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HANDFORTH'S NEW CHUM!

An amusing incident from the rousing, extra-long story inside, featuring Edward Oswald Handforth and the Chums of St. Frank's.

New Series No. 105.

OUT ON WEDNESDAY.

May 5th, 1928.



Mr. Pyeraft was scandalised when he saw Vivian Travers make a rush at the girl. She did not attempt to avoid that vicious attack, however. Instead she merely sidestepped and gripped her assailant. Next moment Travers, with a wild shout, went clean over the girl's back!

A Topping Long Story of School Life at St. Frank's!

HANDFORTH'S NEW CHUM!



By
EDWY SEARLES BROOKS

Alone in the school, friendly with practically nobody—although it's entirely his own fault—Handforth welcomes the opportunity of making a new chum, and in Bert Hicks he thinks he has found one who is true blue. Poor Handy! He little realises that Bert is a rascally footpad—out for all he can get from the generous-hearted leader of Study D.—Ed.

CHAPTER 1.

Mr. Pycraft to the Rescue!

A SHRILL girlish scream, vibrant with terror, caused Mr. Horace Pycraft to start round so abruptly that he dropped his book and allowed his glasses to fall from his nose.

"Good gracious!" ejaculated Mr. Pycraft.

The master of the Fourth Form at St. Frank's was strolling sedately along the towing-path in the cool of the May evening. He had left the more populated section of the river bank behind, as he wished to be alone. He had no desire to be irritated by the shouts and cat-calls of irresponsible juniors. Mr. Pycraft was an unsociable man—an unpleasant man—and his own company was all that he desired. What company, indeed, could be better?

And then, just as he was about to walk round that clump of bushes ahead, the scream rang out. Only for a moment did Mr. Pycraft hesitate, and then he ran forward.

Dashing round the bushes, he came upon a scene which startled him considerably. It would be no exaggeration to say that Mr. Pycraft was dumbfounded.

For there, close at hand, stood one of the girls from the Moor View School. She was shrinking back, her face alight with terror. And there, in the act of making a savage rush at her, was one of the St. Frank's juniors! Even in that dramatic second, Mr. Pycraft recognised the fellow.

"Travers!" panted the master of the Fourth.

But it was too late. Vivian Travers of the Remove was unable to check his abandoned rush; and thereupon something happened which caused Mr. Pycraft greater amazement than ever.

For the girl, making no attempt to avoid that vicious attack, merely side-stepped, gripping her assailant as they met. Travers, with a wild shout, went clean over the girl's back, and thudded heavily to the grass.

Mr. Pycraft could scarcely believe the evidence of his eyes. With apparently no effort, this slight, fair-haired girl had pitched Vivian Travers clean over her back! It almost seemed that she did not need Mr. Pycraft's help. Nevertheless, the Form-master strode forward.

"Travers!" he thundered. "How dare you?"

"Eh?" gasped the Removite, sitting up and staring. "Great Samson! I beg your pardon, sir! I——"

"You cowardly young rascal!" stormed Mr. Pycraft furiously. "What do you mean by this—this disgraceful exhibition? How dare you make such an attack upon this girl? I witnessed the whole——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

A shout of uncontrolled laughter rang out, and Mr. Pycraft gave a gulp, and half turned. For the first time, he noticed that there were others present. Figures in white flannels—Remove fellows. Girls in neat gym attire. They had been standing back, watching the whole episode.

"Awfully sorry to disappoint you, sir, but things aren't what they seem," said Travers coolly. "The fair maid is in no need of assistance."

The unpleasant Form-master, vaguely realising that he was beginning to look ridiculous, glared at Travers.

"What—what is the meaning of this scene?" he demanded harshly. "I demand an explanation! I saw you make a savage rush at this girl, Travers, and——"

"Really, sir, it's quite all right!" put in Irene Manners, who happened to be the girl in question. "It's only just a little demonstration."

"A what?"

"A demonstration," said Irene demurely, her blue eyes twinkling with merriment.

"The fact is, sir, I have been giving the young lady some lessons in ju-jitsu," explained Travers blandly. "Ju-jitsu, as you may know, is a specialised form of Japanese self-defence. I am something of an expert, and in the goodness of my heart I have been passing on my knowledge to this young lady. I may say at once that she has proved to be a very apt pupil——"

"Oh, I see—I see!" said Mr. Pycraft, attempting, in vain, to regain his lost dignity. "In that case, may I inquire the reason for the ridiculous scream I heard?"

"Was it ridiculous?" asked Irene, rather hurt.

"Since you were in no danger, it certainly *was* ridiculous!" retorted Mr. Pycraft.

"Merely a touch of realism, sir," explained Travers. "You see, I was supposed to be a desperate footpad, and Miss Irene was a poor, defenceless maiden. If you will stand by, sir, we will give a further demon-

stration. I can assure you that the performance will be worth watching——"

"I have no desire to witness it!" broke in Mr. Pycraft sourly. "I do not approve of this—this nonsense! Ju-jitsu, in my opinion, is not the form of—er—exercise which young ladies should indulge in!"

"On the contrary, sir, it is a noble system of self-defence which every girl in the country should learn," said Travers enthusiastically. "You have already seen how effective it can be. With consummate ease I was tossed over this frail damsel's shoulder. I may mention, in passing, that I alighted with an unrehearsed thud. My pupil is by no means as fragile as I had been led to believe."

"Bah!" said Mr. Pycraft unpleasantly.

He turned on his heel and strode away, painfully aware of the titters that arose. Indeed, long before he had reached the cover of the friendly bushes, the warm evening air was filled with shouts of laughter. Somehow, Mr. Horace Pycraft did not appreciate the joke!



CHAPTER 2.

The Outcast!

VIVIAN TRAVERS chuckled.

"Well, well!" he said amusedly.

"Somehow, I don't

think the old boy was particularly pleased!"

"He was simply wild with rage!" laughed Irene. "But why should he be? And what nonsense to say that we girls shouldn't learn ju-jitsu! He must be terribly old-fashioned."

"Mr. Pycraft is many things besides being old-fashioned," said Travers. "Let us not discuss him. Let us, rather, extend sympathy to the unfortunate Fourth-Formers who have to endure him daily. Poor chaps! I feel sorry for them!"

There were fresh chuckles.

"The old idiot might have known that it was only a demonstration of some kind," said Jimmy Potts of the Remove. "But Pycraft always loves to interfere—and, for once, he poked his nose into something that gave him a bit of a jar."

"I think I'm the one who had the jar!" murmured Travers, rubbing his side.

"Did I really hurt you?" asked Irene, with concern.

"It wasn't you—it was the ground!" explained Travers. "You've certainly taken your lessons well to heart, dear old girl. I'm glad that I'm not a professional footpad!"

There was more laughter.

"Let's see you do it again, Renie," said Doris Berkeley.

"By all means!" nodded Travers. "Nipper, dear old fellow—forward!"

Nipper and Tregellis-West and Watson were present—to say nothing of Archie Glen-thorne, and one or two other prominent Removites. Marjorie Temple and Mary

Summers were also there. They had all come along to watch.

"Just as you like!" grinned Nipper obligingly.

He went for Irene as though he were about to seize her. But before he could do so, she obtained that deadly grip, and Nipper, too, went hurtling over her back.

Thud! He alighted on the grass heavily.

"Splendid!" beamed Vivian Travers. "Ju-jitsu is great stuff!"

"Oh, absolutely!" remarked Archie, as Nipper picked himself up. "I mean to say, the whole performance is dashed remarkable. The dear old girl can chuck you chappies about like ninepins!"

"Oh, but I only know one or two of the simpler holds," said Irene modestly. "Vivian has been ever so patient with me, and I think he's a brick for taking so much trouble," she added, whereat Travers protested that "trouble" was a totally inadequate word to use.

Two other juniors who had strolled up during the past minute exchanged a significant glance. They were Church and McClure of the Remove.

"Did you hear that, Mac, old man?" murmured Church.

"Vivian, you mean?"

"Yes," growled Church. "So it's got to Christian names, has it?"

They were silent for a brief space. They were thinking of their former leader, the once mighty Handforth. But the mighty had fallen. Edward Oswald Handforth, the celebrated leader of Study D, was no longer a power in the land. He was an outcast—ignored by every fellow in the Remove—ignored even by his former inseparable chums.

These were dark days for Handforth.

And it struck Church and McClure as significant that Irene should be referring lightly to Vivian Travers by his Christian name. Everybody had noticed her friendliness towards the elegant Removite. There was really nothing in it, although the fellows were beginning to talk.

Irene had always been Handforth's own particular girl chum. But the bluff, blustering Handy had quarrelled with Irene, in addition to his schoolfellows. Nobody quite knew why, and nobody had the nerve to question the girl.

The fact remained that she had become very friendly with Vivian Travers, and for several days past Travers had been giving her lessons in ju-jitsu. He was a great expert himself, and Irene proved to be a very apt pupil. She was proficient in several special tricks, as she had demonstrated.

Perhaps Irene was favouring Travers purposely—not because she liked him any better than the other fellows, but because she was piqued with Handforth. She was doing this deliberately—just to teach the aggressive Handforth a lesson. Nobody quite knew the truth of it.

