all, cricket is a glorious game of chance. That's the very beauty of it. You never know what you're going to get. As for being glum about the weather—why? Being glum won't make it any better, will it?"

And the Junior skipper strolled out, smiling as sunnily as ever.

"It's a pity that old Handy couldn't look at it in the same way," said Church. "Do you think we'd better go back to him, Mac?"

"No fear!" said McClure. "We'll leave him severely alone until he's in a better mood."

In the meantime, Handforth had finished his dressing, and he had washed in another bathroom. He was, if anything, more irritable than ever.

Everything seemed to be going wrong to-day.

One of the buttons had come off his trousers, and Handforth didn't realise that he had pulled it off himself, owing to his violent methods—occasioned by his temper. On the top of that, he had lost his collar-stud, and had had to utilise a pin. And, as if this wasn't enough, he had dug the pin deeply into the back of his neck.

Then, later in the bathroom, he hadn't

been able to find any soap, and all the towels had been soaking wet. It was just one dashed thing after another.

He went downstairs, half expecting to find Church and McClure in the lobby. And he was preparing a particularly nasty remark for them. He felt like it. They were his chums, and so they were privileged to get the benefit of his spleen. But Church and McClure were not in the lobby, although one or two other juniors were standing near the open doorway, gazing out into the rainy Triangle.

Handforth arrived at the foot of the stairs, and then he skidded about a yard and a half on one leg. He sat down with a fearful thud, jarred in every bone.

"Hallo! An earthquake!" said Vivian Travers, of Study H, as he glanced round.

"No, it's only Handforth," smiled Potts, his study mate.

"Same thing!" said Travers.

There were a few chuckles, and Handforth rose to his feet, his face red with wrath.

"Who threw this banana skin on the floor?" he hooted violently.

"Speak louder, dear old fellow," drawled Travers. "We're deaf, you know."

"I want to know who threw this banana skin on the floor!" thundered Handforth.

"Well, well!" said Travers. "Such a lot of excitement over nothing! Dear old fellow, banana skins are often being strewn on the floor. I have, on more than one occasion, seen you strewing them on the floor. Why such a fuss?"

"Yes, cheese it, Handy!" said Potts, in surprise.

Perhaps Handforth realised that he was unnecessarily violent. It was, of course, a careless thing to leave banana skins lying about on the floor, but Handforth himself had done it before now. He turned aside and marched up to the letter-rack.

He would seek what little consolation he could in opening the letter from his father. He was quite broke, and there would be a pound-note, at least, in the letter—probably two pound-notes, with an intimation that Willy was to receive a certain share of the remittance.

Handforth was so confident that he put his thumb under the flap of letter that he had taken out of the "H" slot. And then, at the last moment, he noticed that the letter was addressed to Hubbard.

"Silly idiot!" muttered Handforth. "Why the dickens can't he look after his giddy letters?"

It was most unfair to blame Hubbard in this way, but Handforth didn't realise that in his present mood. He put the letter back in the rack. Then he started. There was no other letter in the "H" division. So his remittance hadn't come! He was still stony—his father had let him down!

A discovery of this sort was not calculated to improve Edward Oswald Handforth's temper—and it didn't!



CHAPTER 3.

Getting Worse!

CLAUDE GORE-PEARCE, of Study A, strolled elegantly and leisurely into the lobby with

Gulliver and Bell.

There was something very supercilious about Claude Gore-Pearce. He had originally come to St. Frank's as a day boy, but now he was an ordinary boarder, like the rest. And the fact that he was on terms of close friendship with Gulliver and Bell proved quite conclusively that he was an outsider. He had never done anything, to the knowledge of the Remove, downright bad, but there could be no denying that he was an insufferable snob.

"Which division will your letters be in, Gore-Pearce, old man?" Gulliver was asking. "'G' or 'P'?"

"Well, we can look in both," said Gore-Pearce. "That is, if this *fellow* will be good enough to move out of the way."

Handforth was still standing in front of the letter-rack, irritable beyond measure at the non-arrival of his expected remittance. On the top of everything else, it was almost beyond endurance. He twirled round and glared at Claude Gore-Pearce.

"Are you talking about me?" he demanded aggressively.

"Really, I—"

"Because, if you are, you'd better take it back!" said Handforth. "It's like your beastly nerve to refer to me as a 'fellow'!"

Gore-Pearce rather surprisingly saw the humour of the situation. He could tell that Handforth was in a temper over something—otherwise he would never have flared up because he had been called a "fellow." There was certainly something wrong with him this morning.

"I'm frightfully sorry," said Gore-Pearce solemnly. "Pray accept my apologies. I failed to recognise, for the moment, that we had a Prince of Royal Blood in the lobby."

A chuckle came from the group in the doorway.

"That's not bad for G.P.," murmured Travers approvingly.

But Handforth didn't see the humour of the situation himself.

"Are you calling me a Prince of Royal Blood?" he asked fiercely.

"Will nothing please you?" said Gore-Pearce. "You don't like being called a *fellow*, and you evidently object to being mistaken for a Prince of Royal Blood."

There was something very contemptuous in Gore-Pearce's tone, and the supercilious expression on his face was too much for Handforth in his present mood. It was a face to be punched. If it came to that, Handforth was always ready to punch Gore-

Pearce's face. And this was clearly the right moment.

Crash!

Without warning, Handforth brought his right round, and Claude Gore-Pearce caught the full force of it on his nose. He gave a wild howl, and went over backwards like a ninepin.

"Handforth!"

It was Wilson's voice, and it was full of anger. Wilson, of the Sixth, was just coming downstairs, and he had seen the entire incident. Travers and the other juniors round the doorway looked on with approval. It wasn't very often that they enjoyed seeing Handforth in trouble, but this morning they were quite against him. Gore-Pearce was certainly a cad, but he had done nothing to warrant that unprovoked blow.

"Oh! Oh!" moaned Gore-Pearce, as Gulliver and Bell helped him to his feet. "My nose is broken! It's broken! Oh, you cad! I'll report you to the Housemaster—"

"No, you won't, Gore-Pearce!" snapped Wilson. "We won't have any sneaking, if you don't mind. I'll deal with Handforth."

"Oh!" said Handforth, looking round at the prefect. "And what do you think you're going to do?"

"I never thought you were a bully, Handforth," said Wilson angrily. "There was absolutely no reason for you to attack Gore-Pearce like that. You'll write me two hundred lines."

"Confound you!" shouted Handforth recklessly. "The idiot was being sarcastic—"

"And if you talk to me like that again, Handforth, I'll cane you as well!" said Wilson. "I don't care whether Gore-Pearce was sarcastic or not. You knocked him over without giving him the slightest chance to put up his hands. I'm ashamed of you!"

Wilson walked out, and a murmur of approval went up from the other juniors in the lobby. As it happened, Church and McClure were on the stairs, and they, too, had seen and heard everything. They came down now, and they looked at Handforth with grim eyes.

Their leader had flushed deeply—stung to the quick by Wilson's parting words. It wasn't often that Handforth was told by a prefect that he ought to be ashamed of himself. He resented it. In his present mood he did not admit, for a moment, that the fault was his.

"Hi, Wilson!" he shouted. "You needn't think I'm going to do those rotten lines for you—because I'm not!"

"Cheese it, Handforth!" said Potts. "You'll only make things worse—"

"You mind your own business!" snapped Handforth.

Sir James Potts shrugged his shoulders.

"Oh, all right!" he said shortly. "Keep your hair on!"

"He's in a funny temper this morning," said Church. "He's been like this ever since he got up."

"Do you want me to slaughter you, Walter

Church?" bellowed Handforth, rolling up his sleeves.

"Oh, I'm not afraid of you!" said Church, with contempt. "If you touch me, Handy, these other chaps will bump you. You needn't be in a rage because you've got two hundred lines. It was all your own fault."

"Every bit of it!" agreed Mac. "If ever I saw a chap ask for trouble, I saw you asking for it, Handy! I think Wilson was jolly good-tempered over it. Any other prefect might have hauled you before the House-master!"

Handforth advanced towards his chums.

"I'm going to smash you!" he said thickly. "By George! I'm not going to let you chaps talk to me like that!"

"I rather think," drawled Travers, "that you'll change your mind, Handforth. If you touch these fellows we'll all jump on you. Understand, dear old fellow? When a man is acting like a hog, it's time to subdue him!"

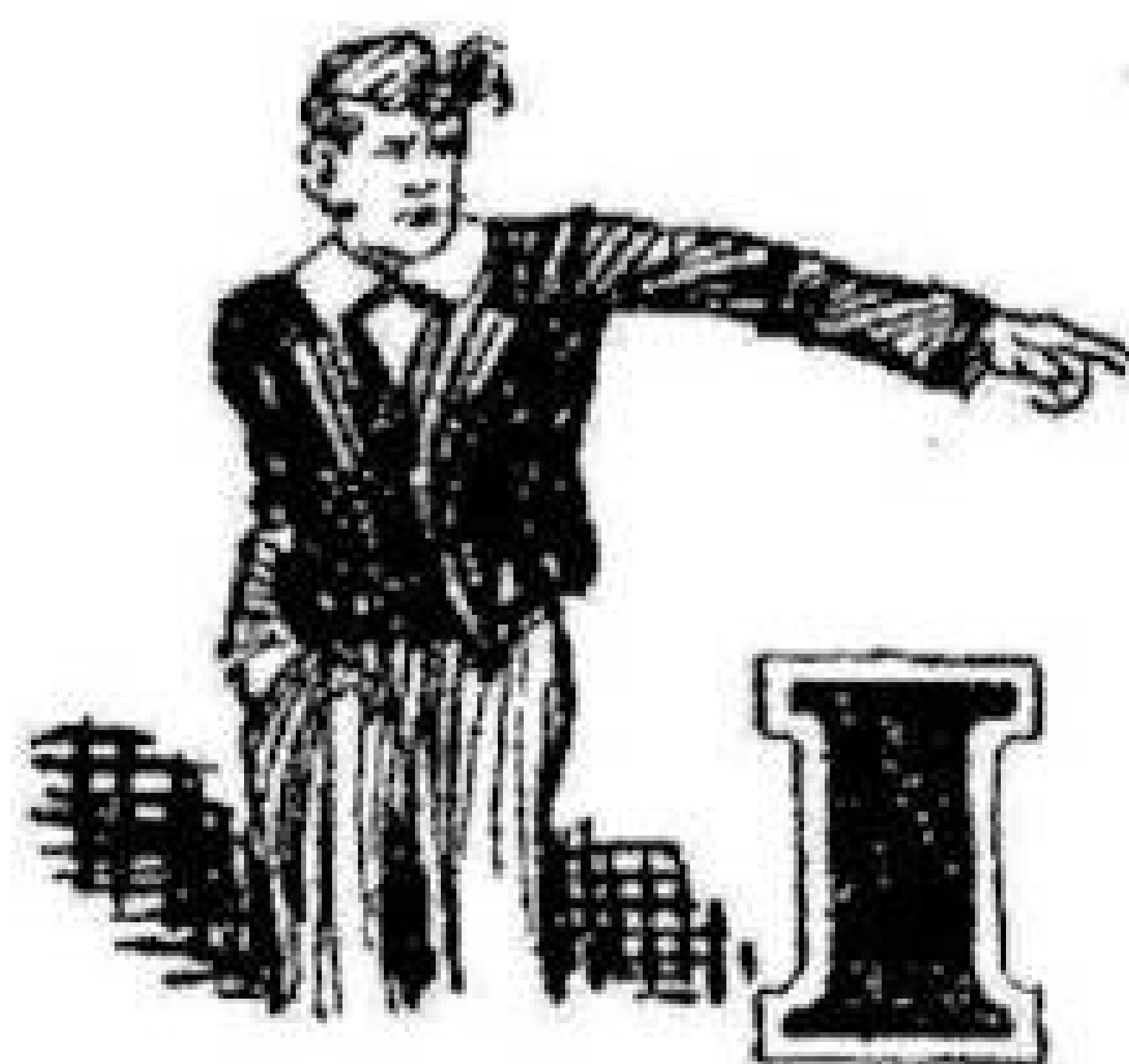
Handforth gulped.

"All right!" he shouted. "You're all against me—the whole lot of you! But I'll get even, sooner or later!"

He strode out into the Triangle, out into the rain, and Church and McClure looked at one another with pained expressions on their faces. But their eyes were as grim as ever.

"Can't make it out," said Church miserably. "He's worse than ever!"

"Oh, rats to him!" growled McClure. "Blow him! The best thing we can do is to ignore him completely until he's man enough to apologise!"



CHAPTER 4.

Bitter Blood!

IT was all so silly—so futile.

Arising out of nothing, built on nothing, it was still

nothing. And yet Handforth was going about, nursing a hundred and one imaginary grievances. If he had had the commonsense to laugh at his own folly, all would have been well.

But he didn't laugh, his resentment grew with every minute that passed.

Trifles—all trifles! Church and McClure were eager and anxious for their leader to approach them, and to growl out some sort of expression of regret. A couple of words would be enough for them, and they would then silence him and tell him that everything was all right.

They were expecting it. Tiffs of this sort had happened before, and Handforth had invariably climbed down after about half an hour. He wasn't the kind of fellow to keep up ill-feeling. He was quick to take offence, but he was equally quick to forgive. Indeed,

good old Handforth was one of the greatest-hearted juniors in the whole Lower School of St. Frank's. He was generous to a degree, and would willingly give his last penny away to anybody who asked for it.

The opportunity only had to come along, and he would grasp at it. He would seize upon any excuse to end this impossible situation. Unfortunately, the opportunity did not arrive.

For one thing after another, tumbling hot-foot upon each other's heels, conspired to make this breach wider and wider. And yet they were all so trivial in themselves but formidable in the aggregate.

It was a sidelight on Handforth's present mood that he should be intensely irritated because the sun came out. It was just what he had been longing for—hoping for. Yet when the sun peered out from behind a rain cloud and shed a glorious flood upon the dripping landscape, Handforth resented it.

He resented that sunshine because it reminded him of the fact that he needn't have been irritable at all. Practically the whole trouble had started because he had grumbled and grouched at the weather; and now the sun had come out for the one especial purpose of mocking him. The sun was telling him not to be so jolly hasty.

And then, who should arrive into his immediate vision but his minor. At the best of times, Willy had an alarming effect upon Handforth. There was such an air of coolness and collectedness about Willy that his major was already exasperated.

"Hallo, Ted!" said the cheery skipper of the Third. "What's biting you this morning? Your brow looks like a chunk of corrugated iron!"

"Go away!" said Handforth thickly.

"I'll go away as soon as you've handed me ten bob!" replied Willy.

He couldn't have said anything more calculated to arouse Handforth to further extremes of fury.

"You won't get ten bob out of me!" he shouted. "I haven't got ten bob! I haven't got ten cents. I'm broke!"

"Well, you needn't let the whole school know it!" said Willy tartly. "There's no need to shout at the top of your voice, Ted. My hat! You *are* in a temper this morning, and no mistake!"

"If you don't get out of my sight, I'll boot you out of it!" said Handforth harshly.

"Didn't you have a letter from the pater this morning?" asked Willy. "You told me yesterday that you'd be getting a couple of quid, and you know jolly well that I'm entitled——"

"The letter didn't come!" broke in Handforth. "I haven't any money—so you can't have any. Clear off, I tell you. I'm dangerous!"

"That's nothing new," said Willy, with a sniff. "You're always dangerous, Ted. What a sell! No cash from the pater this

morning! Oh, well, life's full of little worries!"

And Willy went off, whistling, with his hands in his pockets. His major's unusual show of temper did not affect him, and in less than a minute Willy had forgotten Edward Oswald altogether. He did not quite realise the deep-seated nature of his major's ill-temper.

Church and McClure came out into the Triangle, attracted by the sunshine. Handforth watched them with smouldering eyes, and his resentment only increased when he saw that they were studiously ignoring him. They made no attempt to approach him—they did not even glance in his direction. They were waiting, as a matter of fact, for Handforth to approach them.

Breakfast-time came, but Handforth did not go into Hall with the others. It was childish of him. True, he wasn't hungry. In his present mood, food would have choked him. But it would have been sensible of him to go in with all the others.

As it was, they only looked upon him as a peevish ass. After breakfast, he was still mooning about in the Triangle, his hands dug deeply into his trouser pockets, his chin sunk on to his chest.

"Poor old ass!" muttered Church, as he and McClure stood in the Ancient House doorway. "I've never seen him look so beastly miserable! After all, there's no sense in keeping up this storm in a teacup."

They were quite ready to forgive their leader at that moment. But it pleased Handforth to come striding indoors, and he passed by them without a glance—without any apparent knowledge that they were there. And both Church and McClure glared at his back as he disappeared into the lobby.

"The cut direct!" said Mac indignantly. "And we were just going to make pals with him again!"

"Oh, I'm fed up with him!" said Church. "Hi, Handy," he added, raising his voice, "why didn't you come in to breakfast this morning?"

Handforth strode on, without taking any notice.

"All naughty children sulk and refuse to take their meals!" sang out Church, stung by his leader's attitude.

Handforth swung round.

"Are you calling me a sulky child?" he said thickly.

"Yes, you jolly well are!" retorted Church. "And it's something new to us, too! We didn't know that you were sulky before!"

"I've finished with you!" shouted Handforth. "Understand? Both of you! I never want to speak to you again! Never—as long as I live!"

He swung round on his heel, and walked off.

"Nothing will please us better!" yelled Church wrathfully.

What a pity it was! Trifles—feathery, insignificant trifles! And yet all this leading up to so much!



CHAPTER 5.

Asking for Trouble!

THE Remove, as a whole, was inclined to laugh at Handforth's absurd attitude. It was some-

thing new for him to remain ill-tempered for so long. And the juniors were wondering when he would come off the "high horse." There were many conjectures on the subject.

But most of the fellows felt that it would be safer to steer clear of Edward Oswald. He was in a dangerous mood. An unwary word, and out would come his famous right. Far better to avoid him until he had simmered down.

After prayers, when the Remove had trooped into its Form-room for morning lessons, Handforth sat in his place, glowering unseeingly before him. To be quite exact, Handforth wasn't in his own place at all. He had taken an odd desk in a corner of the room, and was in splendid isolation. He did not seem to realise that he had only made himself look ridiculous.

But he wanted to get away from Church and McClure, who, in the ordinary course, would have been his next-door neighbours. After what had recently happened, he felt he could not possibly sit next to them.

Naturally, Mr. Crowell, the Form-master, noticed Handforth's change of position directly he came into the class-room.

"Why are you sitting in your usual place, Handforth?" he asked, in surprise.

There was only a grunt from Handforth.

"Handforth!" said Mr. Crowell sharply. "Did you hear me speaking to you?"

"Yes," growled Edward Oswald.

"Yes—what?"

"Yes, I did!" said Handforth recklessly. "Upon my word!" said Mr. Crowell.

"Are you being deliberately impertinent, Handforth? What are you doing in that desk?"

The rest of the Remove listened breathlessly. They had hardly expected that Handforth's ill-temper would vent itself upon the Form-master. This was a very rash proceeding.

"I'd rather be here, sir," said Handforth, at last.

"It is not your place, Handforth, and you cannot remain there," said Mr. Crowell curtly. "Go to your usual desk."

If Handforth had not been so rude, Mr. Crowell would probably have let him remain. But the Remove-master was not the kind of man to accept insolence, and he was quite astonished when Handforth made no attempt to leave his new place.

"Handforth!" shouted Mr. Crowell. "Did you hear what I just told you?"

"Of course I did, sir!"



Pouring water over Handforth soon awakened him. He sat up, spluttering and gurgling, almost choking, and then he glared at the grinning Church and McClure with blazing eyes.

"Then why do you not heed?"

"Oh, what difference does it make, sir?" asked Handforth stubbornly.

"It makes a great deal of difference. It is not my habit to run this Form on slack and slipshod lines," said Mr. Crowell. "Each boy must occupy his own place. I am quite aware, Handforth that you have no reason to be proud of your position in the Form, but that is no reason why you should take possession of a desk that is not yours!"

"Well, it's nobody else's, sir," argued Handforth. "It's a spare desk!"

