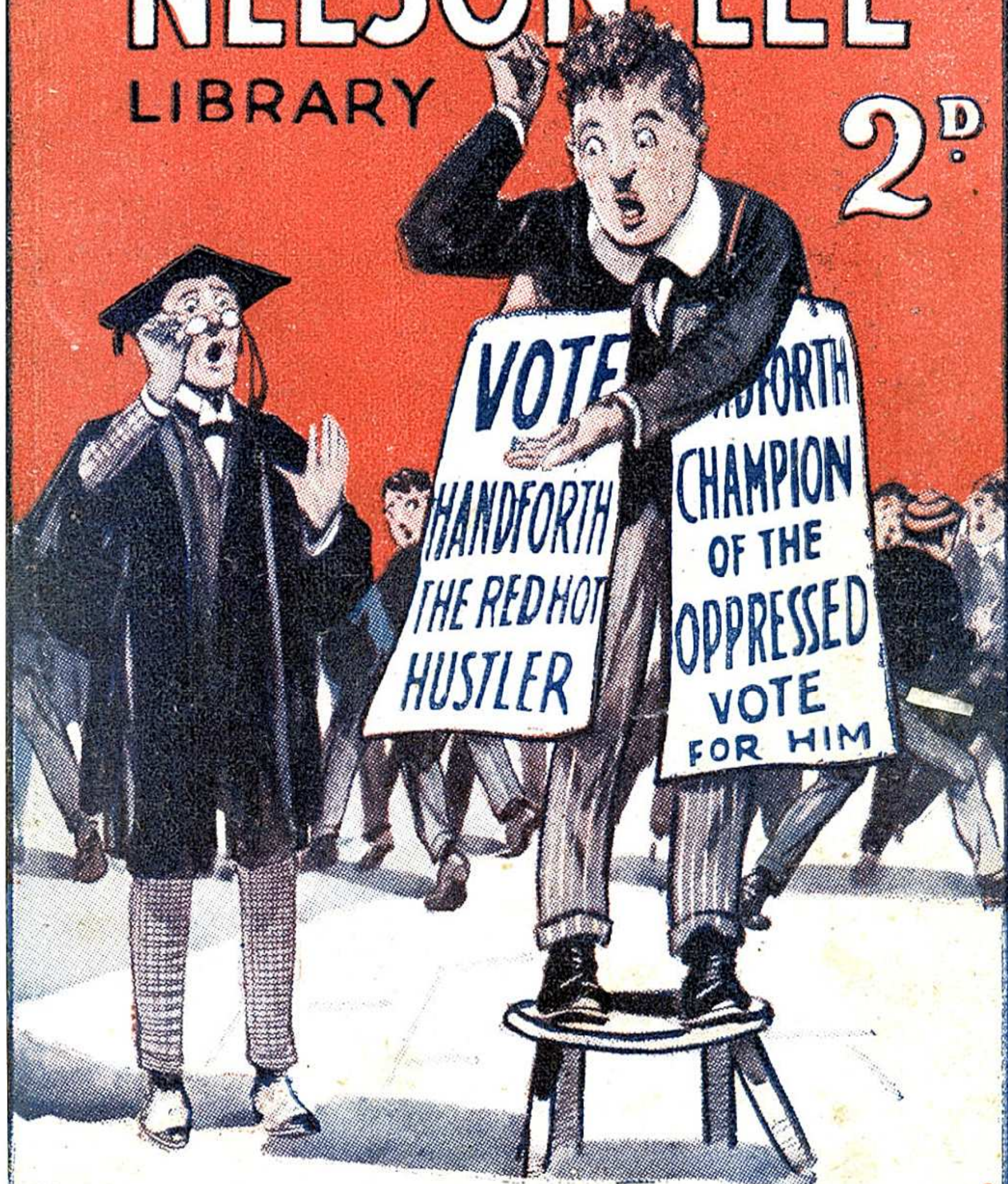


READ ABOUT **HANDY, THE LIVE-WIRE CANDIDATE** THIS WEEK!

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VOTE *for* HANDFORTH!

A Full-of-Fun Long Complete
Story of the Boys of St. Frank's.



"Three cheers for Handy! Hurrah!" The crowded lecture-hall rang with thunderous applause. Such an ovation as this Edward Oswald had never expected. It never occurred to him that the cheering was somewhat overdone.

VOTE FOR HANDFORTH!



By EDWY SEARLES BROOKS

Handy believes in live-wire methods in his great election campaign for the Remove captaincy! You will enjoy this side-splitting long complete yarn of the Boys of St. Frank's.

CHAPTER 1.

HANDFORTH'S COMMITTEE ROOMS.

"GENTLEMEN——"
 "Hear, hear!"
 "I stand upon this platform——"
 "Good!"

"I stand upon this platform—er—er——"
 "Hurrah!"

"I stand upon this platform——"

Edward Oswald Handforth paused, and glared balefully at Church and McClure. He wasn't standing upon a platform at all, but on the hearthrug of Study D. And his chums were sitting on the edge of the table, wearing expressions of resigned fortitude.

"Any more interruptions, my lads, and I'll kick you out of this study!" said Handforth grimly. "How the dickens can I make a speech if you keep butting in? I shan't warn you again!"

"I thought this was going to be a rehearsal?" asked Church.

"So it is!"

"Well, you'll have to be prepared for interruptions——"

"Any chap who dares to interrupt me when I'm speaking from the platform will suffer for it!" said Handforth curtly. "It won't take me two ticks to jump down and slaughter

him. So you'd better go easy. I'm the Live Wire Candidate, and I'm going to make St. Frank's rock to its foundations!"

Handforth glanced down at some notes, but refused to read them. He had prepared this speech thoroughly, and he wasn't going to surrender weakly at the very first rehearsal. He cleared his throat, and thumped the table with violence—as though to give himself confidence.

"Gentlemen!" he thundered. "I stand upon this platform—— I stand—I mean, unless you're absolutely dotty, you'll elect me—— No, that's wrong! Doesn't sound dignified enough."

He glared at his notes, and Church and McClure grinned.

"The safest thing you can do, Handy, is to have that speech typed out, and then read it," suggested McClure. "You'll never remember all your points in the Lecture Hall, when you address the whole Form. And it would be fatal if you got up on your hind legs, and made an ass of yourself."

Handforth snorted.

"What do you mean—hind legs?" he asked warmly. "Do you think I'm an animal, or something?"

"Of course you are," said McClure. "You're an animal——"

"Or something," murmured Church.

"Why, you—you—"

"Oh, chuck it!" said Mac hastily. "We're all animals, aren't we? Human animals. Ask any scientist. I never knew such a touchy beggar—"

"We don't want any scientific rot now," interrupted Handforth coldly. "And if you talk about my hind legs again, I'll biff you. I'm making an election speech, and you chaps aren't giving me any help at all. What's the good of having a couple of lieutenants if they don't do any lieutenanting?"

"That's not a proper word," said Church. "You can't mess about with English—"

"I don't care whether it's a proper word or not," roared Handforth thickly. "Are you going to listen, or are you going to quibble? Gentlemen! I stand upon this platform—as the representative of Energy—as the spirit of Push! By George, that's the stuff! I stand upon this platform as the embodiment of enterprise and progress! Away with threadbare tradition—away with mouldy customs! In me you see the personification of strength!"

"Hear, hear!" said Church feelingly.

"Right on the mark!" murmured McClure, thoughtfully rubbing his left ear.

"Strength!" repeated Handforth firmly. "Elect me as your captain, and you will see the Remove—er— You will see the Remove—"

"Like a battered and mangled army?" suggested Church.

"Yes!" roared Handforth. "Like a battered and— No, you fathead! You will see the Remove forge ahead and set an example to every other public school in the kingdom! As your skipper, I will lead you with ability and strength. I will imbue you with my own force!"

"We can believe it, old man!" said Church, nodding.

Handforth grinned.

"Well, how's that?" he asked triumphantly. "A speech like that ought to do the trick, eh? I can see the Remove rising up and cheering me to the echo. Every chap will simply bubble over with enthusiasm—"

"Wait a minute," interrupted McClure. "You can't expect miracles, Handy. If that's your whole speech, it'll only take about two minutes, and the chaps won't be won over by a two-minute spout."

"You hopeless ass, that's only just an inkling of the line I shall take," said Handforth tartly. "When I get down to the real speech, I shall work up to my big points, and drive them home with a sledge-hammer. And by the time I've done I shall hold the whole Remove in the hollow of my hand. A pity we can't arrange this meeting for this afternoon instead of this evening. I'm just in form now."

"You mustn't be too hasty," said Church, shaking his head. "You've got to make one or two preliminary speeches in the Triangle—and then you've got to go canvassing. At least, that's what you said."

"And that's what I mean," said Handforth grimly.

"Of course, it'll be a waste of time," added Church carelessly. "But that's your own funeral. If you *will* indulge in these dreams, Handy, you must expect to wake up some time."

"Dreams?" said Handforth. "What dreams?"

"Why, your expectation of being elected skipper."

"That's not a dream—that's a certainty!" retorted Handforth, with supreme confidence. "My dear idiots, there's no other possible result of this election. I've made up my mind to be Remove captain, and there's an end of it."

"An end of the Remove?" asked McClure. "Of course, that's possible—"

"No, an end of all arguments!" snapped Handforth. "Any more of your silly jokes, Arnold McClure, and I'll slaughter you!"

"Well, it's a dream—that's what I say," said Church gruffly. "What's the good of kidding yourself, Handy? You call Study D your Committee Room, you've got out election posters, you're making speeches and all the rest of it—but you haven't got one chance in a thousand. I don't like speaking bluntly, but what's the good of seeing a chap spoof himself up to the eyes? This is a case where it's a kindness to be cruel."

Handforth looked at his chums blankly.

"My only hat!" he ejaculated, aghast. "Do you mean to stand there and say that I've got no chance? You! My own chums! Is that all the faith you've got in me? Is that all the trust—"

"Oh, cheese it!" growled Church. "Facts are facts, Handy—and they're hard things to get over. Reggie Pitt and Fullwood are the only candidates in this election—and they're not issuing posters or making speeches. You wouldn't know there was an election on if it wasn't for your spectacular campaign. And the whole Remove is grinning at you. My dear chap, they take you as a joke—that's all. When the election comes off, you'll be hopelessly out of the running. So why not chuck it up now, and save yourself from a lot of chipping? Life won't be worth living if you keep up this tommy rot."

"Hear, hear!" agreed McClure heartily. "The captaincy is only a temporary job, anyhow. Dick Hamilton may be back by the end of next week. That's why these other chaps aren't taking the election seriously. Why the dickens don't you see the thing that's staring you in the face?"

Handforth breathed hard.

"My only hat!" he ejaculated. "Haven't I told you a hundred times that I've made up my mind to be skipper? Not temporary skipper, mark you—but permanent! What do I care about Dick Hamilton? When he comes back and finds me in the position of Form captain, he'll have to abide by it. There'll probably be another election—and I shall win

again. Don't you understand that this is my big chance?"

"But you're only fooling yourself!" said Church helplessly.

"That's what everybody thinks—but that's where everybody is wrong!" retorted Handforth. "After I've been elected, I shall prove myself to be such a marvellous skipper that the Remove wouldn't chuck me overboard for a dozen Dick Hamiltons! That's why we've got to push on this campaign with every ounce of energy. The fellows are spoofing me, eh? Huh! We'll see about that! They may be spoofing me now, but by the time I've finished they'll be solid in my support. This election is going to make history, my sons, and don't you forget it!"

Church and McClure gave it up as a bad job. They were well aware of the fact that Edward Oswald Handforth was simply living in a false paradise. But to tell him so was obviously impossible. He wouldn't listen. He had made up his mind, and there was an end of it. What could be done with a fellow like that?

"Oh, all right—go your own road!" said Church indignantly. "But don't blame Mac and me for not warning you! And don't say we didn't give you the straight tip. This election campaign of yours is a sheer waste of time!"

McClure nodded.

"To say nothing of being a waste of breath," he agreed. "And a waste of energy, and a waste of ink, and a waste of paper, and a waste of paste, and a waste of every other giddy thing! But, there! I'm wasting my own breath now, if it comes to that!"

"I'm glad you realise it!" said Handforth coldly. "Why I put up with you two chaps is one of the world's wonders!"

The rest of the school thought it was vice versa, but neither Church nor McClure thought it worth while to point out this interesting little fact.

"One of the world's wonders!" repeated Handforth. "How much longer have I got to talk to you? How much longer must I drive sense into you? I'm not dotty enough to believe that I can win this election without a lot of campaigning. The chaps treat me as a joke, do they? Well, I believe it—I know it! They think it's a fine bit of fun, to have me putting up as a candidate for the captaincy!"

Church and McClure opened their eyes. This was the first hint they had received that Handforth appreciated the position.

"Oh, I'm not so jolly dense!" went on Edward Oswald grimly. "And I know that I've got to fight in order to win! And that's where we can get the better of these fat-heads! While they're laughing and cackling, we're getting on with the job. And in the end I shall win!"

"Yes, but——"

"But nothing!" interrupted Handforth curtly. "The whole thing reminds me of a genuine Parliamentary election. In a three-

cornered fight, two of the candidates will conduct a half-hearted campaign, being certain of victory. But the third candidate, who's looked upon as an outsider, will conduct a lightning campaign, get the voters on his side, and head the poll. That's what comes of energy in opposition to apathy!"

"My hat!" said Church, staring.

"Well, this is a three-cornered campaign," continued Handforth. "I'm the outsider. At least, that's what the Remove thinks. My dear, deluded imbeciles! An outsider, am I? I'll show 'em! A lightning campaign, and I shall head the poll! And the more we can fight, the better! This is going to be a sweeping victory for Study D—and don't you jolly well forget it!"

Church and McClure gazed at one another in amazement. Edward Oswald Handforth clearly meant every word he said!



CHAPTER 2.

THE CAMPAIGN OPENS.

HERE was really no occasion for so much commotion in the Junior School. Not that there would have been any commotion, but for

Handforth's "lightning campaign."

Dick Hamilton was the captain of the Remove, and that famous Form was in no need of a new skipper. Dick hadn't resigned, and had no intention of resigning. It merely happened that he was away.

Mr. Nelson Lee, the celebrated Housemaster-Detective, had been prevailed upon to accept an important commission, and he had taken Dick Hamilton with him. There was a chance that they would not be back for five or six weeks—but, on the other hand, it was equally possible that they would turn up within ten days. It all depended upon how the case went.

Mr. Beverley Stokes, the breezy Housemaster of the West House, had cheerfully undertaken to look after the Ancient House during Nelson Lee's brief absence. Why bother about appointing a temporary man for such a short period?

And why elect a temporary Form captain, either? That was the way the Remove looked at it. Dick wouldn't be away for long, and Reggie Pitt could easily hold the reins in the meantime. Pitt was junior skipper in the West House already, and the duties of Form captain were well known to him—since he had held that post for some little time.

Left alone, the Remove would have been quite content to await Dick Hamilton's return. But Handforth insisted upon an election. In his opinion, a temporary skipper was absolutely essential. And, since it entailed too much loss of breath to argue with him, he was having his own way.

In the meantime, the usual life of St. Frank's went placidly on. In the Upper

School, the fellows did not even know that an election was pending. Even the juniors of the Modern House and the East House were unaffected—for the Remove was about equally divided between these two Houses.

Football was the greatest attraction just now. The summer holidays were over, and the stern business of the autumn term was in full swing. The aforementioned stern business being, of course, football. Studies were a necessary evil, and had to be grappled with, anyhow.

So far there had been no big match, for the term had only just begun. To-day was Friday, and on the morrow the juniors were playing a Form game—Remove versus Fourth. This was always a keen match, for an intense rivalry existed between these Forms.

Reggie Pitt, in the absence of Dick Hamilton, was the football captain, and he had already selected his team. He was standing in the old Triangle, near the fountain, discussing the prospects with Fullwood and De Valerie, of the Ancient House.

"I think we ought to win easily enough," he was saying. "Buster Boots is spouting about his dark horses, but the season's too young for any big surprises. By the way, I shall want you fellows to practise this evening."

"You won't need to tell us twice," said Fullwood, smiling.

"No fear!" agreed De Valerie. "Footer's going to be a big thing this term. I've heard a rumour that old Browne, of the Fifth, is suggesting the formation of a Rugger team in the Upper School. Is that true?"

"Goodness knows," replied Pitt. "Browne is capable of anything, if it comes to that. Not a bad idea, though. It's about time St. Frank's took up Rugger. Lots of big schools—Redcliffe and Helmford, and all those—would rather send us their Rugger fifteens than their Soccer elevens. Why shouldn't St. Frank's play both games?"

"Isn't it rather messing about?" asked Fullwood dubiously. "I mean, let's be a Soccer school or a Rugger school—one or the other."

"I don't see that it matters," remarked Pitt. "There's no earthly reason why we shouldn't play both games—and then everybody will be pleased. Some of the chaps will be pretty hot in both Soccer and Rugger teams, perhaps. It would be a bit of a novelty. Not that we need discuss the subject—it's only a rumour, so far, and it may come to nothing."

"Nearly time for afternoon lessons, isn't it?" remarked De Valerie, glancing up at the clock tower. "Good! Nearly ten minutes yet. Just in time to treat you fellows to an ice-cream in the school shop. Coming?"

"Ice-cream," grinned Pitt, "is my fatal weakness."

"And it's my secret vice!" chuckled Fullwood. "There's only one trouble about Mrs. Hake's ice-creams—she doesn't make 'em big enough."

"That's easily remedied," said De Valerie. "I'll order a double dose. Come on—we shall need something to cool us off for the afternoon."

They strolled towards the corner of the Triangle where the school shop was situated. Although September was well advanced, the weather was cloudless, and the day distinctly hot. Ice-creams were still in vogue, and would remain in vogue as long as Mrs. Hake had a ready sale for them.

The three Removites found the little shop in possession of Oldfield & Co., of the Modern House. The Fourth-Formers greeted their rivals with suitable banter.

"Poor old Remove!" said Len Clapson sorrowfully. "How do you like being licked in the first real game of the season?"

"Licked?" said Reggie Pitt. "When?"

"To-morrow," said Clapson. "I'm a prophet. Three goals to nil is my prediction."

"Funny thing," said Pitt. "That's just what I was thinking—only you chaps will figure in the 'nil' section."

"Don't you believe it," declared Harry Oldfield firmly. "Old Handforth is so full of his election campaign that he'll be off colour, and he'll let the leather go past him without even trying to stop it."

"That's about the only way you chaps CAN win!" said Pitt blandly.

"You silly Remove ass—"

"Not that Handy will forget his duties in that way," went on Pitt. "He may be an ass, but when he's between the sticks he's in his element. You've got to admit that he's the best junior goalie we've ever had."

"*Talk Of The Devil And He's Sure To Appear!*" chuckled Billy Nation, who quoted proverbs on every possible occasion, as he glanced out through the open doorway.

"Here comes Handy, with Church and McClure flanking him on either side with placards. Let's go out and rag him."

"Rats!" said De Valerie. "We came here for ice-cream. Three, Mrs. Hake—the biggest you can supply. And you Fourth chaps needn't look envious, either—nothing doing!"

Billy Nation sighed.

"*Happy Is The Man Who Expecteth Nothing, For He Shall Not Be Disappointed,*" he quoted sadly. "Still, we can always hope, and *A Good Hope Is Better Than A Bad Possession.*"

Reggie Pitt looked at him with concern.

"Is he often taken this way?" he asked, turning to the others.

"There's something wrong with Billy this term," replied Clapson, shaking his head. "He came back from the holidays stocked with proverbs, and he spouts them at us every time he opens his mouth. Life isn't worth living in Study No. 3 these days."

"You ought to be firm with him," said De Valerie severely. "Hold him down grimly, and master him."

"*Masters Are Mostly The Greatest Servants In The House,*" murmured Billy Nation softly.

"There you are!" said Oldfield. "What's the use? We've argued with him, we've pleaded with him, but we get nothing but ingratitude."

"*All Is Lost That Is Poured Into A Riven Dish.*" replied Nation promptly.

"A riven dish, eh?" grinned Clapson. "We always knew you were cracked, but it's nice to hear such a frank admission."

"*A Generous Confession Disarms Slander,*" retorted Billy.

"Give him an ice-cream, somebody, and make him freeze up!" said Fullwood, in despair. "Thank goodness Handy's coming in—even his rot is better than this flow of wisdom."

"*An Ounce Of Wisdom Is Worth A Pound Of Wit.*" said Billy.

"Oh, my goodness!" roared Fullwood. "Are you going to be silent?"

"*Silence Seldom Doth Harm—*"

"All right, be as silent as an oyster, and make yourself thoroughly harmless," said Fullwood indignantly. "I'm a believer in learning things, but there's a limit."

"You're quite right," agreed Billy Nation nodding. "I'm not

a great hand at talking. *He That Would Live In Peace, Must Hear And See And Say The Least.* I'm afraid that maxim wouldn't do for old Handy—"

"Well, here he is!" said Clapson, with relief. "It's the first time I can remember being overjoyed at seeing the chump!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Edward Oswald Handforth strode into the shop with a determined expression on his face. Church and McClure were just behind. They carried big placards, to say nothing of a high, three-legged stool.