But, as a matter of fact, Irene was very angry with Edward Oswald. Some days

earlier he had accidentally come upon her in animated conversation with a cousin of hers, a young fellow named Winston. Handforth, in his blundering way, had been seized with jealousy. He had roughly demanded an explanation from her, and Irene resenting this tone, had quickly taken offence. She had refused to explain anything to Handforth, and had told him that she did not want to speak to him again until he was in a better humour.

To add to his cup of bitterness, Handforth had since been sentenced to Coventry by the whole Form. He was "less than the dust." He was in a sullen mood—snappy with everybody, his whole life filled up with his own troubles.

He had taken his downfall hardly—bitterly. Since everybody went out of their way to avoid him, he, too, went out of his way to avoid them. He spoke with nobody, but went his own way, aloof and sullen. Never once had he attempted to speak even to Church and McClure. The Form had sent him to Coventry—and he seemed to glory in his own isolation. He had taken to going for long rambles, and he would disappear for hours at a time. Nobody knew where he went, nobody cared. Nobody questioned him, or took the slightest notice of him. In the little world of St. Frank's, he was alone—an outcast!



CHAPTER 3.

Despised by the Form!

EVERYBODY else in the school knew of Edward Oswald Handforth's sudden downfall. Who could avoid knowing it? He was the talk of the Third and the Fourth. Even in the Fifth, fellows were wondering. And if they stopped Handforth, and questioned him, they got no satisfaction. For Handforth seemed to imagine that he had been sent to Coventry by the entire school, and, in consequence, he "froze up" if anybody even so much as approached him.

Seldom had a fellow been so utterly "down." But this, in the main, was Handforth's own doing. He wasn't like other fellows. He was self-willed—stubborn—perverse; and since the Remove had made him an outcast, he associated with nobody.

Other fellows "in Coventry" might have sought consolation with the Fourth-Formers, or even in the society of some of the seniors, for there they would have found relief, and perhaps sympathy. But not so Handforth. If the Remove didn't want him, then nobody wanted him. He seemed to glory in his own misery.

Actually, many of the Removites were ready enough to associate with him again. They were prepared to let bygones be bygones. But Handforth would have none of it. He rejected every friendly overture, and after one or two good-natured attempts by such

follows as Fullwood and Archie Glenthorpe and Travers, they had left him severely to himself.

What a downfall it was!

Edward Oswald Handforth, the bluff, boisterous leader of Study D! Formerly, he had been the noisiest fellow in the Remove—always mixed up in everything, always ready with his voice, and with his fists. Nothing had been done without Handforth. Even in the class-room, he had been the first to get into trouble, and the last to get out of it.

Nowadays, he was a silent figure in class. Mr. Crowell, the Form-master, had noticed it, but he had said nothing. It was none of his business.

It had all come about so foolishly, too! From the very first, Handforth himself had been to blame. Trifles—airy trifles—had started it all. Indeed, it was difficult to trace the actual source. One day he had been irritable—everything had seemed to go wrong. He had got into trouble in the class-room, he had been sentenced to extra lesson, he had refused to write his lines, and had been flogged.

That flogging, by the way, had really been undeserved, for Handforth had been sentenced for creating havoc in Mr. Crowell's study—and the havoc had been caused by Handforth minor's pet monkey. But the Remove knew nothing of this—or, at least, wouldn't believe it. Handforth had been so cantankerous that day that everybody had readily believed the worst of him.

And, ever since, things had just piled up. In his black, resentful mood, Handforth had played a rather mean trick on Castleton, of the West House. He had locked Castleton up, and had taken Castleton's place in the Remove eleven, during the match against Bannington Grammar School.

But old Handy's conscience had tortured him on the field, and he had played so badly that St. Frank's had lost the game. Afterwards, he had been tried by the Form and sentenced to Coventry. Even now, a word from him would put him on friendly terms with everybody. The Remove was waiting for him to make a move. But the Remove was liable to wait in vain.

For Edward Oswald Handforth was no ordinary fellow. Always stubborn, always pig-headed, he was now going the right way to work permanently to antagonise his Form fellows. They didn't want him—they had rejected him! Very well—the moon could fall before he would speak to any one of them!

He was just in that perverse mood. In a miserable kind of way, he seemed to enjoy his exile. It was all so characteristic of him, too. Another fellow would have been sick of the business, and would have been only too glad to get on friendly terms with the Form again.

But Handforth was prone to exaggerate everything. It was a habit of his to blunder along, and to make things ten times worse. Fellows were growing tired of making friendly

overtures. After repeated rejections they were fed-up. He could go and eat coke! If he liked to be so confoundedly pig-headed, he could go his own road!

And so the deadlock continued. The Remove had sent Handforth to Coventry, and the Remove was ready enough to take him back, now that he had served his sentence. But Handforth wasn't ready to come back! He had been despised and rejected, and he took the view that nobody wanted him.

By pure chance he came along even now just after Irene had been giving her demonstration of ju-jitsu. It wasn't until Handforth turned round the clump of bushes that he noticed the group. And then, after one slight start, he walked straight on.

He wasn't the kind of fellow to retreat. With cold, distant politeness, he raised his straw hat to the girls, and said no word.

But he could not help noticing the effusiveness of Irene—towards Vivian Travers. All the others saw it, too. The very instant Handforth appeared, Irene gripped Travers' arm and laughed with him; she felt that by doing this she was teaching Handforth a much-needed lesson. She hardly realised how deeply she was hurting him. She didn't mean to hurt him—she only wanted to tease him.

Handforth walked on, his rugged face pale and set. The Remove had turned against him—and Irene, too, had rejected him! He had nobody now—not a soul in the world! With his heart like lead within him, but with his head erect and his shoulders squared, he continued his walk along the towing-path. Never would he show the others that he was suffering!

It was folly—sheer folly. But then, it was just what anybody might have expected of Handforth!



CHAPTER 4.

The Ragged Stranger.

"PENNY for them, Renie, old girl!" said Doris smilingly.

The two girls were cycling from Bannington. It was the following afternoon, and a half-holiday—both at St. Frank's and at the Moor View School. Irene Manners and Doris Berkeley had been to the local town to do a little shopping, and they were now on their way home. The May afternoon was fine and sunny, and the whole countryside was quivering with the heat. It was, indeed, more like a July day than an afternoon in early May.

Irene had not spoken a word ever since leaving Bannington. She had been cycling mechanically, her pretty face troubled and grave.

"You can have them for nothing, Doris," she replied quietly. "I'm thinking about Ted."

"Thought so!" said the other girl. "I don't want to butt in, you know, but if you ask me, Ted's behaving like a chump. What's

the matter with him these days? The other fellows are ready enough to let bygones be bygones, but he's so obstinate——"

"Oh, you know Ted!" broke in Irene. "He takes things to heart so much."

"Yes, and you only make them worse," said Doris, with a nod. "Look at the way you behaved last night!"

"How did I behave?" asked Irene defensively.

"Oh, there was nothing in it, of course," replied Doris. "And, in a way, it was rather a good rag."

Irene felt rather guilty.

"I suppose you're talking about Vivian Travers?" she said thoughtfully. "Well, why shouldn't I be friendly with him? He's quite a decent sort, I believe—and, anyhow, he's taught me a lot about ju-jitsu. I was over friendly with him, I'll admit—but only because I wanted to show Ted that I was wild with him."

"Talking about ju-jitsu, what's the good of it?" asked Doris, wisely changing the subject. "It's all right just for fun, but it'll never be of any practical use."

"Oh, won't it?" said Irene. "I'm not so sure about that. It's always handy to know those tricks. Look at the way I can throw a big, hefty fellow right over my shoulder!"

Doris chuckled.

"Yes, it looks very effective," she replied merrily. "But how often do you think you'll find it necessary to throw hefty fellows over your shoulder?"

"You're jealous, that's all!"

"Don't be so silly!" chuckled Doris. "Go ahead with your old ju-jitsu, and good luck to you! But I'm only saying that it's more or less of a stunt. You're a Girl Guide, after all, and I suppose you ought to know such things."

"Well, you're a Girl Guide, too," retorted Irene.

"So I am," nodded Doris. "And one of these days I'll get you to teach me all the ju-jitsu you know. It won't take you long."

"You horrid thing!"

"Perhaps we can have some more lessons from Vivian Travers, too," went on Doris, with a chuckle. "What do you really think of Vivian, by the way? Personally, I'm not quite sure of him. He's very smooth and very pleasant, but some of the fellows say that he smokes, and that he's not very particular about the truth."

"We can only judge as we find," replied Irene promptly. "And I must say that Vivian Travers is a very pleasant sort of chap."

They turned a bend in the road, pedalling slowly, for the road was rising slightly here, and this was no afternoon for excessive exertion.

Some little distance ahead a figure could be seen, walking limply in the middle of the road. Irene gave her bell a slight tinkle, by way of preliminary warning. The figure looked up, and it rather seemed to the girls that the limp became more pronounced.

The stranger was a youth—a young fellow of perhaps fifteen or sixteen. He was very ragged, and there was a cunning light in his shifty eyes as he watched the two girls approaching.

They looked very charming on their bicycles, dressed as they were in the lightest of summery attire. They were going to play tennis later on in the afternoon, and they were ready for the courts.