"Silence!" shouted Mr. Crowell. "What is the matter with you this morning, Handforth? Go to your own desk, sir!"

For a moment, it looked as though Handforth might rebel. Then, with compressed lips, he gathered his books together, and rose to his feet. He slammed the lid of the desk, he kicked the iron supports, dropped two or three of his books, and generally made a commotion.

Mr. Crowell naturally jumped to the conclusion that Handforth was being deliberately noisy. He resented being moved, so he was making as much fuss of the job as possible. As a matter of fact, Handforth had been born clumsy, and he had dropped the books by sheer accident, and it was his custom to bang and clatter.

"You are purposely making as much noise as you can, Handforth!" said Mr. Crowell angrily. "If I have any more of this studied impertinence I shall punish you!"

Handforth was stung by the injustice of the accusation.

"I couldn't help it!" he roared violently. "They slipped out of my hand!"

Mr. Crowell was amazed.

"How dare you bellow at me in this fashion, Handforth!" he asked breathlessly.

"Good heavens, boy, what has come over you? You will write me a hundred lines for this behaviour!"

Seething and rebellious, Handforth went back to his old place, and sat down so violently that he nearly smashed the desk. He was vaguely aware of the fact that he was making an idiot of himself, but for the life of him he couldn't act differently. There was some little demon within him, egging him on. It didn't matter what he did to-day—everything was going wrong. He felt reckless and mutinous.

"Now, perhaps, we can get on with the lesson," said Mr. Crowell stiffly.

There was the usual clatter and shuffling of feet as desks were opened, and books were taken out. But this time Handforth sat in his place, perfectly still. He was inwardly boiling, and the close proximity of Church and McClure did nothing to calm him. Although he did not look at them, he felt that their eyes were turned in his direction. By George! If they dared to speak to him, he would jolly soon put them in their places!

However, they didn't speak, and the lesson began. Not that Handforth paid any attention. He was staring sullenly out of the window. The April sunshine was pouring down gloriously into Inner Court, and the tops of some of the trees lining the playing fields could just be seen. They were waving lazily in the morning breeze.

And Handforth thought of cricket. He thought of his absurd tirade against the weather when he had first got up. He needn't have railed at all. For the day had turned out fine, and the Junior cricket match

against the River House School would be a certainty.

Handforth's mind was full of the hundred and one trivial events that had happened since he had got out of bed. It occurred to him, with something like a shock, that it was all his own fault. If only he had kept his temper at the start there wouldn't have been any trouble. The thought exasperated him afresh. It irritated him more than ever to realise that he, alone, was to blame, and yet he wouldn't admit it, even to himself. He made excuses, he convinced himself that he had been goaded.

"Handforth!" came Mr. Crowell's voice. "Why are your books not open?"

Handforth looked up, rather bewildered.

"Books?" he repeated. "Oh, yes! I'd forgotten, sir!"

"Forgotten?" repeated the Form-master. "I shall increase that imposition to one hundred and fifty lines, Handforth. I will not have this inattention!"

"Oh, look here, but——"

"That is enough!" said Mr. Crowell angrily. "Not another word, Handforth!"

By a herculean effort, Handforth controlled himself. It was bad enough to receive a hundred and fifty lines, but Mr. Crowell was quite capable of doubling it, and then, what about the cricket match? Without Handforth, the Junior Eleven would go all to pieces. At least, so Handforth thought!

CHAPTER 6.

Archie the Peacemaker!



H

E won't get through morning lessons without a swishing," said Church, with conviction.

"Serve him jolly well right, too!" growled McClure. "I'm fed up with him! Ill-tempered rotter—keeping it up like this! I've no sympathy with him at all!"

Handforth's chums were leaning against one of the buttresses in the Triangle. It was morning "break," and Church and McClure were not feeling particularly happy. They had thought that Handforth would have approached them with a view to reconciliation long ago, and they were rather lost without their leader. But the blame for this squabble was not theirs, and they were certainly not going to make the first move.

"Hallo, hallo! So here we are, what?"

Church and McClure turned as Archie Glenthorne, of the Remove, came bustling up. The genial Archie was looking unusually concerned, and he adjusted his monocle and gave Church and McClure a critical inspection.

"Satisfied?" asked Church pointedly.

"Good gad! I hope you don't think I was eyeing the good old kit," exclaimed Archie. "Although, if it comes to that, laddie, I must confess that your bags are rather on the

frightful side. I mean, dash it, not the slightest sign of a crease——"

"Never mind my bags!" said Church gruffly. "What do you want, Archie?"

"Oh, rather!" said Archie. "You mean, what do I want? Absolutely! I see what you mean! Well, the fact is, what about it? What's all this dashed unpleasantness between you chappies and that priceless chump of a Handy?"

"There's no unpleasantness on our side, Archie," said McClure. "But Handy seems to have got out of bed on the wrong side this morning, and he's been grumpy ever since. We're not going near him, anyhow! It's up to him to apologise to us!"

"Oh, come! I mean to say, come!" protested Archie. "That's surely the wrong spirit, dear old cheese? Peace, what?"

"Peace—yes, but not at any price!" said McClure. "We're not going to humiliate ourselves before that stubborn idiot! The fault is entirely his, and until he can get into a better temper, we don't want to have anything to do with him."

Archie looked sad.

"Odds discord and strife!" he said, with concern. "I mean to say, how frightfully rotten! The good old place doesn't seem the same this morning. I mean, here are you fellows here, and there, on the other side of the Triangle, is Handforth there! A split in the camp, what! It absolutely gives me the pip to see Handy mooning about by himself!"

"I hope he's got the pip, too!" said Church.

"Oh, I say! Isn't that a frightfully wrong spirit?"

"No, it isn't!" said Church. "He's been behaving like a sulky kid, and he doesn't deserve any sympathy."

"Oh, well, of course—— I mean, there you are!" said Archie vaguely. "But it seems too dashed silly, keeping it up, what? How about leaving it to me? Let's all go across——"

"No!" broke in McClure. "I'm not going over to him, Archie!"

"Oh, but I say——"

"It's his job to come over to us!" said Mac. "And if you'll take my advice, Archie, you'll keep out of this. You'll only get into trouble if you interfere."

Archie winced.

"Here, dash it!" he protested. "I mean——interfere! I rather thought I was acting as a sort of jolly old peacemaker!"

"Sorry old man!" growled Mac. "I didn't mean to say it in that way. But you know what Handy is. He'll only drop on you like a ton of bricks if you go anywhere near him!"

But Archie Glenthorne was not to be shaken off. It pained him to see the chums of Study D at loggerheads, and he was satisfied that Church and McClure were not to blame. The only possible move for him to make, then, was to approach Handforth himself.

Full of hope, and full of cheeriness, Archie

went across the Triangle and walked up to Handforth, who was leaning disconsolately against the wall of the gymnasium.

"What-ho!" said Archie brightly. "I rather thought I'd stagger across, dear old chappie."

Handforth looked up.

"Then you can stagger back again!" he said sourly.

"The fact is, I thought a little chat might be——"

"I don't want a chat!" broke in Handforth. "I suppose Church and McClure sent you, eh? I saw you jawing to them just now! Well, you can go back and tell them that they can go and eat coke!"

In his present mood, Handforth resented Archie Glenthorne's kindly meditation. He thought it was a piece of colossal nerve on Archie's part to interfere. And he took it for granted that Church and McClure had sent him.

"Absolutely not!" protested Archie. "Good gad! What an idea! To be absolutely exact, Handy, old thing, the dear lads advised me not to butt in. It seems to be the general impression that you're to blame——"

"Oh, does it?" snapped Handforth. "So Church and McClure told you that I'm to blame, did they? Well, I'm fed up!"

"Absolutely, but——"

"Fed up with Church and McClure, fed up with the weather, fed up with you, fed up with everything!"

Archie nodded.

"Correct-o! I've had the same sort of poisonous mood!" he agreed. "But, my dear old lad, it doesn't pay. Absolutely not! I mean to say, what's the good of it? Where does it lead to? This sort of thing doesn't suit you, laddie. We like to see you smiling about the place. We like to see you dashing hither and thither, boisterous and cheery. So what about it?"

"What about what?"

"What about coming across to the dear old lads and shaking hands?" suggested Archie brightly. "Let bygones be bygones, and all that sort of thing, what?"

For a fateful second Handforth hesitated. An eager light leapt into his eyes, and he impulsively opened his mouth to speak. Then that little demon inside him whispered something. He glowered. He turned aside.

"Go to the dickens!" he said sourly. "Mind your own beastly business!"



CHAPTER 7.

Not Very Successful!

A

ARCHIE was pained, but he was not done.

"Handy, old boy, you don't mean that!" he said

quietly. "Absolutely not! It's not like you to keep up this dashed resentful spirit——"

"I'm not resentful!" roared Handforth, twirling round.

"Good gad! Odds earthquakes and tornadoes!" ejaculated Archie, backing away. "Surely there's no necessity for this hurricane effect, old dear?"

"Get away from here!" said Handforth. "Your face irritates me! When I want to make things up with Church and McClure, I'll go over to them. And I don't want any help from anybody else."

"Yes, but——"

"And I'll *never* go over to them!" went on Handforth aggressively. "They're to blame, only they won't admit it! They try to put everything on to me! Everybody is! Blow them—blow the whole crowd!"

"But, my dear old horse, there's absolutely nothing in it!" protested Archie mildly. "I mean to say, it's all a trifle—a series of dashed trifles. As light as air, if you know what I mean. Dash it, why keep the thing up?"

"Will you mind your own business?" demanded Handforth thickly.

Archie became frigid.

"I'm beginning to think, you blighter, that you're very much of a blighter!" he said. "I mean, I'm doing the best I can to show you the error of your ways, and you're as obstinate as a dashed mule!"

"Are you calling me a mule?" roared Handforth.

"Absolutely!"

"All right, then—take that!"

Biff!

Archie Glenthorne took it. Excited and enraged, Handforth had delivered a terrific uppercut. He regretted the blow the very instant he had struck it.

Archie lay flat on his back on the ground, and fellows were staring across the Triangle from every direction. Handforth bent over the fallen junior, words of regret on his very lips. But before he could utter a syllable, a shout came from the direction of West Arch.

"Handforth! Leave that boy alone!"

Handforth gulped and turned. Mr. Crowell came rustling up, his face red with anger.

"You brutal boy!" he said furiously. "I saw you deliberately strike Glenthorne just now, Handforth! It was an unprovoked attack, and I am amazed at you. Glenthorne, are you badly hurt?"

Archie sat up. He looked dazed and bewildered.

"Music!" he murmured dreamily. "I hear music—soft and melodious—— Eh? Good gad! Oh, what-ho! I mean to say, Mr. Crowell and his brother!"

"What do you mean, Glenthorne?" asked Mr. Crowell sharply.

"That's dashed rummy!" went on Archie, as he staggered to his feet. "Frightfully sorry, sir—but I thought there were two of you! I can now see that there's absolutely only one."

Mr. Crowell was satisfied that Archie was not particularly hurt. He turned to

Handforth and grasped him by the back of his collar.

"Handforth, you are coming with me!" he said curtly.

"What are you going to do——" began Handforth, turning as red as a beetroot.

"I am ashamed of you, Handforth!" broke in Mr. Crowell. "You know very well that fighting is forbidden in the Triangle—and the blow you struck Glenthorne was a cowardly one. I am going to take you straight to the Housemaster."

Mr. Crowell was strong, and he rushed Handforth into the Ancient House before the startled leader of Study D could realise his intentions. Handforth's humiliation was great, and from all quarters of the Triangle came scathing comments.

"Serve him jolly well right!"

"He asked for it, and he's got it!"

"He shouldn't be so beastly ill-tempered!"

The Remove, as a whole, considered that Handforth was a prize ass. The juniors weren't used to this sort of thing from him. They were generally ready to laugh at him, but now they only felt angered.

Within the Ancient House, Handforth was hustled into Mr. Nelson Lee's study, and Mr. Crowell lost no time in explaining what had occurred.

"I do not pretend to know the nature of the argument that was taking place between Glenthorne and Handforth, but I distinctly saw Handforth strike Glenthorne down," said Mr. Crowell. "There was no warning—no possibility of Glenthorne defending himself. It was a cowardly attack, Mr. Lee."

"What have you to say, Handforth?" asked the Housemaster-detective sternly.

Handforth was silent.

"You know perfectly well, Handforth, that you have done wrong," said Nelson Lee, rising to his feet and taking a cane from a corner of the room. "I am going to punish you severely."

"It was only one biff, sir!" said Handforth rebelliously. "Archie had been goading me, and I was fed up with him."

"Handforth has been in an evil temper all the morning, sir," said Mr. Crowell. "I have had great trouble with him in the Form-room. I do not know what is the matter with him to-day. He is very wilful and obstinate."

"Hold out your hand, Handforth!" said Nelson Lee quietly.

Just for a moment Handforth hesitated, his eyes blazing with rebellion. Then, clenching his teeth, he held out his hand.

Swish!

"Now the other!" commanded Lee.

Swish!

Edward Oswald received a "six-hander," and by the time he left the Housemaster's study his palms were burning with agony. But, inwardly, he was burning with a far greater intensity.

He was unreasonable enough to blame Archie Glenthorne for this disaster, and never

for a moment had it occurred to him to blame himself. He returned to the Remove Form-room like a smouldering volcano!



CHAPTER 8.

More Trouble!

NOBODY felt any sympathy for Handforth as he sat down again at his desk. All the fellows could see that his hands were puffed and swollen, and they knew exactly what had taken place.

"Serve him right!" was the general verdict.

Even Archie Glenthorne had, for once, steeled his heart. He had come to the conclusion that the rôle of peacemaker was a thankless one.

Even now, if Handforth had only possessed a sense of humour, he might have pulled himself up in time. But Handforth had always lacked a sense of humour—he had a habit of taking things literally.

Now, instead of confessing to himself that he had been a silly ass, and that he had better smile, he sat at his desk, fuming and seething.

Mr. Crowell did not make things any better.

"I am sorry, Handforth, that Mr. Lee should have found it necessary to cane you so severely, but I must remark that I entirely approve of the punishment," said the Form-master. "Nothing can justify an unprovoked attack, and I hope that you will take this lesson to heart."

"Oh, go and eat coke!" muttered Handforth.

Somehow or other the words came without his commanding them. They were out almost before he knew it, and the Form, hearing them, sat aghast. And having spoken them, Handforth was foolish enough to feel pleased. That was the way to talk to that old dolt of a Crowell!

"What did you say, Handforth?" asked Mr. Crowell sharply, as he left his desk.

"Nothing, sir!"

"How dare you lie to me, Handforth?" shouted Mr. Crowell. "I heard you distinctly tell me to go and eat coke!"

"If you heard me, sir, why did you ask?" growled Handforth. "I suppose I thought I was talking to one of the fellows. Why make a fuss over nothing?"

Mr. Crowell compressed his lips.

"It seems to me, Handforth, that your caning has only made you worse," he said curtly. "You have come back to the Form-room in a more rebellious mood than ever. Very well! During first lesson, I gave you an imposition of one hundred and fifty lines. That imposition is doubled!"

Handforth made no reply, and the Form considered that he had got off very lightly.

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A moment later the sun came out from behind a passing cloud, and a shaft of sunlight streamed across the room in front of Handforth's vision. It reminded him of something.

"Do you mean that you have given me three hundred lines, sir?" he burst out.

"Yes, Handforth, that is exactly what I do mean."

"Well, I can't do them, sir!"

"You cannot do them?" repeated Mr. Crowell, in amazement. "Indeed! That is a very interesting statement of yours, Handforth. And why, pray, cannot you write these lines?"

"Because I'm in the Junior Eleven, sir," replied Handforth. "There's a match against the River House School this afternoon, and——"

"You will kindly realise, Handforth, that your athletic activities do not interest me," broke in Mr. Crowell tartly. "You came to this school to receive your education—not to waste your time on play. I realise, of course, that a certain amount of games are necessary, but work comes first."

"It isn't work, sir, doing an impot.!" pro-

tested Handforth hotly. "Besides, it's a half-holiday this afternoon——"

"It will be no half-holiday for you, Handforth!" said the Form-master. "At least, not until you have completed your imposition. You will attend in this Form-room for extra lesson at two o'clock!"

Handforth was so excited that he rose in his seat.

"And what's the Eleven going to do without me?" he demanded. "You can't mess me about like that, sir!"

"I cannot do what, Handforth?"

"Mess me about!" roared Handforth aggressively. "Blow extra lesson! It's half-holiday, and I want it for that match, and——"

"Will you be silent, you impertinent young rascal!" shouted Mr. Crowell, reaching for his cane, and crossing the room. "I shall double that imposition, Handforth! You will write me six hundred lines!"

"What!" gasped Edward Oswald.

"And, boy, you will remain in this Form-room throughout the afternoon—until you have completed your task!" fumed Mr. Crowell. "Never in the whole course of my

career have I come across such a wilful boy! I am amazed at you, Handforth. I am heartily shocked! Sit down, sir!"

"But look here——"

"Sit down!" thundered Mr. Crowell, exasperated beyond all endurance.

There was such fire in his tone that even Handforth had to heed. He sat down, his eyes blazing, his chest heaving. But even now he did not give it up.

"I shall ask Mr. Lee about it!" he said mutinously. "It's not fair that the cricket should be spoilt——"

"Handforth," panted the Form-master, "will you be silent, or not? Another word from you, and I will take you straight before the headmaster. Never have I known a boy more deserving of a flogging!"

At last Handforth realised that he had gone too far. He knew Mr. Crowell of old. He would, without compunction, haul him before the Head; and Dr. Malcolm Stafford was not likely to take a lenient view of the position.

And so, for the remainder of the morning lessons, Handforth boiled and raged—but he did so inwardly. Not a stroke of work did he do. He even made no pretence to work, but Mr. Crowell did not heed. The Form-master could see that any further argument with Handforth would only lead to a violent scene. But Mr. Crowell inwardly declared that he would make Handforth pay sooner or later.

Curiously enough, Handforth was saying exactly the same thing—that he would make Mr. Crowell pay. But, after lessons, Handforth was saying these things aloud. He was saying them with violence, and with white-hot heat!



CHAPTER 9.

Fateful Words!

NIPPER, who was completely fed up with Handforth to-day, thought it advisable to chip in. As a rule, Nipper did not interfere with the other juniors, but Handforth was a member of the Eleven, and a new man had to be found to fill his post.

"If you'll take my advice, Handforth, you'll stop making these threats against Mr. Crowell," said Nipper grimly. "Don't be such a confounded ass!"

"I don't want advice from you, or anybody else!" retorted Handforth, who was standing in the lobby, defiant and angry. "And if you call me names——"

"Oh, don't start on me!" broke in Nipper. "You'll regret this folly later on, Handforth. You've only made yourself look ridiculous in the eyes of the whole Form. I didn't think it was in you."

"I'm just showing everybody that I can't be messed about with!" roared Handforth. "I suppose you think I'm going to do those six hundred lines, eh? Well, I'm not! I don't care a rap for old Crowell! Blow him!"

"Why can't you cool down, old man?" asked Nipper earnestly. "This sort of defiance won't do you any good. For goodness' sake, be yourself."

"And I'm going to get even with Crowell, too!" went on Handforth, ignoring the good advice. "By George, I'll make him suffer! Before the day's out, he'll wish he'd never been born!"

"Chuck it, Handy!" said Church miserably.

"And I don't want to talk to you!" bel-lowed Handforth, turning furiously upon his old chum. "If Crowell takes me into his study, I'll wreck every giddy bit of furniture in the place! I don't care a hang for him!"

Nipper gave it up.

"You're certainly in a pretty evil temper to-day, Handforth," he said coldly. "Well, you're released from the Eleven."

"I don't want to be released—I'm not going to be released!" snapped Handforth. "When the game starts, I'll be out there to play, and you'd better not give my place to anybody else!"

"But, my dear idiot, you're booked for extra lesson——"

"I don't care what I'm booked for!" said Handforth. "I'm not going to attend extra lesson! Understand? And if Crowell tries to force me, I'll make him so sorry for himself that he'll wish he never came to St. Frank's."