"Huh!" ejaculated Handforth, disparagingly. "Thought so! Wasting your time on ice-cream, eh? Well, I'm going to make a speech. You Fourth Form chaps needn't interfere, because you're not wanted!"

"Well, there's nothing like being perfectly frank," grinned Oldfield.

"I'm out for the Remove captaincy, and I'm going to win," said Handforth firmly.

"*There's Many A Slip Betwixt The Cup And The Lip!*" said Billy Nation smiling.

"Eh?"

"Take it easy, old man," advised Billy. "*Hasty Climbers Have Sudden Falls.*"

"You'll have a sudden fall in a minute—without doing any climbing!" retorted Handforth warmly. "By George! Do you think I came here to listen to your silly proverbs?"

"They're not mine," said Nation. "They're all as old as the hills—"

"Then they're no good to me," interrupted Handforth. "I'm out for progress. I'm the candidate in favour of push and go. All the old stuff is dead—and I've no use for it. Vote for me and you vote for—"

"Chaos?" suggested Pitt, as Handforth paused.

"Well, there goes the bell for lessons, so that's that," grinned Fullwood. "I don't pretend to be a lover of the class-room, but lessons strike me as being the lesser of two evils. Let's escape!"

The juniors crowded out, chuckling, and Handforth breathed hard.



CHAPTER 3.

A LITTLE CANVASSING.

"LESSONS!" said Handforth fiercely. "It's a shame—that's what it is! There ought to be special rules for election time. How

can we bother with lessons in the middle of a campaign like this? I'm going to make my speech—and blow the bell!"

"But you'll only get into a row," objected Church. "And what's the good of making a speech to the thin air? All the fellows are going in, and—"

"I can't help that," interrupted

Handforth obstinately. "Where's that stool? I came out here to make a speech, and I'm going to make one. I'm not going to be dished by any bell!"

Against such reasoning as this there was no argument. Church and McClure stood by, fuming, while Handforth perched himself upon the stool, and spread out his hands towards the empty Triangle.

"Comrades!" roared Handforth. "No, that's wrong! That's what old Tucker would say, and I'm not one of his breed! Brothers! That's better—"

"A bit too much like Browne!" interrupted McClure.

"Gentlemen!" roared Handforth triumphantly. "Gentlemen of the Remove! Let me impress upon you the importance of this election. Away with apathy—away with sluggishness and indifference! I want your votes—I want you to elect me as your captain, and bring an era of joy to the Remove, such as the Remove has never seen. I'm out for big things!"

Church gave McClure a glance of signifi-

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cance, and McClure nodded. Handforth was well started, and there was positively no telling when he would stop. Unobtrusively, his chums slipped away, leaving their placards on the ground. In another three seconds they were streaking for the School House.

"Don't think for a moment that I am making idle boasts," continued Handforth, thumping one fist into his other palm. "Elect me, and you elect a winner! Place me at the head of the poll, and the Remove will be governed by a firm, kindly hand—a hand that will never falter in its unerring progress towards the ultimate goal of—"

"Handforth!"

"Eh?" said Handforth, starting. "Don't interrupt—"

"What is the meaning of this, Handforth?"

With an effort, Edward Oswald pulled himself together. He found Mr. Crowell standing immediately in front of him—and the master of the Remove was not looking particularly genial. The rest of the Triangle was empty.

"It's all right, sir," said Handforth. "I'm making a speech."

"There is no need for you to tell me the obvious, Handforth!" barked Mr. Crowell. "I am not in the least surprised to find you making a speech to the thin air, for you are the one boy in the school who would do such a thing. But are you aware of the fact that the bell has already sounded?"

"The bell? Which bell, sir?"

Mr. Crowell pursed his lips.

"I am loath to remind you that lessons are considered an essential factor in the life of St. Frank's," he said sarcastically. "It pains me to drag you from this—this improvised platform, Handforth. But I would remind you that unless you are in your place in the Form-room within one minute, I shall detain you for two hours this evening."

"But—but I'm making a speech, sir!" protested Handforth indignantly. "I'm the favourite for the Remove captaincy, sir!"

"I fully appreciate the paramount importance of this campaign," said Mr. Crowell. "At the same time, lessons must receive a slight amount of attention. I am sorry to inflict this nuisance upon you, Handforth, but my duty is clear. And these," he added, glancing at the discarded placards. "Upon my word! Are you responsible for these extraordinary announcements?"

The placards were made of newspaper sheets—several of them pasted together in order to make a thick, durable substance. Words were daubed upon the surface in black enamel, and stood out boldly:

"VOTE FOR HANDFORTH—THE RED-HOT HUSTLER!"

And the other placard bore this legend:

"HANDFORTH—THE CHAMPION OF THE OPPRESSED—VOTE FOR HIM!"

Mr. Crowell pointed to the latter effusion accusingly.

"What is the meaning of this?" he asked. "Are you suggesting, Handforth, that the Remove is suffering from oppression?"

"It's—it's just a slogan, sir—"

"You'll tear it up at once," said Mr. Crowell. "I am responsible for the Remove, and I will not have these innuendoes levelled at my head."

"These which, sir?" asked Handforth. "I haven't levelled anything at your head! I wouldn't dream of such a thing—"

"I am by no means surprised that you are ignorant of the word 'innuendo,' Handforth," interrupted Mr. Crowell tartly. "An innuendo is a suggestion—an insinuation. This—this disgraceful legend is a clear hint that the Remove is oppressed. Unless you can conduct your election campaign in a different way, I shall prohibit the whole thing."

Handforth was staggered.

"But—but I'm the favourite, sir!" he gasped.

"You surprise me, Handforth," said Mr. Crowell. "If you are elected as temporary captain, you will surprise me still more. I am aware that the boys are foolish and irresponsible—but I rather think there is a limit to their folly. However, the Form is awaiting us."

He marched off, and Handforth only just managed to escape detention by dodging in at the last possible second. He was bubbling with indignation. These lessons were an unwarrantable interruption. There was simply no other way to describe them. Just when he was getting warmed up to a really good speech, this interruption comes along, and ruins everything!

He only narrowly escaped detention as it was, for he was inattentive and restless during the afternoon. Fortunately—for Handforth—Mr. Crowell had a headache, and he refrained from starting any arguments. For once the Form-master left Handforth severely alone.

"Good!" said Edward Oswald, as soon as dismissal came. "Now we'll go round and do some canvassing, you chaps. We'll prepare everybody for the big speech. Polling's to-morrow, so we can't waste any time."

"And what about tea?" asked Church grimly.

"Tea?"

"You put it in a pot, and pour boiling water over it," explained Church.

"You—you ass!" snorted Handforth. "Do you think I don't know what tea is?"

"Well, you seemed a bit uncertain!" growled Church. "Anyhow, it's tea-time—so we can leave the canvassing until afterwards."

Handforth frowned.

"We shall miss tea this evening," he said firmly. "My plan is to catch all the chaps in their studies. We'll do some vigorous canvassing, and get the electors on my side. There's something more important in this world than guzzling tea and filling ourselves with stodgy bread-and-butter and indigestible



Church suddenly brought the bolster down with all his might upon Handy's head. The bolster ripped open from the force of the blow, and Handy was smothered with its feathery contents. Just then, Mr. Crowell looked in!

cakes! Come on! You're my lieutenants, and you've got to support me!"

"But tea is wonderfully stimulating!" urged McClure. "Once you've had a couple of cups of tea, Handy, you'll be full of vim and go. And nobody can expect to make good speeches on an empty stomach. Your best policy is to have a solid, hearty meal, and prepare yourself for the battle."

"Oh, well, perhaps——"

"Absolutely!" said Church quickly. "You'll never be a success unless you stoke yourself up, Handy. We've got sardines, and fish-paste, and corned beef, and jam, and lemon curd——"

"No!" interrupted Handforth firmly. "You can't tempt me with those things! We've going to do that canvassing now—and tea can wait! We'll start at the end of the corridor, and work upwards."

Church and McClure groaned.

"There's footer practice, too," said McClure. "We've got a game with the Fourth to-morrow, and Pitt's got your name on the list, Handy. You've got to turn out for practice directly after tea——"

"Eh, what's that?" interrupted Handforth. "Who said I've got to turn out for practice?"

"Reggie Pitt."

"And who the dickens is Reggie Pitt?"

"A chap in the West House——"

"I know who he is!" roared Handforth.

"Well, you asked——"

"Who's Pitt?" demanded Handforth curtly. "Who is he? A West House bounder! And he gives me orders, eh? Huh! He's an optimist if he thinks I'm going to obey 'em!"

McClure went red.

"You—you exasperating fathead!" he snapped. "Polling isn't until to-morrow evening—and there's this game on the list before then! Pitt's the skipper—whether you admit it or not! And if you don't turn out for practice, he'll probably cross your name off the list, and put somebody else down as goalie."

Handforth laughed.

"Let him try it!" he said fiercely. "By George! Do you think we're going to let a West House idiot order us about? I'm the skipper—or I shall be to-morrow evening. And the team against the Fourth is going to be chosen by me. What's more, I'm going to do that canvassing now."

"Good!" said Church. "Do it!"

"And good luck to you!" added McClure coldly.

They linked arms, and marched off.

"Hi!" roared Handforth. "Where are you chaps going?"

"Tea!" said Church and McClure, in one voice.



CHAPTER 4.

HARDLY A SUCCESS!

EDWARD OSWALD HANDFORTH took a very deep breath. This wasn't a very good indication for the future! He—the captain—to-be—ignored and flouted by his own chums! It simply wasn't to be stood! Unless he nipped this sort of thing in the bud at once it might outgrow his powers of control.

He reached the door of Study D just as Church and McClure were entering.

"Just a minute!" he said, in a cold, steady voice. "Are you fellows coming on that canvassing stunt with me, or are you going to spend a week in the school sanny?"

"Neither," said Church. "We're going to have tea."

"You—you insubordinate fatheads!" gasped Handforth, his icy control vanishing. "You traitors! Aren't you my trusted lieutenants?"

"After tea we'll be your slaves!" said McClure generously.

"You'll be my slaves now!" hooted Handforth. "By George! Mutiny! Mutiny—even before I'm skipper! I'll give you one more chance, you—you rebellious lunatics! I'll give you—"

Quite calmly Church shut the door. It slammed in Handforth's face, and nearly caught him on the nose. He stared blankly at the panels as he heard the key turn in the lock.

"Hi!" he howled. "Open this door!"

"After tea!" came Church's voice.

"My only hat! Are you going to obey?"

"After tea!" replied McClure.

"You—you—you—"

"After tea!" said Church and McClure together.

Handforth stood there, clenching his fists, unclenching them, and clenching them again. His rugged face worked spasmodically, and there was such a glare in his eyes that he looked demented.

"Trouble?" asked somebody sympathetically.

It was the last straw. Handforth turned, and found his minor close by. Willy was standing there with his hands in his pockets, eyeing the scene with approval. Edward Oswald nearly choked. For Willy to witness this tragedy was a sheer disaster.

"Clear off!" he said thickly.

"Five bob!" said Willy.

"Eh?"

"Five Bob," repeated Willy calmly. "I just came along—"

Handforth positively mouthed at him.

"Do you expect me to give you five bob now?" he breathed hoarsely. "Unless you're out of this passage in three seconds I'll smash you up!"

"You bully!" said Willy severely. "That's no way to talk to your fragile, defenceless young brother! Just because Church and McClure defy you for once, you needn't

threaten me. Good luck to 'em! It's these little explosions that makes life worth living for the poor chaps. They've got to let off the safety valve now and again."

"They've locked me out!" said Handforth fiercely.

"They know something," said Willy, nodding. "But if I was in their shoes, I'd think it was safer to lock you in. And a few lengths of rope wouldn't come in amiss, either. When a chap starts foaming at the mouth, it's time to tie him up!"

"You—you—"

"But don't let me interrupt the happy party," went on Willy. "Chubby Heath and Juicy Lemon are waiting for tea—and I've come along to buy the provender. The sooner you whack out that five bob, the sooner you'll be rid of me. I wouldn't dream of making myself a nuisance to anybody."

"You won't get a cent out of me!" panted Handforth furiously.

"I don't want a cent," replied Willy. "I want five bob!"

"I tell you—"

"One dollar!" said Willy patiently.

"Don't insult English money by calling five bob a dollar!" roared Handforth.

"Well, you were talking about cents just now—"

"I don't care what I was talking about!" howled Handforth. "I'm not going to lend you a cent, or a dollar, or five bob, or anything. And there's an end of it. Understand?"

"Yes!"

"That's final!" added Handforth.

"Yes!"

"Absolutely final!" said Edward Oswald triumphantly.

"Good!" said Willy. "You've finished?"

"I have!"

"Then whack out that five bob, and we'll call it quits!" said Willy calmly.

Handforth swayed slightly.

"Quits?" he gasped faintly.

"Yes," said Willy. "We don't want to have any arguments, I suppose?"

His major feebly beat the air, clutched at the doorpost, and produced two half-crowns from his waistcoat-pocket.

"Take 'em!" he breathed. "Take 'em and go!"

"Then I win?" asked Willy, taking them. "Thanks!"

He strolled off, whistling, and Handforth swallowed something which had obstructed his throat. Whenever he tried to master his minor, the result was always the same. There was something absolutely uncanny about Willy. Without getting in the least excited, without exerting himself in the slightest, he invariably got his own way. It wasn't merely tact—it was a gift.

The door of Study D opened, and Handforth started.

"Tea," said Church invitingly. "Come on, Handy—all ready!"

Edward Oswald instinctively clenched his

fists. This was better than he had hoped for! His chums had actually played into his hands—and now they were going to pay the full penalty for their insubordination!

He strode into the study, and paused.

An intoxicating odour of hot tea assailed his nostrils—hot tea, buttered toast, to say nothing of frying kippers. Church and McClure had been busy during their leader's little argument with Willy!

"Ready?" asked McClure, turning away from the stove, frying-pan in hand. "Where's Handy's plate? Oh, here we are! Good! Come on, Handy—all hot—cooked to a turn. Your tea's poured out, too."

Handforth unclenched his fists, and staggered to a chair. He sat down heavily, and took a gulp of tea in order to steady himself. It tasted good. And the kipper certainly sent forth an appetising aroma.

He looked up. Church and McClure were busying themselves as though nothing had happened. They were cheerful and light-hearted—and even Handforth, with all his warlike nature, found it difficult to slaughter a couple of fellows who were obviously at peace with the world.

Besides, now that he came to think of it, he was jolly thirsty, and the good things on the table were appetising, too. He looked at the kipper, and the kipper gave a little crackle.

"Oh, well," said Handforth awkwardly. "I mean, tea— After all, a chap can't afford to miss his meals, can he?"

"I hear that everybody's keen on the meeting to-night," said Church, with rare tact. "It looks as though the whole Remove will turn up. Pass the bread-and-butter, Mac."

"Good thing we had those kippers in," said McClure. "I spotted 'em this morning, when the fish wagon was taking a supply of stuff round to the back. You can always trust me to know a good kipper."

"Best we've had for weeks," said Handforth approvingly. "After all, why have a lot of squabbling and bickering? Jolly good of you chaps to get tea ready so quickly. We can start on the canvassing stunt as soon as we've done."

"That's just the idea," agreed Church, nodding.

And there was peace in Study D. Long association with Handforth had left Church and McClure with an uncanny gift of perception. Handforth fondly believed that he was their leader—but when it came to a pinch, they could make him eat out of their hands!

come in, gets left behind. The fellow who goes out for victory, and fights every inch of the way, is the winner."

"Hear, hear!" said Church mechanically.

"I know—because my pater is an M.P.," went on Handforth. "He spent thousands of quids on his campaign, and spoofed the people into returning him to Parliament. He made all sorts of promises, and all he does now is to sit in the House of Commons and go to sleep."

McClure grinned.

"And I suppose you're going to adopt the same tactics?" he asked.

"Absolutely!" said Handforth firmly.

"You're going to spoof the Remove into electing you?"

"Eh?"

"And then you're going to sit still and go to sleep?"

"You silly ass, St. Frank's isn't the House of Commons!" snapped Handforth. "There'll be no chance of going to sleep when I'm captain. The whole Form will be alive from the first fellow to the last. I mean to make all sorts of changes. As soon as I'm skipper I'll drive some discipline into the lot of you! I'll have obedience, or there'll be trouble."

"Wouldn't it be as well to get elected first?" suggested Church, as he pushed his tea-cup aside. "And what about that canvassing idea? I don't want to disturb you, old man, but time's getting on—"

"By George, yes!" interrupted Handforth, rising to his feet. "We'll start with Study A, and work upwards. Then we'll go along to the West House, and canvass the chaps there. My idea is to put a few quiet arguments forward, and then consolidate the position at the meeting, later."

"It's a good idea," said Church, "but the fellows are so pig-headed. You must be prepared for opposition, old man. And it's quite likely they'll treat you as a joke, too."

Handforth's chums would be heartily thankful when the election was over. It was an absolute certainty, in their opinion, that Reggie Pitt would be elected as temporary skipper. Handforth didn't stand a chance in a thousand, but he would never admit it until he saw the actual result of the poll with his own eyes. Church and McClure looked forward to another day of campaigning with many misgivings. This sort of thing had a wearing effect.

But to tell Handforth that he was exerting his energy for no purpose would have been fatal. The only thing was to let him run on, and discover the dreadful truth for himself. Experience was the only teacher which Handforth understood.

"Well, come on!" he said briskly.

Fortified by a hearty tea, Church and McClure were ready for the canvassing round. They arrived at Study A, and Handforth paused. He frowned.

"I'm not sure that I want the votes of these cads," he said dubiously.

CHAPTER 5.

ON THE JOB.



VERY election," said Handforth, a little later, "is won by persistency and doggedness. The fellow who takes things

for granted, and who waits for the votes to

"You can't afford to scorn anybody's vote," said Church. "Better try 'em."

Handforth grunted, and opened the door. Bernard Forrest, the cad of the Remove, hastily threw a cigarette into the fireplace, and Gulliver and Bell dived to the window.

"Smoking, eh?" said Handforth curtly, as he strode in. "You disgusting rotters!"

"Who told you to come in here?" demanded Forrest, with a glare. "Clear out, confound you! We don't need any rot from you, Handforth!"

"You won't get any rot—but you'll get a few biffs!" roared Handforth aggressively. "By George! Caught red-handed! Shut that door, Church! Get ready to fight! We're going to lick these worms to jelly!"

"Chuck it, Handy!" breathed Church.

"What?"

"Don't forget you came here to canvass for votes——"

"My hat, yes!" said Handforth, starting. "I'd forgotten that!"

"Votes, eh?" said Forrest, catching the words. "Oh, certainly! We'll give you two each, Handforth, old man! It'll be simply lovely to have you skipper. You can rely on us all along the line."

"Hear, hear!" said Gulliver and Bell promptly.

Handforth regarded them suspiciously.

"You'll vote for me?" he asked.

"Yes, rather!"

"Honour bright?"

"Honour bright!" retorted Forrest & Co.

Handforth unclenched his fists. After all, he couldn't very well smash up these chaps after they'd promised to vote for him. He turned to the door again, and nodded.

"All right," he said. "Good! But as soon as I'm skipper I shall put down this smoking with a firm hand. That's understood!"

He went out, and a cackle followed him as he closed the door.

"Rather a tactless remark, old man," said Church. "I mean, after they'd promised to vote for you, it was hardly the game to use threats. And you can't believe a word they say, either. We warned you that most of the chaps will try to pull your leg."

"But they said 'honour bright,'" said Handforth, aghast.

His chums looked at him wonderingly. It amazed them that he could credit the honour of such out-and-out cads. But, as a matter of fact, Handforth was right for once. Forrest & Co. had been quite sincere. Handforth's election would suit them down to the ground—for they took it for granted that the whole Remove would be in a state of chaos as soon as Handforth took the reins—and this would give them more scope for their own peculiar fancies.

"Oh, well, we can't bother with 'em!" went on Handforth, at length. "Let's have a shot at the other chaps."

They looked into Study B, but Hubbard and Teddy Long were absent. Study C not only contained Sir Montie Tregellis-West and

Tommy Watson, but Reggie Pitt and Jack Grey, too. The two West House juniors had been visitors for tea.

"Good!" said Handforth, as he surveyed them. "I'm canvassing!"

"There's nothing like it," agreed Reggie Pitt.

"I want you chaps to promise me your votes," continued Handforth.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Chuck it, Handy!" grinned Church. "You can't expect to get Pitt's vote, can you?"

"Why not?"

"Well, he's one of the candidates——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"If Pitt has the interests of the Remove at heart, he'll vote for me!" said Handforth firmly. "And that applies to you other fellows, too. As soon as I'm captain, I'll take charge of the footer, organise the general sports, institute lectures, and fix up boxing campaigns."

"We believe it," said Tommy Watson, nodding. "Especially the boxing campaign business. In fact, there'll be so much boxing if you're elected that there'll be no time for anything else!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, can I rely on your votes?" asked Handforth.

"Dear old boy, you can rely on anythin' you like," said Sir Montie.