The youth moved towards the side of the road as the girls came nearer. He was limping very painfully now, and quite suddenly he seemed to catch his left foot in a rut. His ankle twisted under him, and he gave a cry of agony. The next moment he fell to the road, where he lay meaning.

Irene and Doris exchanged quick glances. But they did not hesitate. They jumped from their machines, and propped them against the hedge. Then they ran forward, and bent over the ragged stranger.

"Are you hurt?" asked Irene practically.

"It's all right, miss—only my leg!" muttered the youth, looking up with a twisted face. "It ain't nethin'. I'll soon be all right. Maybe you can tell me how far it is to Bannington?"

"Only about two miles," replied Irene. "But look here—you can't lie there, you know. A motor might come along, and——"

"Don't you worry, miss—I'll soon be all right!" interrupted the youth, dragging himself painfully to his feet. "Thank you kindly, miss. About two miles to Bannington, eh? Maybe I'll be able to earn a few coppers once I get there. And perhaps I shall be able to get a bite to eat. I ain't tasted nothin' since yesterday."

The girls were silent. Indeed, they hardly knew what to say.

"I'm broke!" went on the youth, looking from Irene to Doris, and taking particular note of their handbags. "I don't s'pose it'll matter to you much—but I'm a poor cripple without a job. Can't get work nowhere, miss. Starvin'—that's what I am!"

He hung his head, and there was something very pitiful about him. Ragged, down at heel, and unkempt; yet, at the same time, he was very dirty, and very unconvincing.

And his shifty eyes could not remain long averted from Irene's neat handbag!



CHAPTER 5.

A Practical Demonstration!

AFTER a moment or two, the ragged youth looked up.

"I s'pose you couldn't spare a few coppers, young ladies?" he asked in a whining voice. "It ain't my 'abit to beg, as a rule. I ain't that sort. But when you're down an' out, like I am, you ain't so particular like."

"I'm sorry to hear that you're so unfortunate," said Irene quietly, as she opened her bag. "It's all right, Doris—I've got some money here," she added, glancing at her chum. "Here's a shilling."

She took out the coin, and held it towards the unkempt stranger.

"Thank you kindly, missie—you're a good sort!" said the youth, as he greedily took the money. "I thought you 'ad a kind face as soon as I saw you. A pretty face, too—"

"We won't discuss my face, if you please!" interrupted Irene quietly.

She glanced at Doris, and they prepared to move on.

"I 'opes you never know what it's like to be starvin', young ladies!" said the ragged youth. "I'm crippled, too, an' homeless. Ain't got no father nor mother. Ain't got a soul in the world who cares about me. After all, a shillin' don't go far," he added, with a different note in his voice. "I s'pose you couldn't make it 'arf-a-crown while you're about it, between the two of you?"

As a matter of fact, the youth had caught sight of some notes in Irene's bag, to say nothing of a good deal of loose silver. And now, in a subtle kind of way, he had lost that pathetic look. He had become aggressive—evil.

"I'm sorry!" said Irene shortly. "That's all we can do."

"'Ere, don't be in a 'urry!" said the boy, taking a step towards Irene. "You've got lots o' money in that bag o' yours, ain't you? Can't you make it 'arf-a-crown?"

"No, I can't!" replied Irene coldly.

"Oh, so that's your tone, is it?" panted the youth, with a sudden flushing of his unpleasant face. "Too mean to give 'arf-a-crown to a poor cove what's starvin'? What's the good of a bob? Come on—let's 'ave some more!"

He had come out in his true colours. A glance up and down the road had assured him that not another soul was in sight. This was a very quiet spot—lonely and isolated. There was not even a cottage within earshot—or even within sight.

Irene had not moved, but her blue eyes had suddenly gleamed. It almost seemed that she was pleased. Certainly she was in no way alarmed.

Doris, on the other hand, although she had heaps of pluck, was thoroughly startled. She knew that this spot was lonely, and she knew, moreover, that the ragged youth was an unscrupulous young rascal. He was burly and muscular, and his manner was very threatening.

"Come on, Doris—we'll go!" said Irene quietly.

"Yes," said Doris. "I think it's about time."

They moved towards their bicycles, but the ragged youth, with no sign of a limp, dodged in front of them.

"Hold 'ard!" he said, with a leer. "You ain't goin' yet, my fine young peacocks! Let's 'ave that bag o' yours!" he added,

looking evilly at Irene. "Come across with it while you're safe!"

"So that's your game, is it?" said Irene hotly. "You wretch! Stand aside! I'm very sorry that I gave you that shilling!"

"There's your rotten shilling!" snarled the boy, throwing the coin on the ground at Irene's feet. "I want somethin' better than that! Yes, an' I'm goin' to 'ave it, too! I want that bag o' yours! Are you goin' to 'and it over quietly, or shall I take it from you? You'd best be quick, an' make up your mind!"

Perhaps he expected the girls to turn pale—to run. But they did nothing of the kind. Irene stood her ground, and if the youth had been observant he would have noticed that she was preparing herself for action. Her muscles were tensed, and there was a very business-like look about her whole attitude. Doris, too, was just as ready—although not in the same way.

"I shan't give you my bag, and I am not afraid of your threats!" said Irene, with contempt. "Will you stand out of the way, or—"

"I've 'ad enough o' this!" shouted the boy coarsely. "I want that bag—an' I mean to 'ave it!"

He made a sudden rush—a savage attack. He probably felt that this was a golden opportunity. Two young girls, unescorted—on a lonely road; and not another soul in sight! What a chance to improve the shining hour!

But somehow the thing didn't quite work out as he had expected.

As he rushed forward at Irene, the girl made no attempt to escape. She did not shriek with terror. She did not faint. In fact, she didn't do any one of the things that the young tramp had anticipated.

She did something very, very different.

With a quick movement, she came forward to meet him. He felt a grip on his arm, and, before he could save himself, he was blundering right into the girl. The next second he went over—his arms and legs flying. Clean over Irene's back—to descend upon the road with a dull, jarring thud.

"My only hat!" said Doris breathlessly.

"I thought you said that ju-jitsu wouldn't be of any practical use?" cried Irene, as she stepped briskly aside. "Now then, you cad! We're not quite so helpless as you thought, eh?"

She spoke with utter contempt, and moved towards her bicycle.

For a moment the youth sat up, dazed—hurt; then, snarling with uncontrollable fury, and with arms upraised, he leapt to his feet and attacked again. He had been thrown by a girl! And he hadn't get hold of that bag, either!

Crash!

The result of that second attack was even worse than the first. For by great good fortune, Irene succeeded in getting the same grip, and the startled young footpad went flying over her back with greater violence



Nipper was trying to tell Handforth what a young rascal his new "friend" really was, but Handy refused to listen, and he walked past with his fingers stuffed into his ears.

than before. He thudded to the hard road, winded, bruised—and now frightened.

"Come on!" cried Irene. "We've got him down, Doris! Now let's hold him until help comes."

It was enough.

The youth, with a gasp of dismay, leapt to his feet and bolted through the nearest hedge. He was dazed, bewildered and thoroughly scared.

In the lane the two girls laughed merrily.

"Well, my only aunt!" said Doris, at length. "There's something in that ju-jitsu of yours, after all, Renie!"

CHAPTER 6.

Willy on the Job!



WILLY HANDFORTH gave an expressive sniff.

"Well, you're a pretty mouldy-looking lot," he said frankly. "But then, there's always the consolation of knowing that the other eleven will be mouldier! Anyhow, as soon as we've decided who's to be the eleventh man, we can get busy."

"What about me?" asked Button, of the West House.

Willy gave him one glance, but made no comment; and, somehow, there was no

necessity for words. That glance had been sufficient. Edgar Button felt shrivelled.

It was a meeting of the Third Form—or, to be more exact, a meeting of the fags who boarded in the Ancient House and the West House—and it was taking place under one of the leafy chestnuts in the West Square.

Somewhere, on the other side of the Triangle, a similar meeting was taking place—between the fags of the Modern House and the East House. The explanation was quite simple. Willy, as skipper of the Third, was organising a cricket match for that afternoon, and he was choosing his own side. The game was to be Ancient and West versus Modern and East.

"Of course, we shall whack those East-side fellows as easy as winking," said Willy thoughtfully, as he cast his eye over his material. "But we might as well get hold of a good eleventh man."

It was becoming quite a habit at St. Frank's to refer to everybody living in the Ancient House and West House as "West-side" fellows. Similarly, those who boarded in the Modern House and East House were "East-side" people.

"Well, it's a pity if you can't find an eleventh man among us lot," said Chubby Heath bluntly. "There are a lot more than eleven of us here."

"Yes, but how many cricketers?" said Willy disdainfully. "About four. I've

considered every one of you three or four times, and I'm blowed if I can find an eleventh man."

"I'd like to play!" said Gates hopefully.

"Well, my dear kid, you can go and play as much as you like!" said Willy. "You'll find some rattles down in the toy-shop, and there might be some marbles there, too."

Eric Gates turned red. He was an extremely simple youth, and in the Third he was known by the undignified nickname of "Soppy." It was said by the fags, quite frankly, that Gates was half human, half imbecile. Yet, strangely enough, he was well up in the Third when it came to a place in lessons.