And Handforth stormed off, realising in his heart that he had only made himself ten times more ridiculous than before. He was amazed at his own folly. What possessed him to say such preposterous things? What evil influence was at work within him. Yet, for the life of him, he couldn't control himself. Everything was going wrong to-day—right along the line. From the very first minute of his awakening, the day had gone awry.

Even now he did not see that he alone was to blame. The simple truth was, he was allowing his temper to get complete possession of him. It had never happened before, and he was surprised at himself. But his natural obstinacy and stubbornness prevented him from doing the sensible thing.

Everybody ignored him—everybody was fed-up with him—and left him severely alone. Church and McClure took great care to steer clear of him. They were miserable and wretched. When the dickens would he come to his senses?

Handforth went into dinner, but even now he had no appetite. Every mouthful of food seemed to choke him. He was glad when the ordeal was over. He felt that all eyes were upon him—and this, in truth, was the case. His foolish behaviour of the morning had attracted widespread attention.

"It doesn't pay to defy the masters," said Vivian Travers, shaking his head. "Handy will realise that before long. It'll probably end in a flogging by the Head, and then he'll come to himself."

Handforth went straight upstairs, and changed into flannels. It was a crazy thing to do, but he took a particular delight in doing it.

When he came down, it was just striking two o'clock, but he made no attempt to go to the School House—to the Remove class-room. Mr. Crowell was probably waiting there. Very well—let him wait!

In this mood, Handforth strolled boldly out into the Triangle, and he prepared to make his way towards Little Side. The other cricketers were already on the ground, and Handforth meant to take his place in the Eleven. It was an insight into his present state of mind. It was amazing that he could imagine, for a single instant, that he would be allowed to play!

Indeed, he had not covered ten yards in the Triangle before Mr. Crowell himself came striding out of the School House.

"Handforth, do you know that it is after two?" asked the Form-master curtly.

"Why, so it is, sir!" said Handforth, with studied impertinence, as he looked up at the clock. "What about it?"

"Did I not order you to report for extra lesson at two o'clock?"

"But I'm going to play cricket, sir."

"You—you insolent young rascal!" panted Mr. Crowell. "You've had the audacity to change into flannels—just as though I had given you no orders! Good gracious! I will soon show you, Handforth, whether you can defy me in this fashion!"

Wilson and Biggleswade, two of the Ancient House prefects, were passing at the moment, and Mr. Crowell beckoned to them.

"Wilson, Biggleswade!" he panted.

"Sir?" said Wilson.

"Please take this boy into the Remove Form-room in the School House!" said Mr. Crowell, pointing at Handforth. "He has defied me, and I have a feeling that he will continue to defy me. Force is the only method to employ."

"This way, kid!" said Wilson grimly.

Edward Oswald Handforth was staggered. He had expected nothing like this. Wilson and Biggleswade grasped him firmly, and he was literally dragged into the School House and plumped down at his desk in the Remove Form-room. Obviously Mr. Crowell was not to be defied!



CHAPTER 10.

Like a Tartar!

REALISATION came to Handforth then.

He was in the Form-room, the door was locked, and Mr.

Crowell was mounting guard over him.

Reckless as he was, Handforth saw that he could not force his way out by sheer violence. That was the road to expulsion.

And yet, although he realised his folly, he did nothing whatever to mend his ways. It was just his obstinacy, his celebrated stubbornness.

The match was on, and he was compelled to remain indoors for extra lesson. All right! What couldn't be cured had to be endured. But, by George, he wasn't going to give that beast of a Crowell any satisfaction!

It was in this mood that Handforth commenced his impot. It wasn't merely asking for trouble—it was yelling for it. And, before very long, trouble arrived.

During that first half-hour, Mr. Crowell was feeling relieved. He had feared that he would have endless trouble with Handforth. The leader of Study D had become so rebellious that there was every likelihood that nothing would cure him but a flogging from the Head. So Mr. Crowell was easier in mind when he saw that Handforth was settling down to his task with energy and enterprise.

The junior sat at his desk, writing away for all he was worth. There was something feverish in his activities. Perhaps he was trying to get the impot done rapidly. Very well—that would be all to the good. Mr. Crowell, knowing the severity of the punishment, would be inclined to gloss over any pages of poor work.

Getting on towards three o'clock, Mr. Crowell left his seat and walked to the window. He looked out across the playing fields, and then he turned to Handforth's desk and picked up some of the sheets that the junior had already completed. When he saw them, Mr. Crowell got a shock.

"Good gracious!" he ejaculated. "Handforth, what are these?"

"Lines, sir," said Handforth, with satisfaction. There was a gloating note in his voice, and Mr. Crowell did not fail to detect it.

The Form-master was staring at the impot. almost dazedly. Never had he seen such an atrocity. At the best of times, Handforth was not famed for his handwriting, but the effort now in Mr. Crowell's grasp was awful beyond words. Indeed, they weren't really lines at all. They had been scrawled with such carelessness, and with such deliberate slovenliness, that hardly any words were distinguishable. Each page was covered with a mass of erratic pen strokes, illuminated here and there by large blots.

"You said you wanted six hundred lines, sir, and I'm doing six hundred lines!" said Handforth, with savage joy. "I've already done two hundred, and at this rate——"

"Silence! I can only assume, Handforth, that you have taken leave of your senses!" said Mr. Crowell harshly. "Good heavens, boy, do you imagine that I shall accept these atrocious pages? Give me the rest!"

"Here, I say, I——"

Handforth broke off as Mr. Crowell seized all the pages that had been completed. With a deliberate movement, the Form-master tore them in half. He tore them again. He crumpled them up, and tossed them across the room into the waste-paper basket.

"There!" he said, breathing hard. "You will now do those lines again!"

Handforth sat there, dumbfounded.

"You've torn them up!" he burst out at last. "Look here, sir, I can't keep on doing those lines——"

"You know perfectly well, Handforth, that those pages were unacceptable!" rapped out Mr. Crowell. "You will start all over again, and you will do them properly."

Handforth nearly choked. In his heart, he had known that this would happen. He had deliberately written those lines in a vile hand, and he had deliberately blotted them. Yet now that he had been called up, he fooled himself into believing that he had been freshly ill-treated.

"It's not fair, sir," he panted. "You've got me stuck in here while all the other fellows are playing cricket, and you're doing the best you can to drive me mad! I've done over two hundred lines——"

"I am quite out of patience with you, Handforth," broke in Mr. Crowell harshly. "I've always known you to be an obstinate boy, but never before have I found you to be so wilful, so stubborn, so wicked. You will begin all over again, and write me six hundred lines."

"Oh, but look here——"

"I shall not examine them again," went on Mr. Crowell relentlessly. "You will complete the entire imposition before I examine it, Handforth, and if it is unsatisfactory I shall tear it up in its entirety. I shall then double it, and you will have absolutely no freedom until it is completed."

With this edict, Mr. Crowell returned to his desk. Handforth sat there, stunned. For he knew that Mr. Crowell meant it. His plan had failed—as he must have known it would fail. As Travers had said, it wasn't any earthly use defying a Form-master.

The whole Remove could do it, perhaps—but not one individual. That, indeed, was an example of concentrated folly.

Sick at heart, and bitter, Edward Oswald began writing again. This time he wrote legibly, he avoided all possible blots. A kind of dull hopelessness had come over him. He was beginning to realise that he was the under-dog.

Three-thirty came, and Mr. Crowell walked towards the door. He took a key out of his pocket.

"I am going out for a little while, Handforth," he said, turning. "You will continue your work. I might as well tell you that I intend to lock you in. If you make any attempt to neglect your work, I shall be very angry with you."

Handforth made no reply—but his pen remained idle after Mr. Crowell had gone out, and after the key had rattled in the lock!



CHAPTER 11.

Open Defiance!

HANDFORTH was breathing hard.

The sudden departure of Mr. Crowell was unexpected.

Handforth believed that the Form-master would remain with him the whole afternoon, and so he had resigned himself to his fate. But now his whole outlook was changed. Suddenly, abruptly, dramatically, relief had come.

He flung his pen down and ran towards the nearest window. Hauling himself up, he stood upon the ledge and gazed out across Inner Court towards Little Side. He could see the figures of the junior cricketers, and—more—he could see the score board.

"My only hat!" he muttered huskily.

Thirty-seven runs for six wickets. There it was on the board! And the River House juniors were in the field. That meant that St. Frank's was batting—and St. Frank's was doing very badly.

"By George! I knew they needed me!" muttered Handforth fiercely. "It's just the kind of wicket I'm good on! It's slogging they need this afternoon—hard driving! And here am I, stuck in this rotten Form-room! It's more than flesh and blood can stand!"

The St. Frank's Junior Eleven was, indeed, in a fix. The River House skipper had won the toss, and he had elected to put the Saints in first. It was quite a wise move, for there had been another heavy shower directly after dinner, and now the sun and the wind were causing the wicket to dry rapidly. It was essentially a bowler's wicket.

And Nipper and his men were being skittled out.

Nipper, it was true, had gone in first, and was still batting, but runs came very slowly. It was impossible to take any chances.

Handforth opened the window of the Remove class-room wider, and then he commenced to worm his way out. It was, of course, a perfectly mad proceeding. But Mr. Crowell had gone—liberty was within sight—and cricket, during the summer term, was Handforth's passion.

He was never much of a fellow for thinking ahead. The possible consequences of this act did not occur to him.

If only he could escape now, and get across to the cricketers, all might be well. Perhaps Mr. Crowell wouldn't come back for an hour, and, during that time, Handforth could take his knock and help his side.

It was open rebellion, but Handforth didn't care. He gloated. He had decided from the very first to defy the Form-master, and to



Handforth arrived at the foot of the stairs, and then he skidded about a yard and a half on one leg. He sat down with a fearful thud, jarred in every bone. "Who threw this banana skin on the floor?" he hooted.

play cricket. Well, he was going to do it! Rats to everybody! Rats to Crowell in particular!

He dropped to the ground outside, and a moment later he dodged behind some bushes. The headmaster himself had appeared in the distance, and Handforth had no particular desire just now to have a chat with Dr. Stafford!

Edging his way past the bushes, he reached the side wall. It was only the work of a moment for an agile fellow like Edward Oswald to swarm over. He was now in the private lane which entirely surrounded the school property. He ran along it, turned through the gateway into Little Side, and then affected a normal walk.

"Great Scott! Here's Handy!" sang out somebody.

"Well I'm blowed!"

"How the dickens did he manage to get off?"

Handforth's walk was so natural that hardly anybody suspected that he was a truant from extra lesson. Not that the spectators gave much thought to the matter. They were too anxious about the state of the game. If anybody considered the point at all, he probably thought that Mr. Crowell had taken compassion upon the junior and had released him. Perhaps old Handy had expressed his regrets. That was a sure way to get round Crowell.

"How's that?" went up a sudden shout.

"Out!"

A kind of groan went up from the spec-

tators. Another St. Frank's junior was out—caught in the slips. The wicket was certainly very tricky.

Handforth was running now. Breathlessly he dashed into the pavilion, and was just in time to stop Reggie Pitt as the latter was going out, with his bat tucked under his arm.

"Hold on, Reggie!" panted Handforth. "Are you next man in?"

"Yes," said Reggie. "Why?"

"Well, let me go in next," said Handy. "I feel in fine form, and if I can only do a little slogging, I'll make that score look silly!"

"But, my dear man, you're not in the Eleven!" said Pitt. "Nipper has put another man in your place."

"Rot!" said Handforth. "I *am* in the Eleven! I've come back—I've come here to take my place. And I ought to be next man in!"

"Better let him have a shot at it, Reggie!" advised De Valerie, of the Ancient House. "He's just the man we need in this fix. He might be able to pull the game out of the fire."

"All right!" said Reggie Pitt promptly. "Shove these pads on, Handy, and good luck to you!"

They did not think of making any inquiries regarding the imposition. Handforth was here, and that was all that mattered. He had arrived just in time to stop the rot. His vigorous hitting would ~~probably~~ work wonders.

And so, a minute later, Handforth, flushed with triumph, strode out of the pavilion. A shout went up from all round as he was seen and recognised.

"Good old Handy!"

"Hurrah!"

"Jolly glad to see that you're yourself again, Handy!"

Church and McClure, who were on the other side of the field, could hardly believe their eyes. They were relieved and overjoyed.

"Well, thank goodness!" said Church. "This knock of his will probably put him in a good humour—and then that rotten trouble will be over."

But they were just a little too previous!



CHAPTER 12.

The Humiliation!

HANDFORTH was feeling overwhelmingly triumphant as he approached the wicket. He had done it! He had escaped from that horrible Form-room. He had escaped from old Crowell, and he was about to take his knock! It just showed what could be done by a fellow of determination and courage!

Handforth was further overjoyed because he saw that several of the girls from the Moor View School were among the spectators. Irene Manners was there—and Handy had always had a particularly soft spot for the fair Irene. She was going to see his triumph! She would know nothing about his ill-temper of the morning.

"By George! What an ass I've been!" muttered Handforth light-heartedly. "Well, I shall be different after this—that's all!"

He had to pass Nipper's end in order to reach his own crease, and Nipper was looking at him curiously as he drew level.

"How did you manage it, Handy?" asked Nipper.

"That's all right!" said Handforth. "I'm playing, isn't that good enough?"

"Great Scott!" ejaculated Nipper. "You don't mean to say that you cut extra lesson?"

"That's exactly what I have done, my son!"

"Then you're mad!" said Nipper anxiously. "Why, man alive, you can't play those sort of tricks with Mr. Crowell!"

"Can't I?" said Edward Oswald. "Well, I've done it!"

And then came the bombshell.

Mr. Crowell himself appeared in sight, and the master of the Remove was looking very excited; he was also looking dangerously angry!

He had come out to the playing-fields to speak to Fenton of the Sixth, and, quite by chance, he had glanced at the junior game. Something familiar about the walk of the

new batsman had attracted his attention. Then, recognising him, Mr. Crowell had halted in his tracks as though paralysed.

"Handforth!"

For the moment Mr. Crowell could hardly believe his eyes. He had left Handforth in the class-room, hard at work. Yet here he was, on Little Side, preparing to take his place at the wicket in the junior game against the River House School! It was incredible.

Never for a moment did Mr. Crowell intend to be flouted in this way. Certainly he was not going to allow this rebellious boy to override him. Obviously Handforth had got out of the window, and, as he had already been in flannels, he had taken advantage of his liberty. Mr. Crowell was staggered by the reckless audacity of the junior's manoeuvre.

It was the most blatant example of defiance that Mr. Crowell had ever encountered. If he allowed Handforth to play in this game, he would never be able to assert his authority again.

Handforth, all unconscious of Mr. Crowell's rapid approach, was preparing to face the bowling. The field was no longer "at ease," but tense and expectant. Handy's slogging was famous, and it would be rather fun to get him out first ball. Every fieldsman was waiting for a catch.

But a signal came from one of the umpires, and the bowler checked as he was about to take his run. A master, with his gown flowing behind him in the breeze, had invaded the playing pitch.

"Well, this is a bit thick!" said one of the River House fellows. "What the dickens does this man want? Hasn't he got any more sense than to barge in like this, in the middle of a game?"

Nipper watched Mr. Crowell's approach with a complete understanding of the situation. He had been half expecting it. So Handforth had, indeed, cut extra lesson—and Mr. Crowell was on his track. The folly of the whole thing was startling.

"Hamilton!" snapped Mr. Crowell, as he drew opposite to Nipper. "Did you give Handforth permission to play in this game?"

"I didn't know he was here, sir, until he came on to the field," replied Nipper. "I had already given his place to another fellow!"

"Thank you, Hamilton!" said Mr. Crowell.

His voice was cold and steady, for, in truth, the Form-master was in an icy passion. He strode down the playing pitch.

Handforth watched him rather dazedly. He hadn't expected any such move as this. But he was determined not to give in. Here he was, and here he would stay! It didn't matter what punishment came afterwards, but he was jolly well going to take his knock.

The very sight of Handforth, at such close proximity, seemed to destroy Mr. Crowell's self-control. Fairly panting with anger, he reached forward and grabbed Handforth by the scruff of the neck.

"Come with me, boy!" he said harshly.

All sorts of shouts went up from all round the field.

"Here, leggo!" panted Handforth, wriggling. "I say, sir, chuck it, you know! I—I'm just going to take my innings——"

"You are coming with me, Handforth!" panted Mr. Crowell. "You impertinent young rascal! How dare you come out here, after I had given you strict instructions to remain in the Form-room? I intend to show you that my orders cannot be treated with impunity!"

The situation was becoming intolerable.

"I'll do the lines later, sir," said Handforth desperately. "For goodness' sake don't make a scene out here! There are all sorts of visitors looking on——"

He broke off. He suddenly remembered that the Moor View girls were there. Irene was looking on! Irene herself was seeing all this!

"I won't go!" he panted, with sudden ferocity. "No, by George! Leggo!"

"You unmitigated young reprobate!" shouted Mr. Crowell. "We will see whether you will come or not, Handforth!"

And such was his anger that even Handforth's strength was useless against him. He grabbed hold of the discomfited Edward Oswald by the scruff of the neck, and literally pushed him off the field. It was the most humiliating exhibition that anybody had ever seen in public. Handforth, squirming, shouting, gesticulating, was dragged away.

And Irene Manners & Co. had seen everything. The whole school had seen! The leader of Study D was like a madman as he was whirled back into detention!



CHAPTER 13.

Worse and Worse!

THERE!" panted Mr. Crowell, at last. "There, Handforth! Perhaps that will show you that I mean you to obey my orders!"

They were both in the Form-room; the door had slammed, and the key had been turned in the lock. Handforth was standing some little distance away, his clothing ruffled, his hair untidy, his eyes blazing.

"You've made me look ridiculous in front of everybody, sir!" he burst out passionately. "Couldn't you have let me alone? I'd have done the lines afterwards——"

"It was entirely your own fault, Handforth!" broke in Mr. Crowell. "The spirit of defiance is evidently flaming in you to-day. It is my intention to quell it! Get back to your work, sir!"

"Oh, it's a shame!" broke out Handforth. "In front of all those people——"

"Get back to your work!" thundered the Form-master.

An end must come to all things, good and bad, and Handforth was now beginning to feel thoroughly exhausted. He was suffering from the reaction. He felt that he hadn't the strength to defy Mr. Crowell any longer.

Indeed, the realisation of his conduct had rather stunned him. Now that it was all over, he appreciated the enormity of his offence, and he was rather surprised that Mr. Crowell hadn't taken him before the Head for a flogging. It was a relief to learn that Mr. Crowell intended to deal with him personally, and, dimly, Handforth was just beginning to understand what an arrant ass he had been.

His rage, so hot a minute before, was rapidly burning itself out. Nothing remained but self-condemnation and bitterness.

Yet, perhaps, it would be more correct to say that Handforth was filled with self-pity, rather than with self-condemnation. It wasn't that he blamed himself for everything that had happened to-day. He chose to believe that Fate had ordained it all. It was just his rotten luck.

Not by one whit had his animosity against Mr. Crowell decreased. His fury had gone, it was true, but he was left in a condition of cold sullenness. He was startled at the intensity of his hatred against the Form-master.

And still that obstinate spirit of his did not allow him to see the light. As far as he could understand, he hadn't done anything wrong. He wasn't to blame. The day had been one long series of misfortunes.

If Handforth could only have seen himself as others saw him, he would have had a shock. He would have seen a pig-headed fellow of burly proportions acting like a sulky child. He would have been astonished at his display of petulance and peevishness.

Yet, because he could not see himself in this way, he considered that he was the victim. Everybody else was to blame—not him! All the others were at fault! Everybody was mad!

He went on with his lines almost mechanically. He scrawled them atrociously. Not quite so badly as he had done that first lot, but sufficiently badly to warrant rejection when Mr. Crowell examined them. But he didn't care. He was still reckless, and perhaps Mr. Crowell would grow tired of this business, and would pass the lines.

Scratch, scratch, scratch!