"Good!"

"But that doesn't mean to say you'll get the votes," went on Tregellis-West. "Begad! You're frightfully welcome to rely on us, but it'll be risky. Why not save a lot of trouble by standin' down?"

"Because I've made up my mind to be Remove captain—and nothing is going to stop me," replied Handforth. "Determination is the one force which ensures success. I'm going on with this campaign like a meteor sweeping through the heavens, and before I've done I shall forge my way through turbulent waters to victory."

"You may be right," said Pitt, "but I've always understood that meteors forge their way through space."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'm out for the captaincy, and nothing will be allowed to stand in my way!" snorted Handforth. "I'm doing some canvassing at present—just to make sure of your votes. Are you going to say 'yes,' or shall I wipe up the floor with you?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'm waiting!" said Handforth ominously.

"Yes!" said the four juniors, in one voice.

"That means you'll vote for me, eh?"

"It means that we're willing to agree to anything if you'll only clear out, and leave us in peace," said Reggie Pitt blandly. "Being one of the candidates I can't very well vote at all—but I can safely promise you that Tommy and Montie and Jack—our friends on my right and left and northern flank respectively—will give you their votes."

"What's that?" said Jack Grey. "You silly ass——"

"And that," said Reggie, "is a promise."
 "Really, old boy—"
 "Hang it, Reggie, look here—"
 "A definite promise!" declared Pitt. "So you can go away, Handy, and forge your way through turbulent waters elsewhere."
 Handforth beamed.

"Good!" he said heartily. "I told you I was out for blood, didn't I?"

"We knew you were out for something, but we didn't think it was quite so lurid as blood," said Reggie. "Still, as long as you get your requirements from some other study, we shan't mind. Tommy, you'd better fetch Handy a pail."

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 Handforth went out of Study C, and gazed triumphantly at his chums.

"Well?" he asked.
 "It beats me," said McClure flatly. "Old Pitt absolutely promised those votes, too. The funny thing is, I can't see where the catch comes in."

"Catch?" repeated Edward Oswald. "My hat! When will you fellows realise that I'm forging ahead—"
 "Through turbulent waters to victory?" asked Church. "All right—we understand, old man. Let's continue the pilgrimage. Study E next, eh? I'll bet we shall find Archie asleep."

They looked into Study E, and found Archie Glenthorne sprawling languidly on the lounge. Alf Brent, his study mate, was face downwards on the hearthrug, his chin resting on his hands, and with a book in front of him.



CHAPTER 6.

REGGIE PITT'S LITTLE SCHEME.

"H A T - H O!" murmured Archie dreamily. "Visitors, what?"

The genial ass of the Remove roused himself slightly, waved a languid hand, and adjusted his monocle.

"I mean to say, guests, and all that sort of thing," he went on. "Be good enough to arouse the old tissues, Alf, and do the honours."

Alf Brent glanced up.
 "It's only Handy!" he grunted. "Clear off, you disturbing fathead! I've just got to an interesting point."

"Good gad!" said Archie, starting. "I mean, odds slights and slurs! A somewhat

foul method of welcoming the good old laddies, as it were. Kindly take a chair, Handy, old turbine! Take a couple of dashed chairs, and make yourself absolutely comfortable."

Handforth sniffed.
 "I haven't come here to make myself comfortable, or to sit down, either," he said curtly. "I'm canvassing. You've either got to promise me your votes for to-morrow's election, or I'll chuck the pair of you out of the window!"

"Absolutely!" said Archie, nodding.
 "Are you going to give me your vote, or not?"

"Who? Me?"
 "Yes, you!"
 "Oh, absolutely!" said Archie promptly.
 "Absolutely what, you fathead?"

"I mean to say, you want the best votes—we have them!" said Archie cheerily. "Any-

thing to oblige, laddie. Good gad! Nobody comes to Archie in vain, what? I mean, votes! How many, old traction-engine? Say the good old number, and I'll proceed to deliver the goods!"

"You dithering idiot!" snorted Handforth. "I only want one vote from you. And I don't want it now, either!"

"Then why wreck the good old peace in this foul fashion?" asked

Archie. "I mean, how about it, Alf? The lad barges in, and interrupts our fruity hour of repose, and I'm dashed if he wants these dashed votes at all! Somewhat ripe, in a way of speaking."

"Oh, don't answer him!" said Alf gruffly. "Let him wander on!"

"Absolutely," agreed Archie. "I wish he dashed well would!"

"Would what?" demanded Handforth.
 "Wander on," replied Archie, with a wave of his hand. "I mean to say, there it stands, laddie, just behind you—the ever-open door. A bit too much ever open, by gad! I can feel sundry blasts whistling round the ankle department."

"Come on, Handy!" said Church.
 "Rot!" said Handforth. "These chaps haven't promised—"

"If this is your idea of canvassing, I'm going to chuck it!" interrupted Church crossly. "You can't come into the chaps' studies and threaten to slaughter them unless they vote for you. That's not canvassing—it's intimidation. You wouldn't like to win this election by Red methods, I suppose?"

**DO YOU WISH TO
 CORRESPOND**

**with other Members of the
 St. Frank's League inter-
 ested in your hobby, or
 living overseas?**

See particulars on page 36.

"I don't care whether they're red or green!" retorted Handforth, missing the point. "I'm going to win. Archie will look green in a minute if he doesn't give me his promise—and there'll be plenty of redness, too," he added, pushing up his sleeves.

"Better fetch that pail, Mac?" suggested Church.

Archie slowly rose to his feet.

"Alf, old sparrow, it appears that a slight amount of bother is indicated," he said, in distress. "I mean, is this our study, or not? Do we allow this frightful invasion by frightful frights? It seems to be that something ought to be done about it. What-ho! The battle cry goes forth!"

"Good old Archie!" grinned Brent, rising. "That's the style."

But before any actual trouble could start, a further invasion took place. Reggie Pitt came in, followed by Jack Grey, Tommy Watson, Tregellis-West, Fullwood, Russell, and De Valerie.

"Good absolutely gad!" gasped Archie, starting. "I mean, help! Odds hordes and multitudes!"

"It's all right, Archie—nothing to fear," said Reggie crisply. "Has Handy been pleading for your votes at the poll?"

"Pleading is right!" said Alf Brent, grinning. "In about another ten seconds his pleadings would have developed into a riot. We were just going to chuck him out!"

"Absolutely on the cold line!" said Archie.

"Well, don't upset the poor fellow like that," said Pitt. "Promise him your votes at once, and finish with him. Life's too short to bother over a mere vote or two."

"*Better To Please A Fool, Than Tease A Fool!*" said Billy Nation, from the doorway.

Handforth turned and glared.

"Are you calling me a fool, you Fourth-Form fathead?" he asked hotly. "And who told you to barge in where you're not wanted?"

"I've just been looking for Pitt," said Billy. "Boots wants to speak to him about the football to-morrow!"

"What's it got to do with Pitt?"

"Isn't he the skipper of your team?" asked Nation.

"No, he's not!" retorted Handforth. "I'm the skipper!"

"Well, we needn't argue," said Pitt gently. "Peace, children, peace!"

"Absolutely," agreed Archie. "I mean to say, this seems to be an occasion for a few knobs of tact and patience, what?"

"You'll have a wearying time of it," said Billy Nation, with a grin. "Handy is enough to exhaust anybody. *Patience Is A Stout Horse, But It Tires At Last!*"

"He's calling me a horse!" roared Handforth.

"Well, a horse isn't much different from a mule, after all," said Brent.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You're both wrong," smiled De Valerie. "We've always understood that Handy was an ass!"

"You—you—you——" bellowed Handforth, incoherent.

"*Every Ass Loves To Hear Himself Bray!*" murmured Billy appropriately.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Better go easy with those proverbs of yours," advised Pitt. "Poor old Handy is swelling visibly—he'll burst if you don't look out! His head is as big as a barrel already!"

"*Empty Barrels Make The Most Sound!*" retorted Billy Nation.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Fortunately, the irrepressible Fourth-Former took himself off before slaughter was actually committed. Handforth took a deep breath, and glared round at the Remove juniors.

"Well?" he demanded. "What's all this rot, anyhow?"

"Absolutely," said Archie. "What, I mean, is this rot? Good gad! Poetry! Absolutely priceless rhyme——"

"Priceless is the correct word," agreed Pitt. "A rhyme like that isn't worth anything! But why not promise Handy your votes and let him go? These other chaps have promised."

"In that case, we'll agree, too," said Brent, scenting something.

"Absolutely," said Archie. "What ho! Rely on us, laddie!"

"Is this honest Injun?" demanded Handforth suspiciously.

"Positively official and guaranteed to be jewelled in every hole," said Pitt, nodding. "So now you're free to go and forge through another chunk of that turbulent water of yours!"

Handforth & Co. retired, victorious. At least, Handforth felt victorious. Church and McClure had a shrewd idea that there was something fishy about this affair. Reggie Pitt was renowned as a japer of no mean quality, and the rash manner in which the fellows were promising Handforth their votes was too good to be actually true.

But as soon as Handforth & Co. had gone, Pitt's companions grabbed him.

"Now, you ass, what's the funny idea?" demanded Jack Grey grimly. "What the dickens do you mean by making us promise to vote for that hopeless ass?"

"Out with it, Reggie!"

"What's the wheeze?"

Reggie Pitt pulled himself away.

"Can't you have pity on the poor chap?" he asked severely. "Can't you see how anxious he is to get the majority and be elected captain? Why not do him a good turn?"

"And vote for him?" gasped Tommy Watson.

"Why not?"

"I can think of a hundred reasons why not—but one's enough!" retorted Tommy. "He'd make the worst Remove skipper in



The Captain of the Remove scented trouble when Mr. Crowell entered the dormitory with Teddy Long—who looked like some new kind of bird, with his head all smothered in feathers. “Handforth, do you know anything about this?” snapped Mr. Crowell.

St. Frank’s history! Do you want the other ninety-nine reasons?”

Reggie grinned.

“That one’s enough, but let’s keep cool,” he said calmly. “Here’s the point. As far as I can understand, this election is a one-man affair. If it wasn’t for Handy, there wouldn’t be any election at all.”

“That’s right,” agreed Brent, nodding. “The Remove is quite content to get along without a skipper until Dick Hamilton comes back.”

“Of course,” said Watson indignantly. “Dick might turn up next week. Where’s the sense of having all this fuss?”

“Exactly,” agreed Pitt. “That washes out the election altogether. Therefore, why shouldn’t we spoof old Handy, have a heap of fun to-morrow, and solemnly give him every vote there is? He wants votes—let him have ‘em!”

“Up to the neck!” nodded Pitt. “The whole Form has decided that no election is necessary, but Handy has practically forced the thing by setting himself up as a candidate. But why should we pander to him by standing against him? Let him get all the votes—let him be elected!”

“And then have a good howl at him afterwards, eh?” said Jack Grey. “My only hat! What a jape! Imagine Handy’s face when he sees the figures!”

“Something like this: ‘Handforth, 45; Pitt, 0; Fullwood, 0!’” chuckled Reggie. “And then, after he’s fully convinced himself that he’s skipper, we’ll tell him the gentle truth.”

“I shall have my camera ready for that moment!” grinned Watson.

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“Won’t it be a bit of a dirty trick?” asked Archie. “I mean, the poor old lad will absolutely crumple up like a toy balloon when you shove a pickaxe into it!”

“He’ll soon recover,” said Pitt confidently. “Handy’s got marvellous powers of recuperation. Besides, he deserves it. Look at the way he’s going about, upsetting everybody with his tommy-rot, and taking it for granted that he’s going to be elected. He’s asking to be spoofed.”

“Well, that’s true enough,” admitted



CHAPTER 7.
THE PLOT.

THE other juniors looked at Pitt wonderingly. A few smiles became apparent; chuckles followed, with wide grins here and there.

“Spoof him, eh?” said Fullwood happily.

Brent. "It'll be the joke of the season, too. He'll be skipper for about two minutes, and then he'll learn that the election was bunkum from start to finish. Perhaps it'll teach him a lesson not to be so arrogant."

Reggie Pitt grinned.

"I'm not complaining of Handy's arrogance," he replied. "He wouldn't be Handy without it. It's one of his chief charms, my sons—and you can't deny that he's a jolly useful chap in a scrap. Handy's quite all right as he is, and he was sent straight from the heavens as a subject for japing."

"Of course, he's a hopeless chump, but isn't this expecting a bit too much?" asked Fullwood. "Even Handy will smell a rat, I'm afraid. He can't be idiot enough to expect a sweeping victory of that sort. And the whole jape will be ruined if he suspects things in advance."

"Yes, that's a point," said Jack Grey, thoughtfully.

"A somewhat jagged snag, what?" said Archie.

"It would be, if we went to work in the wrong way," said Pitt. "But we've got to go round and give everybody the tip. We've got to get the whole Remove in this affair secretly. Although secrecy won't be so very important with Handy. He's so full of the election that he won't see the red light when it's right in front of him."

"But what's the idea of giving the tip?"

"Well, my idea is to do the thing by a gradual process," replied Reggie shrewdly. "For example, he's holding a big meeting to-night, and nobody meant to go. The thing was a joke. Handy's expecting the Remove to turn up, but the Remove has decided that it doesn't matter."

"Of course," nodded Fullwood.

"My plan is for everybody to turn up," said Pitt. "We'll treat him as a joke at first, and then pretend to be impressed by his spouting. See the wheeze? By the time the meeting's over, about half of us will be enthusiastic supporters. At least, that's what Handy will think."

"A sort of insidious business, old boy?" asked Tregellis-West.

"That's the idea," agreed Reggie. "Then, to-morrow, there's the footer match against the Fourth, and we shall win. We'll give Handy all the credit, and at his final meeting—he's going to hold one just before the poll, I believe—we'll work up a marvellous scene of enthusiasm. In that way he won't have a chance of smelling a rat—he'll think that his eloquence has done the trick."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"By Jove!" said Watson. "That's a brainy scheme, if you like!"

"The poll will be at seven o'clock," continued Reggie, grinning. "It'll only take ten minutes to count the votes after all the ballot papers have been shoved in the box, and I'm going to suggest the formation of a special committee to count the votes, and

announce the result. An independent committee, you understand."

"Chaps outside the Remove, you mean?"

"Yes, young Handforth of the Third, Boots of the Fourth, and Browne of the Fifth—they ought to form a good independent committee," said Reggie. "In the meantime, the whole Remove will gather in the Triangle and await the result. Browne can announce it from the Ancient House steps. Just imagine old Handy's excitement when he hears!"

"Why not rig up a magic lantern, and throw the result on a screen?" suggested Fullwood. "We might as well do the thing in the approved style."

Pitt saluted him.

"A sheer stroke of genius!" he said respectfully. "That's the best yet! Up comes the row of figures on the screen—with old Handy well at the top! My only hat! Isn't it worth a bit of trouble?"

"I wouldn't agree if it was anybody else—but with Handy it's different," said Tommy Watson. "He's so jolly sure of himself that it'll be a good lesson to him. Perhaps he won't be so cocksure next time."

Within half an hour everybody in the Remove had been informed, and everybody fully agreed that the jape was a top-holer. A tremendous amount of interest became apparent in Handforth's election campaign, and, in place of apathy, there arose a feeling of tremendous enthusiasm.

Even football practice was curtailed, and Handforth could see many signs of rapidly-increasing interest. In order to make the affair look thoroughly genuine, Reggie Pitt and Fullwood were holding impromptu meetings in the Triangle, and their audiences had been especially primed in advance to appear hostile.

"Didn't I tell you I'd wake things up?" demanded Handforth, as he stood on the Ancient House steps. "Pitt and Fullwood are getting windy. They thought it was going to be a walk-over for one or the other of 'em, but now they're compelled to hold meetings."

Church and McClure looked rather puzzled.

"It's fishy," said Church, at length. "I believe there's some sort of game on. Anyhow, you'd better go easy—and be prepared for leg-pulling. Everybody's getting ready to spoof you."

Church and McClure had not been admitted into the secret—for it was generally felt that they would stand loyally by their leader, and probably give him the straight tip. But they were keener than Handforth, and could read the signs accurately.

But Reggie Pitt had reckoned on this—and he had reckoned, too, on Handforth's propensity for discrediting everything that his chums said.

"Rats!" said Edward Oswald promptly—a clean enough justification for Pitt's assumption. "There's no spoof about this. The

other candidates are waking up, that's all. And they'll need to wake up, too, if they're going to get any votes. My aim is to make a clean sweep."

"There's nothing like being thorough," agreed McClure. "At the same time, you mustn't be too optimistic, Handy. You're liable to come an awful cropper if you take things for granted. I tell you there's something on."

"The chaps are getting ready to pull your leg," insisted Church.

Handforth regarded them coldly.

"And do you think that I shall be fooled?" he asked, with a sniff. "When my leg's being pulled, I shall know it. And if any of these fatheads try that game, they'll soon be sorry! Wait until the big meeting. I've got my speech all ready, and it's going to knock everybody flat. Anyhow, I've made up my mind to be skipper, and nothing's going to stop me."

Church and McClure managed to escape, and they hovered round a meeting which was presided over by Reggie Pitt. A number of Ancient House fellows were collected round, and they appeared none too friendly.

"Rats!" yelled somebody. "No West House chap for us!"

"Hear, hear!"

"You need a captain who'll conduct the Remove with force and judgment!" Pitt was saying. "You can trust me——"

"We'd rather have Handy than you——"

"After all, Handy's an Ancient House chap!"

"Rather! Good old Handy!"

"Get down, Pitt—you're out of the running!" sang out somebody else. "Look at the way Handy's been conducting his campaign. Dash it all, the chap deserves some support! I've a good mind to vote for him."

"Same here!"

Church and McClure drifted away, and glanced at one another.

"Rummy!" said Church, shaking his head.

"Thundering rummy!" agreed McClure.

"In fact, too rummy to be real!" said Church. "We're supposed to go and repeat all that to Handy, you know. There's a jape afoot—and Handy is the goat. But what's the good of telling him?"

"No good at all," agreed Mac.

"What's the good of warning him that he's being spoofed?" asked Church, in despair. "He'll only turn on us, and say we're dotty. The best thing we can do is to wait until the big election meeting, and see how things go. I've got an idea that we shall have a surprise."

And so Handforth prepared for his big speech, sublimely unconscious of the actual truth. His chums suspected it, but he wouldn't listen to them. The more convinced they became, the more ridicule Handforth heaped upon them. So they left him to his fate.



CHAPTER 8.

THE BIG ELECTION MEETING.

MR. CROWELL pulled Handforth up in the Ancient House lobby some little time later.

"What is all this commotion, Handforth?" he asked irritably.

"What commotion, sir?"

"For the last fifteen minutes boys have been dashing about in the most noisy manner," complained the Form-master. "If you are in any way responsible I must warn you——"

"Why, it's an election meeting, sir," said Handforth indignantly. "You can't expect the fellows to keep calm during the campaign, sir. But it won't last long—I shall be captain by this time to-morrow evening."

"Oh, indeed?" said Mr. Crowell, raising his eyebrows. "You seem very sure of yourself, Handforth. You appear to take it quite for granted that you will gain the majority vote."

"It's a foregone conclusion, sir."

"I am not sure whether to be pleased at the prospect, or to be alarmed," said Mr. Crowell dryly. "However, if you are elected by the Form, the Form must necessarily abide by its choice. But I am afraid that your optimism, Handforth, is greater than your judgment."

"Hear, hear, sir!" grinned Fullwood, as he came by. "Has Handy been saying that he's certain to be elected?"

"Handforth has no doubt whatever," replied Mr. Crowell.

"Ah, well, time will show," said Fullwood, with a sigh.

"If you're going to start any rot——" began Handforth indignantly.

"Tut, tut!" said Mr. Crowell, frowning. "You must curb your temper, Handforth. And let there be less noise about the passages. Just because your Housemaster is away, you appear to be taking advantage of the fact. Personally, I am at a total loss to understand why a temporary Form captain should be elected—but perhaps you know your own business best. I wouldn't dream of interfering."

He nodded, and walked off, and Fullwood chuckled.

"It does seem a bit dotty, doesn't it?" he asked.

"What seems dotty?" demanded Handforth.

"Why, having this election—just to select a temporary skipper," said Ralph Leslie. "Dick Hamilton may be back within a few days——"

"What's it got to do with Dick Hamilton?" asked Handforth curtly. "After I've been elected, I shall remain skipper for good."

"Oh!"

"No temporary rot for me!" went on Handforth. "If Hamilton wants the captaincy back, he'll have to seek re-election—and I shall fight him at the polls. Naturally, he won't stand an earthly chance."

"Good old Handy!" grinned Fullwood. "Never say die!"

He strolled away, highly amused, and Handforth glared after him. Church and McClure came up, looking worried.

"Funny fathead!" said Handforth. "Where's the joke?"

"That's what we've been trying to find out," said Church. "There's a joke somewhere, though. Take my tip, Handy, and go easy. Go jolly easy. There's some game afoot, and the more cautious you are the better. Be particularly wary at this meeting. It's my belief the chaps are going to turn your meeting into a rag."