"No," said Handforth minor, "there's nobody here who'll do. I rather thought about you, Jimmy Hope, but now that I look at you again, it can't be done. This is going to be a cricket match—not a jape."

The ordinary fag eleven, recruited from the entire Third, was, in a way, a respectable team. But then Willy had the whole faggery to select from. In this particular game, where the two elevens had to be drawn from the Third, the problem was more difficult.

"Can't we play with ten men?" asked Juicy Lemon impatiently. "What's the good of wasting all the afternoon, Willy? Ten of us can easily whack those East-side chaps."

"I'll tell you what," said Willy thoughtfully. "We'll invite my major to play."

"Eh?"

"Oh, cheese it!"

"Don't be an ass, Willy!"

"We'll invite my major to play!" repeated Willy firmly. "A game of cricket will probably buck him up, and put new life into him."

"Here, but I say!" protested Chubby Heath. "You can't do that, Willy!"

"Why can't I?"

"Because your major has been sent to Coventry."

"Rats!" said Willy. "We haven't sent him to Coventry, have we? It's not our quarrel, you chumps! If we like to invite Ted to play for the Third, we can do it. You ought to feel jolly honoured!"

There were still a good many protests, but Willy only frowned.

"I'm the skipper, and I've decided!" he said coldly. "I've heard enough of this noise! Does anybody else want to raise an objection? Just say the word, and I'll deal with him!"

Willy slowly rolled up his sleeves, and looked round. But the fags were now surprisingly enthusiastic for the inclusion of Edward Oswald Handforth.

"It's a jolly fine idea!" said Owen minor stoutly. "It'll give our team a bit of distinction. Those other asses may object to us having a Removite in the eleven, but who cares?"

"Yes, let's have Handy!" said Juicy, with a nod.

Willy smiled complacently to himself. As a matter of fact, his conscience was pricking him a little. He did not forget that his pet monkey, Marmaduke, had played a big part

in starting Edward Oswald's trouble. Of course, Handforth had been an ass even before Marmaduke had played havoc with Mr. Crowell's study, but there could be no denying that the monkey had made things a lot worse.

So Willy felt that it was up to him to rally round his major. Indeed, he had decided upon this cricket match so that he could invite Edward Oswald to play in it. He had objected to Third-Former after Third-Former, not because they were bad players, but because it was necessary to find a place for "old Ted."

"Yes," said Willy brightly. "Ted may be an ass, and he's certainly a chump, but he hasn't any quarrel with the Third. So why shouldn't we come to the rescue? He'll be as pleased as Punch when we invite him to play, and those other Remove chaps will feel pretty small when they see him on Little Side. Come on—let's go and drag him out."

"Where is he?" asked Chubby. "He may have gone for a walk, or——"

"Or he may have started to swim the Channel," said Willy. "But, as it happens, he hasn't done either. He's in his study, mooning about with a giddy book. Think of it! Squatting indoors with a book on an afternoon like this! Let's go and rope him in!"

And the fags, grinning cheerily, moved off towards the Ancient House.

CHAPTER 7.

Nothing Doing!



EDWARD OSWALD HANDFORTH grunted, and shifted his position.

He was sprawling in the easy chair in Study D, and he held a story-book in his hands. He had read the same paragraph about twenty times, and even now the sense of it had not imprinted itself upon his brain.

His thoughts went elsewhere.

And these thoughts of his were varied—and ever changing. Sometimes he would dwell upon Irene's new friendship for Vivian Travers, and he would swear all sorts of terrible vengeance upon Travers' innocent head. Then his mind would dwell upon Church and McClure, and for a moment, perhaps, his eyes would soften. Then he would frown again. Church and McClure hadn't spoken to him for days. Blow them! They weren't his friends now, anyhow. What the dickens did he care?

He quite overlooked the fact that Church and McClure would have been eager enough to speak to him if he had only given them a mite of encouragement. But they had only to approach him and he would stalk off with his chin in the air. Handforth was just at that stage when he saw everything through distorted spectacles. Everybody else was in

the wrong, while he was the injured one. And with that stubborn perversity of his, he grimly told himself that he would never weaken. They had cast him out, and out he would stay. He wanted nothing more to do with them!

"Oh, blow!" he muttered impatiently.

He tossed the book aside, knowing full well that he could not read it. It was a gloriously fine afternoon, and the seniors were playing cricket. Many of the juniors, too, were at practice games on Little Side. The open air called to him—beckoned him to come out. But Handforth still sprawled in the armchair.

At that moment there came a tramp of feet out in the corridor, and, to Handforth's surprise, the footsteps came to a halt outside the study door. A loud thud followed, and the door flew open.

"Here he is!" said a cheery voice. "Well, Ted, old son, we've come for you!"

Handforth got out of the chair, and the look that he bestowed upon Willy was in no way encouraging. His glance passed on to Chubby Heath and Juicy Lemon, to Owen minor and the others—and his frown deepened.

"What's all this?" he demanded gruffly.

"We want you to play for us," explained Willy briefly.

"Play for you?"

"Cricket," explained Willy.

"Cricket!"

"It's a game!" said Willy patiently. "You take three stumps, and there's a leather ball; somebody takes a thing called a bat, and makes an ass of himself in front of the stumps. Another chap takes the ball and tries to throw it——"

"I know what cricket is!" roared Handforth.

"Good!" said Willy, grinning. "But you didn't seem to understand what I meant, old man. Well, since you know, that saves me the trouble of explaining. We want you to play for the Third this afternoon. A special match, you know."

Handforth seemed in no way overjoyed.

"Oh!" he said non-committally.

"Yes," nodded Willy. "We knew that you were rather down in the dumps, so we had a jaw and decided to play you. Of course, you quite understand that it's a signal honour. Ted? Removites aren't allowed to play for the Third, as a rule. But we're willing to make an exception——"

"You can be as willing as you like—but I'm *not* willing!" interrupted Handforth gruffly. "Clear out of this study—all of you! Of all the nerve! Do you think I'm going to play cricket with a lot of fags?"

Willy looked rather pained. His major did not seem to appreciate the honour at all. It was a lamentable state of affairs.

"But it's cricket!" said Willy patiently. "Don't you understand, Ted? I'm asking you to come and play cricket."

"I heard what you said!" growled his major.

"Then what's the matter with you?" demanded Willy. "They won't have you in the Remove—or, at least, you won't have them. If you'd only act sensibly, all this trouble would soon be over. Most of the chaps are only waiting for a word from you——"

"That's enough!" interrupted Handforth fiercely. "I know what I'm doing—and you can take it from me that I'm not going to have anything more to do with the Remove!"

Willy shrugged his shoulders.

"Oh, well, we won't argue," he said. "Time's getting on, and we ought to be starting. We thought about having a good spread after the game, Ted. Naturally, you'll join in——"

"I tell you I won't join in!" roared Handforth, becoming exasperated. "I'm not going to play cricket with you, and I'm not going to have any more of your rot!"

"But the feed——"

"Hang the feed!"

"But, you silly ass, I want to borrow five bob from you to pay for the stuff!" said Willy calmly. "So don't look so peeved, old man. Buck up, and hand it over. Five bob!"

"You—you—you——"

Handforth paused, breathing hard. His minor's demand for five shillings had just about "put the lid on it." In nine cases out of ten, Willy's persistence won the day, but Handforth wasn't himself this afternoon.

"I'll give you ten seconds to clear out of here!" he said thickly.

"Yes, but——"

Handforth counted ten aloud—and he performed the task in about four seconds.

"Well, I warned you!" he shouted, charging forward.

"Hold on!" gasped Willy. "That's not playing the game, you ass! There's still about five seconds left—— Oh, crumbs! Leggo, you ass! What the——"

"Cave!" howled Chubby Heath.

There was a stampede. The fags fell over themselves in their eagerness to get out of the study. Willy and Chubby Heath, who were the last, were fairly hurled out. Handforth felt just in the mood for physical violence. The fags crashed out into the corridor, but they were on their feet again in next to no time.

"Now then—scoot!" panted Handforth darkly. "And don't come near this study again! If you do, I'll make you smart!"

Willy shook his head sadly.

"And I've been wasting my sympathy on you!" he said in a bitter voice. "I might have known better! In future I'm going to sympathise with the rest of the Remove! Of all the obstinate, pigheaded——"

But Willy, at this point, deemed it advisable to remove his person elsewhere. Somehow his major was beginning to look very, very dangerous.

CHAPTER 8.

Alone!



"By George!"

Handforth, breathing harder than ever, slammed the door of Study D, and stood

there with clenched fists. He could hear the scamper of the fags as they turned the corner of the corridor. Then came silence.

"Nerve!" muttered Handforth wrathfully. "Expecting me to play in their rotten fags' game! Oh, I'm fed-up! I'm absolutely fed-up!"

He sat down on the edge of the table, and looked round him forlornly. His anger subsided. What was he to do? How could he spend the afternoon?

It was obviously impossible for him to remain in this stuffy little room. He felt stifled. He wanted to get out into the open air—to go on and on. Nobody cared a toss about him at St. Frank's. Even Irene had turned against him. He wanted to get away—completely and utterly away. He felt a strange and overpowering longing to be amongst strangers.