Handforth's pen travelled over the sheets, and page after page was completed. At his desk, looking on relentlessly, sat Mr. Crowell. The master was quite cool now, but he was grim, too. There was nothing vindictive in Mr. Crowell's nature, and now that he had got Handforth back to his task he was content to let the matter rest there. He felt that Handforth had been sufficiently punished by that humiliation in front of the whole Junior School.

At just about tea-time, Mr. Crowell gave Handforth a splendid chance to repair a

good deal of the damage. Handforth, with characteristic obstinacy, threw it away.

"Handforth, lay down your pen for a moment," said the Form-master.

The junior looked up, his eyes smouldering.

"I want to get these lines done!" he growled.

"Nevertheless, one minute does not make much difference," said Mr. Crowell. "Handforth, I am very sorry that you have behaved in this way to-day. I do not want you to think that it gives me any pleasure to keep you here, in extra lesson. I am in no way pleased at the unfortunate scene which took place on the cricket field. But you were very wilful, Handforth, and it was necessary to act drastically. I hope you are sorry for your general conduct."

Handforth was silent. It was a fine opening. Mr. Crowell was giving him a chance to express his regret, and, if he did so, in all probability the Form-master would let him off the remainder of the lines. It was just like Mr. Crowell to do that.

But still Handforth remained silent.

"Well?" prompted Mr. Crowell at last.

"Have you nothing to say, Handforth?"

"No, sir," muttered Handforth stubbornly.

"I am very sorry," said Mr. Crowell. "I was half expecting that you might be willing to express your sorrow——"

"Why should I, sir?" broke in Handforth. "I've done nothing that I am sorry for! I'm not to blame! It's not my fault! Everything's been conspiring against me to-day——"

"Nonsense!" interrupted Mr. Crowell curtly. "You had better get on with your work. I can see that I was wrong in interrupting you."

Mr. Crowell's voice had become very cold. He was more angry than ever—angry in a quiet, icy way. He had given Handforth his chance, and Handforth had rejected it. Very well! The boy should suffer the extreme penalty now! There should be no concessions!

As for Handforth himself, he was foolishly congratulating himself for his firmness. At least, he was pleased to think of it as firmness. He did not recognise its true nature; he did not see that he was merely sulky.

And then, well after the tea-time hour, Mr. Crowell released him. By now he had completed four hundred and fifty lines of the imposition.

"No, Handforth, I do not want them now," said Mr. Crowell, as Handforth offered him the pages. "I want the complete imposition at seven-thirty. I will then examine it, and if it is satisfactory, nothing more will be said. But I warn you quite plainly that if the lines are badly executed I shall make you do them all over again. Now, don't forget. Bring me the imposition at seven-thirty."

Mr. Crowell unlocked the door, and walked out. Handforth was left alone, and he sat there, gazing balefully at the closed door.

"Blow him!" he muttered. "What do I care about him and his beastly threats? Just for that, I'll write these last lines worse than ever!"

Which proved quite clearly that Edward Oswald Handforth was in no chastened mood.



CHAPTER 14.

Idle Threats!

A GLOOMY silence reigned in Study D in the Ancient House, broken occasionally by a clink of a spoon in a teacup, or by the clatter of a plate.

Church and McClure were having tea.

And a more miserable-looking pair of youngsters could not have been found in a day's march. For over five minutes this silence had been maintained, and then the door opened, and Vivian Travers looked in.

"Well, well!" he said placidly. "What is this we see? Is something wrong in here, dear old fellows?"

"Don't rot, Travers!" growled Church, looking up. "You know very well what's wrong. Handy is still bottled up with old Crowell, and goodness knows when he'll be released!"

"At the risk of earning your displeasure, a love of truth compels me to say that I have no sympathy with Handforth," remarked Travers. "In fact, I don't think you'll find a single fellow in the Remove who has any sympathy for him. When a man asks for trouble, why worry when he gets it?"

"That's true enough, of course," said Church glumly. "But it isn't like Handy to keep a thing up all day in this way. It's so—so unusual! Ever since he got out of bed this morning he's been impossible."

"And as for that affair this afternoon, I shudder to think of it!" said McClure. "Everybody thinks it was rotten of old Crowell to yank Handforth off the field like that. Dash it, he might have let the chap stay on the pitch until he had had his knock!"

"Thereby casting all his authority to the wind?" said Travers, shaking his head. "No, no, dear old fellow! Much as I loathe masters, as a class, I'm bound to cast my vote in favour of old Crowell. He did the only thing possible. Handforth has defied him, so he yanked Handforth off the field."

"Oh, well, everything's in a rotten state," said Church gruffly. "I hope to goodness Handy will have the sense to chuck up his idiotic behaviour to-night. Another day like this would finish me off!"

"Listen!" said Mac, with a start. "He's coming!"

Vivian Travers glanced round as a familiar footstep sounded down the passage. Sure

enough, a moment later Handforth hove into view.

"Allow me!" said Travers politely.

He stood aside, shielding his face with his hands. Handforth stared at him as he was about to enter the study.

"What the dickens do you think you're doing?" he demanded grimly.

"It is just as well to be prepared," replied Travers. "To-day, dear old fellow, you have a reputation for lashing out without warning. You have been seen to strike poor innocents down without provocation."

"Idiot!" snapped Handforth.

He pushed past, and strode into the study. But the glance that he bestowed on Church and McClure was in no way friendly.

"Oh," he said sourly, "so you're having tea, eh? It never occurred to you to wait for me?"

"We—we didn't know you were coming, Handy!" protested Church. "Don't be unreasonable. Besides, after the way—you've been going about to-day—like a bear with a sore head—we're not particularly keen on having tea with you, anyhow."

"I thought so," said Handforth bitterly. "Everybody's against me—even my own study mates. All right, I don't care! How did the match go?" he added abruptly.

"We lost," said Mac.

"Of course we lost!" said Handforth. "What else did you expect? But if I'd had my innings, we should have won. By George, I'm going to slaughter Crowell for what he did this afternoon. I'm going to make him wish he'd never been born!"

"Easy, Handy—easy!" warned Travers, from the doorway. "Your voice isn't particularly quiet."

"I don't care who hears me!" shouted Handforth. "So you managed to lose the game, did you?"

"Yes, they beat us by five wickets," said Church. "We got only fifty-nine, all out. Then the River House chaps went in, and got an easy sixty, well before tea. And as a shower came on they called it a game, and packed up."

"Huh!" said Handforth, with contempt. "Fifty-nine—all out! There's a fine score for the Junior Eleven! By George, if I had been allowed to have my knock, I should have made half a century off my own bat! But, no! That beast of a Crowell stopped me! He dragged me off the field in front of everybody! Even in front of Irene! I'm going to make him suffer!" he added fiercely. "By George, just you wait until I've finished with him!"

Church simply could not keep silent.

"Don't be such a howling ass, Handy!" he burst out. "Where's the sense of blaming Crowell? You brought it all on yourself, didn't you?"

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

"That's rot!" said Church. "You know jolly well how you acted in the class-room this morning. It's a wonder Crowell didn't take you to the Head to be flogged. And

then, too, the way you knocked poor old Archie down—for nothing! You asked for that big impot., and you got it. And if you choose to cut extra lesson, what else could you expect from old Crowell? Naturally he came on to the field, and hauled you off. Why don't you try blaming yourself, instead of putting everything on to other people's shoulders?"

"Well spoken!" said Travers, nodding.

"Who told you to interfere?" bellowed Handforth, swinging round.

"Sorry—frightfully sorry!" said Travers, bowing. "Allow me to apologise. For the moment, I forgot myself. At the same time, I would like it to go on record that I heartily endorse everything that Church has just said."

Handforth was red with fresh anger. Something told him that these fellows were right. The blame *was* his! But he wouldn't admit it. Never—never!

"I don't care for any of you!" he said harshly. "You're a lot of rotters! And Crowell's going to get it hot from me, I tell you. I'm going to have my own back on him!"

"Oh, let's clear!" said Church, rising to his feet. "If you're going to keep on quarrelling, Handy, Mac and I had better go. We don't want to speak to you again until you're in a different mood."

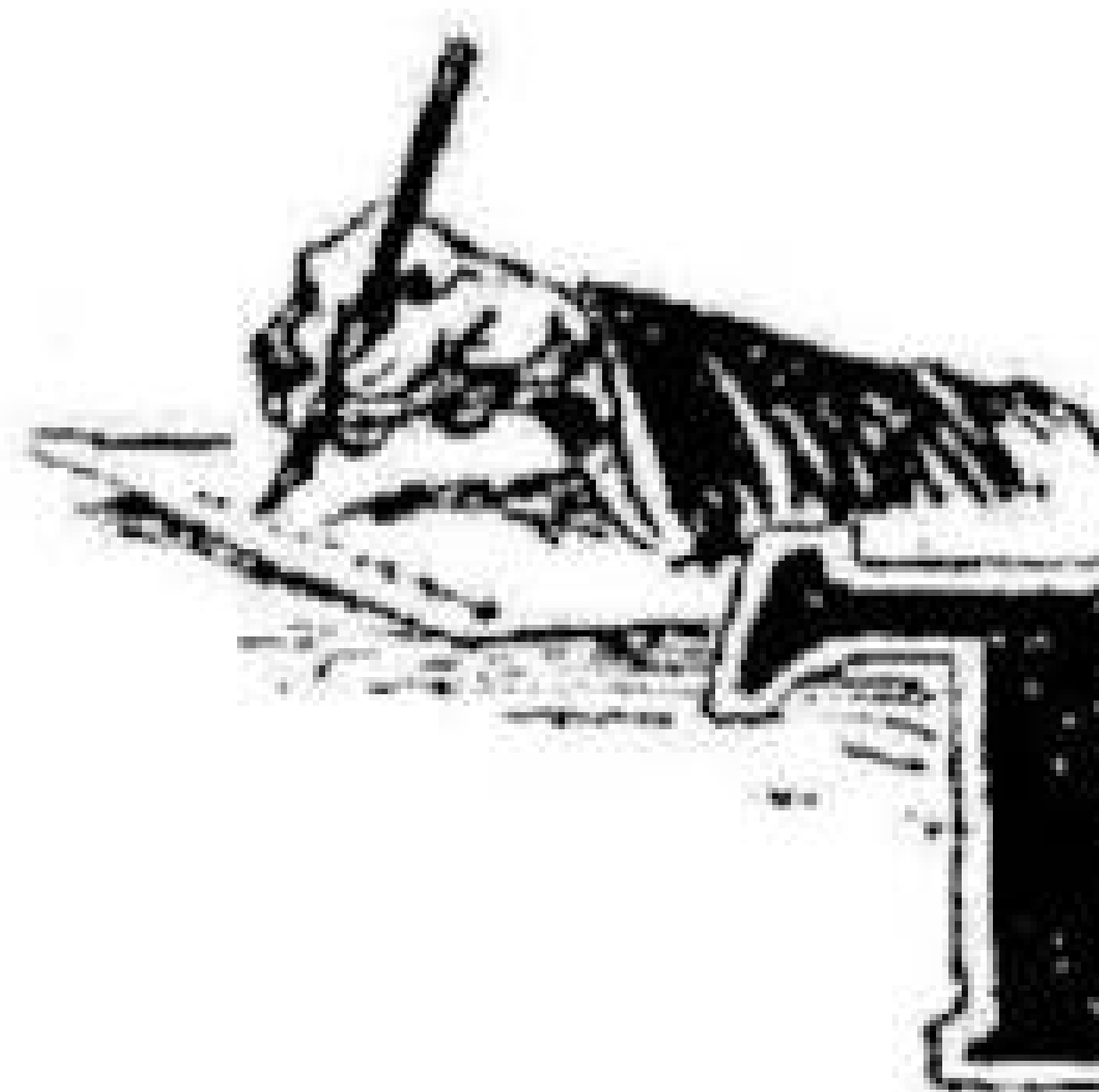
"I shall never be in a different mood!" flared Handforth.

"Then we never want to speak to you again!" retorted Church.

Whereat he and McClure strode out of the study, and closed the door behind them. Handforth stood there, listening to his chums talking to Travers as they all went down the corridor. And Handforth sat down abruptly, staring straight in front of him.

CHAPTER 15.

Realisation!



TEA, for Handforth, was out of the question.

He was right off his meals to-day. Church and McClure had just "walked out on him." Handforth was so surprised that he was almost stunned. All the afternoon he had been telling himself that his chums would be only too willing to plead with him to be friendly once more.

He expected to come to Study D, and to have Church and McClure begging of him to "chuck it." But they had told him, quite plainly that they wanted nothing further to do with him until he was in a different mood. This, indeed, was an eyeopener for Handforth.

It made him think as, sitting there at the untidy tea-table, he gazed unseeingly out of the window into the evening sunshine of

"You unmitigated young reprobate!" shouted Mr. Crowell. "We will see whether you will come or not!" And, before the whole school—before Irene & Co.—he grabbed hold of the discomfited Handforth by the scruff of the neck and pushed him off the field. It was the most humiliating moment of Handforth's life!



the West Square. It made him think deeply.

"They don't want me!" he muttered miserably. "By George! I wonder if I have been a bit rotten to-day?"

Somewhere at the back of his mind doubt was creeping in. He was fed up with the whole business, and badly wanted things to go on in the ordinary way.

But who was to make the first move? Things were awkward now. Church and McClure had told him that they wouldn't speak to him again—until he was different. Well, hang it, he was certainly not going to grovel before them! Not likely!

So it seemed that a deadlock might occur.

Six o'clock boomed out while Handforth was thinking, and he suddenly came to himself. Only an hour and a half before he had to deliver the impot.! And there were lots of lines to write yet.

He pushed the tea things aside, and went on with his work. His hand was aching atrociously from the effect of the lines he had already written. His fingers were numb, and now and again it became agony to hold the pen. Incidentally, his hands were still sore from the effects of that swishing he had received during the morning.

Although a dimly awakening realisation was coming to him, he had lost none of his animosity against Mr. Crowell. With a kind of malicious joy, he deliberately scrawled those remaining lines. He made an awful hash of them. The first four hundred and fifty had been bad enough, but these remaining lines were truly terrible. He was in a "don't care" mood. So what did it matter if there was a fresh row over this impot.?

All the better if there was! The more he could defy old Crowell, the better he would like it. He made up his mind that he would show the Form-master that he wasn't the kind of fellow to be played about with! Mr. Crowell would be sorry for himself before he had finished with Handforth.

So, still in this unrepentant mood, Handforth finished his lines. His eyes were gleaming as he gathered all the sheets together, and put them in a heap.

"Now, we'll see how he likes 'em!" he muttered. "I'll teach him who's boss!"

He left Study D, and walked along the passages until he came to Mr. Crowell's room. He tapped on the door, and entered. One glance round was sufficient to tell him that the Form-master's study was empty.

This wasn't in accordance with Handforth's programme, and he hardly knew what to do. True, it wasn't seven-thirty yet, and

that had been the hour of the appointment. Handforth didn't like to wait there—because, for one thing, it was strictly forbidden for a junior to be in a master's room alone. Not that Handforth cared much about this part of it. He was restless. He didn't want to stay there.

So he put the lines on the table, right in the middle of Mr. Crowell's blotting pad,



and went out. He returned to Study D, and threw himself into the easy chair.

"Well, that's over!" he murmured. "And Crowell needn't think that I'm going to do any prep. to-night. Not likely—after working all the giddy afternoon! And if there's a row in the morning, all the better!"

Handforth sat there, thinking of the cricket match. He was thinking, too, of Irene. What did she think? What *could* she think? What had the other fellows been telling her? In all probability, they had explained that he had been acting the fool all day.

He half thought of hurrying straight off to the Moor View School, so that he could have a word with his girl chum. It was rather a pity that he did not do so, for

Irene might have brought him to his senses.

But Handforth didn't trouble to move. He just lolled there, thinking. He was too fed up with everything in general to take any action. As for scheming out a plan of revenge against Mr. Crowell, such an idea did not occur to him. All his threats had been idle ones. For even when Handforth was in a temper, he wasn't vindictive. There was nothing like that in his nature.

"You unmitigated young reprobate!" shouted Mr. Crowell. "We will see whether you will come or not!" And, before the whole school—before Irene & Co.—he grabbed hold of the discomfited Handforth by the scruff of the neck and pushed him off the field. It was the most humiliating moment of Handforth's life!



His conscience was beginning to prick him now, too. Why had he been such an absolute ass? After all, he had written those lines in an awful way. What would Mr. Crowell say about them?

The school clock chimed the half hour, and Handforth started. It was half-past seven!

He rose to his feet. Perhaps it would be better if he went back to Mr. Crowell's study,

and had the thing out. He knew there was bound to be a lot of trouble over those rottenly-written lines. Well, Handforth wasn't the fellow to run away from trouble. It might be better to have it out straight away. But a glint came into his eyes as he told himself that he would never write those lines again.

He went out of the study, and almost the first person he ran into in the passage was Willy, his minor. And Willy Handforth, of the Third, was looking flushed and anxious.

"Hallo, Ted!" he said breathlessly. "Seen Marmaduke anywhere?"

"Your beastly monkey? Of course I haven't!" retorted Handforth. "It's about time you trained that pet of yours——"

"He nipped out while my back was turned!" interrupted Willy. "By Jove, I'll give the little beggar something after I've caught him. But don't say a word, Ted—nobody else knows! And if you spot him, for goodness' sake collar him, then smuggle him along to me."

"Oh, go and eat coke!" said Handforth. "I can't be bothered with your silly monkey——"

"But he'll be killed, or sold, if any of the masters get to know that he's escaped!" said Willy anxiously. "And you know how fond I am of old Marmy! When he escaped the last time I was warned. If it happened again—Marmaduke would have to go! And now the little bounder has popped off somewhere. Thank goodness nobody else has seen him about—or else the whole House would be talking!"

Willy hurried off, continuing his frantic search. Handforth went on his way to Mr. Crowell's study, and he had forgotten Marmaduke, the monkey, long before he arrived at his destination.

But he was soon to receive a reminder!

CHAPTER 16.

Marmaduke's
Busy Hour!



AP-TAP!

There was no response to Handforth's light knock

—so he opened the door of Mr. Crowell's study, and entered. He muttered an ejaculation of annoyance almost before he got inside, for it was clear to him that the Form-master was still absent. The electric light was not switched on, and the study was in semi-darkness.

It was quite dusk outside now, and as the evening had been very fine the window was

open, and the curtains were drawn fully aside. Sufficient twilight came in to enable Handforth to see everything in the room.

And then, just as he had got over the threshold, he came to a sudden halt.

"What the—— Well, I'm jiggered!" he muttered blankly.

Handforth stood still, dumbfounded. For the sight that met his gaze was sufficient to startle anybody. He had departed from that study, about half an hour earlier, leaving everything neat and tidy. Mr. Crowell was a great stickler for neatness, and his study was always scrupulously exact. Everything was in its place—everything in apple-pie order.

And now——!

Almost the first thing that Handforth saw was an incredible amount of litter on the floor. Right across the carpet, from the door to the desk, and, indeed, on every other part of the carpet, papers were littered, some of them crumpled into little balls. Tattered remnants and torn shreds were everywhere. These crumpled sheets of paper were all over the desk, too. The study was in an extraordinary state.

Handforth took a pace forward, his heart beating more rapidly, his eyes almost starting out of his head.

"What the dickens can it mean?" he muttered dazedly.

His eyes were accustomed to the dusk now, and he could see everything much more clearly. It gave him a fresh shock when he noted that both the inkpots had been overturned, and the ink, red and black, had been splashed over everything on the desk.

Indeed, that desk was an atrocious sight. Mr. Crowell's books were ruined. They were dripping with ink. There were pools of ink on the carpet, and there were great splashes of it down the wallpaper. The general damage was terrific.

And then Handforth made another discovery. This was one which brought his heart leaping into his mouth. More by chance than anything else, he picked up one of the crumpled sheets of paper from the desk, and something familiar about it attracted his attention. He looked more closely, and then gasped.

"My impot!" he ejaculated, horrified.

It was a sheet of his imposition!

Like a fellow demented, he examined some of the other sheets. He went on his hands and knees and picked up many of the sheets from the floor. Yes, they were all part of his impot.! And it was torn into shreds—crumpled and ruined!