"It's a cert," declared McClure. "The lecture hall is filling up—and nobody would dream of going unless there was a rag in the air."

Handforth stared.

"Nobody would go?" he repeated. "What about my speech?"

"Oh, well——"

"You babbling lunatic!" roared Handforth. "Are you suggesting that the chaps are only turning up because they're going to rag me? A fat lot of faith you've got! A fine pair of lieutenants—I don't think! This meeting is going to be my biggest triumph—I can feel it in my bones!"

"There's no accounting for your bones!" said Church crossly. "If you won't listen to sound advice, you can jolly well take everything that's coming to you! But Mac and I warn you——"

"I don't want any warnings!" interrupted Handforth. "You can keep 'em!"

He made his way to the lecture hall, and Church and McClure followed behind, sadly shaking their heads.

The lecture hall was about a quarter full, and for a moment Handforth felt a pang of disappointment. But a second glance showed him that the Remove was there in full force, even to the last fellow. And he couldn't expect any of the other Forms to be interested in the Remove election. After all, these were the chaps he wanted.

"Hurrah!"

"Here comes Handy!"

"Three cheers for the hot candidate!"

Handforth swelled visibly as he strode towards the platform. But Church and McClure gave one another significant glances. There was something rather theatrical about this round of welcome. There was a false ring about it.

"Speech, Handy!"

"Hear, hear!"

"They're just kidding him!" growled Church, with rising anger. "It's too bad—pulling the leg of a mere infant! That's all he is when it comes to a meeting of this sort—a giddy baby in arms!"

"Better tell him so," suggested McClure. "I'll come and see you in the sanny afterwards—or else send some flowers to your funeral!"

Handforth experienced a slight sensation of gratification as he faced the Removites. His optimism had led him to expect a hearty

welcome, but he had scarcely anticipated such a rousing, whole-hearted reception as this.

"Gentlemen of the Remove——" he began.

"Hear, hear!"

"I stand before you this evening as the champion of right," went on Handforth vigorously. "The Remove needs a new skipper, and I am determined to fill the post. I want your votes, and any chap who refuses to give 'em to me will have to put on the gloves——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Rot!" shouted Tommy Watson. "You can't get votes by intimidation!"

"Yah! Take your threats somewhere else!"

Handforth started. He suddenly realised that he had departed from the tone of his prepared speech, and he hastened to repair the fault.

"I'm only joking, of course!" he declared. "I don't want any votes that aren't given freely and willingly. That's understood. My object is to show you why you should vote for me, and why it will be in the best interests of the Remove that I should be skipper!"

"Hear, hear!"

"In the first place, I'm the chap who ought to have been skipper terms ago!" roared Handforth. "I've always been squashed out of it—shoved into the background by jealousy! But this is my chance to come to the fore, and show the Remove that I'm the only possible skipper!"

"It's no good, Handy—you're too violent to make a good leader!"

"Violent, am I?" bellowed Handforth. "Who said that? I dare him to come up on the platform! If he comes up, I'll pulverise him!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, he's not a bit violent!" grinned De Valerie.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Handforth turned red.

"That's only a figure of speech!" he said hastily. "Remember, I want your votes—I ask for your votes—and, what's more, I'm going to have your votes! I'm going to show you why it's your duty to plump for me! I'm going to show you why you should put your crosses against my name on the ballot papers! Handforth for the Remove—Handforth for Freedom and Peace!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I don't want to say anything against Dick Hamilton," continued Handforth. "He's one of my best friends. I wouldn't dream of saying a word against him behind his back. But where has he led the Remove? Where? That's what I ask you! He's led it into state of decay and spinelessness!"

"Oh, go it, Handy!"

"He's allowed the Remove to drift into slipshod methods," continued Handforth grimly. "And what's the result? Instead of our Form being the most important at St. Frank's, it's hardly any better than the

Fourth! The Remove hasn't done anything big for terms!"

"By Jove, he's right there!"

"The Remove hasn't raided the River House chaps, or japed the Fourth, or proved itself in any way!" went on Handforth indignantly. "What's become of our famous reputation? Where's our backbone? We haven't got one now! We're backboneless—we're absolutely drifting into obscurity! And I'm going to alter all that—I'm going to bring that backbone from the blackness of the depths, and shove it in the limelight!"

"Why not try the X-rays?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

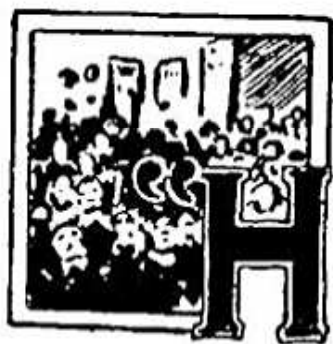
"I'm going to train that backbone, and bring it to the front!" roared Handforth.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It'll be a rummy kind of backbone if it's in the front!" grinned Reggie Pitt. "But perhaps you know best, Handy. It's your scheme!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I mean to make the Remove famous throughout the land!" thundered Handforth. "Elect me skipper, and I'll show you the way to fame! Obey my orders—adopt my ideas—and the Remove will start upon a career of glory such as it never knew before! I'm the man for the job! The Fighting Remove! The Invincible Conquerors! The Form that Never Fails! Vote for me, and I'll make these things possible!"



CHAPTER 9.

A SUCCESS!

URRAH!"

"Good old Handforth!"

The Remove cheered vigorously. Such fellows

as Reggie Pitt, Jack Grey, Fullwood and De Valerie knew how much to believe of Edward Oswald's "gas." They supported him heartily—as per arrangement. But there were many of the lesser juniors who were really worked up by Handforth's picture of a fighting Remove. They had come to this meeting in order to laugh at him—and they were already half-inclined to vote for him in real earnest.

"You can't do it, Handy!" sang out somebody. "Dick Hamilton will be back before you can get that programme into running order!"

"Hamilton doesn't come into the business at all!" roared Handforth. "He's held the reins too long. When I'm skipper, I shall remain skipper—and if Hamilton wants an election he can have one! And I shall rely upon you fellows to give me your votes again. I shall get 'em, too—because I have proved my worth!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Good old optimist!"

"I've set my heart on this thing, and I'm not going to rest until I've won!" continued Handforth earnestly. "I'm out for victory—and you can give it to me by letting me have your votes to-morrow night. Always remember that the other candidates are mere make-shifts. They only mean to carry on until Hamilton comes back. But I'm no make-shift—I'm determined to be permanent skipper, so if you don't give me your votes, you'll be jolly sorry for yourselves. I shall make another speech to-morrow evening, and then I'll give you an outline of my policy—"

"We've had a hint or two already, old man!"

"By the sound of it, we're going to be a regiment—not a Form!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What about the football, Handy?"

"That's one of the points I shall discuss to-morrow!" replied Handforth promptly.

"We shall play the Fourth to-morrow afternoon, and I shall be goalie. I thought about playing centre-forward, but I shan't interfere with the present team."

"Marvellous!"

"What's come over you, Handy?"

"The team's been selected by Pitt, and it'll save a lot of trouble if he gets his own way over it," continued Handforth. "It's not worth while messing about—I can make all the alterations I need after I'm skipper."

Church and McClure were surprised to hear their leader voicing these sentiments. They had repeatedly urged him to let Reggie Pitt's team stand—but he had ridiculed them. Now he was adopting their suggestions, and firmly believed they were his own.

The Remove cheered him to the echo, and there were hardly any dissenting voices. The meeting broke up amid general enthusiasm, and even Handforth's chums began to wonder if it was genuine. It seemed too ridiculous—and yet those cheers had sounded really sincere.

"Well, it beats me!" said Church blankly. "They can't seriously mean to elect the ass?"

"Impossible!" said McClure. "Life won't be worth living if he's skipper. My only hat! He's hard enough to manage now, goodness knows! What will he be like if he becomes Form captain? Study D will be more like a boxing booth!"

"He won't be elected!" growled Church. "I tell you it's a spoof—and the poor fat-head doesn't realise it! I'm blessed if I'll enlighten him, either—he'll only punch my nose for suggesting such a thing!"

All the same, Church was the first to sound a note of warning as he and his chums undressed in their dormitory. Handforth gave him one look, and compressed his lips.

"That's enough!" he said curtly. "I've heard more than I want to hear! The Remove is with me, so you needn't start any of your nonsense!"

"They're fooling you, Handy!" said Church earnestly. "Don't you think that

Mac and I are on your side? We want to warn you——”

Swish!

Handforth lifted a water-jug, and swilled the entire contents over Church in one sweep. It was a deliberate action, and he put the jug down, sat on the edge of the bed, and unlaced his shoes.

“Now you can cool off!” he said tartly.

Poor old Church gasped and spluttered helplessly.

“All right—wait!” he gurgled. “Just you wait!”

“Why wait?” asked McClure. “What’s the matter with you now?”

He spoke indignantly, for Handforth’s action had been entirely unwarranted. It was a bit thick for him to act like this when his chums were only giving him a timely word of warning.

“Slosh him, old man!” urged McClure warmly. “I’ll do it, if you like. I’ve never known such an obstinate, pig-headed, blundering——”

“Watch me!” said Church, with sudden grimness.

He swept up the bolster from his bed, swung it round, and caught Handforth such a terrific swipe on the side of his head that the amazed leader of Study D reeled over sideways, and sat down with a jarring thud.

“Take that!” said Church breathlessly.

“It’s all right—he’s taken it!” nodded McClure, with satisfaction.

“My hat!” gasped Handforth, blinking round. “What the—— Who the—— You—you—— I’ll jellify you for that!”

Thud!

Church did not wait to be jellified. Handforth was in a very advantageous position, and Church was still very wet from his drenching. He swung the bolster round again, and brought it down with all his force upon Handforth’s head. It wasn’t often that Church and McClure rebelled, but when they did, Handforth knew all about it. And these little affairs were necessary, in order to show Handforth that he wasn’t exactly everybody.

The bolster was a good one, but it had been made for a certain purpose—and that purpose did not include the violent use to which it was now subjected. It naturally protested, and burst with a kind of tearing sound. Edward Oswald Handforth completely vanished amid a smother of white feathers.

“My goodness!” gasped Church, reeling away.

And, naturally, at that very moment Mr. Crowell looked in. He *would* look in at such a crucial moment. The Form-master had an unfortunate habit of appearing just when he wasn’t wanted.

“Good gracious me!” he ejaculated blankly.

“Corks!” said Church, in dismay.

It looked like a particularly thick snow-storm for a moment, and then Handforth arose from the midst of the whirling feathers, spluttering and gurgling. He had his mouth half-full of them, so he could scarcely be

blamed for the incoherency of his utterances.

“This is disgraceful!” said Mr. Crowell, recognising all the signs. “You three boys not only quarrel continuously during the day-time, but it appears that you must use violence in your very bed-room!”

“It was my fault, sir,” said Church quickly. “I—I didn’t know——”

“Precisely!” interrupted Mr. Crowell. “You didn’t know that I was coming into the room, eh? I can well believe that, Church. And you didn’t know that this action would cost you two hundred lines, did you? But it certainly will!”

“That’s not fair, sir!” said Handforth warmly. “I’ll take those two hundred lines, if you don’t mind. I swilled Church with water, and he only tried to get his own back. I’m the chap to punish, sir.”

“It appears that you are both deserving of punishment,” declared the Form-master. “I am not sure that McClure is not equally involved, but I will give him the benefit of the doubt. You other two will take two hundred lines—and you must clear this litter up at once, and be in bed within ten minutes. Let me hear no more disturbances from this room.”

Mr. Crowell nodded curtly, and went out.

“Now!” said Handforth, in a suppressed voice. “Now, you insubordinate rotters! You’re just as bad as Church, Mac—you egged him on to do it!”

“Yes, and I’ll egg him on again!” said McClure coldly.

“Is this the way to treat your Form captain?”

“To treat whom?”

“Your Form captain!” roared Handforth.

McClure looked round the room, and shook his head.

“Can’t see him!” he said calmly.

“I’m your Form captain!” snorted Handforth fiercely. “You needn’t pretend to be so jolly innocent! I’ve got this election in the palm of my hand, and the other candidate don’t stand a ghostly chance. And I’m going to show you—this very minute—how a Form captain acts when his subjects rebel!”

“Subjects, eh?” snapped Church. “What do you think you are—a lord?”

“Yes!” retorted Handforth promptly. “Lord of the Remove!”



CHAPTER 10.

FROM INFORMATION RECEIVED.

HERE was no doubt that Oswald Handforth was perfectly serious. The Remove’s jape was not only working, but progressing

with undreamed-of smoothness. In spite of a score of hints, Handforth was as blind to the actual truth as ever. He fondly imagined that the election was genuine, and that he had gained the support of the voters.

"Once more, Handy—just once more!" urged Church, almost tearfully. "We're with you, old man—we're on your side—we're your pals!"

"Hear, hear!" said McClure. "You can always count on us, Handy."

Handforth regarded them suspiciously.

"You can't get round me like that—" he began.

"We're trying to open your eyes to the truth," said Church, clutching at his leader's arm. "Now, keep cool! Don't chuck the bed at me, or push my head through the wall! You're being fooled! The chaps are having a joke at your expense, and they haven't the faintest intention of making you skipper."

"By George!" said Handforth thickly. "So you're at it again, are you? Do you think I haven't got eyes? Do you think I was born without ears?"

"Well, no—"

"Do you think I've got no brains?"

"Yes—"

"What?" snapped Handforth.

"Er—no!" said Church hastily. "You've got brains, Handy!"

"Even a sheep has got brains!" murmured McClure.

Whether Handforth heard the latter remark or not remained in doubt, for at that moment the door of the dormitory softly opened, and a face looked in. Handforth gave it one glance, and frowned.

"Take that thing away!" he said curtly.

Teddy Long, the owner of the face, slid into the dormitory.

"What thing?" he asked nervously.

"That thing you've just brought in—that thing that people call your face!" said Edward Oswald. "They only call it that out of politeness. I'll give you just ten seconds to get outside into the corridor—"

"But—but this is urgent!" interrupted Teddy Long quickly. "I've got some news!"

Handforth regarded him grimly. Teddy Long was the sneak of the Remove, and "news" with him was merely another word for scandal. Teddy made a regular hobby of going about the school, bartering scurrilous gossip. Sometimes he made quite a little cash by this method—sometimes he received his deserts.

"News?" said Handforth ominously. "Great Scott! Have you got the nerve to come here with some of your beastly scandal-mongering? Clear out, you fibbing little worm! I wouldn't believe—"

"Oh, but really, Handy!" interrupted Long. "This—this is something special! It's the truth, too—honest injun!"

"Honest injun be blowed!" snapped Handforth. "You don't know the meaning of the giddy expression!"

"It's worth ten bob to you," said Teddy, instinctively backing away.

"Why, what the—"

"Or—or more!" went on Long, getting his words out so fast that they tumbled over one another. "Whack out ten bob, Handy,

and I'll give you some information that'll make your hair stand on end. It's worth every penny of the money, because you'll be able to ruin the whole plot!"

Handforth forgot his grim intentions.

"Plot?" he said. "What plot?"

"This—this affair of your being elected skipper," said Teddy eagerly. "It's only a jape, you know. They're fooling you!"

Church and McClure sadly shook their heads. If Handforth would coolly swamp them with water for saying these things, what would he do to Teddy Long? The chap's life was in positive danger.

"Go on!" said Handforth, deadly calm.

"It's all a jape, you know," explained Teddy fluently—his quickness of speech occasioned by the fact that he was telling the truth for once. "Pitt and Fullwood and De Valerie and the others went round, warning us. I'm supposed to be pledged to secrecy—but I think it's a dirty trick to play such a low-down dodge on a fine chap like you, Handy! I thought I'd warn you!"

"For ten bob?" asked Handforth darkly.

"Oh, well—"

"You young blackmailer! I don't believe a word—"

"Oh, but it's honour bright!" said Teddy Long. "Listen, Handy! The chaps are making it a Form jape. They're going to spoof you up at your meeting to-morrow, and then they're going to elect you by a full lot of votes. Everybody's going to vote for you, and the idea is for you to kid yourself that you're captain."

Church shrugged his shoulders.

"There you are!" he said gruffly.

"Do you believe this piffle?" roared Handforth.

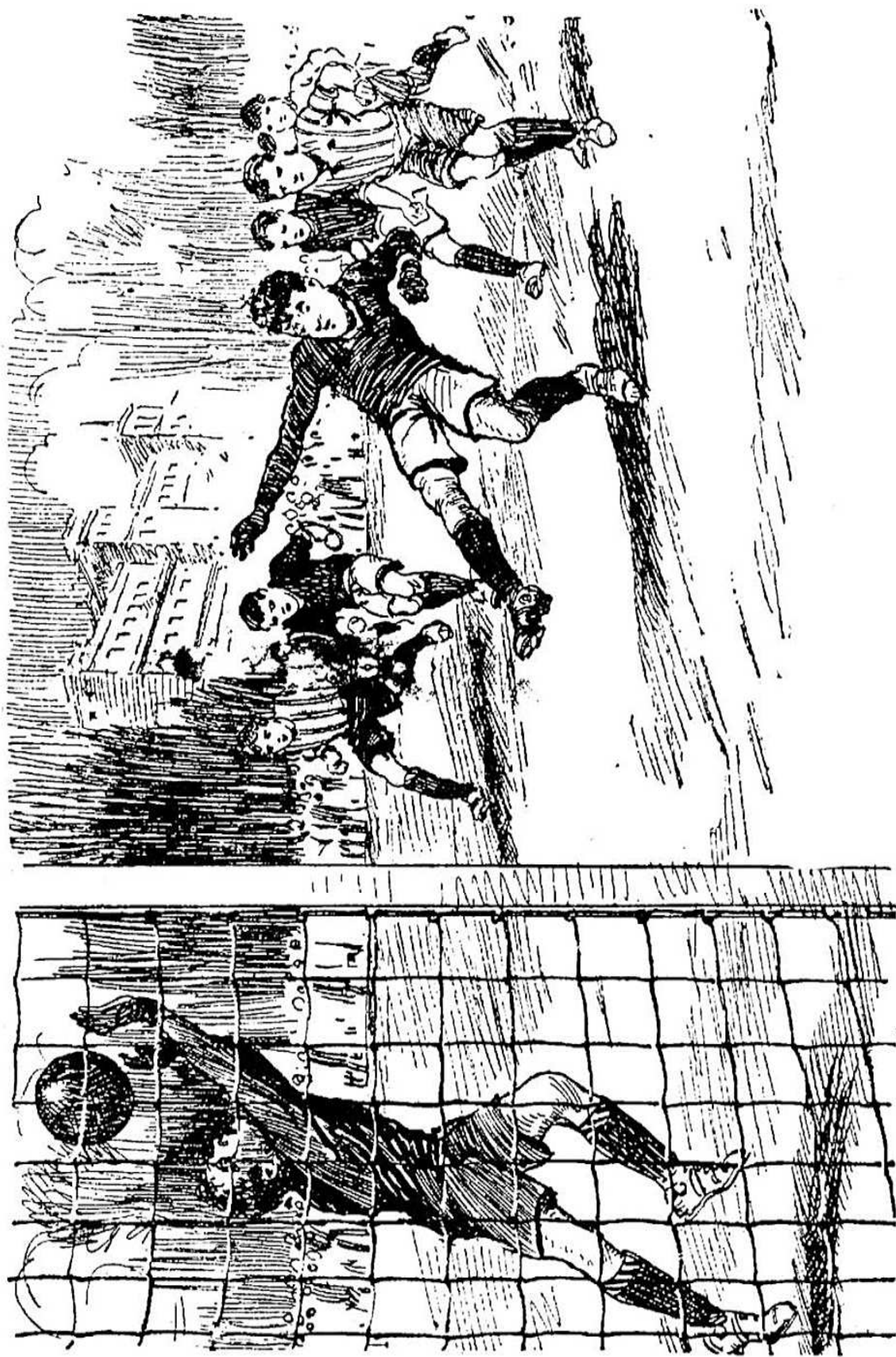
"Of course we believe it!" snapped McClure. "Haven't we been telling you the same thing for hours? But we only guessed it—we didn't know the actual truth. We weren't included in the jape."

"You see?" asked Long eagerly. "These chaps believe it, Handy! And it's absolutely true! Take my tip, and show everybody that you're not to be fooled! They're all laughing up their sleeves—and after you've been elected they're going to have a tremendous rag. It's only a spoof, you know—the Remove has decided to carry on without a skipper until Hamilton comes back. You'll be elected, and you'll be kicked out of the captaincy within ten minutes! They're simply going to make a silly goat of you—and if this warning isn't worth ten bob, I'll eat my hat!"

Teddy Long paused, quite out of breath. But he had blurted out the full information, and he waited with keen anxiety. It was quite characteristic of him to sell the Form for a few shillings.

"Oh!" said Handforth at last. "Oh-ho!"

"Well, it's a good thing to know how the land lies!" growled Church. "You're a bit of a filthy blabber, Long, but I'm not denying that I'm glad to hear the news. We sus-



“Hi! Stop him! Get back to your goal, you ass!” Handy heard nothing. He saw only the goal, and, steadying himself, he shot. Slam! The leather went like a cannon ball from his boot. Oldfield made a wild leap to save, but nothing could stop that powerful drive and the ball jammed in a corner of the net. Handy—the Remove goalkeeper—had scored!

pected something like this all along, didn't we, Mac?"