When he went out of doors, he felt that all eyes were turned upon him. Everybody stared at him—whispered about him. He was the subject of every conversation.

At least, this is what Handforth assumed. He hardly realised that he had ceased to be a subject of talk. His attitude was so perverse that the Removites were beginning to ignore his very existence.

"My Austin!" muttered Handforth suddenly. "By George! That's it! I'll take the bus out, and go for a run. I'll go for miles—right through Bannington—yes, and to Helmford. Nobody knows me in Helmford. Thank goodness, I shall be able to have tea in some little isolated café, and I shall be alone. And I wish to goodness I didn't have to come back!"

Handforth always acted on impulse. He seized his hat, strode out, and made his way to the garage. Within five minutes his little Austin Seven was purring out into the lane. Handforth sat at the wheel, grim-faced and rigid. He trod on the accelerator, and the faithful little car soared forward. Handforth gloated in speed. He had always been reckless in this respect, and this afternoon he was positively suicidal.

He went tearing through Bellton at about thirty-five miles an hour, and it only filled him with delight when he saw that a group of Fourth Formers had been compelled to leap for their lives.

He went roaring along, and the faster he went the faster he wanted to go. He went careering on over the countryside, a danger to himself and to everybody else. He was

just in that "don't care" mood. He was fed-up with life in general, and this burst of speed was bringing him some measure of relief.

Long before he got to Bannington, he changed his mind about going to Helmford. After all, what sense was there in going to Helmford? Handforth remembered, too, that it was a half-holiday at Helmford College, and some of the fellows there knew him. Perhaps they had heard rumours about his downfall. It would be very awkward if he met any of them.

And, now he came to think of it, he couldn't even go to Bannington.

He vividly remembered his performance in the cricket match on the previous Saturday against the Grammarians. He had dropped easy catches, and he had scored a duck. Everybody at the Grammar School knew about him, and he had been the laughing-stock of the place, too. No, he certainly couldn't go into Bannington.

So before he even reached the outskirts of the town he swung round into a little side lane, and went tearing down its winding course. He had now reached the stage when it didn't matter a hang to him what road he took or where he went to.

By the most miraculous good fortune, he avoided accidents. More than once he nearly collided full-tilt with farm carts in those narrow lanes, but he always managed to scrape past. And, in some strange way, the narrowness of these escapes pleased him. He was enjoying the thrill. His wayward spirit yearned for such excitement.

Strangely enough, he had plenty of petrol in the tank. Certainly he never gave the question a thought. And after he had completely lost himself, without the slightest idea of how he should get back to St. Frank's, he felt more or less relieved. His desire for excessive speed abated.

It was getting on towards tea-time when at length he found himself in the neighbourhood of Edgemore.

It occurred to him that he might go along to Edgemore Manor, and drop in upon the old earl. That genial old soul, at least, would welcome him and would make him comfortable. But Handforth rejected this idea. In all probability, the Earl of Edgemore had heard about his troubles, and he couldn't bear the thought of the kindly old man questioning him.

So he turned into another little side lane near Edgemore, and plunged along, careless as to where he went.

The fact was, he was at a loose end. He didn't know what to do; and this state of uncertainty caused him to be absent-minded. He went swinging round a bend of the narrow lane, without even troubling to sound the horn. And, abruptly, an emergency arose.

Almost at the last second, Handforth saw that a ragged youth was walking along in

the middle of the lane—not twenty yards ahead. He apparently hadn't heard the approaching car, and there was certainly no room to get round him.

Zurrrrh!

When it was almost too late, Handforth plunged his hand upon the electric hooter-knob. The ragged boy looked up, saw the Austin Seven bearing down upon him, and he gave a wild leap into the hedge. At the same second, Handforth jerked the steering-wheel, and the little car struck the grass at the side of the road, and plunged on like something alive. Finally, by the sheepest of good luck, the Austin came to a standstill, with its near-side wheels within a couple of inches of a deep ditch.

Breathing hard, Handforth turned and looked back.

The ragged boy was just pulling himself out of the hedge, on the other side of the road, a little bit further down.

"I say, I'm sorry!" sang out Handforth, with real regret. "Hope I didn't scare you?"

The ragged youth made no answer for a moment. For one thing he was still recovering his breath; for another he was looking intently at Handforth. In a single glance, he took in Handforth's flannels—his straw hat, with its Ancient House band. And the savage anger died out of his eyes, and a cunning light took its

place!



CHAPTER 9.

Trying it on Handy!

THE ragged boy suddenly changed his expression. He assumed an air of dejection—of humil-

ity. He tried to conceal that cunning, greedy light in his eyes. He had failed once before that afternoon, and he did not want to fail again.

"You're not hurt, are you?" asked Handforth, as he got out of the little car, and walked towards the stranger.

"It's nothing, sir!" said the other. "Only just ricked my ankle a bit, when I jumped

into the hedge. You gave me a rare start, young gent. Lummy! I thought I was going to be killed that time!"

"Well, you know, it was partly your own fault, for walking in the middle of the road," said Handforth. "Still, we won't argue about it. Perhaps I was going a bit too fast. It's a jolly good thing I managed to clear you all right."

"Thought it was my last minute, young gent!" said the ragged youth unsteadily. "You see, me not feelin' extra grand this afternoon, I wasn't quite so steady——"

He broke off, and swayed dizzily. Indeed, if Handforth had not suddenly thrust out a hand and gripped him, he would have fallen.

"Here, hold up!" said Handforth sharply. "What's the matter?"

"Dunno, sir!" muttered the other. "I keep coming over all dizzy-like. It's took me five or six times to-day. Mebbe it's because I ain't eaten a morsel of grub since yesterday mornin'."

Handforth stared, aghast.

"No grub since yesterday mornin'?" he repeated.

"And even then it wasn't much!" muttered the youth. "Only a pen'orth of thin lunch biscuits. That was my last penny, young gent. I ain't been able to earn none since."

Handforth looked at him with pity. The boy was very ragged, and he was

very dirty. His eyes were close-set and shifty; he had a low brow—a criminal type of face altogether.

But Edward Oswald Handforth was notoriously unobservant. He did not notice these characteristic signs. He only saw the ragged condition of his companion's attire—his boots, with their gaping holes, his unkempt hair, and his general appearance of destitution.

"Poor beggar!" he muttered sympathetically.

"I ain't a beggar!" protested the boy, with a gulp. "'Tain't fair to say——"

"I didn't mean it in that way!" interrupted Handforth hastily. "You don't understand. I only meant that I'm sorry for you. Here, come and sit down on this grassy bank, in the shade. You're still unsteady. You can't walk on until you've had a bit of a rest."

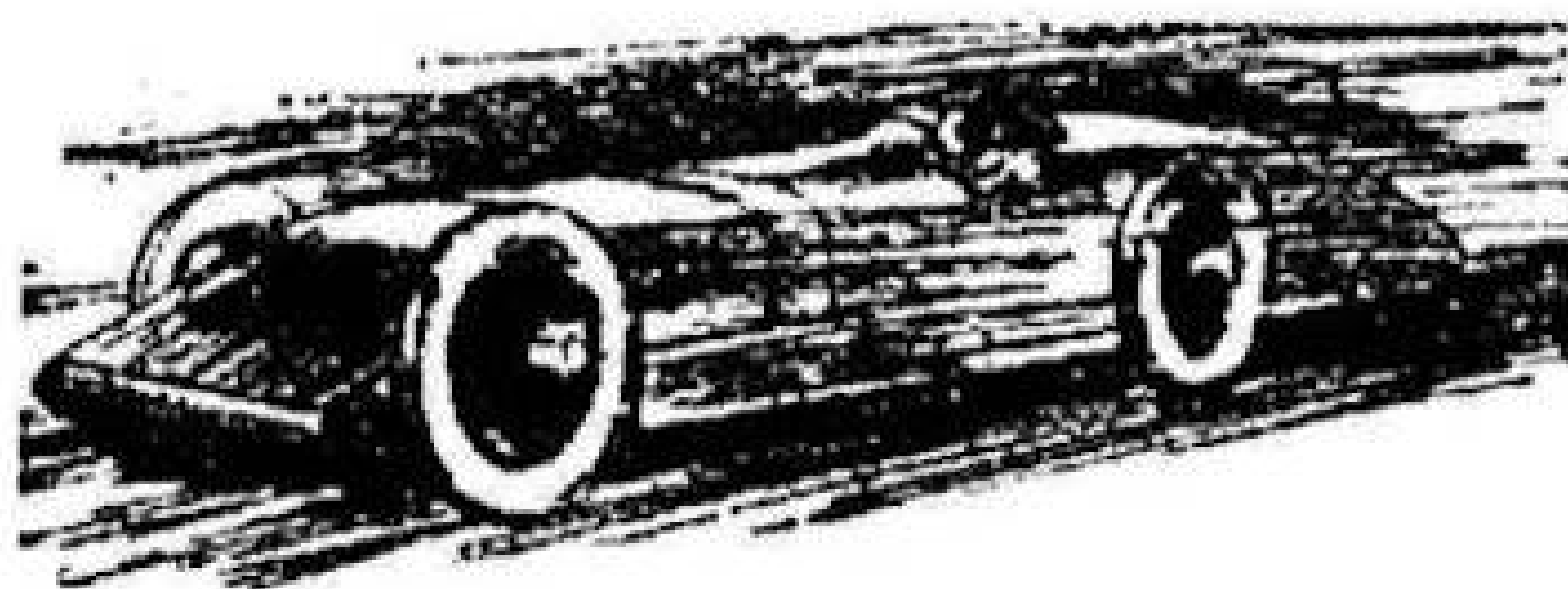
"Thank you, young gent," said the boy gratefully.