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Handforth stood there aghast. Who could have been so vindictive, so criminally destructive, as to enter this study and——

Handforth's thoughts came to an abrupt and startled standstill. A queer, chattering sound had come to his ears, and the very next second a brownish little figure leapt upon the desk and sat there, right in the middle of Mr. Crowell's blotting-pad. Two gleaming eyes gazed at Handforth, and there was a flash of sharp white teeth.

"Marmaduke!" breathed Edward Oswald, a great light dawning upon him.

Willy's pet monkey! Of course, the thing was as clear as daylight now. Marmaduke had strayed through the open window and he had found the room empty. The rest was easy to imagine. Marmaduke had found that impot. lying invitingly on the desk, and he had proceeded systematically to tear it up, sheet after sheet! It was just like one of Marmaduke's destructive tricks.

But the monkey had not been merely content with that. He had thrown the ink all over the place, he had torn Mr. Crowell's precious books into shreds, too. There were even leaves from a morocco-bound volume of "The Encyclopædia Britannica," lying about on the desk, torn and ink-stained.

"Oh, my only hat!" said Handforth hoarsely.

Perhaps Marmaduke thought that Handforth was uttering words of appreciation. At any rate, the monkey danced up and down and chattered gaily.

"You—you little brute!" panted Handforth, glaring at the monkey. "No wonder Willy was so jolly anxious to get hold of you again! So this is what you do when you get free? You've done pounds' worth of damage here, you little demon!"

Marmaduke playfully lifted up Mr. Crowell's gum-pot, and with a chatter of delight he poured the gum all over the Form-master's mortar-board, which was lying on the desk.

"Stop it!" shouted Handforth desperately.

He made a grab at the monkey, but Marmaduke was too quick for him. He dodged, slithering off the desk like a streak of lightning. Handforth blundered forward, and both his hands splashed into the pools of ink on the mahogany surface of the desk. But he hardly noticed this as he spun round. Marmaduke was on the mantelshelf now, scattering the ornaments.

Crash! Crash!

A couple of glass vases clattered into the fireplace, where they splintered to atoms. Marmaduke leapt across, in one clean jump, and perched himself on the top of the bookcase. Handforth blundered round and reached up.

"So you think you can get away from me, eh?" he panted, as he pulled a chair towards him. "We'll see about that, you dangerous little sweep! By George! I'd better collar

him and smuggle him back to Willy! There'll be an unholy row over this later on! Thank goodness Crowell hasn't seen it!"

Standing on the chair, he was able to reach to the top of the bookcase. But Handforth was an optimist if he believed that he could catch the agile little monkey. With another of his leaps, Marmaduke reached the desk, hopped down, and bounded on to the window-sill. Handforth was after him hot foot.

"Now I've got you!" he panted.

But he was wrong. Marmaduke was outside, streaking off into the dusk. In fact, Handforth hardly caught a sight of him. In next to no time, Marmaduke had vanished, even before Handforth could get one leg over the window-sill.

And just then, by an extraordinary cruel stroke of chance, the study door opened and Mr. Crowell walked in.

In that first second, Mr. Crowell sensed that something was wrong. Even before he switched the light on he could tell. He saw the litter on the floor dimly, and he saw the figure over by the window—a figure climbing out!

"Who is that?" he demanded sharply.

Handforth gave an incoherent gulp, for he was too startled to say anything intelligible. The next second he was dazzled by the sudden flood of electric light as Mr. Crowell pressed down the switch.

"Handforth!" shouted the Form-master. "Good heavens, boy, what have you done?"



CHAPTER 17.

Circumstantial Evidence!

EDWARD OSWALD HANDFORTH was petrified by Mr. Crowell's words.

For they were significant words. They told Handforth, on the flash, that Mr. Crowell associated him with this scene of destruction.

"Good gracious me!" said the Form-master, staring round him in bewilderment. "This—this is appalling! The whole place is a shambles!"

The more he looked round, the greater became his anger and stupefaction. He strode forward, the crumpled papers treading underfoot.

"My desk—my desk!" he shouted despairingly. "Good heavens—my books—my papers! Everything is destroyed—everything ruined!"

He gazed round the room, and saw the splashes of ink on the wallpaper. He saw the shattered ornaments in the fireplace, and he saw, incidentally, the significant inkstains on Handforth's hands. Edward Oswald was still sitting on the window-sill, too dumb-founded to move.

"Handforth!" panted Mr. Crowell. "Come here! Come inside! Do you hear me, boy?"

"But—but—" began Handforth helplessly.

"Not a word!" thundered Mr. Crowell. "I have seen enough! You wretched young rascal! You vindictive——"

"But—but I didn't do it, sir!" shouted Handforth indignantly. "Great Scott! You don't think I did all this destruction, do you?"

The words came from him in a torrent, but the effect of them was only to make Mr. Crowell more angry.

"Handforth, I have had trouble with you all day!" he said, his voice trembling. "And now, to cap all, you have done this!"

"But I haven't sir!"

"How you can have the audacity to stand there lying to me is more than I can possibly comprehend!" panted Mr. Crowell. "Your inkstained hands is proof of your guilt. I am staggered, Handforth—I am utterly and absolutely stupefied!"

If it came to that, Handforth was in very much the same condition. Yet he could hardly blame the Form-master for jumping to such an obvious conclusion. The circumstantial evidence was as black as thunder against the junior.

Never for an instant did Mr. Crowell believe that anybody but Handforth had created this destruction and havoc. More than once during that evening Mr. Crowell had heard rumours that Handforth had been threatening to have revenge. Well, this was it! This was Handforth's idea of "getting his own back"!

It was all so clear—all so obvious. Mr. Crowell had even come in just as Handforth had been getting out of the window. The Form-master hadn't seen the slightest sign of the monkey, and there wasn't a clue left in the room to show that Willy's pet had been there. Only Handforth—and Handforth was known to have a grudge against Mr. Crowell, and Handforth was smothered in ink.

The thing was as clear as daylight.

"These papers!" said Mr. Crowell dully, as he looked round the floor. "What are they? Where have they come from? Upon my word! I do not know whether I am on my head or my heels! Never have I seen any scene such as this! Oh, you vicious young wretch!"

"These papers are my impot., sir!" panted Handforth. "I put them on your desk and left them there. But when I came back, about five minutes ago, I found everything upside down——"

"If you attempt again to disclaim responsibility for this destruction——"

"But I didn't do it I tell you, sir!" broke in Handforth despairingly. "Oh, I say! You don't think I'd be rotter enough for that, sir?"

"These papers are your imposition, eh?" broke in Mr. Crowell. "Indeed!"

An idea came to him, and he picked up two or three of the crumpled sheets. He

smoothed them out; he saw the atrocious handwriting which Handforth had perpetrated. And now Mr. Crowell was angrier than ever.

"I think I begin to see!" he said tensely. "Yes, Handforth. A very clever trick—a very cunning dodge! But, even now, I cannot understand the working of your mind. What was your object in doing all this?"

Handforth was husky with alarm.

"I tell you, sir, that I didn't do it!" he repeated.

"If you didn't—who did?" snapped the Form-master. "Who did, Handforth?"

"Why, it was——"

And then, with the words on the very tip of his tongue, Handforth checked himself. He had been about to say that Willy's monkey was responsible. Then he remembered Willy's warning words.

Handforth was bowled over by this fresh thought. It hit him with the force of a physical blow. For he suddenly realised that

his tongue was tied. He could not possibly "peach" on Marmaduke! For, if he did, the monkey would be forthwith sold, or destroyed. And Marmaduke was Willy's fondest pet!

No, he could only keep silent. It wasn't for the monkey's sake that Handforth came to this decision—but for Willy's. Never would he betray his minor! Handforth had very strict ideas on the subject of sneaking. Willy would get into appalling trouble if the truth came out about Marmaduke's escapade—and Marmaduke himself would be banished for ever. So Handforth compressed his lips, and swallowed something that had come up into his throat.

"Well, Handforth?" said Mr. Crowell. "What were you going to say?"

"Nothing, sir!" muttered Handforth.

"You admit that you are guilty?"

"No, I don't, sir!" said Handforth. "I didn't do it—but I can't tell you who did!"

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Handforth, for having the brains of a dolt—for even a dolt could understand that you are guilty. I am going straight to the headmaster, and I shall report this matter to him."

Handforth made no reply. He was trying to think—trying to devise some way of clearing himself. But how could he? The evidence was complete. He had been caught in the act!

"You will wait here, Handforth!" went on Mr. Crowell tensely. "Before I take you to the headmaster, I want to have a word with him alone. So you will wait here. If you are missing when I return, so much the worse for you!"

The Form-master flung himself out of the room, and slammed the door. Handforth was taken by surprise. He had expected to be hauled away at once, and he was grateful for this respite. Mr. Crowell had no fear, of course, that the junior would try to bolt. For what was the use of bolting? He would soon be found, even if he did get away somewhere.

A moment or two after Mr. Crowell had gone a thought came to Handforth. He turned to the window, looked out into the dusk, and then vaulted over the sill!



CHAPTER 18.

Standing By His Major!

HANDFORTH lost no time, once he got outside. At the double he dodged round to the rear door of the Ancient House and entered.

Greatly to his relief, he met nobody. He went straight to the Third Form quarters, and burst into Willy Handforth's little study. He had been half afraid that he would meet some of the other Removites on the way, and he didn't want that just now. Time was precious, and he simply *had* to have a few words with his minor.

"Oh, hallo, Ted!"

Willy spoke cheerily. He was alone in that little study, and Handforth was immensely pleased to discover this. Closing the door, he stood there with his back to it. Willy stared at him in wonder.

"What's wrong, Ted?" he asked. "You're acting pretty rummily, aren't you?"

"Your monkey—" began Handforth.

"Yes, I know," nodded Willy. "Disobedient little beggar! But you needn't worry, Ted, I've found him."

"Yes, but—"

"I came across him streaking along the wall, at the back of the House," said Willy. "Of course, he came like a shot in answer to my whistle, and he was put back into his cage pretty promptly, I can tell you. Nothing to worry about now, though."

"Nothing to worry about!" echoed Handforth hoarsely. "Oh, my hat!"

"Why, do you know anything?" asked Willy, in a curious voice. "What's Marmaduke been up to? His paws were inky, I know, but—"

"I'll tell you what he's been up to!" interrupted Handforth hoarsely. "That monkey of yours, my lad, will probably get me expelled from the school!"

"What the dickens—"

"Within an hour I shall be sacked, I expect!" went on Edward Oswald bitterly. "And all through that monkey of yours!"

"Don't be silly, Ted," said Willy quietly. "There's no chance of you getting sacked because of Marmy. Why can't you tell me what's happened?"

"You know I've been doing an impot. for old Crowell?"

"Who doesn't know it?"

"Well, I went to his study about a quarter of an hour ago, and I found Marmaduke in there!" said Handforth. "The study was a wreck!"

"What?"

"An absolute wreck!" said Handforth. "Papers littered everywhere, books destroyed, ink over everything, and goodness knows what else. I tell you, Willy, that the whole place is wrecked. And Crowell thinks *I* did it!"

"*You!*" yelled Willy.

"Well, you see, I was in the room, alone," explained Handforth. "At least, I was alone except for that monkey of yours. But I chased him out, and I was just following him through the window when Crowell came in."

"Phew!" whistled Willy, pulling a long face. "Naturally, old Crowell thought that you did it. You can't blame him for that. Ted. What else was he to think? Why didn't you tell him that Marmaduke had done it?"

"How the dickens could I?" growled Handforth. "Didn't you tell me that Marmaduke would be banished—"

"If there's a choice between Marmaduke and you, old son, there's not much question as to which one will have to go," broke in Willy. "You ought to have told Crowell the truth, you ass! You ought to have explained that Marmaduke had been in there, and that he had created all the destruction. Then Crowell would have understood."

"Would he?" muttered Handforth. "I wonder! Somehow, I believe that he would still have suspected me!"

"Oh, come off it!"

"But don't you see, Willy, there's absolutely no evidence," went on Handforth. "Crowell only saw me, and it seemed to him that I was trying to escape through the window. I tell you, he wouldn't have believed that yarn about the monkey, especially as I've been idiot enough to go gassing about the place saying that I was going to be revenged on him!"

"Where's Crowell now?"

"Gone to the Head!"

"Isn't it a rummy thing that he didn't take you with him?"

"Yes, rather," said Handforth. "I suppose he wanted to report the thing privately first. I'm supposed to be in Crowell's study now—waiting."

"Well, you'd better buzz back in case you get into trouble. Leave this to me."

"And what do you suppose you can do?"

"I can do a lot," replied Willy. "You can be jolly certain, anyhow, that I'm not going to leave you in the cart, old man."

A sudden thought struck Handforth major.

"Did anybody else know that Marmaduke had escaped?" he asked.

"No."

"There you are, then!" said the leader of Study D. "We're the only ones in the secret, and your monkey is back in its cage now. Even if I wanted to, I couldn't bring forward any witnesses. I couldn't produce anybody to say that the monkey had escaped."

"What about me?"

"You don't count," replied Handforth. "You're my brother—and you're the monkey's owner. I'm talking about an independent witness."

"The truth is the truth, and there's nothing safer than the truth," said Willy. "Don't you worry, Ted. You go back to Crowell's study, and wait there as you were ordered. I'll stand by you."

Handforth went, all his former troubles dwarfed by the enormity of this latest catastrophe. It had brought him to his senses. At last he was realising how badly he had behaved during the day.

He went back to Mr. Crowell's study in a very miserable frame of mind. No wonder old Crowell had jumped to such a conclusion. Hadn't he been playing up Crowell the whole day long? Wasn't it natural that the Form-master would believe the worst of him? What an arrant idiot he had been?

And meanwhile, Willy was on his way across Inner Court towards the Head's house. Willy had come to a decision, and Willy was a fellow of action.

There was only one thing to be done.

He was going straight to the Head, to tell him the full truth. It would probably mean the loss of Marmaduke, but what did that matter? Ted had to be exonerated at all costs. Marmaduke was guilty, and so Marmaduke would have to suffer. The issue was quite simple.

So it came about that while Handforth was waiting in Mr. Crowell's study, and while Willy was making for the Head's house, everybody else in the school knew nothing about the incident. Nobody had been told—nobody heard the faintest inkling of it. So there was no discussion—no comment. It wasn't possible for any of the fellows to express an opinion.

And nobody knew that Marmaduke had been at liberty during that evening. Willy had kept it mum, and he had believed that everything was all right. In many ways, the situation was grave. But the young captain of the Third had plenty of confidence as he presented himself at the Head's front door.



CHAPTER 19.

Nothing But the Truth!

DR. MALCOLM STAFFORD sat back in his chair, and absent-mindedly polished his pince-nez. His face was grave, and his brow was troubled.

"This is a very serious matter, Mr. Crowell," he said. "Indeed, if I had heard the story from any other source, I might have found it difficult to believe it."

Mr. Crowell, who was sitting on the other side of the Head's desk, leaned forward.

"Indeed, sir, I find it very difficult to believe myself," he said. "That any boy could be so destructive is startling. But I would remind you that I caught Handforth red-handed. He was in the act of escaping when I entered the study."

"Yes, yes, Mr. Crowell, I quite understand that," said the Head. "How terrible! I am pained beyond measure. Did you report the matter to the boy's Housemaster?"

"Mr. Lee is out, sir, so I could not do so," replied Mr. Crowell. "I came straight to you."

"I will have Handforth brought to me," said the Head, as he placed his glasses on his nose. "I must question him—I must get to know why he did this wicked act."

"I do not think there is much doubt on that score, sir," said Mr. Crowell. "Handforth has been most difficult all day. I have had very great trouble with him. In ordinary circumstances I should not have reported this to you, but I really think that the occasion demands a further explanation."

And Mr. Crowell went into the details of the day's doings. He explained how obstinate Handforth had been during morning lessons—how he had escaped from detention—how he had deliberately written his lines in such a fashion that they could not possibly be passed.

"The boy has been awkward ever since breakfast-time," concluded Mr. Crowell. "It is very seldom, indeed, that I have to make such a serious complaint against Handforth. He is one of the best boys in my Form. Clumsy, impetuous and noisy, but otherwise scrupulously honest and trustworthy."

"I know—I know!" said the Head, frowning. "Handforth has a very good character. That is why I am so astounded at his present conduct. It seems so foreign to his nature."

There was a tap on the door, and Phipps, the Head's butler, appeared.

"Yes, Phipps?" said Dr. Stafford, glancing up.

"Master Handforth, of the Third Form, is here, sir," said Phipps. "He particularly wishes to speak with you. He requested me to inform you that the matter is vitally urgent."



The moment after he had hit Archie Glenthorne Handforth regretted it. He made to bend over the fallen junior, but before he could utter a syllable, a shout came from the direction of West Arch. "Handforth! Leave that boy alone!" Handforth gulped. It was the voice of Mr. Crowell, and the Form-master was rustling towards the scene, his face red with anger.

"That would be Handforth minor," said Mr. Crowell quickly.

"Does he know of his brother's recent conduct?" asked the Head.

"Not that I know of, sir," replied Mr. Crowell. "I told Handforth to remain in my study; but it is quite likely he has disobeyed my orders. He has been disobeying me all day."

The Head looked across at Phipps.

"You will bring the boy in," he said shortly.

A minute later, Willy Handforth entered. He had expected to find Mr. Crowell there, and he was rather glad of it. It was better that Mr. Crowell should hear the truth, too.

"Well, Handforth minor?" said the Head. "I hope you realise that I am granting you a big concession by allowing this interview? It is not usual for me to see boys of the Junior School at this hour of the evening."

"No, sir, I know it," replied Willy, coming up to the desk and standing at attention. "It's about my major, sir."

"Has your brother told you that he has committed a particularly vicious act of destruction in Mr. Crowell's study?" asked the

headmaster sternly. "Have you seen your brother since that episode?"

"Yes, sir," said Willy. "Ted came to me about a quarter of an hour ago. He disobeyed Mr. Crowell's orders, and left Mr. Crowell's study. But there's nothing in that, sir. Ted isn't guilty!"

"But this is nonsense!" said Mr. Crowell. "I saw your brother escaping from the window——"

"He wasn't escaping, sir," interrupted Willy. "He was chasing Marmaduke."

"Marmaduke!"

"My monkey, sir," said Willy, turning to the Head.

"Good gracious! Your--your monkey?"

"Yes, sir. One of my pets."

"What are you talking about, Handforth minor?" demanded Dr. Stafford. "Do you expect me to believe that your monkey caused all the damage in Mr. Crowell's study?"

"Yes, sir—and I hope you *will* believe it," said Willy. "Because it happens to be the simple truth. Soon after seven o'clock my monkey escaped, while I was cleaning out his cage. He dodged away, and I couldn't

find him. At about half-past seven my brother went into Mr. Crowell's study, and found the room upside down. Marmaduke was on the desk destroying things. Ted chased him, but the little beggar eluded him. In fact, Marmaduke got out of the window, and Ted was just going in chase when Mr. Crowell came in, and pulled him up. Honour bright, sir, my brother wasn't responsible for the damage done to Mr. Crowell's study."

For a moment there was silence. The Head was looking very dubious, and Mr. Crowell was positively unconvinced. As far as he knew, Willy was a very truthful boy, but this was an exceptional occasion. His brother's safety was at stake, and that made all the difference.

"Really, sir, I find it very difficult to believe this boy's story," said Mr. Crowell. "It would be hateful if we'd accused Handforth major unjustly. Heaven forbid such a thing! But, really, is it not obvious that this young boy has told this story on purpose to shield his brother?"

"I must confess it sounds very, very thin," said the Head gravely. "Handforth minor, you tell me that your—er—monkey escaped at about seven o'clock, and was at liberty until seven-thirty, or just after?"

"Yes, sir."

"How many boys helped you search for the animal?"

"None, sir," replied Willy steadily. "I didn't tell anybody except my brother. And I found the monkey later on out in the Triangle, in the dusk. Nobody knew that he had escaped except Ted."

The Head and Mr. Crowell exchanged significant glances.