"We didn't suspect it—we knew it!" said McClure.

Edward Oswald Handforth stared at them in amazement.

"You're both mad!" he said. "This chap's the biggest liar under the sun! Do you mean to say you're fooled by his rot? It's only a yarn—invented on purpose to rook me of some money. I don't believe a word of it—not a giddy syllable. This election is genuine!"

Church and McClure stared at their leader with stupefied astonishment.

"But—but can't you see?" asked Church feebly. "Handy, can't you take warning? Long's telling the truth! This election is just a jape, and if you go on with it you'll make yourself the laughing-stock of the school!"

"Instead of being Form skipper, you'll be the butt of everybody's jokes!" said McClure, nearly on the point of tears. "Give Long his ten bob, and kick him out! He's saved you from——"

"I'll show you what I'm going to do with Long!" interrupted Handforth fiercely. "No, you don't, my lad!" he added, grabbing Teddy before he could escape. "By George! I'll teach you to come here with these dotty inventions. Ten bob, eh? I never knew you were an optimist before!"

Utterly helpless, Church and McClure watched. It was incredible—it was unthinkable—but it was an undeniable fact that Handforth refused to believe the truth! This wasn't one of Teddy's usual lies—it rang true. Besides, Church and McClure had the evidence of their own senses to guide them. Handforth was so obsessed with his dream of power that he was as blind as a bat, and as deaf as a post.

With pleading voices, Handforth's chums urged him to be careful. He refused to listen. They did everything within their power to convince him, but he remained unconvinced.

"Oh, all right!" said Church hoarsely. "Go to your doom! Mac and I wash our hands of you entirely—you can jolly well walk into the trap, and it'll serve you right."

Handforth wasn't listening. He was quite busy with Teddy Long. This unfortunate young gentleman was in no condition to make any loud protest. He was lying face downwards on Handforth's bed, and Handforth was sitting on the back of his head. Any sounds that Teddy uttered were smothered in the recesses of the bedclothes.

"We'll soon deal with this young blighter!" said Handforth curtly.

He was thoroughly indignant. Indeed, even if he had believed the story—even if he had been convinced—he would have treated Teddy Long in just the same way. For there was no denying that the young rascal was a black traitor, and that his present mission was the act of a worthless cad. He deserved drastic punishment.



"Hi! Stop him! Get back to your goal, you as steady as a rock, he shot. Slam! The leather v wild leap to save, but nothing could stop that powerf —the Remove g

"I'll show you how we deal with these cases," said Handforth. "Now that I'm Form captain, I'm going to be more strict than ever."

He grabbed the empty bolster-slip—the one which Church had inadvertently ripped open—and with a few convulsive movements he forced it over Teddy Long's writhing form. He tied the end of it round Teddy's neck, and the junior was helpless in the improvised sack. The bolster-slip was so narrow that he could not even move his arms.

"Now, lemme see," said Handforth thoughtfully. "H'm! This isn't quite good enough. We need—— By George, I know! Church, the paste!"

"Paste?" growled Church, glaring.

"Off the mantelpiece!"

Church fetched a small pot of paste from the mantelpiece, and watched with interest. Handforth jerked Teddy Long round, and his face became liberated from the bedclothes.

"Help!" gasped the victim. "Hi! Fire! Police! Leggo— Ugh!"

Handforth stuck the paste-brush into Teddy's mouth, and the cries ceased.

"Every time you yell, you'll get another mouthful!" he said firmly.



Handy heard nothing. He saw only the goal, and he kicked a cannon ball from his boot. Oldfield made a run for it and the ball jammed in a corner of the net. Handy—had scored!

With a number of deft sweeps, Handforth smothered Teddy Long's face with paste. Then he took a palm-full of the stuff, and rubbed it into the junior's hair as though it were a shampoo. Within a few seconds the sneak of the Remove was looking pasty in more than one sense.

"Now!" said Handforth cheerfully.

He bent down, scooped up two handfuls of the loose feathers, and tipped them over Teddy Long's head. The result was startling.

CHAPTER 11.

MR. CROWELL SEES AN APPARITION.



"My only hat!" said Church, grinning.

That paste had done the trick. Feathers clung to every atom of Teddy

Long's face and head. It was only necessary to throw the fragments of fluff at him, and they stuck. There was now nothing to be seen but a writhing bolster-slip with a ball of feathers at the top. As a final move, Hand-

forth took a fist full of feathers, and forced them into Teddy's mouth.

"Ten bob, eh?" said Handforth. "That's all the ten bob you'll get!"

He heaved the junior off the bed, carried him to the door, and pushed him out into the passage. He stood him upright, and allowed him to lean against the wall. Then he closed the door, and went across to a wash-basin.

"And that's that!" he said calmly.

Handforth, in fact, had been cool and deliberate throughout the performance. The leader of Study D could be either very excited and violent—or very cool and calculating. He was a fellow of extremes, and he was now in one of his latter moods.

"I'm not denying that Long deserved it, but you might at least heed his warning," said McClure. "You're being spoofed, Handy—"

"There's another bolster-slip here," said Handforth deliberately. "There's plenty more paste, and heaps more feathers. Are you going to dry up?"

"Oh, you can boil yourself!" said McClure crossly.

In the meantime, the unfortunate Teddy Long was fighting his own battle out in the deserted corridor. For the first moment or two his time was fully occupied with the task of emptying his mouth of down. He had swallowed a few feathers, and they were feeling rather rummy. And he nearly sent forth a series of wild howls, but checked himself in time. What would a master or a prefect say if one of them happened to come along?

Teddy would have no compunction in sneaking, but he had an instinctive feeling that he would be included in the possible punishment. His only safe method was to get back to his own dormitory, and induce Hubbard—who shared the room—to help him.

So far he was fairly safe. Everything was quiet, and he was at least standing on his feet. But what would happen when he tried to walk? Undoubtedly, he would topple over, and then his plight would be hopeless. At all costs he must remain in a perpendicular attitude.

"Oh, goodness!" breathed Long miserably. "What a fool I was to try anything with that beast, Handy! Well, thank goodness he's not going to be skipper! Life wouldn't be worth living if he was really elected!"

He ventured upon a hop—since this was the only possible means of progression. And, once started, he found that unless he kept it up, he would topple over. He progressed down the dim corridor in a series of hopping jumps.

And then, as one might have expected, Mr. Crowell bobbed up again. But there was no coincidence about it this time. The Form-master was coming back to see if Handforth & Co. were quiet, according to his instructions. Mr. Crowell wanted to make quite sure before he retired.

He turned the angle of the corridor, and then he halted, his flesh creeping slightly. Mr. Crowell wasn't a superstitious man, but he was nearly startled out of his wits by the apparition which appeared before his eyes.

The lights had been turned out in the corridor, and there was only the moonbeams coming through the overhead skylights. A white figure was coming towards him in a series of weird, spasmodic hops. And the figure was certainly nothing human—a long, ghostly white thing with an enormous knob of fluffiness at the top.

"Good heavens!" gasped Mr. Crowell, starting back.

For a brief moment he simply held his breath, utterly unable to form any conclusions. And then the spell was broken. The "ghost" toppled over with a very solid thud.

"Crikey!" ejaculated the ghost painfully.

"Oh!" said Mr. Crowell, his voice grim. "Oh, indeed!"

He strode forward, annoyed with himself for being even momentarily startled.

With a snap, he switched on one of the electric lights, and he gazed at the writhing form on the floor with amazement tinged with deep suspicion.

"Upon my word!" he said curtly. "What is the meaning of this? Boy, who are you?"

"Oh, help!" moaned Teddy Long, acutely alarmed. "Pup-please, sir, I—I'm Long, sir!"

Mr. Crowell made no comment for a moment. He recognised the junior's voice, and there was no need for any other identification. This was a case where two and two made four. A bolster-slip—and feathers. And not twenty minutes earlier Mr. Crowell had seen similar things in Handforth's dormitory.

"This is outrageous!" said Mr. Crowell, as he bent down and unfastened the top of the bolster-slip. "Careful, my boy. Oh, well, it cannot be helped now!" he added, as the linen ripped up, and as Teddy Long struggled free. "I presume that Handforth is responsible for this—this outrage?"

"Please, yes, sir," said the feathers.

There was no sign of a face, but a mere suspicion of a gap where the mouth was situated.

"What is this stuff—glue?" demanded Mr. Crowell angrily. "H'm! Paste, by the smell of it!" he went on, as he took a handful of the feathers from Long's head. "Of all the the extraordinary tricks. I can only assume, Long, that you annoyed Handforth very greatly, for it is not like him to behave in this fashion. Come with me at once!"

Long wanted to blurt out everything, for his very first instinct, whenever he was caught by a master, was to sneak. But he had no opportunity, for Mr. Crowell grasped him by the arm, and led him towards Handforth & Co's dormitory. The Form-master was not ignorant of Teddy's character, and he was fairly convinced that Edward Oswald had had certain justification in taking such drastic measures.

And Mr. Crowell did not exaggerate the enormity of the "outrage," either. A little paste would do Long no harm—in fact, it would probably do him good, since it would compel him to indulge in a thorough wash for once. And Mr. Crowell knew that Handforth had not deliberately destroyed a bolster in order to achieve his end. However, the matter could not be allowed to rest.

Lights were out in the dormitory when Mr. Crowell entered, but it only took him a moment to switch them on. Handforth and Church and McClure were in bed, and the litter had been tidied up. At least, the feathers were out of sight, although Mr. Crowell had certain suspicions as to what had become of them.

"Handforth, did you do this to Long?" snapped Mr. Crowell.

"Yes, sir."

"What for?"

"He deserved it, sir," said Handforth simply.

"That is no answer——"

"I didn't deserve it, sir!" broke in Teddy, whose face was just beginning to appear. "I came and did Handforth a good turn, and this is all I got for it! I'm all stuck, sir. I can hardly talk without my lips sticking together!"

"Let's hope they remain sealed!" said Handforth tartly.

"Come, come!" broke in Mr. Crowell. "Are you presuming to wrangle in my very presence? I want the truth, Handforth. Why did you perform this—this extraordinary trick upon the boy?"

"Sorry, sir—I can't say any more!" growled Handforth. "As Form captain, it was my duty to give him a lesson. I'm willing to take my gruel, if you're going to cut up rusty about it, though."

"I fancy I every reason to—ahem—cut up rusty!" retorted Mr. Crowell coldly. "And what is this item of news you give me, Handforth? Since when have you been captain of the Form?"

"I'm as good as elected, sir——"

"That's just it, sir!" broke in Teddy Long excitedly. "Handforth's being fooled, sir—and I came along to warn him."

"Fooled?"

"Of course he is, sir! The whole Remove is in the jape!" panted Long. "They're going to elect Handy to-morrow, and make him believe that he's skipper—and it's all spoo. And just because I come along and tip him the wink, he does this. I—I hope you'll flog him, sir."

Mr. Crowell stroked his chin.

"An extraordinary story," he said curtly. "Indeed, I simply refuse to discuss it with you, Long. Go off at once to the nearest bath-room, and have a thorough wash. No, sir—not another word!"

"But what about Handforth, sir——"

"I will deal with Handforth!" rapped out Mr. Crowell grimly. "Handforth, you will come with me at once to my own bed-room."

Teddy Long went off, his misery slightly tempered by the thought that Handforth was

now about to "get it in the neck." And Handforth, with a grunt, got out of bed, put on his dressing-gown, and followed Mr. Crowell.

"Well, can you beat that?" asked Church disgustedly, as the door closed.

"Beat what?"

"Why, even Crowell thinks the whole yarn is a fake!" growled Church. "It's as clear as daylight, and yet he can't see it. If you ask me, Handy ought to be in a cradle every night, and in a pram during the day. I'm fed-up with the dotty idiot!"

Five minutes later Handforth returned, his face set, his hands tucked under his arms. Church and McClure were sympathetic in a moment. All their animosity vanished.

"Did he lay it on thick, old son?" asked Church compassionately.

"Does it sting, Handy?" inquired McClure.

Edward Oswald Handforth untucked his hands and gave his chums a cold glance. He switched off the light and hopped into bed. The only sound he uttered was a grunt.

And Church and McClure could get nothing else out of him.



CHAPTER 12.

THE CREAM OF THE JOKE.

JOHAN BUSTERFIELD BOOTS, the energetic skipper of the Fourth Form, broke into a chuckle as Handforth appeared in

the Ancient House doorway.

It was morning—Saturday morning—and Boots and a few other Fourth-Formers were chatting near the fountain—playing the forthcoming Form match in advance vocally, and winning by many goals. They all grinned as Handforth appeared.

"Hallo, skipper!" sang out Boots.

"Vote for Handforth!"

"Elected by a staggering majority!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Handforth glared, lifted his nose, and stalked away, as though he had heard none of the sarcastic observations.

"It's no good, Handy, you'd better resign, and finish with it!" shouted Bob Christine. "They're only fooling you!"

"We've heard all about it!" yelled Clapson.

"They're kidding you!"

"Poor old scout!"

Another yell of laughter went up, and Handforth set his teeth. He glanced round, and gazed coldly at Church and McClure, who had loyally followed him. They had only just come down.

"Who told you chaps to hang round me?" asked Handforth curtly.

"We—we— Well, we—"

"I don't want you!" said Handforth. "You're not my chums any more. I've got no chums; I'm fighting this battle alone!"

"Can't we have our own opinions now?" asked Church hotly.

"Can't we think for ourselves?" snorted McClure.

"No!" said Handforth coldly. "Either I think for you, or you're not my pals. You've proved that your thinking apparatus is all rusty and wonky!"

"You—you ass!" gasped Church. "Are you still trying to make out that you're not being japed? Haven't you heard? Everybody knows the truth now. The cat's out of the bag. And the whole thing's a frost. I don't suppose they'll carry on with it now."

"Go and eat coke!" said Handforth gruffly.

He walked away, as completely autocratic as ever. He had evidently made up his mind to take the election seriously, and nothing on earth could shift his determination.

Teddy Long, in fact, had got down earlier than anybody else in the Remove, and it had not taken him long to circulate the full story. It had been an unwise move to take him into the scheme in the first place, for he had never been known to keep a secret.

"Poor old Handy!"

Edward Oswald started. A number of fags were singing a kind of chant in the shelter of the West Arch. If Handforth had been wise he would have ignored them, but he came to a halt, and glared.

"That's enough!" he said aggressively.

"Chuck it, Handy!" grinned Dicky Jones. "We all know the horrid truth. Even if you're elected, you'll be kicked out of the captaincy in two minutes. Why not resign, and look dignified?"

"The poor old chap is still hopeful," grinned Tommy Hobbs.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Poor old dupe; can't see when he's tricked!"

Handforth made a rush, and the fags scattered, yelling with laughter. And this sort of thing went on continuously, wherever Handforth went. He was chipped unmercifully and impartially by fellows of every Form and every House. In fact, the whole school was chuckling over the affair—with the exception of the Remove.

"Well, it's a dirty trick!" said Reggie Pitt, as he chatted with Fullwood and a few other fellows just before breakfast. "Somebody's been gassing, and the whole game is ruined. Handy won't stand for election after this."

"All our plans for nothing!" growled Fullwood. "We were going to have the laugh on him after the election—but this is a giddy anti-climax. It's a pity some chaps can't keep a secret."

De Valerie came up, grinning.

"No need to look so disappointed, you fellows," he said cheerfully. "Handforth's as enthusiastic as ever—he's determined to win, and he turns a deaf ear to everybody."

"You mean to say he's still keen on the election?" asked Pitt.

"Keener than ever!" chuckled De Valerie.

"Oh, rot! He's not such an ass as all that!" said Fullwood.

But before morning lessons were due to commence, the Remove was startled by the discovery that Handforth was going ahead, exactly as though the secret was still intact.

He steadfastly refused to believe the obvious truth, and was pressing his campaign with even greater forcefulness than ever. New election posters appeared, and he had already made three separate speeches in the common-room, in the Triangle, and in the gym., to different groups of electors. He was like a volcano, active and fiery.

He was carrying on with tremendous vim.

"Hang it all, we've got to admit he's a sticker!" chuckled Reggie Pitt. "I always knew he was a chump, but this takes the biscuit! He's going ahead with the campaign when he knows jolly well that we're only spoofing him."

"It seems impossible!" said Jack Grey.

"He doesn't know we're spoofing him," denied Fullwood.

"Doesn't know?" asked Jack, staring. "Scores of fellows have told him!"

"Handforth is one of those chaps you can speak to for hours without convincing him," replied Fullwood cheerfully. "He doesn't believe it, because he doesn't *want* to believe it. That's the whole secret."

"By Jove, I believe you're right!" said Reggie Pitt. "You've hit it, Fully. The poor old boy is so thoroughly wrapped up in the idea of winning the captaincy that he's spoofing himself far more than we could ever spoof him. The question is, what shall we do?"

"Why not tell him quietly, but firmly, that

the election's off?" suggested Fullwood. "Tell him that he needn't trouble any more, because nobody will vote. That ought to convince him."

"It seems a pity to spoil the fun," objected De Valerie. "Dash it, this is the very cream of the jape! Although he knows the truth, he won't admit it's the truth! Why not go straight ahead, hold the election, and have a bigger laugh than ever at the end?"

"It seems a shame to take the money!" grinned Pitt.

"Yes, perhaps we'd better go on with it," agreed Fullwood slowly. "After all, he needs a stern lesson. If we call the affair off now it'll be a fizzle, and he'll think he's been swindled. Let's carry it through to the bitter end, then show him what an utter donkey he is!"

"Hear, hear!"

And it was decided, then and there. The Remove, as a whole, chuckled joyously. There was something novel in spoofing a fellow openly—when he refused to admit that he was being spoofed. Everybody started talking enthusiastically, and with exaggerated excitement, about the election. Spoof meetings were held in the Triangle, in the passages, and the speakers were uproariously cheered. The Remove had suddenly gone mad about the election.

Handforth's own speeches were so successful that Church and McClure groaned aloud, and

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voiced fierce and inflamed sentiments regarding their Form-fellows. They knew exactly what was in the wind.

"It's a dirty trick!" growled Church. "Handy's being spoofed all over again—and he's in such a mood that this foolery will make him more than ever certain of winning the election."

"They're all a lot of rotters!" said McClure angrily.

"Who—us?" grinned Somerton, as he happened to pass.

"You, among others!" said McClure, glaring.

"Don't you believe it?" smiled the school-boy duke. "Why, you ought to be jolly pleased. This thing is going to subdue Handforth so much that he'll be like a lamb for weeks. You'll have peace for the first time since you came to the giddy school!"

"Peace!" said Church bitterly. "That only shows how much you know about Handy! Wait until this evening—when he finds out! Peace? My only hat! It'll be more like a world-war!"



CHAPTER 13.

REMOVE VERSUS THE FOURTH.

It was rather a good thing, perhaps, that a football match should occupy most of the afternoon. It provided a lull in the electioneering activities. And there was any amount of interest displayed in the match.

There was always a great deal of partisan feeling when the Remove and the Fourth clashed on the football field. The two Forms had about the same standing in the Junior School, and the Fourth would never admit that it was in any way inferior to the Remove. On the other hand, the Remove took it quite for granted that such matches were theirs from the kick-off. Thus, a Remove victory was taken as a matter of course. But when the Fourth won—as it occasionally did—there was tremendous enthusiasm in the common-rooms of the Modern House and the East House—and everlasting inquests on the game in the common-rooms of the Ancient House and the West House.

The football season hadn't really started yet. To-day's game was a kind of preliminary to the big fixtures to follow. The best players from both teams would be chosen—for, of course, the St. Frank's Junior Eleven consisted of both Removites and Fourth-Formers.

The two teams were the strongest that could be chosen:

Remove—Handforth; McClure, Burton; Kahn, Nicodemus Trotwood, Church; Grey, Tregellis-West, Fullwood, Watson, Pitt.

Fourth Form—Oldfield; Crowe, Denny; Churchman, Bray, Yorke; Nation, Clapson, Boots, Christine, Crooke.

Armstrong, the Junior House captain, of the East House, was highly indignant at being left out of the Fourth Form team, but Boots' judgment was thoroughly justified, for Armstrong was in very poor form.

There was even keener interest than usual in this particular match, for it was felt that Handforth would make an awful mess of it. He generally played indifferently if his mind was occupied with other worries—for Handforth was one of those fellows who can only concentrate on one thing at a time.

And he was so full of his electioneering just now that he would probably start making speeches in the middle of the game! The crowds gathered round him, chuckling.

"Now, you chaps, understand one thing!" said Handforth firmly, as he and the other members of the Remove team came out of the pavilion. "We've got to win this game—and win it by a big margin. No slacking—no easing up. Even if we get a big advantage, we've got to keep on pressing."

"Are these our orders?" smiled Reggie Pitt.

"Yes, they are!"

"Oh, I only wanted to know!" chuckled Reggie. "Just a little rehearsal, I suppose?"

"Rehearsal?" asked Handforth.