His voice was so full of whining obsequence that Handforth was completely deluded. As

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for the ragged youth, he had seen, at a glance, that Handforth was a boy belonging to a big school. In all probability, he had money on him! It would be impossible, of course, to obtain any of that money by force. But this young rascal had other methods at his disposal!

They sat down on the bank, and it was certainly very peaceful there. The lane was such an unfrequented one that grass was growing all along the centre of it, and there wasn't one chance in a hundred that any other traffic would come along.

"That's better!" said Handforth. "So you haven't eaten anything since yesterday morning? Why not?"

"I haven't got no money, sir."

"Haven't you got a home, or anything?"

"Home?" said the youth bitterly. "Crikey! That sounds funny to me, young gent! I haven't had a 'ome, not for years! I'm just on the tramp. Can't get a job—can't get nobody to give me a chance."

"What about your people?"

"People?"

"Your father and mother."

"They're both dead!" said the youth, making his voice quiver very effectively. "Hicks is my name, gent—Bert Hicks. When I was a kid, I used to live round by the Old Kent Road. My dad used to run a greengrocer's barrow down at New Cross. But he was killed in a street accident when I was just a nipper, and mother didn't live long arter that. You see, young gent, I'm all alone in the world. Ain't got nobody."

Handforth was all concern.

"I say, how rotten!" he exclaimed uncomfortably. "Dash it, this sort of thing doesn't seem fair. Do you mean to tell me that you haven't got a home of any kind? Haven't you got any place to sleep?"

"Only under the 'edges, sir, or, mebbe, under the side of a 'aystack!"

"But what do you do for a living?"

"Anythink I can get hold of, sir," said Bert Hicks eagerly. "I don't care. I'm willing to work—and want to work. I'll do anythink, sir. As long as it's honest work, I don't mind. But my dad used to say to me: 'Bert, kid, never do nothing unless it's honest.' That's what he says to me, young gent, and I've allus remembered it. Even though I'm nearly starving, I've kept honest."

There was a break in his voice, and he hung his head. Handforth sat there, listening dully. He was comparing his own troubles with those of this stranger. What were they, indeed? Nothing! What had he to worry himself about? This poor boy was starving—parentless and homeless. By comparison, his own troubles seemed too insignificant to think of.

The fact of the matter was, Handforth had swallowed Bert Hicks' story whole. And Bert Hicks was still continuing on the same line—trotting out a "hard luck" story which filled Handforth with sympathy and pity.

Bert was cunning—and, in a way, clever. He could see what type of fellow he had to deal with; and so he laid it on thick.

If Church and McClure had been with Handforth then, there would have been a different story to tell! For those shrewd Removites would have quickly seen through Bert's dodge. But Church and McClure were not here, and Handforth listened attentively.

It had always been the easiest thing in the world to pull his leg—and his leg was being pulled now as it had never been pulled before!



CHAPTER 10.

Handy's Great Idea!

BERT HICKS was feeling very gratified.

His story was ended, and he was sitting there, on that grassy

bank, with his head in his hands. But out of the corner of his eye he could just see Handforth's face. And Bert knew well enough that he had played his part successfully. This idiot of a schoolboy had swallowed the story whole. He believed all the rigmarole of invention. What was more to the point, he was evidently considering the question of financial aid.

"Well, Hicks, I'm very sorry for you," said Handforth, at length. "You've had a rotten time, and there's not much prospect of an improvement. It must be awful, tramping about the country like this, never knowing when you're going to get your next meal."

Bert looked up, his shifty eyes avoiding Handforth's direct gaze.

"You don't know what it's like, young gent," he said hoarsely. "Mebbe you can imagine a bit of it, but you've got to go through it to understand it. Lummy! I wouldn't want that, neither. I don't wish nobody the tortures I've 'ad!"

There was a gleam in Handforth's eyes now. His face was flushed, and all the wrinkles had departed from his brow. He was looking his old self, and the transformation was startling in its abruptness. He sat there, staring in front of him, oblivious of Bert's close proximity.

"By George!" he muttered. "It's a wheeze! And why not? Blow them all! Yes, it's the idea of the century!"

"I don't understand, young gent!" said Bert, staring.

But Handforth did not even hear him.

He rose to his feet, and paced up and down the lane. He was thinking hard. An idea had come to him—one of his own special ideas. It was an idea that nobody but Handforth could think of. It was characteristic in every way.

"Look here," he said, suddenly turning to Bert Hicks and staring eagerly at him.

"What are your plans for to-day?"

"Why, I ain't got no plans."

"Good!"

"I don't rightly understand——"

"Just a minute!" interrupted Handforth. "I'm thinking—I want to get this thing straight. I'll tell you the wheeze in a couple of minutes!"

At St. Frank's everybody was against him. He was an outcast—he hadn't a friend in the whole school! And what was more, Handforth didn't want any friends. They had all scorned him—rejected him. Well, he wasn't going to eat humble pie, and make the first move towards reconciliation.

No, he wanted to show everybody that he was independent. He didn't care a hang about them. In future, he would make his own friends.

And here, next to him, was a poor fellow who had met with terrible luck—half-starving, homeless. What was wrong with Bert Hicks as a new chum?

That was the startling idea that had come to Edward Oswald Handforth!

He fairly gloated over it. In his own opinion, it was a master scheme. He really did feel, too, a friendliness towards this forlorn, ragged boy. Or perhaps it was friendliness of a different kind—with pity behind it. He was intensely sorry for Bert, and he wanted to do something for him. Well, by making Bert his friend, he would get him out of his present troubles, for then Bert Hicks would be comparatively well off.

"By George! I'll show them!" muttered Handforth, with intense satisfaction. "They've turned me down, and they've spurned me. Very well, then! I'll go back to St. Frank's with a new friend. I'll show them all that I don't care a snap of my fingers for them!"

It was a startling idea—and it was essentially Handforthian. No other fellow in the school would have thought of such a thing. It was, indeed, preposterous. But Handforth did not think of the obvious difficulties. It did not occur to him that masters might object to the stranger's presence in the school. He was so full of the idea that obstacles did not occur to him at all.

As for Bert Hicks, he sat there, wondering. Why was this schoolboy so excited? What was this idea that he kept talking about. Somehow, Bert began to feel just a little uneasy. Something told him that his hopes weren't going to materialise in the way that he had figured.

For Bert, of course, had taken all that trouble over his "life story" in order to fool this schoolboy. He only wanted money—ten shillings, perhaps—or, with luck, a pound. It would be a good afternoon's work if he could wangle a quid out of the young toff! To get anything by force was quite out of the question—for Handforth was bigger than Bert, and trickery had been Bert's trump card. He thought that it was about time to give a hint or two.

"I'm dry, young gent!" he muttered hoarsely. "I'm feelin' rare queer, too. If only I could get a square meal, it wouldn't be so bad!"

Handforth looked at him.

"You'll get a square meal, all right!" he said, nodding.

"Thank you kindly, young gent!" said Bert eagerly. "Then—then you mean to give me a few bob, sir? It's kind of you—because I ain't got no right to ask for money. As I said afore, I ain't a beggar. I wouldn't take a penny, if I could 'elp it. But when a bloke is down like me he can't afford to be too partic'lar. I'll earn the money, young gent. I'll do anything in reason——"

"Dry up!" interrupted Handforth. "Bert, my son—I think you said that your name was Bert, didn't you?"

"Yes, sir—Bert Hicks!"

"Then, Bert, my son, you're my pal from now on!" said Handforth pleasantly. "I want you to get into this car with me, and we'll drive off to St. Frank's."

"Eh?" gasped Bert, with a start. "Drive to St. Frank's? You—you mean, your school?"

"Yes!"

"But I couldn't do it, sir!" protested Bert. "It wouldn't be right——"

"Blow whether it would be right!" interrupted Handforth. "You're coming to St. Frank's with me, and you're going to have tea with me in Study D! By George! I want everybody to see that I've got a new friend! Yes, I'll make them sit up and take notice!"

Bert's face fell.

"But-but, I can't, sir," he blurted out. "I—I——"



CHAPTER 11.

The Compact!

HANDFORTH had not expected such an early snag as this, and he looked at Bert in astonishment.

"It's quite all right," he said briskly. "You've only got to put yourself in my hands, and everything will be all serene. Don't you understand that I'm going to take you to a whacking big feed?"

"Yes, sir; but——"

"Didn't you tell me that you're starving with hunger?"

"Yes, sir; only——"

"Well, I'm going to take you to my school, and you're going to have tea with me in my study!" said Handforth. "It'll be a fine tea, too. One of Mrs. Hake's special veal-and-ham pies—sardines—potato salad—fresh rolls and butter—doughnuts—pastries—chocolate eclairs. I'll give you the feed of your giddy life!"