"This is very serious, Handforth minor," said the Head. "You are telling me that it is quite impossible for you to bring corroborative evidence."

"Exactly, sir," said Mr. Crowell. "I saw no sign whatever of any monkey. Indeed, the whole story sounds preposterous to me."

Mr. Crowell was the last man in the world to be vindictive or unjust. But nobody on earth could blame him for taking his present view. Handforth had disobeyed orders, and he had seen his minor. What was easier, then, than to invent this story of the escaped monkey? Nobody else knew that the monkey had escaped—nobody had seen it at liberty.

And there was something else, which seemed, to Mr. Crowell, to clinch the matter utterly and completely!



CHAPTER 20.

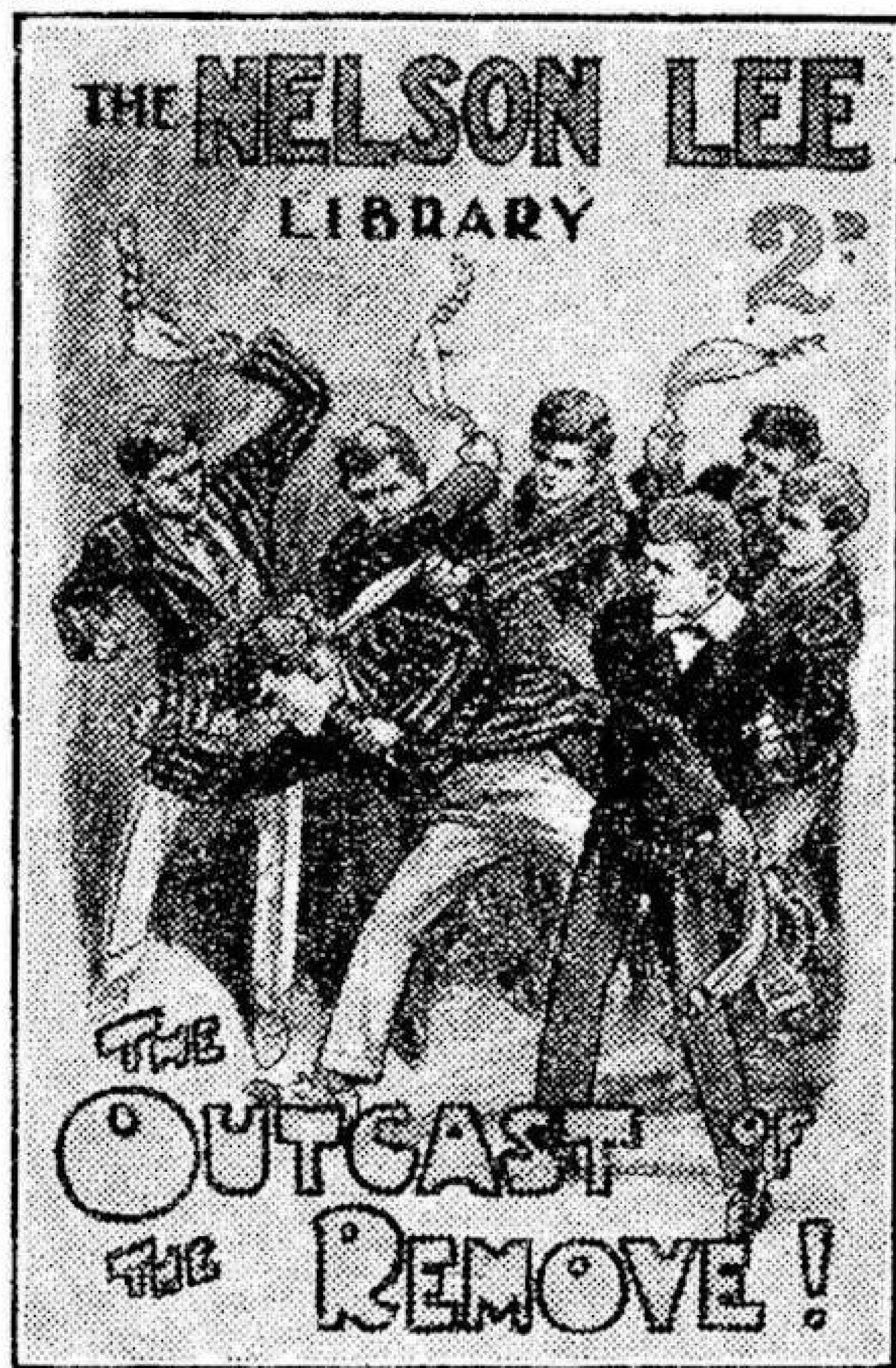
Mr. Crowell's Ingenious Theory!

WILLY looked anxiously from the headmaster to Mr. Crowell, but he saw no signs of credence. Both the gentlemen were clearly sceptical.

"I hardly know what to say to you, Handforth minor," exclaimed the Head, at length. "You have come to me with this story in an attempt to save your brother from punishment. It is, perhaps, natural that you should strive your hardest to that end. At the same time, there is no excuse for concocting a deliberate tissue of falsehood—"

"Please, sir," interrupted Willy urgently, "it's not fair! I've only told the truth, sir! Although nobody but Ted and I know of my monkey's escape, he *did* escape. And he *did* do all that damage to Mr. Crowell's study. My brother is absolutely innocent of it. That's the truth, sir!"

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"Dear me," said the Head, drumming his fingers on the desk. "You certainly speak very convincingly, Handforth minor. I would like to believe you."

"If Ted had really done it, sir, I wouldn't excuse him at all!" said Willy quietly.

"You must remember, my boy, that your brother has been heard to make many threats against Mr. Crowell during the day," said the Head. "He has been very awkward—very difficult. Mr. Crowell has had a great deal of trouble with him, and he had been threatening—"

"That's only Ted's gas, sir," said Willy,

in alarm. "He's always saying things he doesn't mean."

"May I be allowed to speak?" put in Mr. Crowell. "I really think, sir, that I have a theory that will fully explain the whole situation."

"Is any further explanation needed?" said the Head.

"Well, there is certainly one point that puzzled me," said the Form-master. "I could not quite understand why Handforth should destroy his own imposition. I have already told you, sir, that I found it strewn over the room, crumpled, torn and tattered. It struck me as incongruous that he should

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do such a thing, but I believe I know why he did it."

"The same point had occurred to me," nodded Dr. Stafford. "Well, what is it that you suggest?"

"I was obliged to destroy the first portion of Handforth's imposition," said Mr. Crowell shrewdly. "He had written the lines so atrociously that I could not possibly pass them. And I told him quite frankly that I would not examine the lines again until he had completed the entire task. Then I would look them over, and, if unsatisfactory, I told him that he would be compelled to write every word of the six hundred lines once more."

"And you think——"

"I know for a fact that he wrote his lines very badly indeed," said Mr. Crowell. "I examined some of those crumpled sheets, and I have brought two of them with me. See, sir! Look at them for yourself!"

He placed them triumphantly on the desk, and the Head, after adjusting his glasses, examined them.

"Upon my soul!" he said. "These—these are appalling, Mr. Crowell. Is it possible that the boy has the audacity to present an imposition to you in this condition?"

"As you can see, sir, the lines are written so badly that they are almost unintelligible," said the Form-master. "Handforth was in a very bad temper, and wilful. He must have known quite well that I should never pass that imposition."

"Naturally, you could not pass it."

"Handforth knew this, and he hit upon a very ingenious plan to delude me," continued Mr. Crowell. "Whether Handforth minor was in the plot at the time, I do not know. Possibly he was. But it seems to me that Handforth major deliberately destroyed the lines so that he would not have to write them again."

"Ah, I see what you mean!"

"He entered my study while I was absent, and tore the sheets up, one by one—smothered them with ink—crumpled them, and generally made them useless," pursued Mr. Crowell. "At the same time he did other damage—probably by way of satisfying his vindictive spirit. His intention was to get clear away. But he was just a shade too late, for I caught him in the act of climbing through the window."

"Oh, I say, sir, it's all wrong!" burst out Willy indignantly. "My major isn't the kind of chap to plot a thing of that sort——"

"Be silent!" commanded the Head. "I am strongly inclined to agree with you, Mr. Crowell. These badly written lines are significant."

"If Handforth had succeeded in getting away, I should have entered the study and would have had no clue," said Mr. Crowell. "Naturally, there would have been an inquiry, but we should probably have got nowhere."

Without doubt, it was an ingenious theory. It fitted everywhere. It covered all the facts, and neither Mr. Crowell nor the headmaster were to be blamed for accepting it. They were both just men, and it seemed that this was merely a case of two and two making four.

If any blame could be attached to anybody, Handforth was that one. His was the blame all through. For, if he had acted rationally throughout that day, Marmaduke's escapade would never have been laid at his door. It was only because of Handforth's stubbornness, and because of his talk of revenge, that he was now suspected and accused.

Willy was filled with alarm. For once his coolness had deserted him. He leaned over the desk, and he gazed earnestly at the Head.

"But, sir, you don't believe this?" he panted. "I tell you that my monkey——"

"Handforth minor, you may go!" said the Head coldly.

"You can't punish Ted for what my monkey did, sir!" burst out Willy. "It's not fair! I tell you that Mr. Crowell's theory is all wrong. I don't blame him for thinking things like that—because all the fault is my major's. He shouldn't have been such an ass all day! But my monkey did the damage, sir. I swear it!"

"If you persist in this way, Handforth minor, I shall be compelled to punish you very severely," said the Head sternly. "As it is, I am inclined to excuse you, for the circumstances are exceptional. Go!"

Any other junior, perhaps, would have persisted. But Willy had plenty of common-sense, and he could see that further argument would be worse than useless. The circumstantial evidence against his brother was complete!

Five minutes later, Edward Oswald himself was facing the Head, having been brought over, in response to a telephone message, by one of the Ancient House prefects.

"Now, Handforth, your only course is to make a clean breast of this," said Dr. Stafford sternly. "Mr. Crowell has told me the full circumstances, and I am shocked at your exhibition of wilful temper and vindictiveness."

"I didn't do it, sir!" said Handforth steadily.

"It is idle for you to make these denials," said the Head. "Mr. Crowell caught you red-handed, and I am amazed that you should have the audacity to stand there and deny your guilt."

"I tell you I didn't do it, sir!" said Handforth doggedly.

"Then who did?"

"I don't know, sir—— I—I mean I can't tell you, sir!"

"Who did?" thundered the Head, rising to his feet and bending over his desk.

Handforth started back.

"I can't tell you who did, sir—but I didn't!" he replied steadily.

The Head sat down again, and gave Mr. Crowell a curious glance. There was one feature about this affair which puzzled him. If the two Handforth brothers had deliberately concocted that story about the monkey, why was the accused junior so reluctant to make any mention of it?

"I must confess, Handforth, that I cannot understand you," said the Head, leaning over the desk. "I had better tell you that your younger brother has been here——"

"Willy, sir!" burst out Handforth. "Here? What did he come for?"

"I know that you have seen your younger brother since Mr. Crowell left the Ancient House," continued the Head relentlessly. "Therefore, you have had ample opportunity to concoct the story that Handforth minor brought to me. He tells me that his pet monkey committed the damage in Mr. Crowell's study."

"He told you that, sir?" asked Handforth blankly.

He looked so utterly bewildered and startled that the Head and Mr. Crowell could be forgiven for drawing a wrong conclusion. They naturally believed that this was the first Handforth had heard of the monkey. Actually, Handforth was thoroughly startled that Willy should have been here. For he knew that Willy loved that monkey, and would not willingly sign its death warrant—or, at least, its banishment warrant.

"You see?" said Mr. Crowell triumphantly. "Handforth knows nothing about it! It was merely a trick on his brother's part to save him!"

"So it appears," said the Head gravely. "I am very distressed."

Handforth came to himself. Since Willy had told the truth, there was no harm in him speaking out now.

"But—but you don't understand, sir!" he said, staring at the Head anxiously. "What Willy told you is true! He said he was going to stand by me, but I had no idea that he would come here and tell you about Marmaduke. He loves that monkey of his, and he knew that he would lose it if the truth came out. I knew it, too—that's why I refused to say who really did the damage!"

It looked as though Handforth had suddenly seized upon this straw, in order to save himself. Dr. Stafford was becoming very grim.

"Are you telling me, Handforth, that your brother's monkey committed the damage?" he asked ominously.

"Yes, sir!" panted Handforth. "When I went into the study I found the monkey there—as busy as you like! I tried to catch him, but I couldn't. Then he bolted out of the window, and I was just about to follow when Mr. Crowell came in. It's true, sir! Don't you believe me?"

"I am afraid, Handforth, that I do not," replied the Head, his voice stern and cold.

"You are asking too much of my credulity. Until you heard this story of the monkey—from my own lips—you made no mention of the animal."

"But that was because I didn't want to give Willy away, sir!" protested Handforth frantically.

"You had far better make a clean breast of it——"

"But—but I'm not going to confess to something I didn't do, sir!" burst out Handforth. "Besides, it's not reasonable, sir! Why should I go into Mr. Crowell's study and tear up my own impot.? I'd been working on it all the afternoon and evening!"

"Mr. Crowell has given me a very satisfactory explanation of that," said the Head coldly. "You executed that imposition, Handforth, in such an atrocious manner that you knew perfectly well that it would never be accepted. And so, as I see it, you tore it up. You did other damage in your vindictive temper. There can be no doubt that your plan was to escape before Mr. Crowell returned. There would then be no evidence

against you, and the affair would have remained a mystery."

"Exactly, sir," said Mr. Crowell shrewdly. "And his brother's attempt to save him is ingenious, if deplorable. Handforth minor could not, of course, accuse any other boy, but he felt that he was perfectly safe in laying the blame at his monkey's door. The monkey, being dumb, could not deny the charge."

And so the inquiry ended. And who could blame Dr. Stafford and Mr. Crowell for their conclusions?



CHAPTER 21.

The Punishment!

LANG—clang!

In Study C, Nipper looked up from his prep. in surprise.

"Hallo!" he said.

"That's the bell for Big Hall!"

"Begad, s. it is!" said Sir Monte Tregellis-West, laying down his pen. "I wonder what it means, dear old boys?"

"Something special, you can bet!" said Watson. "Big Hall, eh? And it's getting on for supper-time!"

They heard doors opening up and down the passage, and voices were audible. Nipper went to his own door and opened it. Juniors were beginning to crowd out into the corridor.

"What's the trouble?" asked Nipper. "Does anybody know?"

"We're just as much in the dark as you are," said Church, as he came up. "But the prefects are going about saying that we've got to collect in Big Hall as quickly as possible. The bell's clanging, too."

"What a beastly fag!" said Travers, appearing out of Study H. "What do these masters think we're here for? Aren't we allowed to have any leisure in the evening? Something ought to be done about them. They're getting too much of a nuisance!"

Travers was ignored.

"Has anybody seen Handy about?" asked McClure, looking up and down anxiously.

"We haven't seen him all the evening," replied Nipper. "He's been in such a sweet temper to-day that we thought it better to leave him to his own devices. Besides, hasn't he been doing a big impot. for Crowell?"

"Yes, but I was wondering——"

"Phew!" whistled Nipper. "You think that we're being called together in Big Hall because of old Handy?"

"Well, doesn't it look like it?" asked Church. "You know what a beast he's been to-day! It wouldn't surprise me to learn that he had defied old Crowell to his face, and now there's a big row about it!"

"Well, we shall soon know," said Travers.

Crowding and jostling, everybody collected in Big Hall. Seniors and juniors came streaming out of the various Houses, and Big Hall was rapidly filling. This was a general order, and nobody could disobey it. Upper School and Lower School alike had to obey. A good many of the seniors were frankly disgusted about it, but they had to turn out. Parties were broken up, lectures were disturbed, and the whole routine of the school was put out of joint.

Church and McClure were filled with doubts and troubles. They hadn't been able to find Edward Oswald Handforth. He had completely vanished. And they were full of vague fears. For, at heart, they were just as much attached to their leader as ever. He may have been an ass all day, but he would soon get over it.

Their doubts were soon set at rest, and they knew the worst.

For when they went into Big Hall, there was Handforth on the raised platform, looking utterly miserable, but nevertheless defiant. Close behind him was a prefect, apparently on guard.

"There you are!" said Church. "I knew it! The silly idiot has got himself into fresh trouble!"

"Oh, the obstinate chump!" groaned Mac. "I hope to goodness he isn't going to be sacked!"

Everybody knew the truth now.

"It's old Handy—and serve him jolly well right!" was the general verdict. "He's been a Tartar all day, and now he's going to get something that'll make him smart!"

Yet a few of Handforth's best friends—such as Nipper and Reggie Pitt and Archie Glenthorne—were genuinely concerned. They knew that old Handy was sound enough at heart, and they were distressed to see him in this predicament. None of them, however, were prepared for the shock that was to come.

"The school has been called together because I find it necessary to inflict a flogging upon Handforth major, of the Remove Form," said the Head, when the gathering was complete. "Before flogging this boy, however, I think it is right that you should know what he has done."

"Thank goodness!" murmured Church. "Only a flogging!"

"Only!" said Mac. "Isn't that bad enough?"

Other murmurs were sweeping through the junior ranks.

"Silence, there!" came a sharp command from a prefect.

"During the evening, Handforth entered Mr. Crowell's study, in the Ancient House, and did a very considerable amount of damage," said the headmaster. "He destroyed books, he destroyed papers, and he did great damage to the wallpaper and to the carpet. It was an act of vindictiveness against Mr. Crowell, who, I understand, has had occasion to reprimand Handforth many times during the day."

The school listened in wonder. They

could hardly believe this against Handforth—and yet, knowing all the facts, as they did, they weren't particularly surprised after the first shock of the disclosure. For hadn't Handforth been threatening all sorts of awful things against Mr. Crowell?

And, in his present mood, he was quite capable of it. He had cut detention during the afternoon, in order to play in the cricket match. He had been yanked off the field by force, and he had been like a boiling volcano. Yes, undoubtedly he had a grudge against Mr. Crowell! But it was unlike him to take such a vindictive revenge. But then, Handforth hadn't been himself all day.

The Head went on to give a few details regarding the imposition, and the school became more and more convinced. Even Church and McClure believed this story about their leader. How could they do anything else? For the Head made it quite clear that Mr. Crowell had caught Handforth red-handed as he was about to escape. The evidence was complete, and Handforth stood there, guilty.

He received very little sympathy from the Junior School. A fellow who would deliberately wreck a master's study was deserving of a flogging. He had asked for trouble, and he was going to get it. In fact, he was jolly lucky to escape expulsion! That was the general opinion.



CHAPTER 22.

Beyond Their Understanding!

A

ND Handforth? And Willy? What of them?

Handforth was defiant and bitter. He was innocent, but the overwhelming nature of the evidence had bewildered him. He had been given to understand, moreover, that if he persisted in that preposterous story he would probably be expelled.

As for Willy, he was quite calm about it all. It was perfectly rotten—utterly and hopelessly rotten—that his major should be publicly flogged and disgraced for something he hadn't done. But then, after all, who was to blame? If Ted hadn't been such a priceless idiot all day long, this tragedy wouldn't have happened. When it was all boiled down, Handforth himself was to blame for the catastrophe.

That was the way Willy looked at it. And it seemed to him that it would be quite useless to make any explanations to the other juniors. They wouldn't believe him, even if he did. He had mentioned to Chubby Heath and Juicy Lemon, and one or two other fags, that Marmaduke had caused the damage, and they had shrieked with merriment at Willy's wit. Nothing that Willy could say would convince them that the story was true; and if his own

chums wouldn't believe him, what about the other fellows? What was the use of keeping it up?

With regard to the flogging—Well, why dwell upon it? It was a very painful episode, particularly for Handforth.

Afterwards, when the school dismissed, there were all sorts of excited meetings in the corridors and lobbies.

"Heard the latest joke?" sang out somebody. "Young Willy is going about saying that his monkey did the damage?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Like his nerve!" said Hubbard. "Didn't old Crowell catch Handy red-handed?"

"Of course he did!"

"Then young Willy ought to be bumped for spreading such a whopper!" said De Valerie. "I thought better of him!"