"You're getting your hand in early, as it were," went on Reggie. "Finding out what it's like to be skipper, eh? Well, we're all good-natured—we don't mind humouring you. You can have this preliminary canter, and welcome. You might not get another taste."

"You fathead! I'm captain already!" said Handforth tartly. "The thing's a cert., so why shouldn't I assert my authority at once? You can pretend to be the skipper in this match if you like, Pitt—but it's only as a favour!"

"As a kind of special concession, eh?" asked Pitt gravely.

"Exactly!"

"Oh, thanks awfully!" said Pitt. "My gratitude is yours, O mighty and noble monarch! All hail to the exalted one—he who rules with the Iron Fist!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Poor old Handy!"

"A short life, but a gay one!"

"The chap who was skipper for a whole hour!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Handforth loftily ignored the facetious banter, and was so busily engaged in appearing indifferent to the ironical cheers of a group of Third-Formers that he forgot all about the toss. Seeing that he was the skipper, this was an unpardonable oversight.

But Reggie Pitt deputised—quite unsuccessfully, for he lost the toss, and the Fourth had the choice of ends. Handforth came rushing up.

"Here!" he roared. "What's this about Boots winning the toss?"

"It's quite all right—I'm satisfied," said Buster Boots, grinning. "There's a stiff breeze

blowing down the field, and I want the benefit of it during the first half. All settled, Handy. You're late for the fair!"

"All settled be blowed!" snorted Handforth. "I don't admit the validity of that toss at all! I'm the skipper, and we've got to toss again!"

"Don't be an ass!" said Boots. "Pitt's your captain——"

"I tell you——"

"You silly ass——"

"By George! I'll——"

The referee—Morrow, of the Sixth—butted in.

"I say, is this a football match, or a slanging competition?" he asked tartly. "You get between the sticks, Handy, and don't talk so much! Pitt's the captain, and the toss stands!"

"But look here——"

"The toss stands!" repeated Morrow grimly.

"Oh, all right—have your own way!" snapped Handforth. "I might have expected this! But just wait until next week—when I'm the squarely elected skipper! There won't be any more rot of this sort!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Edward Oswald went off, indignant and bitter. It was perfectly obvious—to him—that rank jealousy was already creeping into the election. Why couldn't these fatheads admit that he was skipper and have done with it?

"I'll show 'em!" he muttered, as he stood between the goalposts, frowning upon the field. "By George! My time's coming—it's nearly here! Only a few more hours now, and then——"

"They're off!"

"Go it, the Fourth!"

Handforth started, and found that the game was in progress. He watched keenly, fully on the alert. Football, after all, was a game that needed full concentration, and Handforth had firmly made up his mind that none of the Fourth Form forwards should get the leather past him.

"Come on, Nation—pass to Boots!"

"Pass, Billy!"

"Good man!"

"Shoot, Buster! Handy's day-dreaming!"

Buster Boots had snapped up the pass from Billy Nation, and was sweeping down towards goal. But McClure was getting ready for him, and Handforth glanced round through the net.

"Who's day-dreaming?" he demanded hotly. "Who said that?"

"Look out, you ass!"

"Watch him, Handy! Oh, corks!"

McClure failed to hold the enterprising centre-forward of the Fourth. Boots tricked him neatly, and sent in a long, rising shot. Handforth, who wasn't really expecting any work just at that moment, made a wild leap. He touched the ball, but it eluded him, and dropped into the net.

"Goal!"

"Hurrah!"

"First blood to the Fourth!"

Handforth glared round aggressively.

"You fathead, Arnold McClure!" he roared. "What was the idea of letting Boots get past you like that?"

"What was the idea of you letting him score?" retorted McClure warmly.

"Go it!" grinned the crowd.

This was a bad start for the Remove, and Handforth felt aggrieved. But for these interrupters at the back of the net, he wouldn't have failed in that save. He eyed the group with a frown. They were mostly Fourth-Formers—Armstrong, Freeman, Merrill, and that crowd.

"If you chaps can't shut up—clear off!" he said curtly.

"Poor old Handy!" grinned Armstrong.

"Some skipper!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You—you——" began Handforth.

"Look out!" yelled Owen major, of the Remove. "Watch Christine, Handy!"

"Shoot, Bob, shoot!"

Handforth snorted. He wasn't going to be fooled by this piffle. Why, the teams had only just kicked off again——

Whizz!

Something came over his shoulder just as he was facing the field again, and with a violent start he saw that it was the ball!

"Goal!"

"Oh, good shot, Christine!"

Handforth was speechless. He picked up the leather in a dazed kind of fashion and tossed it out. He hadn't even seen the shot! It had certainly been a surprise, for Bob Christine had cleverly picked up a pass from one of his half-backs and had made a desperate shot for goal, and the wind had done the rest. Two goals within a minute! And both could have been saved!

"Awfully sorry, Handy, old man, but if you MUST make these election speeches, why not wait until the game's over?" asked Reggie Pitt smoothly, as he ran up.

"You howling ass!" shouted Handforth, finding his voice. "I wasn't making a speech! These rotters keep chipping me!"

"Stop that!" said Morrow, glaring at the Fourth-Formers behind the net. "You'd better get away from there. Not that there's any excuse for you, Handforth," he added. "A goalkeeper isn't supposed to take any notice of barracking."

Handforth compressed his lips, and said nothing. He was genuinely upset, for both these goals had been of a surprise nature, and under any sort of normal conditions, he would never have let them be scored. When the game went on he watched the play with fierce eyes.

And although the Fourth forwards tested him with several other hot shots during the first half, he dealt with them all in his own inimitable fashion. Fullwood scored for the Remove, too, and at half-time the game stood at two—one.

Much to Handforth's relief, he wasn't



With his thumbs tucked in his waistcoat, the new skipper of the Remove regarded his subordinates with superior disdain. "Thought you'd fool me, eh?" he asked. "Well, my sons, it is you who've been fooled this time. You've elected me Captain—and I'll stay Captain!"

chipped during the interval, and when the teams changed over, the Remove had the satisfaction of seeing Reggie Pitt equalise by one of his sparkling individual efforts.

But, somehow, the Remove could do no more. The game was fast and keen, and the Fourth backs were worked hard and continuously. But they did their work well, and Oldfield, in goal, played a fine game, too.

Right up to within five minutes of the whistle, it looked like being a draw. Then came a surprising little incident which aroused the Remove spectators to a high pitch of enthusiasm.

Handforth was fuming. For some little time he had had nothing to do. The Remove forwards were bombarding the Fourth goal, but could not score. In Handforth's half of the field there was practically nothing doing, and Edward Oswald grew more and more impatient.

"Forwards!" he snorted. "My only hat! There'll be a difference when I'm skipper! I'll lead the forward line myself, and show 'em how to score goals! What's the good of messing about like this?"

A yell from the Fourth Form spectators signalled a breakaway of the Fourth left wing. Nation and Clapson swept the field, and the Remove half-backs were tricked. Clapson sent a long pass through to Boots, in the centre, but he put it rather too far forward.

"By George!" roared Handforth.

He raced for the leather before his backs could attempt to get near. It was a race between Handforth and Boots, and the Remove goalie won. But instead of kicking the leather down-field, he caught it on the point of his toe and ran on.

"What the——" began Reggie Pitt, staring.

"What's the idea, Handy?"

"Pass, you ass, and get back to your goal!"

But Handforth was deaf. He was so obsessed with the idea of playing in the centre-forward position that he completely forgot his goalkeeping. For the past few minutes he had been living as a centre-forward in his imagination, and he was still more or less "in the clouds."

"The chap's mad!"

"Get rid of it, Handy!"

"Pass to Fullwood, you chump!"

But Handforth heard nothing. The Fourth Form half-backs had been so surprised that they let him through before they knew it. And before Handforth reached the backs, he steadied himself and took a shot.

Slam!

It was one of his goal-kicks, the sort he was accustomed to sending well across the half-way line from his own goal area. The leather went like a cannon-ball from his foot—a low, powerful drive which the wind assisted amazingly. Oldfield, in the Fourth

Norm goal, made a wild, acrobatic leap, but he was too late. The ball sang past him, and jammed in the corner of the net.

"Goal!"

"Well, I'm jiggered!" said Reggie Pitt, blankly.

"He's—he's scored!" gasped Fullwood. "And he's our goalie!"

Handforth glanced round with supreme indifference.

"That's just a sample!" he said coolly. "I'll show you!"



CHAPTER 14.

HANDFORTH'S CONFIDENCE!

THAT goal was the sensation of the hour.

The final whistle blew almost as soon as the teams had lined up again,

and the Remove had won by the odd goal in five. And Handforth, the goalie, had scored the winning shot! That was the amazing tale that soon spread throughout St. Frank's.

It was surprising enough for a goalkeeper to turn himself into a centre-forward on the field and to score, but it was simply staggering that Handforth should be the one. The Remove was ready to acknowledge his prowess as a sturdy defender, but the Remove had never given him credit for being a forward.

And yet he had shown the Remove forwards exactly how to shoot! And instead of bragging and boasting about it, he was perfectly calm, and expressed not only astonishment but annoyance, when he was congratulated.

"What's the idea of making all this fuss?" he asked tartly. "Anybody might think I'd done something special!"

"So you have, Handy!" shouted somebody. "You've won the game for us!"

"Rot!" snapped Handforth. "Can't I score a goal without all this silly commotion? Wait until next week when we play the River House! I'll show you how to score goals!"

"Good old optimist!"

During tea, Church and McClure waxed enthusiastic, and were rather disappointed at Handforth's indifference. He would boast in the most extraordinary manner over something which had no importance whatever, and when it came to something big, he waved it aside with contempt. It was just like him.

"I'm fed up with all this congratulation!" he said coldly. "Can't you give the thing a rest, you chaps? I won the game for the

Remove, but there's nothing in it. I only scored a goal. Why make a song about it?"

"But this'll be a ripping help, old man," said Church. "Think of the election to-night!"

"The election?" repeated Handforth, with a start.

"Rather!" said Church. "You're going to make a final speech soon, and you ought to make a lot of capital out of that goal. 'The fellows are terrifically pleased with you, and you'll probably grab a lot of votes—genuine votes, I mean.'"

"Genuine votes?"

"Well, most of 'em will be spoof——"

"If you're going to start that stuff again, there's going to be an earthquake in this study!" said Handforth darkly. "The election's a spoof, eh? I'm going to be made skipper for fun, eh? The chaps are going to fool me, eh? It's all a jape, eh?"

He glared, and Church and McClure had nothing to say.

"Let me give you a tip," continued Handforth. "This election is going to be genuine. I'm going to get the majority of votes, and after I'm elected, I stay elected. Huh! Do you think they can mess me about like that? Not giddy likely! They've started this thing, and I'm going to finish it!"

"Poor old Handy!" murmured Church, with genuine sorrow. "He doesn't even realise that he's being used as a shuttlecock. After all these hints, he's as obstinate as ever!"

"He'll get a terrible shock to-night," said McClure.

Handforth regarded them grimly.

"Any more of that muttering and I'll chuck you out of this study to-night, instead of waiting till Monday," he said warmly.

"Until Monday?" repeated McClure, staring.

"Monday!"

"Yes, but why are you going to chuck us out on Monday?"

"My dear fatheads, you don't suppose I'm going to be bothered with two useless lumps of blubber after I'm skipper?" asked Edward Oswald, in surprise. "A Form captain needs a room entirely to himself, and I've already fixed up where you're going. As a matter of fact, I'm going to re-arrange all these studies on Monday," he added carelessly.

"If you're made captain?" asked Church.

"No; after I'm made captain," replied Handforth coolly.

"But, you pitiful ass——"

"If you're going to say that I don't stand an earthly chance, take my advice, and hold it back!" interrupted Handforth. "You can say it if you like, but you'd better get Mao to have the first-aid case ready."

And with that dire threat, Handforth waited. On seconds thoughts, Church found that he had nothing whatever to say. He gave an impatient grunt, and drank McClure's tea at a gulp. He felt that it was necessary to do something to cover up the awkwardness of the moment.

Handforth bustled out soon afterwards, and his chums gave one another hopeless glances.

ANSWERS

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"It's amazing!" said Church, shaking his head. "He's just as mad as ever. We can talk to him until the moon turns purple, and it won't make any difference. There's only one thing that teaches him, and that's experience."

"Well, he'll be taught to-night!" said McClure, with relief.

Handforth's final speech was made in the Triangle, and the very fact that he was going out for votes proved to the Remove that he was taking no notice of the "spoofo" story. He still believed that he had a chance. And it was decided, then and there, to give him the pleasure of being elected. After all, he would always be able to say that he had been Form captain, even if this period of bliss only lasted for a brief ten minutes.

"We've told him he's being spoofoed; he knows he's being spoofoed, and he knows what to expect after he's elected," said Reggie Pitt. "So let's go ahead and carry the farce to its final conclusion."

"And the last act looks like being the funniest," grinned Fullwood.

"I hear that some of the chaps are going to vote for him in real earnest," put in De Valerie. "That goal of his worked the trick, you know. Still, it'll be a lot better if he collars every vote there is. Poor old lunatic!" he added sadly. "I say, what a chump!"

Handforth's speech was a scream. He could hardly say ten words without receiving an uproarious burst of exaggerated applause. There was no attempt now to sustain the secret. Handforth was spoofoed openly, and his leg was pulled until the crowd expected him to close the proceedings in disgust. But he carried on with supreme coolness, as though the enthusiasm was genuine.

There was something almost uncanny in his sublime confidence. One or two of the sensitive fellows began to think that it was a dirty trick to kid him like this. It was so painfully clear that he was deadly serious. And it was so horribly obvious that the Remove was out for a good laugh.

"Vote for me and you'll have a term of endless activity," declared Handforth, in conclusion. "You'll have a term chock full of thrills!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's too much of a risk, old man!"

"The Remove, with me at the helm, will become the most talked-of Form in the school—the most celebrated Form in the country!" roared Handforth. "I've made up my mind to convert the Remove into a live, electrified body of fighters. Before long we shall be known as the Roaring Remove!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It sounds like the Roaring Remove already!" grinned Willy.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Poor old Ted! He will do these things!" sighed Willy, shaking his head.

"Trust me, and you won't be let down," concluded Handforth firmly. "Elect me your skipper and there won't be a Form we shan't smash—a rival school we shan't lick. This term we're out for glory, and with me at the

helm we'll get it. So let me have your votes, and I'll do the rest!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Vote for Handy!"

"Hurrah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The meeting broke up noisily, and the Remove went to the poll.



CHAPTER 15.

AN OVERWHELMING MAJORITY.

WILLIAM NAPOLEON BROWNE, of the Fifth, shook his head.

"While admitting that Brother Handforth has undoubtedly asked for this slosh in the slacks, one must confess that it is a somewhat murky deed," he said, as he fingered a sheaf of ballot papers. "I trust that your opinion coincides with my own, Brother Willy?"

"I don't know about murky," said Willy Handforth. "I should call it a necessary deed. Ted needs these jolts now and again to bring him to earth. Goodness knows, the old ass has had enough warnings!"

"It beats me," said Buster Boots, blankly. "It beats me hollow. How the dickens he can carry on with it is more than my brain can grasp!"

"We are ever ready to make allowances, Brother Boots," said Browne benevolently.

"I didn't ask you to be funny!" said Boots, turning red.

"I can assure you that nothing is further from my thoughts," said the captain of the Fifth. "But let us not waste time in needless haggling. The Remove awaits in the Triangle, and it is our duty to complete the counting, and flash the welcome message upon the silvern screen."

"Same silvern screen being a bed-sheet," observed Willy, grinning.

The committee was taking its time over the counting, just to give an impression that the whole thing was genuine. There was no need to count at all, as a matter of fact, for everybody had voted, and everybody had put a cross against Handforth's name. In fact, the slide for the magic-lantern had been prepared even before the poll.

In the Triangle the Remove was waiting—to say nothing of the entire Third, and the greater portion of the Fourth. Even a few Fifth-Formers had condescended to come out to watch the fun.

"Might as well have a look," remarked Chambers. "I want to see Handforth's face when the result goes up."

"I want to hear his speech of victory," grinned Bryant.

"I want to hear his moan of dismay when he finds out that it's all a rag," said Phillips, with a chuckle. "Is it possible that such a human donkey really exists? I always knew Handforth was a chump, but this beats everything!"

"Hurrah!"

"Look out—here comes the result!"

The "screen" was fixed up on the wall of the Modern House, and the magic-lantern was installed in one of the front dormitory windows of the Ancient House. A beam shot across the Triangle, and wobbled indecisively on the ivy opposite. It was gradually brought under control, and the sheet was focussed.

"Hold your breath, everybody!" said Reggie Pitt tensely.

A titter went round, but there were no actual laughs yet. Handforth stood in state on the Ancient House steps, with Church and McClure forlornly by his side. They were numbed. Their leader was just as optimistic as ever, just as certain of real victory. It was beyond all human understanding. It was weird and wonderful.

"Hurrah!"

"Here's the result!"

A slide had just been put in, and the crowded Triangle read the following words:

"REMOVE ELECTION RESULT!"

The slide was removed, and another substituted:

**"HOLD YOUR BREATH AND WATCH—
HERE IT COMES!"**

The crowds chuckled heartily, and Handforth grunted. Again the slide was removed, and the result was displayed:

"HANDFORTH	45
PITT	0
FULLWOOD	0
Majority	45."

A roaring burst of tumultuous cheering rose, a pre-arranged conclusion to the rag. For a solid minute the Remove cheered to the echo, and then broke into uncontrollable laughter.

"Speech—speech!"

"Come on, Handy—speech!"

"Silence for the new captain!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Handforth, looking perfectly calm, faced the grinning throng. There was a light of determination in his eyes, too—a light that Church and McClure couldn't quite understand.

"Speech!"

"There's not much to say," declared Handforth, after he could obtain a hearing. "I'd like to thank you chaps for electing me, and you can trust me to handle the Remove tactfully and diplomatically—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And strongly!" said Handforth grimly. "You can trust me to stamp out every kind of caddishness, and to make the whole Form clean from end to end. I shan't be gentle in my methods—I'm going to lick the Remove into shape as it's never been licked into shape before."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Good old fire-eater!"

"I don't mind admitting I'm surprised at

the majority," continued Handforth. "I expected to win by a big margin, but I never thought that Pitt's supporters would all desert him. So much the better—they've proved their common sense by plumping for me!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The election's over, and I'm skipper from this minute," went on Handforth, changing his tone. "Some of you chaps are cackling a bit too much, and I don't approve of it. And anything that I don't approve of has got to stop! Now that I'm in power, I'm going to have things done properly. Another yell from you, Gulliver, and I'll slaughter you!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Not only Gulliver, but everybody else howled hysterically. Reggie Pitt thought it time to point out the dreadful truth—although Handforth, unless he was quite an imbecile, must know it already.

"Chuck it, Handy!" said Pitt, mounting the steps. "You know as well as I do that this is only a rag."

"A rag?" said Handforth. "Which is a rag?"

"This election."

"Do you know any more jokes?" asked Handforth coldly.

"My dear ass, be sensible!" urged Pitt. "The whole thing's just a joke. The Remove decided days ago not to have an election. Dick Hamilton is still skipper, and we're going to carry on without a captain until he comes back. You can't spoof me you didn't know this."

"We've had some good fun, and it's all over!" chuckled Fullwood. "You've been captain for seven minutes, Handy—"

"Just about," agreed Handforth, glancing at the clock. "And I shall be captain for the rest of the term, too—and perhaps longer. What's all this rot you're saying? A rag? A joke? A spoof election? When you've got some more funny remarks, I'd like to hear 'em!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The crowd was more diverted than ever by Handforth's obstinate refusal to see the daylight. If ever a chap deserved to be the laughing-stock of all St. Frank's, surely Handforth deserved it!

Mr. Crowell was seen making his way towards the Ancient House steps from the direction of the gymnasium—where, in fact, he had watched the proceedings, and had listened to the entire programme. He was looking rather grim.

"One moment, boys!" he said briskly, as he mounted the steps. "Handforth, I understand that you have been elected captain of our Form?"

"Yes, sir."

"That is, temporary captain?"

"Permanent captain, sir," said Handforth promptly. "If Hamilton wants to fight me at the polls when he comes back, I shall be ready. But I've been elected by the biggest majority ever known at St. Frank's—"

LOOK OUT NEXT WEEK!

"LORD OF THE REMOVE!"

That's Handforth!

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"It's only spoo, you ass!" yelled somebody.

Mr. Crowell turned quickly, as though accepting the interruption as an opening.

"What was that?" he asked sharply.

"Handforth's been fooled, sir!"

"Indeed!" said Mr. Crowell coldly. "What exactly do you mean by that remark, De Valerie? The result of the election is still upon the screen yonder, and Handforth is most decidedly your new captain!"

"But it's only a rag, sir!" shouted a dozen voices.

"Let us have this quite clear," said Mr. Crowell grimly. "Did you boys vote for Handforth in the approved fashion? Did you place your crosses against his name on the ballot papers, and deposit them in the usual box?"

"Why, yes, sir!" said Reggie Pitt.

"Every boy in the Remove did this?"

"Yes, sir!"