Bert Hicks hardly knew what to say. He couldn't explain that he had eaten a square meal at midday—a meal, in all probability, far more substantial than the one that Handforth himself had partaken of. He couldn't indicate, either, that he had every hope of

indulging in a substantial tea. It would have been unwise in the extreme to have admitted possession of at least twenty-three shillings in loose silver and coppers.

Therefore, Bert's hesitation struck Handforth as being peculiar. If the fellow was so hungry, why hadn't he jumped at this chance? The first look of doubt and suspicion began to creep into Handforth's eyes.

Bert saw it, and he wisely took warning. Once this schoolboy saw through his game, he would drop him like a hot brick; and that would mean an end to Bert's dream of an easy quid.

"Don't you want this feed?" demanded Handforth, staring.

"Yes, young gent—of course I do!" replied Bert hastily. "Ain't I told you that I ain't touched nothin' since yesterday mornin'? I'm starvin', sir. The very thought of food makes me go all dizzy!"

"Then why the dickens—"

"It's you, sir!" said Bert huskily. "I don't want to cause no disgrace to you, young gent. You're a swell, living at a big school, an' I'm—I'm— Well, look at me, sir!" he added pathetically. "A ragamuffin! Wearin' nothin' but tatters an' odds an' ends. I ain't fit to be seen with you, sir. That's the truth of it, an' I wouldn't like to disgrace you!"

Handforth laughed, and all his doubts had gone.

"Well, it's jolly decent of you to be so considerate about me, Bert," he said lightly. "But you needn't worry about that at all. I'm not a snob. I don't care whether you're in rags, or whether you're dressed in the latest Saville Row flannels! You're my new pal, and that's all that matters!"

Hicks was relieved. His dodge had succeeded, and Handforth was once again full of trust.

Bert was thinking quickly, too.

He considered the pros and cons. Should he go with Handforth? What would come of the adventure? Would the other boys resent his presence at the school? It might be as well to raise the point.

"It ain't only yourself, young gent—" he began.

"Don't keep calling me 'young gent,'" said Handforth bluntly. "My name's Handforth, of the Remove. All my pals call me Handy. And as I haven't got any pals now, except you, you're the only one who'll have that privilege. So you can call me Handy as soon as you like."

"Thanks, young gent—I—I mean, thanks, Handy!" said Bert hesitatingly. "Lumme! You ain't 'arf a one, ain't you? I never come acrost anybody like you before, sir!"

"And don't call me 'sir,' either," said Handforth sternly. "Remember, you're my new chum!"

Bert was frankly puzzled. Why on earth was this schoolboy so embarrassingly friendly? Handforth, thoughtlessly enough, had not explained anything to the mystified Bert.

"What about the other young gents at

the school?" asked Bert, reverting to his former question. "You ain't a snob, sir—I mean, Handy—but some of the other young gents may be. An', like as not, they won't want me there!"

"It doesn't matter what they want—if I take you there, you'll be all right!" said Handforth. "As my guest, you'll have the run of the place. Besides, although a lot of the chaps are obstinate and idiotic, they're not snobs. A few fellows like Gore-Pearce and Gulliver and Bell are snobbish, but they don't count. Just leave this to me, my son!"

In fact, Bert's ragged appearance was all to the good, in Handforth's opinion. Bert was far more likely to create a sensation in the Remove—and that was what Handforth wanted.

He was anxious to have everybody talking—to set the whole Form agog. And, by Jove, when he walked into the Triangle, arm-in-arm with this vagrant, wouldn't there be a sensation!

Bert Hicks himself could see that he had no alternative.

If he refused to go, Handforth would at once know that his story was false, and so he wouldn't get a penny. If he went, he stood a chance of being kicked out on his neck. But, at least, he would get some cash from Handforth before he left. That much was certain. So, on the whole, it was worth it.

It is only fair to Handforth to explain that he had the utmost faith in his new friend. He sincerely believed that Bert was a victim of cruel circumstances. He had swallowed every word of that "hard luck" story, and he wanted to help this unfortunate boy. If Handforth had had any suspicions regarding Bert's real character, he would never have claimed him as a new chum. But, as Handforth was so easily fooled, he went into the whole adventure with enthusiastic vigour.

"By George!" he said, as he looked at his watch. "It's practically tea-time now. Come on, Bert! Hop into the car!"

"You're sure it'll be all right?" asked Bert dubiously.

"Sure? You bet I'm sure!" grinned Handforth, looking his sunny, genial self once more. "I'm going to give you the time of your life, my son! Come on—let's get off!"

They both climbed into the little Austin, and a few moments later they were gliding off towards St. Frank's.



CHAPTER 12.

The Latest!

"TUCK up, Viv!" said Jimmy Potts impatiently.

Vivian Travers looked round from

the doorway of the school tuck-shop.

"If you think you can do better, dear old fellow, kindly step forward!" he said. "You apparently overlook the fact that there are at least twenty-five hyenas in possession of the counter. One and all, they are howling for ice creams and lemonades. What chance is there for a mere human being, such as myself, to get served with pastries?"

Jimmy Potts grinned. The tuck-shop was, in all truth, crowded. It was just about tea-time, and, in addition to the fellows requiring delicacies for tea, there were many others who wanted serving with cooling refreshments on the spot. They had come straight in from the playing-fields, and they were parched.

"I rather think we'd better give it up, Jimmy," said Travers, at length, as he emerged from the noisy throng. "Supposing we go indoors, make the tea, and indulge in the first luscious course of bread-and-butter and lettuce?"

"Yes, let us!" agreed Jimmy.

Vivian Travers sadly shook his head.

"Well, well!" he said, with deep regret. "I thought better of you, dear old fellow! In your ignorance, you assume that a pun like that is a type of humour. But I can assure you that——"

"Don't make a fuss about it," grinned Jimmy. "I know it was rotten. Anyhow, I've heard worse——" He broke off and glanced round as a humming purr made itself audible. "Hallo! What's the matter with Handy this afternoon? He's driving right into the Triangle!"

They both watched. Incidentally, a large number of other juniors watched, too. It was unusual for Edward Oswald Handforth to drive boldly into the Triangle in this way. Of late he had kept severely to himself, and had always taken his car straight round to the garage by the rear way.

"But what is this we see?" murmured Travers mildly. "Great Samson! Do my eyes deceive me, or is that really a human being sitting in the car?"

"Which one?" inquired Jimmy.

Travers chuckled, and there were a good



With his arms filled with blankets and a pillow, Handforth stole down the corridor towards Study D. He intended that his new friend, Bert Hicks, should be thoroughly comfortable for the night!

many exclamations of astonishment from the juniors round him. In fact, there were so many shouts that all the fellows in the tuck-shop came crowding out to see what the excitement was about.

Edward Oswald Handforth was much gratified.

He had been hoping against hope that there would be a good number of fellows in the Triangle. But he had hardly expected as many as this! And, what was more, they were all staring. They were looking at Handforth's companion with real amazement.

It cannot be truthfully said that Bert Hicks was comfortable. He was, on the contrary, decidedly and emphatically uneasy. To find himself in the midst of this white-flamed throng was disconcerting. Every gaze was turned upon him, and a good many of the fellows were perfectly frank in their comments.

"Who's that ugly-looking tramp?"

"Goodness knows!"

"By Jove! He hasn't had a wash for about five years!"

"Grubby beast! What's he doing in Handy's car?"

Handy hadn't enjoyed himself so much for days. And anybody could see the difference

in him. He was his sunny self again. His rugged face was aglow with satisfaction. He brought the Austin to a standstill near the Ancient House steps, and he affected not to see the crowds of fellows round about.

"Here we are, Bert, old man!" he said, with unnecessary loudness and cordiality. "This is St. Frank's. Fine place, eh?"

"Yes, young gent!" muttered Bert.

Handforth nudged him.

"Don't forget to call me Handy!" he whispered. "And speak loudly, you ass!"

"What ho! This ain't 'arf a swell sort o' place, mate!" said Bert, taking his cue. "So this is where you live, hey? Well, I must say, Handy, old sport, that you're lucky! Some coves 'ave all the good things in this 'ere life!"

"Good gad!" breathed Archie Glenthorne feebly.

"Steady, dear old fellow!" murmured Travers, holding Archie's arm.

"But, dash it, I mean to say!" protested the swell of the Ancient House. "Odds horrors and nightmares! Did you hear what that poisonous chappie said? He absolutely spoke to Handy with the most frightful familiarity!"

"I expect Handy knocked the chap down, or something, and brought him along to the school for treatment!" said Fullwood, in wonder. "There can't be any other explanation."

Handforth proceeded to climb out of the Austin. Bert Hicks did the same, and then the juniors could see that there was nothing the matter with him. He wasn't injured in any way—so Fullwood's theory was obviously incorrect.

"This way, Bert!" said Handforth, waving a hand towards the main doorway of the Ancient House. "You come along with me to Study D, and make yourself at home. You'll be sitting down to the best tea——"

"Just a minute, Handforth!" put in Chambers of the Fifth, barging through the crowd.