Nobody believed it—nobody gave it the slightest credence. Indeed, both Handforth and Willy decided that it would be far better to drop the whole thing. By persisting in the truth, they were only accused of lying; and the more they told the truth, the bigger liars they were set down as.

The Remove, as a whole, felt that Handforth had been very lucky to escape so lightly. They were disgusted with him, too. It had been a cad's trick to wreck Mr. Crowell's study in that way—just out of a spirit of vicious revenge. It was, in fact, so un-Handforthian that the Remove was shocked.

"The best thing we can do is to leave the beggar alone!" said De Valerie. "I'm not going to speak to him, anyhow. I never thought he was such a rotter!"

"He must have been in an awful temper," said McClure, seeking some excuse for his leader. "Not that that let's him out. Personally, I'm ashamed of him."

"So am I!" said Church gruffly.

"Look out!" sang out somebody. "Here he comes!"

They were in the Ancient House Lobby, and a silence fell as Edward Oswald Handforth came marching in from outside. True, Handforth walked with difficulty. He was very sore, and his face was pale and drawn. Many of the juniors drew back as he came in, and they looked at him with staring curiosity.

Impulsively, Church stepped forward.

"Handy!" he said earnestly. "Why the dickens did you do it?"

Handforth halted in his tracks.

"Why did I do what?" he asked.

"Oh, cheese it!" said Church miserably. "You know jolly well what I mean! Why were you such an idiot as to wreck Crowell's study?"

"Oh, leave him alone!" said McClure. "He's had his swishing, and it's all over. Let's forget it."

But Handforth had changed colour. His face was flushed. There was a blazing light in his eyes, although, outwardly, he kept cool.

"Look here, you two!" he said to Church and McClure. "I want to ask you one

question. All the rest of you can go and eat coke!" he added, glancing round. "You, Walter Church—and you, Arnold McClure! Do you believe that I wrecked Crowell's study?"

His chums were taken by surprise.

"What do you mean—do we believe it?" asked Church at last. "What else can we believe?"

"Do you think I'd do a filthy trick like that?" roared Handforth, suddenly, bursting out into a passionate rage. "Oh, I know the others believe it! They'd believe anything! I don't expect any loyalty from them—and I don't want it! But you fellows are different!"

"Hang it, Handy, this is a bit thick!" protested McClure. "Haven't you been threatening Crowell all the evening? Haven't you been going about the school like a Hun ever since this morning? We're willing to let bygones be bygones. You did the thing, and you've been punished——"

"That's enough!" roared Handforth. "You believe it! You think me capable of such rottenness! All right! Now I know!"

"Steady, Handy!" said Nipper uncomfortably. "Isn't it about time that you eased down?"

"You mind your own business!" shouted Handforth, twirling round. "I'm talking to Church and McClure! And I've done with them! Do you hear? I've finished with them—for good! I never want to speak to them again—or see them again! They're a couple of unfaithful cads, and that's all I've got to say!"

Both Church and McClure were flushed and hot with anger, too.

"You can only just get it out in time!" shouted Church wrathfully. "We've finished with you, too, Handy! A chap who can be such a cad as you've been isn't worth a cent!"

"And we don't want to have anything to do with him!" snapped McClure. "You can clear off, Handy. We've done with you!"

Edward Oswald Handforth clenched his teeth, and turned on his feet. He strode out, his eyes glittering. The split between the three inseparable chums of Study D was complete!



CHAPTER 23.

A Fellow of No Account!

V

IVIAN TRAVERS shook his head sadly.

"Dear, dear! Very distressing!" he said.

"Very disturbing!"

But is he really worth all this commotion?"

"No, he isn't," said Church bitterly. "Mac and I have been deceived. We always thought that Handy was as true as steel. But after the way he's acted to-day—after

his conduct in wrecking Crowell's study—we know better."

"He's nothing but a rotter!" said McClure.

"Well, don't let's keep it up," said Nipper gently. "There's no sense in being vindictive. He's had his gruel, and there's an end of it. We're all disappointed, of course, but life's full of surprises."

Everybody sided with Church and McClure. They had done the only possible thing in finishing with their former leader. In the Common-room, just before bed-time, Handforth was still the one subject of conversation.

Nobody had a good word for him.

And whose fault was it but it own?

And yet, what a pity it was! For good old Handy was just as staunch and straightforward as ever he had been. Throughout the day, he had been stubborn and perverse. But that was the sum total of his crimes. His pig-headedness and his ill-temper had led him into all this trouble.

He came into the common-room just before bed-time, and he found that everybody ignored him. As a rule, his arrival was a signal for a general gathering round. For Handforth had always been one of the most popular fellows in the Form.

But now, what a difference! Everybody turned away, and pretended to be deeply discussing cricket or some other subject. Nobody took any notice of him—nobody even looked at him. It had, indeed, been unanimously decided that he should be left entirely alone.

If only Handforth had had the sense to frankly admit his faults, the whole situation would have been altered. Here was the opportunity—now was the time!

But Handforth ignored it. A word of regret—a frank admission of his folly—would have completely changed the attitude of the Remove. It is quite possible, indeed, that the majority of the fellows would have believed his story of the monkey if only he had cast aside that little demon of stubbornness and perversity which now possessed him.

It was rather a shock to Handforth to find himself "cut" like this. He might have expected it, but he hadn't. He had made up his mind to finish with Church and McClure, but it had never occurred to him that all the other fellows might be just as much against him.

"Oh, so that's the idea, is it?" he burst out, as he faced the crowd. "You've sent me to Coventry, have you?"

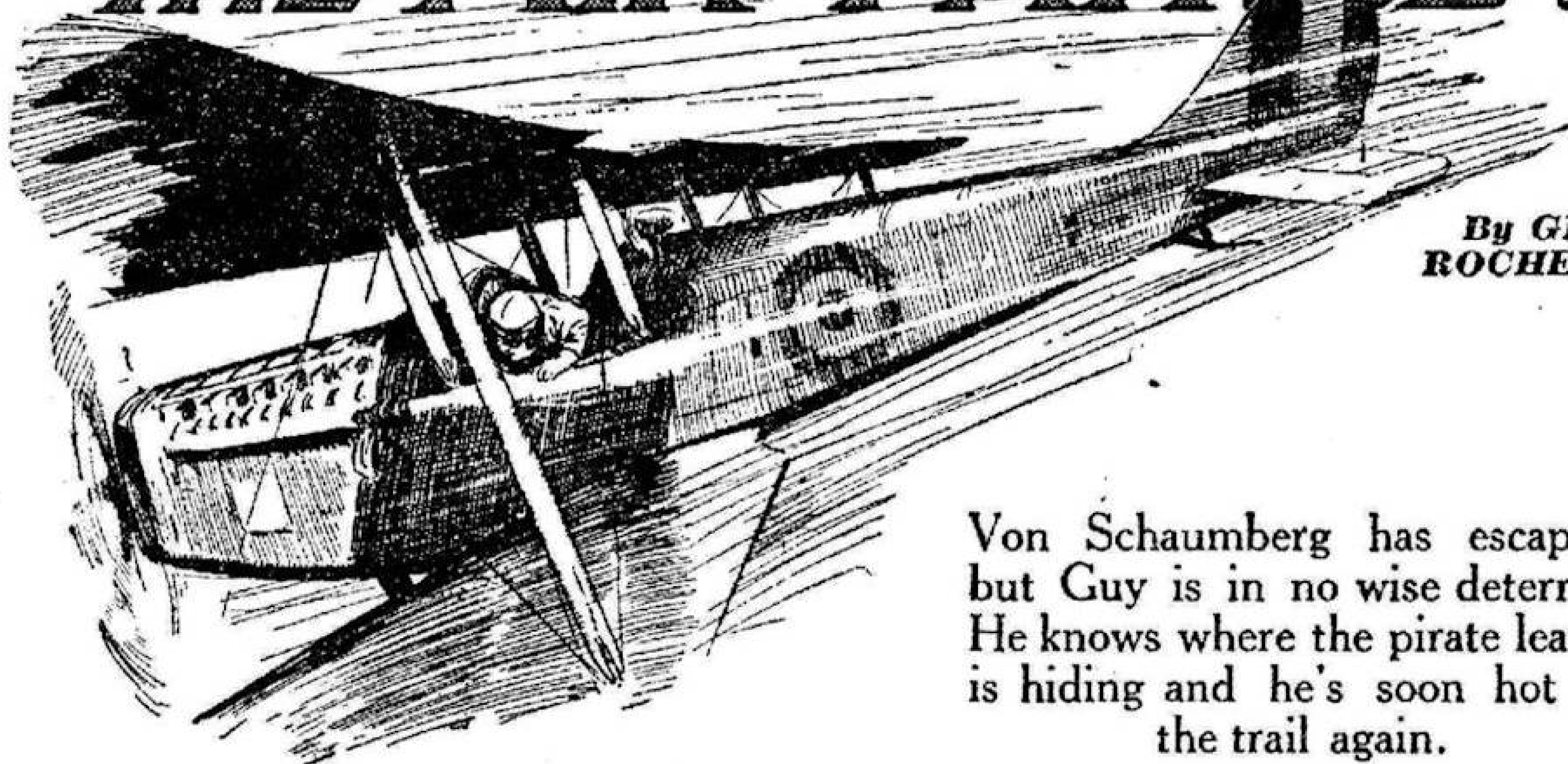
"No, we haven't," said Nipper. "But you're in such a rummy mood, Handy, that nobody cares to say much to you. Until you get into a better temper——"

"So I've got to control my temper according to the orders of the Remove, have I?" interrupted Handforth. "My temper's my own, and I'll do what I like with it! Do you think I care a toss whether you ignore me or not? Blow the lot of you!"

(Concluded on page 41.)

Tell your Editor what you think of this Serial!

THE AIR PATROL!



By GEO. E.
ROCHESTER

Von Schaumberg has escaped, but Guy is in no wise deterred. He knows where the pirate leader is hiding and he's soon hot on the trail again.

WHAT'S ALREADY HAPPENED:

GUY HOWARD, youngest and most intrepid "scout" in the Atlantic Rangers—whose duty it is to guard the air routes between Britain and America—is attached to Aerodrome D, one of the six huge floating aerodromes placed across the Atlantic Ocean. Just recently the big bullion and passenger-carrying air liners have been attacked by air pirates, whose leader is VON SCHAUMBERG. The headquarters of the pirates is unknown. Guy has sworn to exterminate them, and Von Schaumberg, on his part, has vowed vengeance against Guy for killing one of his confederates. Guy obtains a roving commission, and, discovering the pirates' headquarters, succeeds in capturing Von Schaumberg. The ranger takes his

prisoner to Vladmir, a small whaling station, and, leaving the pirate leader in the cells in charge of a man named Stefansen, then flies off and reports on board H.M. Aircraft Carrier Eagle, from which, later, aeroplanes leave and capture the pirates' base. Guy returns to Vladmir, to find that Stefansen has been murdered and that Von Schaumberg has been released by Vorzetzen, the pirate leader's chief lieutenant. Back again to the aircraft carrier flies Guy. He orders one of the pirate prisoners to be bound in a chair. "I'm going to ask you one or two questions," says the ranger, and with that he shoves one end of a crowbar into the heart of a glowing stove!

(Now read on.)

The Interrogation.

"I T will somewhat facilitate our conversation if you will tell me your name."

There was a grim note in Guy's voice as he turned from the stove and faced the bound man in the chair.

"What are you going to do with that iron, confound you?" was the snarled response.

"Nothing—if you are reasonable," replied Guy calmly. "But your name—what is it?"

"Hines!"

"Very well, Hines, please listen to me. I wish to know the precise locality of Von Schaumberg's petrol dumps."

"There aren't any, except this."

"You lie! There is, for instance, the Guillemot."

Hines scowled.

"I didn't think you meant that sort of dump," he growled. "I thought you meant dumps on the mainland."

"Exactly what I did mean, my dear Hines!" replied Guy suavely. "Dumps on the mainland. Where are they?"

"There aren't any, I tell you."

"Sure?"

"Of course I'm sure, confound you!" shouted Hines, and writhed impotently in his bonds.

"I'm afraid it's going to be frightfully unpleasant for you, Hines, unless you can think of some dump on the mainland—or

on some island in these seas," responded Guy pleasantly.

He withdrew the crowbar from the glowing stove. One end was almost red hot. An ugly look crept into Hines' eyes.

"What are you going to do with that iron?" he shouted hoarsely.

"I'm going to see if I can't jog your memory with it, Hines!" replied Guy. "But it's scarcely hot enough yet."

"Bah! You're bluffing!" snarled Hines. "You wouldn't dare—the major wouldn't stand for it."

Guy stared steadily at the puzzled-looking Major Boyd.

"Hines," he said easily, "Major Boyd has left this matter entirely in my hands. No matter what I do to you—he will not interfere. Do you understand? He will not interfere."

And, in those words, the puzzled major read a message to himself. No, happen what may, he would not interfere. He made up his mind on that point. But, dash it, he couldn't visualise this youngster deliberately branding a bound man with a red hot iron.

Couldn't he, though? He looked again at the grim face of the ranger, at the compressed lips and the resolute eyes, and he wondered.

"So you see, Hines,"—Guy was speaking again—"you are absolutely in my hands! Now, for the last time, where are Von Schaumberg's petrol dumps?"

"I don't know—he hasn't any!" screamed Hines.

Guy turned to the two pilots, who lingered near Hines' chair.

"Bare his chest!" he commanded curtly.

Hines' chest was bared. Guy again withdrew the red hot iron from the stove. He held it near his cheek, as though to test the heat, then advanced on Hines.

"Dull memories become, at times, quite bright under pressure—the pressure of hot iron, Hines," he said grimly, while Hines writhed and struggled in his bonds. "Now. What do you know?" added Guy.

"Nothing—nothing, confound you!" shouted Hines. "Don't you touch me! For pity's sake——"

"This much pity will I show you, Hines!" replied the ranger harshly. "You shall not see the red hot iron burning and searing your flesh. That much will I spare you." Then, to the watching pilots, he added: "Blindfold him!"

And, when the bandage had been whipped over Hines' dilating eyes, Guy stretched out a hand to the ice-box, which stood by the wall. It was Von Schaum-

berg's ice-box, wherein he kept his wines secure from the heat of the cave.

Sorely puzzled now, Major Boyd watched as Guy stood in front of the blindfolded Hines, a red hot iron in one hand, a jagged piece of ice in the other.

"Don't stir, Hines!" The ranger's voice was metallic. "The iron is an inch from your chest. Ah, you squirm—you feel the heat of it! Now, you dog, you have one second in which to answer. Where are Von Schaumberg's dumps?"

He stooped quickly, laying the iron silently on the floor, then straightened again. Hines writhed and struggled frantically in his bonds.

"Will you speak?"

Guy was poised in front of him, the piece of ice in his hands.

"No, you're bluffing!" screamed Hines. "I'll—a-a-ah!"

The words ended in a wild, maniacal shriek. Guy had lunged forward, pressing the cold, jagged, cutting ice hard against the man's bared chest.

In that first agonising instant, the blindfolded Hines thought it was the red hot iron crushing against his bared skin. His nerve broke. Mingled with his screams came the words:

"At Zedrich. Oh, confound you! Zedrich."

In a snow-bound hut!

FAR to the north, on the shores of a desolate, ice-fringed creek, stood a lonely hangar. A small, stout-timbered hut nestled in its lee, protected somewhat from the swirling, blinding blizzard sweeping down from frozen Arctic wastes.

Vorzetzen, crouched over the glowing stove in the hut, inclined his head. Von Schaumberg, his huge bulk lounging against the rude table, scowled at him.

"Listening?" he broke out savagely. "Always listening——"

"Yes, listening!" replied Vorzetzen harshly. "Listening to the moan and the wail of the wind, Von Schaumberg."

He broke off with a shudder. Von Schaumberg threw back his great bearded head and laughed. But there was no mirth in the laughter.

"Getting nervy?" he sneered.

"No, getting a bit nearer to the heart of things—for once!" replied Vorzetzen, his eyes on the glowing stove.

Von Schaumberg thrust forward his head, peering through his mass of long and matted eyebrows.

"Meaning?" he snarled.

"Meaning that I'm wondering if the saving of your life this morning was worth the killing of Stefansen!" replied Vorzetzen steadily.

There was a moment of intense silence in the hut, broken only by the wail of the wind outside and the faint crackling of the stove.

Von Schaumberg stood motionless, glaring at the crouching figure of his second-in-command. Then his breath rasped in harshly between broken and blackened teeth, and his great hands clenched.

"What—in—blazes—do—you—mean?" he demanded, each word coming with slow, menacing deliberation.

Vorzetzen leapt to his feet, wheeling on his chief with blazing eyes.

"I mean this!" he shouted. "You've cheated us, Von Schaumberg—cheated us, like the great, hulking spineless beast that you are! What did you promise me—aye, and others—when we joined you? You promised us rich plunder and glorious adventure in the looting of the Atlantic air routes. And where is your gang to-day? Where are Zwolfe, Di Courci, Larasche, and the rest of our comrades, who served you faithfully and well? Dead—all dead! And you live—you, who never led a raid—you, who sat drinking and doing nothing at the base whilst we did your work. Yet you live, and I with you! What lies before us now, but to be hunted like rats till the day comes when we are cornered and killed?"

He shook a fist at the motionless Von Schaumberg.

"I was mad!" he shouted. "Mad when I went to get you this morning! But loyalty dies hard in some of us, and I thought, maybe, that even at this eleventh hour you would, by some bold stroke, save something from the wreckage of all our plans and hopes!"

He gestured angrily, passionately, and now his voice was very bitter.

"But, fool that I was, I might have known—might have known that all you would suggest was the saving of your own rotten skin by coming here to Zedrich. But we're trapped, you dog, trapped by that blizzard outside!"

He broke off, and one hand sidled towards the pocket of his tunic. He might have wondered at Von Schaumberg standing there so silent, so motionless.

"There is a chance," he went on gratingly, "that a machine could climb above the cloud-banks into a clearer sky. But snow on 'planes and fuselage, together with the weight of your great hulking body, would ruin that chance which I in-

tend to take. I will risk the snow! Your weight, I will not risk!"

His automatic leapt into view. At the same instant Von Schaumberg launched himself forward with amazing agility.

Bang!

The bullet buried itself in the timbers of the roof as Von Schaumberg's great hand closed with a vice-like grip on Vorzetzen's wrist. The automatic clattered to the floor.

Swathed in the swirling, drifting, acrid smoke from the exploded cartridge, the two men fought in silent fury. The little, bloodshot eyes in Von Schaumberg's bearded face blazed with an almost bestial fury. He released his hold on Vorzetzen's wrist, and his great clenched hand smashed full into Vorzetzen's livid face.

Backwards and forwards they swayed, their breath coming in great gulps as each strove for the mastery. Once Vorzetzen screamed aloud as his bare hand, forced behind his back, was crushed against the red hot stove. And Von Schaumberg kept it there; kept it there a full five seconds, whilst his huge bulk pressed against Vorzetzen and his great, ugly bearded mouth grinned snarlingly.

With strength born of agony and despair, Vorzetzen forced him back. But that effort cost Vorzetzen dear. It weakened him for the moment, and, in that moment, Von Schaumberg's leg curled round him, just behind the knee. With every atom of his enormous strength concentrated in the throw, Von Schaumberg hurled himself forward.

Vorzetzen crashed backwards to the floor, the massive bulk of his leader sprawled atop of him. He struggled desperately to writhe free, but, with terrific force, Von Schaumberg's fists crashed cruelly into his face.

A few moments later the pirate leader rose shakily to his feet. He stood swaying, glaring down at the limp, still form of Vorzetzen. Then he kicked savagely at the man who had saved him from death that morning.

"There, you hound!" he snarled. "Now you know who's boss!"

The Hand-clasp.

VORZETZEN moaned and stirred uneasily. Stooping, Von Schaumberg lifted him and slumped him roughly into a chair.

"Here, drink this!" he said, and held a flask to Vorzetzen's bruised and bleeding lips.