"Then Handforth is captain of the Form—elected by his own Form-fellows," declared

Mr. Crowell finally. "There can be no two ways in a matter of this sort. You have elected Handforth, and the matter is ended."

A dead, awful, stupefied silence descended upon the Remove. Even the Fourth-Formers and the fags, and the others, held their breath. Mr. Crowell's edict had come like a bolt from the blue.



CHAPTER 16.

HANDFORTH'S TRIUMPH!

ALPH LESLIE FULLWOOD was the first to find his voice.

"You can't mean that, sir," he said steadily.

"I certainly do mean it, Fullwood."

"But look here, sir, it's only a joke!" protested Fullwood, in alarm. "Handforth was so confident of being elected that we thought we'd help him by pitchforking him into the

captaincy by an overwhelming majority. But it's only a rag, sir——"

"That is quite enough, Fullwood," interrupted Mr. Crowell. "I do not believe in jokes of this type—and I do not accept this affair as a joke. You have voted for Handforth, and you must abide by your voting."

"But, but——"

"Enough!" said the Form-master. "I give my full sanction to Handforth's captaincy, and from this moment he is your official captain. And I shall not sanction any other election until Hamilton returns, so you need not think that you can get out of the matter in that way. If you have been foolish enough to vote for Handforth against your own convictions, that is your own affair. An election is a serious matter, and should be treated seriously. If you choose to treat it with levity, it is fitting that you should suffer as a result of your own actions. Handforth, let me congratulate you upon your victory. If there are any points you need help with, do not hesitate to seek my advice."

With a curt nod, Mr. Crowell went indoors.

"And that," said Handforth, "is that!"

He was wearing an expression of quiet triumph, and his eyes were gleaming victoriously. Church and McClure gazed at one another, vaguely suspicious of something. At the same moment, they had thought of the same idea.

William Napoleon Browne, coming out on to the steps with Horace Stevens, chuckled with quiet amusement.

"I have a lurking suspicion, Brother Handforth has got the half-nelson on the Remove," he said smoothly. "I have a second lurking suspicion that Brother Handforth commenced this double-crossing process at an earlier period. A great eye-opener for us all. Who would have suspected our own Brother Ted of such sinister cunning?"

The Remove, slowly recovering, was beginning to give voice.

"Crowell's mad!" gasped Jack Grey. "I say, it can't be true, you know! We haven't saddled ourselves with Handy as a skipper, have we?"

"Looks horribly like it!" said Pitt.

"But only until Hamilton comes back——"

"Only!" broke in Fullwood bitterly. "Dick won't turn up until the end of next week at the earliest—and that means a week of this hopeless fathead, at the very best! And it's more than likely that Hamilton won't show up until the term's more than half over!"

Reggie Pitt shook his head.

"In that case we shan't need a skipper at all!" he said. "There won't be any of us left—we shall all be slaughtered by then. You see, there are consolations in the most trying situations!"

"Can't you be serious?" growled Fullwood. "There's only one thing for it—we've got to make Handy resign! Crowell can't object——"

"My poor, deluded infant," interrupted Pitt. "Would you attempt to lift St. Frank's

from its foundations? You could do it more easily than we can convince Handy that he ought to resign! Listen! Our skipper is about to burst into speech!"

Handforth, with his thumbs tucked in his waistcoat, was ready.

"Thought you'd fool me, eh?" he asked genially. "Well, my sons, let me tell you the truth. I wasn't fooled for a minute—but you've been fooled all the time! You didn't give me credit for such smartness, eh?"

"We've—been—fooled?" asked De Valerie thickly.

"Properly duped!" replied Handforth. "What are you going to say when I tell you that I knew that Mr. Crowell would support me?"

"You knew!" yelled a dozen voices.

"Of course I knew!" grinned Handforth. "That young sneak, Long, tried to get money out of me last night by blabbing the whole plot——"

"We know that," interrupted Pitt. "But you were still fooled——"

"Was I?" said Handforth cheerfully.

"Here's something you didn't know. Long told Mr. Crowell all about it, too—and Mr. Crowell spoke to me afterwards. He told me that he didn't approve of this kind of ragging!"

"What!"

"And he told me that if you elected me, he'd make you stand by it!" said Handforth happily. "I knew this last night, you poor simpletons! So I've been pretending to keep the thing up all day—pretending to be fooled. And all the time I've been spoofing the lot of you!"

"Oh, my goodness!"

"We—we've played into his very hands!"

"Oh, help!"

"Of course you've played into my hands!" agreed Handforth, nodding. "Do you think I'd be such a lunatic as to tell you about Mr. Crowell's decision? Not likely! I kept that dark. And instead of you having a nice little rag at my expense, I've been elected skipper at yours!"

"Without question, Brother Horace, a thoroughpaced trickster," murmured Browne.

"I'm not a spoof captain—but the official skipper, sanctioned by our Form-master," said Handforth coolly. "What's more, you're all going to know it pretty soon—even if you don't know it now! I'll teach you bounders to pull my leg! I'll show you one or two things!"

The Remove simply stared, speechless. The jape was turned against them in the most disconcerting fashion, and they were utterly and absolutely done! Edward Oswald Handforth was their Form captain!

Another election was forbidden by Mr. Crowell, and to make Handforth resign would be an impossibility. The Remove had never felt so utterly dished in the whole of its existence. And they, themselves, were responsible! They had enjoyed their joke, but it had recoiled on their own heads.

"You can all dismiss now," said Handforth, waving his hands in a fatherly way. "I shan't start anything to-night. And to-morrow's Sunday."

"Thank goodness for small mercies!" said Fullwood fervently.

"But on Monday I shall start my campaign!" said Handforth.

"Campaign?" breathed Church. "What campaign, old man?"

"On Monday, the Remove begins a new era!" roared Handforth. "On Monday I take the helm, and I'm going to show the Remove exactly what leadership really is!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Next week looks like being a bit lively!"

"We shall never live through it!"

"It'll be lively enough!" thundered Handforth grimly. "Any fellow who refuses to obey my orders will be smashed! Any fellow who breaks the rules and regulations of the school will be slaughtered! I'm going to hold the reins firmly, and if anybody starts jibbing

I'm going to pull those reins and order full speed astern! Now that I'm at the helm I mean to rule the roost!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You're getting a bit mixed, old man," said Pitt gently. "You can't make us go full speed astern by pulling the reins, and I never knew that a roost was steered by a helm!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Edward Oswald waved a dignified hand.

"You can have your laughs to-night—but if any fellow makes a joke at my expense on Monday—down comes the chopper!" he said firmly. "Come on, Churchy—come on, Mac—let's go indoors and celebrate!"

The chums of Study D vanished, and the Remove dispersed in a kind of trance.

Next week, by all appearances, a few things were going to happen!

(You'll howl with laughter when you read how Handy throws his weight about in "LORD OF THE REMOVE!"—next week's stunning long complete story of the Boys of St. Frank's.)

THE END.

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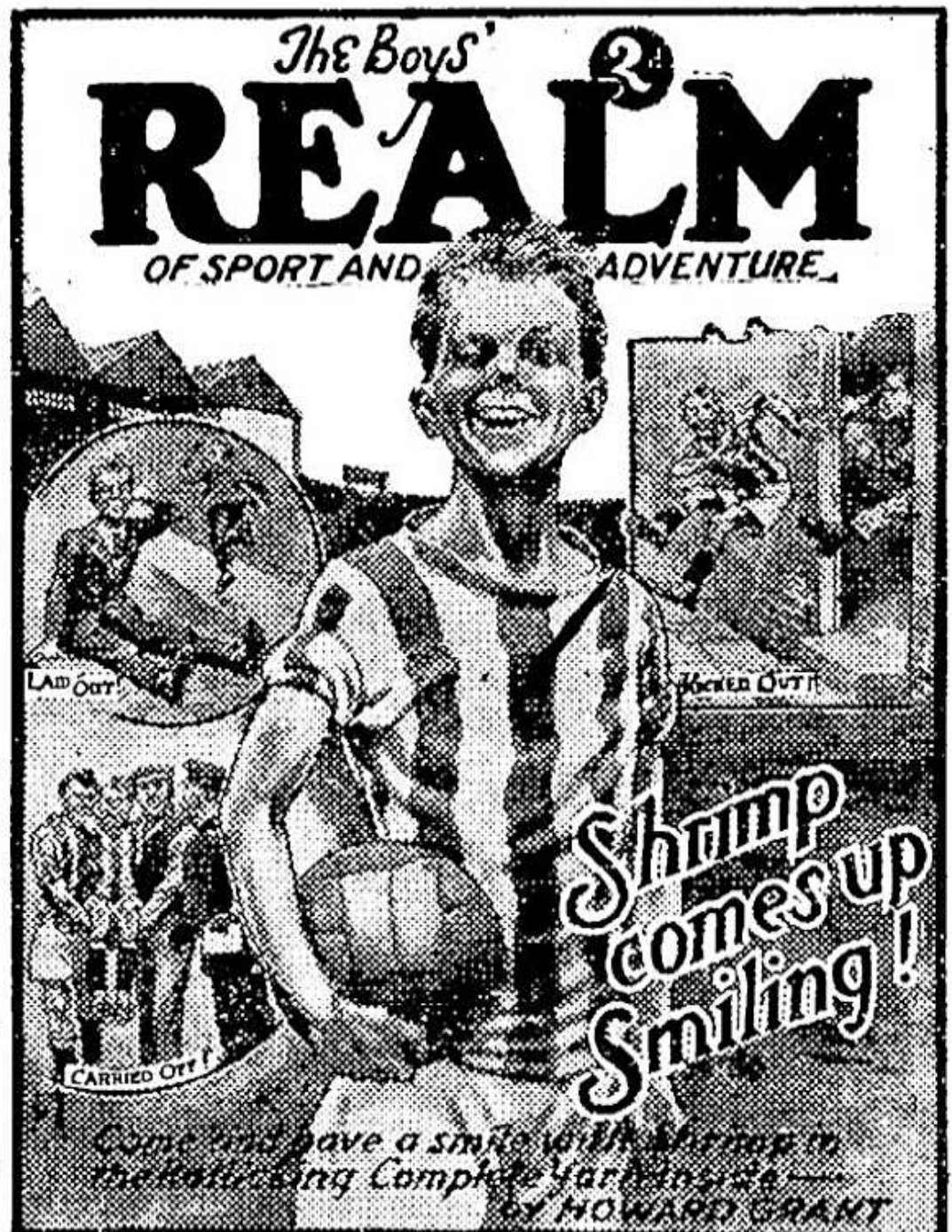
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The Membership Application Form will be found on page 42.

AS you know, I am always answering questions. Every letter that reaches me gets a personal reply. It was all the more pleasant, considering that lots of the queries asking for immediate answers are fair "teasers," to receive the following:—"I was genuinely astonished and pleased with the really obliging and most thorough manner in which you dealt with every point of my letter. The information that you sent is infinitely useful."

Don't think that in quoting this letter, which comes from overseas, I am blowing my own trumpet. Rather it is paying a tribute to the thoughtful courtesy of the supporter who expresses his thanks so well. As you will see, our correspondence feature has assumed larger proportions. I am glad this is so. The exchange of letters, and the facilities afforded for mutual help will, as time goes on, undoubtedly become an even more important side of the work of the League. I want to thank a loyal supporter who wrote to me this week. This correspondent is Mrs. J. Burgess, Longmore Farm, Dairy Cottage, Esher. She tells me she has been a constant reader of the NELSON LEE LIBRARY since it was first published, and she enclosed a far back number. I was glad to see this well-read copy; it was a first-rate number, with "The House of Fear" as chief story. But the "N.L.L." has travelled far since those days, as we all know.

Members wishing to correspond with other members should send in their applications to the Chief Officer at the address given above. Notices should be as brief as possible and written clearly.

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Ben B. Yates, 13, Recreation Gardens, Low Lane, Birstall, near Leeds, wishes to hear from readers anywhere.

J. C. Burch, The Manse, Station Road, Crayford, Kent, wishes to correspond with readers in Central Africa and Australia; stamps, camping, aero engines, and cycling.

Jack Hearne, 29, New King Street, Bath, wishes to hear from readers in Bath, with view to start a club.

H. F. Atlay, 23, Drakewood Road, Streatham Vale, S.W.16, wants another O.O. in his district. He would like to hear from any member qualifying.

R. Tompkins, 136, Duke Road, Chiswick, London, W.4, wishes to communicate with a Leagueite in Africa.

E. Turnbull, 59, Back Heaton Park Road, Heaton, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, wishes to correspond with a reader in South Africa or India.

S. H. Harrison, 10, Lord Street, Sandy Bay, Hobart, Tasmania, wishes to correspond with a reader in England.

Norman Sealey, 251, Northumberland Road, Southampton, wishes to correspond with a reader in any part of the world about football, wireless, and "all sorts of things."

Charles Smart, 7, Copeley Hill, Erdington, Birmingham, would like to hear from members in his neighbourhood.

Stan H. Wheatley, Livestock Office, S.A. Railways, Adelaide, South Australia, wishes to hear from members.

Member No. 2811 would like to hear from readers and members all over the world, to exchange stamps and postcard views. All letters answered. Address, Fredk. Charles Green, 119, Merridale Street, West, Wolverhampton, Staffs.

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CHAPTER 1.

MID-AIR MYSTERY!

"IT'S the most wonderful airplane in the world, Mr. Lee! It can do two hundred miles an hour, and it can poise in the air like a giddy dragon-fly! Rupert Talbot spent a fortune and half a lifetime inventing the 'Hawk,' but I guess he signed his death-warrant in doing so!"

Nelson Lee and Nipper stared aghast at the flying man. This was worse than they had thought, for Jim Leslie's 'phone message had simply mentioned that the famous inventor had disappeared.

"Do you mean that his body has been found?" Lee demanded.

"It hasn't yet," Leslie admitted. "But I'm expecting to hear every minute——"

"We'll stick to the facts, and leave your expectations alone," the great detective smiled. "So far, we only know that Mr. Talbot has invented a new flying machine, and that you have reason to fear he has been kidnapped."

Leslie nodded, and stared gloomily at the pair he had called in haste from London. He was so openly downcast that Nipper wondered, for Jim Leslie was known to take hair-raising risks almost daily whilst testing the Talbot flying-machines. It seemed really laughable that this fearless youth could have the wind up so completely—just because he suspected his chief had been kidnapped.

But Leslie's next words proved that his fears were justified, and that a very sinister mystery had enveloped Ullet Grange, this quiet house in Hampshire.

"I'll stick to the facts, as you suggest, Mr. Lee," he said, grimly. "The first fact is that almost any European government would give a cool million to own our 'bus and the plans that made it possible—and some chap's gone a long way towards earning that million!"

"By the kidnapping of Rupert Talbot, you mean?" Lee demanded. "Have you any reason to suspect that your experimental work has been spied upon?"

"A dozen reasons—now that it's too late," Leslie admitted, ruefully. "There have been

strange faces seen in Wensley village, and last night we disturbed two beauties nosing round the Hawk's hangar! Of course, it's open to anyone to watch our flying, and any innocent could see we were trying out a new kind of machine, but how they knew enough of Mr. Talbot's secret business to arrange a booby trap for an Air Ministry expert has me fogged."

"We'll stick to the facts, Leslie," Lee reminded him.

"Sorry, sir," Leslie grinned, awkwardly. "Well, you must know that once the boss was sure he had a winner, he offered the Hawk's plans to the Whitehall bigwigs. After a dozen letters and a heap of telephone messages, the Government agreed to send an expert down on a kind of preliminary inspection. Sure enough, Mr. Arnold Dean arrived early this afternoon, had a trial flight in the Hawk, and told me he was delighted with the 'bus. That ended my part of the show; then Mr. Talbot brought him in here to arrange terms and so on, if the Government decided to take the thing up."

He paused and frowned, and Nipper could see the bewilderment grow in his eyes again.

"You were not present at that interview?" Lee asked.

"I was stowing the 'bus away, and warning the mechanics to keep an eye open for trespassers," Leslie answered. "When I did come into the house at last, I was amazed to hear Mr. Arnold Dean accusing the boss of stealing another man's ideas! Then, when his rotten lies were flung back in his face, he actually offered to show Mr. Talbot the other fellow's machine."

"Did Mr. Dean mention where this second inventor lived?" Lee asked quickly.

"No; he said he was sworn to secrecy," Leslie said, bitterly. "Of course, the boss took up the challenge and away they went, arguing like Kilkenny cats. That was six hours ago, Mr. Lee, and an hour after they left a 'phone message came through from Whitehall to say that Mr. Arnold Dean had been suddenly called to Brighton and could not be with us until early evening!"

In the silence that followed Leslie's dramatic words the faint "whirr" of a furiously-

driven motor was heard. It stopped at the Grange door with a grind of wheels, and five seconds later a trim maid announced the arrival of Mr. Arnold Dean!

A thin, grey-haired man stood frowning in the doorway for a moment. Then he stepped straight across to Jim Leslie.

"Where is Mr. Talbot? I must see him immed—" He stopped suddenly, and stared in surprise at Leslie's visitors. "Why, you, Lee—and Nipper! What does this mean—you here? Have I come too late?"

"I'm afraid you have, Dean," Nelson Lee said, nodding to the man he had served in more than one strange case. "This is Jim Leslie—Talbot's pilot and assistant—and he's just finished telling us of the Mr. Arnold Dean who came here six hours ago, and who took Talbot away with him."

"Ts-s-sh! That's worse than I feared," Dean groaned. "A telegram came from Brighton that my wife had been badly hurt in a motor smash. I found her alive and well, realised how cleverly I had been duped, and rushed here as fast as my car could bring me." He turned impatiently to Leslie. "But didn't you get my message—that I had been suddenly called away?"

Leslie nodded.

"We did—an hour after the boss had gone," he answered, bitterly.

"We're wasting time, gentlemen," Nelson Lee said, impatiently. "The pains taken to hoodwink Mr. Talbot show that a very clever gang is after the secret of the Hawk. You're sure the 'plane is undamaged and properly guarded, Leslie?"

"Quite, sir; unless an army attacks the hangar," Leslie replied. "I've four brawny lads round it, and—"

"Good!" Lee snapped. "Now what about the plans—did Talbot carry them with him?"

"Far as I know, they're still in his safe upstairs," Leslie answered. "It has a combination lock, and only the boss himself knows the key word that'll open it."

"Then I don't get the idea, gov'nor," Nipper ventured. "I'd have thought those fellows would have gone for the plans and the 'plane—not for the man who made them."

"We'll make sure the plans really are in the safe," Lee said, briskly. "Now, Leslie, if you'll act as guide, please?"

Leslie nodded, and led the way through a gloomy hall, and up four long flights of stairs. Only when they trod the highest floor did he unlock a door, switch on a light, and point to a massive safe and its big combination lock.

"'Fraid you'll want a stick of dynamite to open that with," he said.

"I'll try my own way, first, if you'll keep absolutely quiet," Lee answered drily.

Kneeling so that his right ear was barely two inches from the lock, the great detective began to slowly finger and turn the dial. His delicate finger-tips were feeling for the tiny catch that marked each key-letter used by Talbot, and his ear was strained for the

minute click of the levers falling into their sockets. Of those who watched, only Nipper had any idea of his aim, and it was with amazed surprise that the others saw the heavy lock suddenly fall apart and the door open to Lee's touch.

"It's a blessing you're on the side of law and order, Nelson Lee," Mr. Dean smiled. "If ever you turn crook, my friend, please keep your too-clever fingers from Air Ministry secrets."

The great detective smiled at the compliment, but his keen eyes were busily probing into the secrets of the safe. His glance speedily fixed on a neatly tied bundle of blue prints, and drawing these out, he showed them to Leslie.

"Are these the Hawk's plans?" he demanded.

"Without a doubt, sir," Leslie answered promptly. "I've seen the boss working on them many a time, and many an argument we've had over 'em, too."

"They're Talbot's private property, of course," Lee said. "But under the circumstances, Dean, I suggest you glance through them, seal them up, and lodge them for safety in the Whitehall strong-room."

"You think the gang who caught Talbot will try to steal the plans?" Dean asked, doubtfully.

"I'm sure of it, and sure they'll try and wreck the Hawk as well," Nelson Lee answered. "You, Leslie, had better help your mechanics to guard the machine. We'll leave you here, Dean, but be careful to lock the door after we've gone." He whirled round on the pilot. "By the way, Leslie, did Mr. Talbot and the spy leave here in a car?"

"They walked—the chap we called Mr. Dean said his car was waiting in the road. I noticed they turned to the left—"

"That'll do," Lee nodded. "Come, Nipper, we'll see if the lane has anything to tell us. Remember the door, Dean, and only open it to one of us three."

Mr. Arnold Dean smiled and took a flat automatic from his hip-pocket.

"If the fellow who stole my name comes back to steal these papers I'll be very sorry for him!" he said quietly.

Satisfied that the all-important plans were in safe hands, Nelson Lee followed the others from the house.

But within an hour he was forced to realise that he had blundered, and ruefully to admit that Talbot's cunning enemies had foreseen his every move.

CHAPTER 2.

THE SHADOW STRIKES!

THE quiet country lane fronting Ulfet Grange stood damp and deserted when Lee and Nipper began their quest. The autumn evening, closing to a misty night, doubled their difficulties, and Nelson Lee frowned as he stared at the prospect ahead.

"It's like trying to catch a shadow, young 'un," he muttered, flashing an electric-torch from side to side. "We've no idea of the spy's real appearance, and he was cute enough to keep his car well away from the house. We've also no hint of where he was making for, but we've got to rescue Rupert Talbot quickly or he'll be past rescuing at all."

"Oh, chuck it, guv'nor!" Nipper gasped. "You don't mean to say they'd murder him?"

"I'm quite sure they will—once they get their hands on his plans," Lee answered grimly. "When that happens, they'll kill Talbot out of hand, and make the secret of the poised 'plane their own for keeps."

Nipper shivered, but had to admit that the guv'nor argued soundly. It was not a pleasant thought, and he was unusually quiet until the light of his torch fell on a patch of half-dried mud.

"Look, guv'nor! A car's stopped here!" he cried. "And there's dozens of foot-marks—"

"Too mixed up to be of any use to us," Lee muttered. "Um! Clincher tyres, but there's thousands of 'em about. There's been a struggle here, though, young 'un, and it's plain that Talbot guessed, too late, the trap set for him."

Nelson Lee was throwing the beam of his torch on a section of hedge that had broken with the impact of struggling men. But Nipper's sharp eyes caught sight of a dark object resting on the bush, and he was reaching for this when his hand remained fixed, and a startled exclamation broke from his lips.

"What's this you've found, young 'un?" Lee asked, taking the thing from Nipper's hand. "Ah! A Stetson hat—and here's the initials R.T. inside it. Well, that's final proof of Talbot's kidnapping, but it doesn't help us to find him."

But Nipper took no notice of the guv'nor's words. He was staring up into the dark sky with an expression of utter bewilderment on his face—staring so long that at last Lee called him sharply to order.

"It's no time for star-gazing. What's the matter, lad?" he demanded.

"That's just what I'm wondering," Nipper said, drawing his hands across his eyes. "When I reached for the hat, some huge black thing passed overhead—a thing the size of a house!"

Nelson Lee frowned, and stared upwards for a moment.

"Your eyes are playing tricks, or you're dreaming——" he began.

"But I'm sure there was something, guv'nor," Nipper interrupted. "Whatever it was, it blotted out the light of the stars for about three seconds, and I couldn't have dreamt that!"

"Whether you dreamt it or not, our first business is to find Talbot," Lee said impatiently. "We must follow up these tyre marks, Nipper, though I'm afraid they won't take us far."

He was right. In less than five minutes the lane joined a main traffic road, and here

the Clincher marks were soon lost sight of. That meant the end of the chase, of course, and Nelson Lee sourly ordered a return to the house.

"A baffling case, young 'un," he said irritably. "Talbot's enemies must have been watching him for weeks, yet they've covered up every clue to their identity. They knew the exact time and reason of Arnold Dean's visit, and that, mind you, was a thing Talbot would keep most carefully to himself."

"It almost looks as if they have a spy in the house, guv'nor," Nipper muttered.

"I doubt if anyone knew of Dean's visit except Leslie, and he is above suspicion," Lee answered. "Anyway, I want to question Leslie more closely——"

Bang! The sharp explosion of a fired gun broke loud above Lee's words. An instant of dead silence; then, less than a hundred feet ahead, excited yells and a burst of firing broke out on the night air.

"An attack on the hangar, guv'nor!" Nipper yelled. "They're after the Hawk!"

Without awaiting orders, he raced down the dark lane, his feet making no sound on the soily track. The fight in the grounds seemed to be growing in intensity, but an eight-foot wall separated Nipper from the combatants, and he reckoned to save time by making a bee-line for the main gates. Then, suddenly, a dark form scrambled over the wall, and before Nipper realised what was happening, it dropped right in his path.

Unable to pull up in time, Nipper barged heavily into the fellow, and the pair stumbled full length to the ground. Instantly guessing that this must be one of Talbot's kidnapping gang, Nipper yelled a warning to the guv'nor and hung on like a terrier.

The chap fought with the strength and ferocity of a tiger, and Nipper felt as if a dozen cyclones had him in their grip. Luckily, Nelson Lee was right on his heels, and joined in the struggle before serious harm could come to the lad.

Even then, with the two of them holding him down, the fellow wriggled and squirmed like a landed eel. It was only when Lee gradually forced his arms together and Nipper snapped steel bracelets over his wrists that the raging spy subsided to panting, sullen fury.

"Great snakes!" yelled a voice. "So you've got one of 'em, Mr. Lee! Here, let me get at the hound——"

Looking up, they saw Jim Leslie leap from the wall—a ten-inch spanner in his fist! He advanced with lips grimly closed and scowled ferociously when Nelson Lee waved him back from his victim.

"But he's been trying to smash the Hawk, sir!" Leslie complained bitterly. "Three of 'em trying to break into the hangar, and if we hadn't been on the watch she'd be scrap-iron by now!"

"We heard the firing," Lee answered. "Anybody hurt?"

"No, but this chap nearly got me," Leslie

replied. "I spotted him racing for the wall, and I'd like to finish the argument, Mr. Lee!"

"Later, perhaps," Nelson Lee smiled. He turned his torch on the prisoner's face and lit up sallow, ugly features and a pair of greeny-grey eyes that flashed the hatred of a wildcat. "Now, my friend, the game's up, and you'll answer a few questions."

"I answer nodings!" the prisoner snarled. "You haf me—but much goot it do you!"

"We're fighting for a man's life, and not inclined to be over-gentle," Lee warned him. "Tell me, where is Rupert Talbot?"

"Where you nod find him," the fellow sneered evilly.

"Drop on his legs, Nipper—you hold his shoulders down, Leslie," Lee ordered briefly. "We'll see if his pockets tell us anything."

Most of the fellow's belongings were of no interest, though the sight of a half-emptied revolver brought a growl from Leslie. Only when Nelson Lee tore the spy's waistcoat open and hauled a small notecase from an inner pocket did the search show signs of bringing reward.

The case held a small fortune in banknotes, and one tiny scrap of paper on which a drawing was roughly scrawled. Ignoring the money, Lee studied the picture with a thoughtful frown, trying to find some hint that would connect it with the kidnapping of Talbot.

It was a crude drawing of a fowling-piece with its muzzle to the right, and underneath this was a bird in flight. Above the butt end of the gun were the figures 740, and to the right in the direction of the flight of the bird were the letters "W S W." Two dots—one to the left and the other to the right of the bird—caught Lee's eye. They were not there by accident, and probably had some hidden meaning or significance.

Nipper and Leslie were staring at the drawing over Lee's shoulders, and for several seconds there was not a sound in the lane. Then a faint drone from overhead made all three stare upwards, and Nipper thoughtlessly turned his torch up into the night sky.

The blue beam fell full on a grotesque object flying at a height of fifty feet. It looked like a giant grey bat—a horrible thing with a wing spread of thirty feet, a huge tubed snout where the head ought to have been!

"Crikey, guv'nor——" Nipper began; but Lee tore the torch from his hand, smothered the light, and whispered an order to them to drop flat.

Without understanding the need, they obeyed—and in that second a red flame burst out ten feet from where they lay, the ground heaved and a thunderclap broke in their ears! It was followed by a clatter of falling stones, and in the ensuing silence they heard a deep moan from the handcuffed spy.

"My hat, guv'nor—is the earthquake over?" Nipper mumbled stupidly.

For answer, Nelson Lee lit up the lane ahead, and those with him gasped with surprise. Ten paces from where they lay, a great hole had been torn in the ground, and yards of the Grange wall had collapsed to rubbish!

Still without speaking, Lee turned the light on the face of the spy, and they saw that he was quite unconscious—a jagged tear on his forehead showing where a splinter of wood had passed with the force and speed of a bullet!

"That'll teach you not to signal with a torch again, Nipper," Nelson Lee snapped. "Had the fellow's aim been a fraction better, the hole yonder would have been—where we now stand!"

"D'you mean to say that thing with wings was a man, guv'nor?" Nipper gasped.

"By George!" Leslie muttered. "A machine-driven glider—and the brute flung a bomb at us!"

"Exactly!" Lee nodded, his lips set in a grim, straight line. "That glider man explains a lot that has puzzled me to-night, and I've a terrible fear that Arnold Dean has paid for my blindness! Leslie, get this fellow to the house as quickly as you can—you'll find us in Dean's room!"

CHAPTER 3.

NIPPER'S EERIE ADVENTURE.

RACING through the grounds, and taking the stairs three at a time, Nelson Lee banged on the door and called loudly upon Dean to open to him. But not a sound came from within the room, and now the great detective acted without hesitation.

"We can't wait, young 'un," he explained quickly. "We must know what's happened to Dean, and there's only one way for it!"

Snatching a gun from his pocket, he drove the muzzle into the keyhole and fired. Before the roar that echoed through the house had died away he had the door open, and his worst fears were realised by seeing Arnold Dean stretched motionless and face downward across the floor!

In a second they were beside the fallen man, and had lifted him to a couch. Tearing his collar and shirt open, Lee sighed with relief to find that he still breathed and was apparently uninjured.

"Queer smell, guv'nor," Nipper said, sniffing. "Smelt it before, somewhere."

"Carbon-monoxide—one of the deadliest gases known," Lee replied. He sprang for the window, tore the curtains aside, and tapped out every pane of glass with the butt of his gun. "A weak solution only, or Dean would have been dead by now. He'll soon recover, but where are the plans?"

In the excitement of the last few minutes Nipper had actually forgotten the all-important plans of the poised 'plane—the discovery Talbot claimed to have found, and an invention that would make its owner master of

the skies! Now the lad looked round the room with startled eyes, marvelling that the plans could be missing, with a locked door and a heavily-barred window to prevent a thief from entering!

"My hat, guv'nor!" They can't have gone! Dean must have them on him, or he's already placed them in the safe!"

Nelson Lee shook his head.

"I locked the safe, and I've already felt through Dean's pockets," he answered. "No, they've gone, young 'un, and it's easy to guess who has them."

"You mean the flying man—the chap who chucked the bomb at us?" Nipper gasped. "But the door was locked and the window barred; nobody could have got into the room!"

Nelson Lee was staring fixedly at the broken window and, as though drawn by a magnet, Nipper's eyes turned in the same direction. Then, in a flash, the lad understood the cunning scheme by which Dean had been outwitted.

"Crikey, guv'nor!" he whispered. "The window-frame isn't latched! The beggar's flown on to the window-sill like a bird——"

"A method he's used many times, I think, and one that explains his uncanny knowledge of Talbot's business," Lee interrupted dryly. "The curtains would hide him from anyone in the room, and to-night he's simply opened the window from outside and squirted the gas over Dean!"

"I can understand that, but I can't see yet how he got his hands on the plans," Nipper protested.

"Easy enough, with a fishing-rod and hook," Lee said, with a shrug. "We've been nicely fooled, young 'un, and the only clue we've got is this crude picture—if clue it is?"

Again he stared in perplexity at the rough drawing taken from the spy's pocket. Jim Leslie, having put that same spy safely away, now hurried into the room and stared in dismay at the still unconscious Dean.

To avoid disturbing the guv'nor, Nipper began to explain the situation in a whisper, but before he had finished the great detective looked sharply up and beckoned them nearer.

"I'm beginning to understand this picture puzzle, and it's a question of minutes if we're to save the plans," he said quickly. "The fellow we caught in the lane is undoubtedly a messenger from some secret service department abroad. He's brought instructions to our glider friend, and the orders are in this picture!"

Leslie's mouth opened, but Lee signed him to silence.

"Listen, lads," he continued. "Here are the figures 740, and the letters W.S.W.; I take them to mean seven hundred and forty miles, west-south-west. The bird means as the crow flies. Then, take this first dot as Ullet Grange—where a wonderful flying invention has been made—and the second dot as the place where the thieves have orders to make for, if successful. We then have

left the drawing of a rifle, a fowling-piece or a——" he looked up from the picture and stared eagerly at Leslie, "or a gun. Leslie, do you know a man named Gunn hereabouts who happens to be interested in fly——"

Leslie whooped wildly, and banged his fist on the table.

"My goodness, you've got it, Mr. Lee!" he yelled. "There's a fellow named Gunderson living at Alton—thirty miles away—a chap who flies a two-seater 'bus for pleasure!"

"Then that's our man, and he'll be away in the two-seater the moment he can get her into the air!" Lee cried. "Dean's car is at the door——"

"And my Hawk is in the hangar!" Leslie interrupted, with eyes flashing. "There's a fine landing at Alton—she'll do the thirty miles in a jump, sir!"

It was no time for hesitation, and Nelson Lee had only one question to ask.

"How soon can you have the plane ready?" he demanded.

"In five minutes," Leslie promised.

"Then off with you," Lee said quickly. "We must find someone to attend Dean, then we'll be with you."

So well did Leslie and his men work that the plane was waiting when Lee and Nipper ran across the ground. In another minute they were strapped to seats in the cockpit, and a mechanic bumped the propeller over for the start.

Leslie waved his hand, the engine burst to life with a spluttering roar and the mechanic sprang clear. Whir-r-r! The Hawk moved steadily along the smooth run, gathered speed, then leapt into the air like a swallow!

The crash of the twelve-cylinder engine died to an even "pur-r-r" before they had reached two thousand feet. Shortly afterwards, Leslie pointed down to the lights of a town.

"Winchester!" he shouted through the tube. "Alton twenty miles nor'-west, and Gunderson's 'drome two miles beyond that."

Ten minutes later, Alton lights were passed at a height of four thousand, and the flares of Gunderson's place were seen. Leslie instantly shut off his engine, turned their on-rush to a steady glide, and began to drop earthward like a ghost.

But a full mile still separated them from the 'drome when the harsh splutter of another engine burst out, and they saw a second 'plane spring into the air.

(Continued on page 43.)

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THE GREY BAT!

(Continued from page 41.)

"That's Gunderson's 'Firefly'!" Leslie yelled. "I'd know its crimson body anywhere—the brute's beaten us by a minute!"

He shot the Hawk forward, but the lights of the 'drome were instantly doused and the Firefly was swallowed in the upper darkness. Switching on a searchlight he quartered the skies ahead, but the Firefly had vanished!

It was soon evident that he had overshot his mark, and he was coming round in a great circle when several staccato reports burst out, and a hail of bullets zipped between wires and stays!

"He's sitting on our tail!" Nipper yelled, as a bullet stung past his ear like an angry wasp.

Turning sideways, he could see the enemy 'bus a hundred feet away and slightly above them. Then, as the Firefly shot past, he glimpsed its pilot—his chin steady, the joy-stick, his hands holding two blazing automatics!

"Lee, I'm hit!" Leslie gasped, and sagged forward in his chair.

The Hawk zoomed aloft like a frightened colt, and began to bank at a terrifying angle, but Lee was just able to touch the stick with his fingers and he managed to right the bus to an even keel!

"Are you badly hurt, Leslie?" he yelled. "Shoulder," the pilot groaned, adding, pluckily: "Keep the stick! I'll manage the controls!"

"The beggar's dead ahead!" Nipper cried. "Ring him, gov'nor! We'll be able to drive him down!"

But Gunderson never meant that to happen. He had emptied his guns, risking all on the first staggering surprise. Unable to reload, he was now desperate, and drove straight at the Hawk.

One hundred feet separated the winged monsters, then sixty—forty!

But Lee knew his business. Bringing the Hawk round, he swirled upwards, and was winging fifty feet above Gunderson before the crook realised his move.

Looking downward, they suddenly realised how helpless they really were. They could now see a fellow strapped to the seat behind Gunderson. It could only be Rupert Talbot, and his life was at the spy's mercy!

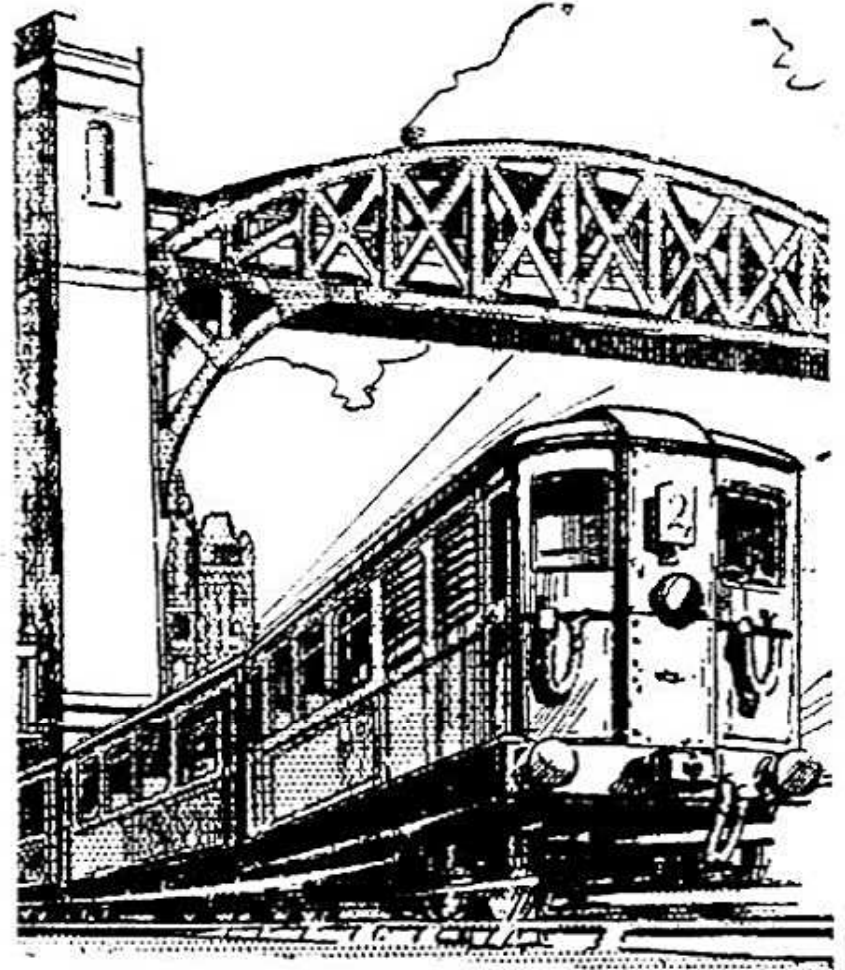
The Firefly made straight for the Channel and they followed helplessly. It was evident that Gunderson meant to keep his course in defiance of anything they could do.

"There's only one chance, gov'nor," Nipper yelled. "Get above her! I'm going to board!"

"Impossible, young 'un!" Lee cried. "I won't allow it!"

"You must!" Nipper shouted. "There's no other way. It's good-bye to Talbot's life and the plans if you refuse!"

(Continued on next page.)



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THE GREY BAT!

(Continued from previous page.)

Lee yielded; there was nothing else for it.

"Very well, I'll get above her!" he cried. "Take my gun, and wait until I'm sitting right on top of him."

As Nipper climbed out of the pit his heart nearly failed him, but he set his lips grimly, and hung on whilst the Hawk drooped and began to steal forward.

At last the top plane of the Firefly was almost within reach of Nipper's dangling feet, and with a gasp he released his hold and dropped! The rush of air tore at him for one awful second, then his body struck, and he hung on!

"My sainted aunt!" he grunted. "I've landed!"

Edging backward until his feet were dangling over the cockpit, he dropped lightly. In that instant Gunderson first became aware that he had a passenger aboard. Leaving the controls, he was snatching a knife from his belt when Nipper struck!

The butt of the gun took the man neatly on the temple, and he crumpled up as if shot. The plane, pilotless, began a sickening nose-dive, but Nipper reached swiftly over the unconscious spy and managed to right her when barely two hundred feet separated them from the sandy shore.

He knew enough of a plane's gadgets to shut off the engine, but there his know-

ledge ended. She was now gliding down, and Nipper was momentarily expecting a crash when the Hawk's light showed him a level stretch of sand straight ahead.

The next second she bumped heavily, tore a wing to shreds and tilted to a standstill. But Nipper grinned happily over the mishap, slashed Talbot's bonds adrift, and helped the bewildered inventor to his feet.

"You've saved me, and you've saved the plans for England!" Talbot cried. "But you've dropped from the skies! Who are you, lad?"

"Known as Nipper, and here comes my boss," Nipper grinned as the Hawk touched down thirty yards away. "Nelson Lee'll do all the explaining, sir, while I tie this spy up!"

But there was little left to explain. Leslie's wound was roughly bandaged whilst Lee told the old inventor of the night's stirring happenings. Talbot was unsparing in his praise when he had learned all.

"I tremble to think of the consequences if these plans had been lost to us," he said thankfully. "Leslie, you've helped to save them, and you're my partner from to-night. You'll name your own fee, Mr. Lee—but what can I do for this lad who risked a four-thousand-foot fall for me?"

Nipper scratched his nose thoughtfully.

"You can give me a few flying lessons," he grinned.

(That was a good yarn you've just read. But next week's story of Nelson Lee and Nipper: "THE LION-TAMER'S SECRET!" you will like even better. It is a real corker!)

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