The strong spirit seemed to send new life coursing through Vorzetzen's veins. His eyes flickered open and he looked

about him, wonderingly, dazedly. He passed a shaking hand across his brow then, as though the act had cleared both mental and physical vision, he fixed his eyes on Von Schaumberg.

All passion had died in Von Schaumberg's bearded face. He seemed strangely calm, strangely self-possessed.

"Do you know that I could have killed you then, Vorzetzen?" he said gruffly.

"Then why didn't you?" asked Vorzetzen weakly.

Sudden contempt blazed in his eyes as perception came to his quickening senses.

a rough hand on his lieutenant's shoulder.

"This is the talk of a weakling."

Again Vorzetzen flared up.

"Weakling!" he snarled. "And what are you?"

Von Schaumberg laughed rumblingly in his beard.

"I am no weakling!" he replied. "But I have been a fool. I have not trusted you, Vorzetzen, for it is my creed to trust



Vorzetzen's automatic leapt into view. At the same moment Von Schaumberg launched himself forward with amazing agility. Bang! The bullet buried itself in the timbers of the roof as Von Schaumberg's great hand closed with a vice-like grip on Vorzetzen's wrist.

"But I know!" he went on bitterly. "You saved me, so that you could save yourself! Without me to pilot the machine, you would be forced to stay here till the Rangers got wind of this dump and came and collected you. Well, I refuse to pilot the machine. I'm through!"

"You will stay here and be captured?"

"Yes. Better that than be hunted till we are eventually run to earth! The sooner it's over the better. I'm through!"

"Come, man!" Von Schaumberg laid

no man. Yet if I had trusted you, we would not have fought, and there would have been no talk of our being hunted like rats. But we have fought—fought like men, and maybe we will be all the better friends for that!"

He pulled a thin leather case from his pocket and, abstracting a long black cheroot, lit it and blew out a cloud of pungent smoke.

"Now listen to me, Vorzetzen," he said, "and I will tell you what I should have told you before. Our island base is,

undoubtedly, lost to us for ever. But what of that? We have had rich plunder from the bullion machines on the air routes, and three-quarters of that is safely lodged in the banks of Central Europe."

"But we can never use it!" burst out Vorzetzen passionately.

Again Von Schaumberg laughed; it was the laugh of easy self-assurance.

"You are wrong, my friend!" he replied. "We can use it, and we are going to use it!"

He leant forward, and there was that in his voice which thrilled Vorzetzen.

"Listen!" he said tensely. "That island base was but the foundation in my scheme of things. I knew the day would come when we must vacate it, but I hoped that day would not come before I was prepared. It did not! You think, Vorzetzen, that I stand here to-night a broken, ruined and hunted man. Hunted, yes, but neither broken nor ruined!"

His voice sank to almost a whisper.

"For I am powerful, Vorzetzen, and within a few short weeks I shall strike in a manner which will stagger the world. When this night has passed, and the dawn has come, we will leave here. The past is behind us. We will forget it—forget that we fought, you and I. And, in the future which lies before us, I will give you that confidence, that knowledge of my plans, which is your due!"

He thrust out his hand. Vorzetzen hesitated, staring into the bearded face of his leader. Then slowly he rose to his feet, and took the proffered hand.

"Fiend you are, Von Schaumberg!" he said hoarsely. "Now talk—that I may judge whether you are also a liar or a man!"

With the Dawn!

FAR into the night those two men sat talking, and the first grey light of the late dawn was not far distant when, eventually, Von Schaumberg heaved himself to his feet and crossed to the door.

Unbarring it, he looked out across a stretch of ghostly whiteness which merged with the shadowy waters of the creek. Not frozen yet, that creek, but it would be when the Arctic summer drew to a close.

"The blizzard's past, Vorzetzen!" he said, over his shoulder. "Snatch an hour's sleep and then we'll get off."

Vorzetzen nodded and stretched himself on a heap of blankets near the stove. He knew his leader would sleep in the cockpit, when they had left that lonely, long-deserted outpost of civilisation behind.

Who had put Zedrich on the map is a

question which might well be asked. It was one Hans Griken, who, in the late 'nineties, had made a valiant effort to establish a whaling station there. But the ice had beaten him and, weary of the unequal struggle, he had shot himself.

Nothing remained now to give token of his work. The Arctic had claimed Zedrich again as her own until Von Schaumberg had come with his hangar and his hut—brought there in sections by the Gullie-mot, and intended to serve him as they were serving him now.

Re-entering the hut, Von Schaumberg took heavy fur-lined flying kit from pegs behind the door. Donning it, he cast a glance at the already slumbering Vorzetzen, then quitted the hut.

He made his way to the hangar and slid back the door, which moved easily on ball-bearings. Inside stood the seaplane which had brought he and Vorzetzen from Vladmir.

He looked to the winch rope, by means of which the machine had been drawn up from the waters of the creek, and which was holding it now on the sloping, ice-covered runway.

Satisfied that the rope could be cast off in an instant, he busied himself with the filling of petrol tanks and replenishing of oil feed. Time and again he broke off to walk to the door of the hangar and stand motionless, peering southwards into the thinning greyness that told of the coming dawn.

The tanks filled, he turned his attention to the synchronised Vickers gun in the forward cockpit. He placed belts of ammunition in their clips, after ascertaining that the gun was working efficiently. Then, with the same methodical care, he overhauled the Lewis gun on the swing-mounting in the rear cockpit, placing drums of ammunition ready to hand in the racks.

At length he seemed satisfied that all was in order. Outside the hangar he paused to light a cheroot, then commenced a slow pacing backwards and forwards. But always he kept peering southwards, and more than once he stood with head inclined in a listening attitude.

But nothing broke the intense silence which brooded over that cold and desolate land. The cheroot smoked, he threw the chewed end into the snow and turned briskly towards the hut.

It was then he halted—halted abruptly and stood as though turned to stone. From far, far to the southwards, there came on the still air a faint drone!

(Is it the Rangers coming? You'll know next Wednesday, boys!)

ALL HIS OWN FAULT!



(Continued from page 35.)

"You're going the right way to get bumped, my lad," said De Valerie grimly. "We're just about sick of you!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Come on! Let's do it!" yelled somebody spitefully.

But Nipper held up his hand.

"Cheese it!" he said sharply. "Don't goad the chap on any more. He's been in a rotten mood all day, and he still seems to be as bad. Leave him alone!"

Handforth laughed rather hysterically.

"Thanks awfully!" he said, with mock gratitude. "How kind of you, Nipper! By George!" he added, with a sudden outburst. "Try it on—that's all! Come on—I don't care! Try to bump me! I'll smash the whole crowd of you!"

They gave it up as hopeless.

It was quite impossible to get on with him. He had been bad all day, and now he seemed to be worse than ever. Finding that nobody accepted his invitation, Handforth turned on his heel, opened the door and strode out.

Slam!

The door crashed to with a thud that shook the room. Handforth walked down the corridor, and strode out into the open air of the Triangle. There he mooched about, with his hands thrust deeply into his trousers pockets. He took no notice of the bell that clanged shortly afterwards. Bed-time meant nothing to him. He was in an arrogant humour.

And that little devil, which had come so unexpectedly into his nature, was filled with triumph. It was now sheerly impossible for Handforth frankly to admit that he had been in the wrong, and that he was sorry for it. He was past it now.

And he gloated. He revelled in the fact that all hands were turned against him.

"What do I care?" he said fiercely. "All right! Hang them all! Everybody—including Church and McClure! Blow them! Rats to them! I'll soon show them that I can get on all right on my own!"

Thus that memorable day ended, with Edward Oswald Handforth alone and ignored. Handy—the bluff, genial Handy—scorned by everybody in the Remove! What a change—what a complete downfall!

And it had come about through trifles—mere nothings! The fault was his own, but he, of all fellows in the school, failed to see this!

That night his rebellious nature gloated

over the prospect of the immediate future. He didn't care a snap for the Remove! He would enjoy himself far better on his own—with every hand turned against him!

But there were stormy days ahead for Edward Oswald Handforth!

THE END.

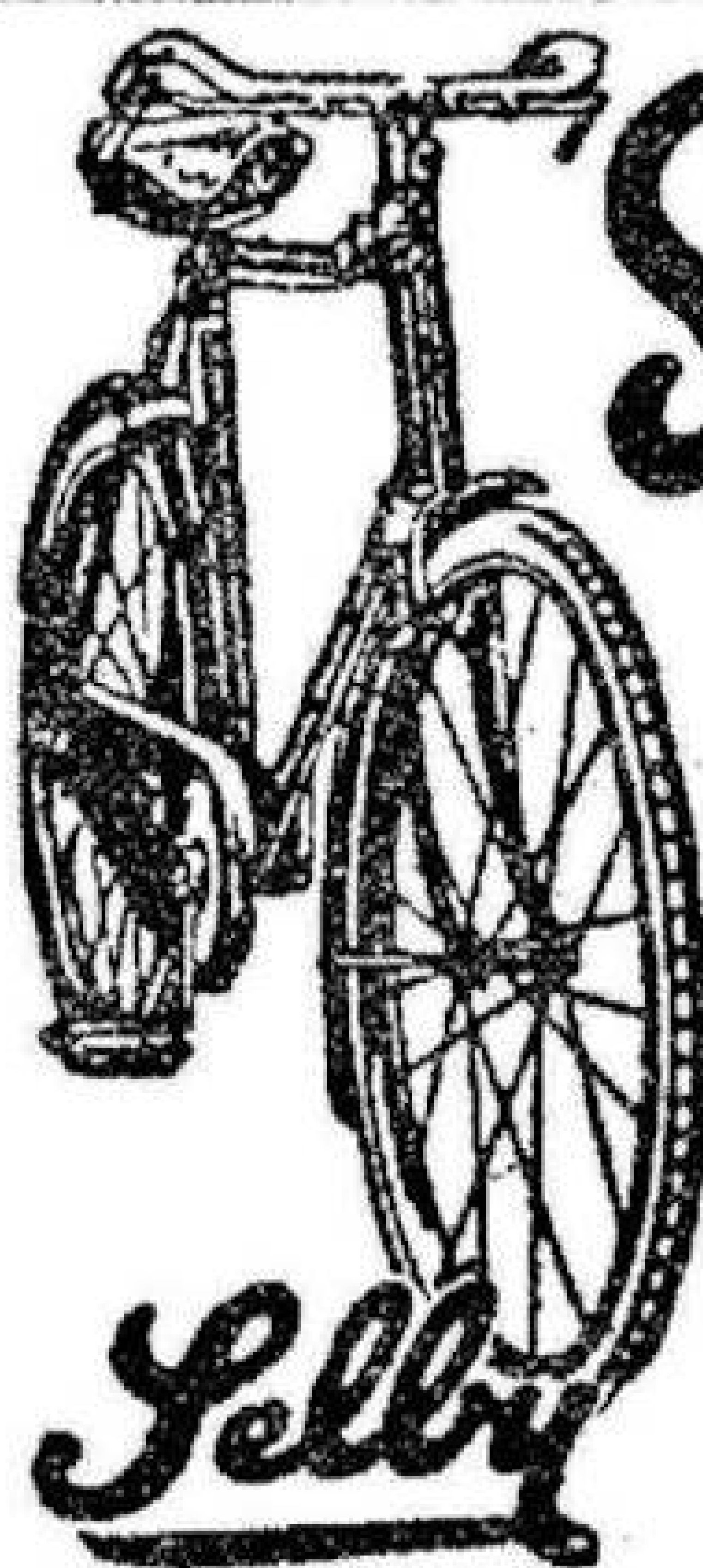
(The next yarn in this magnificent series is entitled, "THE OUTCAST OF THE REMOVE!" Look out for it next Wednesday.)

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By
The Editor.

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American Rugger.

A LONDON reader asks me about this form of Transatlantic footer. It is hot stuff; nothing tame and ordinary, or yawn-compelling about American Rugger. A newcomer, if he dropped in to witness a match and take due note of the fast and furious play, might be very surprised to see a number of waiting players all ready garbed for the fray. They are footballers in waiting in case of accidents—there are often many—for Rugger in America is a tremendous business. A man goes down and is carried off, and his place is immediately taken by one of the sportsmen who are in attendance to meet such emergencies. The understudies usually get a look in when a match is hotly contested.

A Trip to Scarborough.

A Barnsley correspondent asks about the best route from his town to Scarborough. For the first fourteen miles the road is good, though there are several short stiff hills. The route is by Candy Cross and High Ackworth to Pontefract. The next stage of forty miles is by Ferrybridge, Burton Salmon Junction, Towton, Tadcaster New Inn to York. The roads on this stretch are perfect. From York to Scarborough, the route is via Golden Hill, Malton, Billington, Brompton and Ayton. This is all good going, though one or two hills will call for a change of gear. You can avoid the big hill between Ayton and Scarborough by going via Seamer Junction.

I hope my chum will have an enjoyable run. Hills or otherwise, a tour of this sort is splendid so long as there is no fretting. Lots of inexperienced cyclists—and some who are experts and ought to know better—will insist on going all in through mighty difficult country, and so wearing themselves out in the most unnecessary manner. The pleasure of biking is in going as you please, and taking a knobbly bit of country quite easy.

The Stolen Submarine.

An ambitious author up North has knocked off a yarn about a stolen submarine, and he

wants to know who will buy the chef d'œuvre. Let us stand aside and have a look at the editors queue-ing up to nab this gem. I hope my chum will get away with it, but I would recommend him to look after his giddy hero, for the Royal Navy might turn very nasty if any of the warships are pinched!

CORRESPONDENTS WANTED.

Norman Sealey, 251, Northumberland Road, **Southampton**, wishes to hear from stamp collectors, at home and overseas, for the purpose of running a stamp club.

E. A. Woolfson, 13, Arnott Street, S.C.Rd., **Dublin**, wishes to correspond with readers in India, Egypt, Canada and New York.

G. Wilson, 9, Old Ford End Road, **Bedford**, wishes to hear from readers in the British Isles, the Empire, U.S.A., and the continent of Europe. All letters answered.

Julius N. Harris, "Luctonia," The Walk, **Merthyr Tydfil**, South Wales, wishes to buy Nos. 1-20 and Nos. 60-76 "N.L.L." new series. Must be in good condition.

Miss Vera C. Silling, 7, Turnbull Street, **Sunderland**, Co. Durham, would like to correspond with girl readers only, over seventeen years of age.

Kenneth Slack (age 15), 9, Harrison Street, Currock, **Carlisle**, Cumberland, wishes to correspond with readers in any part of the world, except England; interested in sports and stamp collecting.

Cecil R. B. Jones, 123, Wakehurst Road, Wandsworth Common, **London, S.W.11**, wishes to hear from any "Old Frogmorian"—S.F.L. member—including Bob James and Albert Ford, etc.

Harry Brereton, 50, High Street, **Congleton**, Cheshire, would like to correspond with readers in Australia, Africa, America, Italy and Spain. All letters answered.

L. Cooper, 34, Bacchus Road, Winson Green, **Birmingham**, wants to hear from members in his district.

W. Frank Bilecock, 10, Bensons Row, **Biggleswade**, Beds., wishes to correspond with readers in Bedfordshire; also with Leagueites anywhere.

George Burgess, 271, Northstoke, Arundel, Sussex, offers for sale N.L.L.'s containing the "Castleton" series.

Desmond Garahan, Creevachbee, Ballymahon, Co. Longford, Ireland, wishes to correspond with readers in South Africa and Australia on stamp collecting.

M. Koji Mohamed, Porto Novo, Southern India, wishes to hear from those interested in stamps. Would exchange stamps for photos.

Jack Burke, 35, Glen Street, Essendon, Victoria, Australia, wishes to correspond with readers in South Africa, Egypt, India, South America, Philippine Islands and New York City who are interested in wireless.

W. Cliffe, 168, Rashcliffe Hill Road, Lockwood, Huddersfield, wishes to hear from readers.

James W. Cook, 21, Rook Street, Poplar, London, E.14, asks for a reply from Julius K. Muhlhaus, of Stuhlweissenburg, Hungary (Czecho-Slovakia), and Franz Stahl Schmidt and Wilhelm Schwarzkopff, of Grunstadt, Germany; he also wishes to hear from readers anywhere.

Arthur Gee, 32, North Soochow Road, Shanghai, China, wishes to hear from readers. All letters will be answered.

Jack Hardy, 81, George Street, Bury, Lancs, wishes to correspond with readers in the British Empire outside the home country; also readers (English) in the U.S.A.

Ernest A. Dennison, 27, Northway Road, Camberwell, London, S.E.5, would like to communicate in the Dutch language with a reader in Holland, or with a reader in England who has a knowledge of Dutch.

Thomas Page, 82, Leavesden Road, Watford, Herts., wishes to obtain N.L.L. Nos. 105, 111—283, old series. Will pay 3d. copy. Also has for disposal Nos. 300—483, old series; 26—48, 60—75, new series.

F. Wagner, 58, Moorland Road, St. Austell, Cornwall, wants to hear from readers interested in natural history.

B. Peters, 32, Wynn Street, Edgbaston, Birmingham, wants to obtain Nos. 67—73, inclusive, of the N.L.L.

Frank Malia, 204, Kirk Street, Byker, Newcastle-on-Tyne, wants copies of the N.L.L., old series.

Albert R. P. Cruickshank, 99, Young Street, Annandale, Sydney, N.S.W., Australia, wishes to hear from readers in England.

Reg Dixon, 71, Boston Road, Mount Eden, Auckland, New Zealand, wishes to hear from readers anywhere, especially those who collect stamps and cigarette-cards. All letters answered.

R. Matthews, 15, Albion Row, St. Peter's Street, Cambridge, wants to hear from readers anywhere, especially Holland. He also wishes to get in touch with a club in his neighbourhood.



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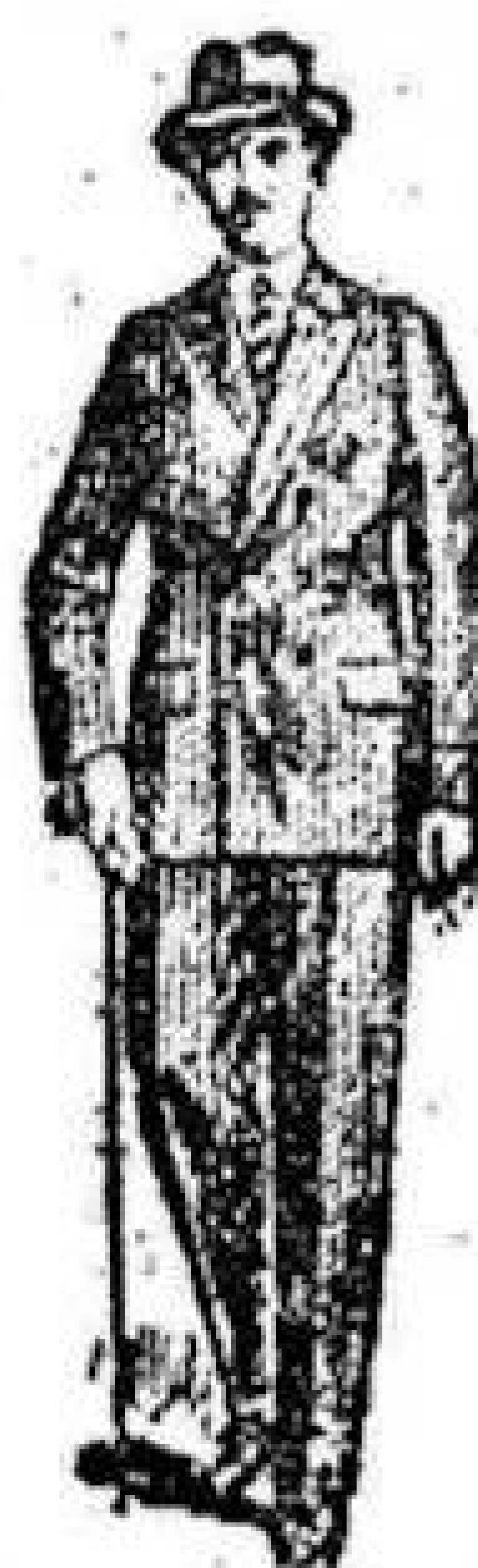
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