"Eh?" said Handforth, starting round. "What the dickens do you want, Chambers? What are you butting in for?"

Cuthbert Chambers had a habit of butting in. In his own opinion, he was a very big man—but, unfortunately, nobody else at St. Frank's shared this opinion. Handforth would not have spoken to any Removite or Fourth Former. But Chambers had rather taken him by surprise.

"Who's this—this fellow?" demanded Chambers, indicating Bert Hicks with a jerk of his head. "What do you mean by bringing——"

"This young chap is my new friend!" interrupted Handforth proudly. "He's my new chum!"

"What?" gasped Chambers, while the crowd murmured in amazement.

"He's my new friend!" repeated Handforth loudly. "I suppose I can choose my friends without your permission, Chambers? Clear out of the way, you Fifth Form ass!"

"But look here——"

"I've finished with the Remove!" continued Handforth disdainfully, as he glared round him. "I'm not on speaking terms with any of them. So I've brought my new chum to tea."

And, seizing Bert Hicks' arm, Handforth walked triumphantly up the Ancient House steps. Everybody stared and gasped, and the sensation was tremendous. Arm-in-arm, Handforth and his new chum vanished into the lobby.

And many of those watchers understood.

It was merely another example of old Handy's waywardness!



CHAPTER 13.

The Unseen Witnesses I

"WELL I'm blowed!" said Doris Berkeley, in a startled voice.

"Doris!" protested Irene.

"I can't help it!" said Doris. "If you don't like my language, you'll have to lump it. I am blowed!"

"Whatever do you mean?" asked the other girl in astonishment.

Doris pointed downwards.

"Look who's here!" she said tensely.

And four pairs of eyes looked. Irene Manners and Doris Berkeley were on the balcony at the top of the famous old Clock Tower, and Nipper and Sir Montie Tregellis-West were with them. They could look straight down into the Triangle and see everything that was going on. Yet very few of those below noticed the figures high up there at the top of the Tower.

The two Moor View girls had called in at St. Frank's on their way back to their own school, and as Doris had expressed a desire to have a look at the landscape from the Clock Tower, Nipper and Tregellis-West had escorted the girls up. A magnificent view could be obtained from that elevated position.

Now that she was up there, however, Doris did not seem to be interested in the landscape. She was looking straight down into the Triangle, and her pretty face was flushed with excitement. Her dark eyes were glowing, too.

"Well?" she said, glancing at Irene. "Don't you understand?"

"Oh, my hat!" said Irene breathlessly. "It's—it's that awful young rotter——"

"Of course!" said Doris, nodding.

"But it can't be!" said Irene. "We must be mistaken, Doris! He's with Ted, and he seems to be quite friendly. It can't be the same boy!"

"But it is!" insisted Doris.

Nipper chuckled.

"What's the argument?" he inquired. "I don't want to butt in, girls, but if there's

any point to be settled, perhaps I can oblige?"

"Begad! And you can count on me, too!" offered Sir Montie generously.

Both the girls hesitated. Down in the Triangle, near the Ancient House, they could see Edward Oswald Handforth and Bert Hicks. They had witnessed the arrival of the Austin Seven, containing Handforth's remarkable new chum, and they had recognised that ragged youth at once—at least, Doris had done so, and now Irene was just as sure.

The girls had said nothing whatever to Nipper, or to any other St. Frank's fellows, of that adventure on the Bannington road. Irene had felt that it would sound like boasting, if she had told the story. Perhaps the fellows wouldn't have believed her—they wouldn't have credited that she had actually "bested" the young footpad. And so Irene had pledged Doris to silence. Now, however, the situation was different.

"I'd better tell them, Renie!" said Doris, after a brief pause.

"Oh, but why?" asked Irene. "There's no reason——"

"Yes, there is!" insisted Doris firmly. "If you don't think so, look down there!"

But Irene was already looking, and she could see that Handforth and Bert Hicks were surrounded by a crowd of juniors. Chambers was there, too. And in that momentary silence Handforth's voice clearly came up to the top of the Tower.

"He's my new friend!" Handforth was saying. "I suppose I can choose my friends without your permission, Chambers? Clear out of the way, you Fifth Form ass!"

"Oh, crumbs!" breathed Doris. "Did you hear that, Renie? His new friend!"

"But—but Ted must be mad!" said Irene, in dismay.

Handforth's voice came up to them again:

"I've finished with the Remove! I'm not on speaking terms with any of them! So I've brought my new chum 'tea!"

The girls watched rather dazedly as they saw Handforth walking arm in arm with that young ruffian. They both disappeared into the Ancient House.

"Another of Handy's silly stunts!" said Nipper gruffly. "By Jove! If it isn't just like him! He's made up his mind that everybody in the Remove is against him, and so he has chummed up with this ragged fellow! He probably picked him up in one of the lanes."

"Handy's always doing these impulsive things—he is, really!" said Tregellis-West, with regret. "Of course, the fellow may be quite all right—it isn't fair to judge him by his ragged clothin', begad! But I'm afraid Handy will get into frightful trouble if any of the masters see him."

"That's just it!" said Nipper. "Things might be uncomfortable. That stranger is probably as right as rain, but the masters might not think so. They're a bit too par-

ticular at times. But why are you girls looking so startled?" he went on, turning to Irene and Doris.

"Because that fellow with Ted is a young hooligan!" said Irene quickly. "He's a tramp—a footpad!"

"Here, I say—draw it mild!" protested Nipper.

"But he *is*!" said Doris. "We met him on the Bannington road, on our way home. He pretended to be crippled, and Renie gave him a shilling, and then he demanded more."

"Begad!" murmured Sir Montie.

"Not only that, but he attacked us!" continued Doris breathlessly.

"He did—what?" said Nipper, his voice becoming grim.

"He attacked Renie, anyhow!" said Doris. "He tried to snatch her bag, and he used dreadful language, too! I tell you he's a thief—a tramp—a footpad! Oh, but you ought to have seen Renie throw him over her shoulder!"

"Look here, Doris——" began Irene, flushing.

"I can't help it—I've got to tell them!" said Doris firmly. "That promise doesn't hold good now, Renie! You know that she's been taking lessons in ju-jitsu from Vivian Travers?" she went on, turning to Nipper and Sir Montie. "Well, she gave that young tramp something to remember! She threw him clean over—twice! And after that he got scared, and bolted. But if Renie hadn't known ju-jitsu, goodness knows what would have happened to us! I tell you, the fellow is a rank wrong 'un!"

And the whole story came out, while Nipper and Tregellis-West listened with ever-growing wrath.

"And Handy has been idiot enough to 'make friends' with this vagrant!" said Nipper, breathing hard. "It's just like him, of course—I dare say he's swallowed the chap's story, hook, line and sinker! Anybody can fool Handy with a 'hard luck' yarn! Of course, something will have to be done!"

"Well, we thought it only right to tell you!" said Doris.

"Of course it was right," nodded Nipper. "Thanks awfully, girls! We've got to rescue Handy from this young crook—and the sooner we do it, the better!"



CHAPTER 14.

Ready for Action.

IT was lucky, indeed, that the girls had been on the Clock Tower balcony at that particular time. They had made no mistake about identification. The ragged youth they had seen with Handy

was the same ragged youth who had attempted to hold them up on the Bannington road. He was, unquestionably, an unmitigated young hooligan.

"Of course, this makes all the difference," said Nipper thoughtfully. "I wasn't going to interfere. If Handy likes to bring ragged friends into the school, it's his own business. And being ragged, in any case, isn't detrimental to a fellow's character. The best of us fall on hard times occasionally."

"But this boy is a young criminal!" said Irene quickly. "He tried to hold us up—he attacked us! If a policeman had been anywhere near, he would have been arrested, and——"

"Yes, I know that," interrupted Nipper. "He deserves to be arrested! An unutterable cad like that, who'll try to take advantage of unprotected young girls, ought to be horse-whipped, too!"

"Unprotected is right!" chuckled Doris. "You ought to have seen Renie!"

"Well, of course, he didn't know anything about Renie's prowess at ju-jitsu!" smiled Nipper. "At least, he didn't know until it was too late. Well, we shall have to take drastic action. We know this chap's character—we know that he's an out-and-out wrong 'un—and therefore we shall be justified in pitching him out of the school."

"I don't think we'd better stay!" said Irene quietly.

"No, perhaps you'd better not," agreed Nipper. "There might be a scene—especially if that rat catches sight of you. He'll guess that it was you who gave him away."

"But it wasn't sneaking!" said Doris.

"Good gracious, no!" laughed Nipper. "You've done Handy a jolly fine service by telling us. We shall be able to put him on the right track. He may be an obstinate idiot, but we don't want to see him making an arrant fool of himself. Come along—let's get down."

Four or five minutes later they were down in the Triangle, and they found little groups of fellows talking excitedly together—discussing Handforth's latest stunt. Irene and Doris took their bicycles, and departed.

"Just a minute, you fellows!" said Nipper, as the two girls vanished through the gateway. "I want you!"

A good few Removites were within earshot, and they gathered round. They included Vivian Travers, Jimmy Potts, Fullwood, Reggie Pitt, Jack Grey, and Gresham and Duncan.

"What's the trouble?" asked Pitt, as he noticed Nipper's grave face. "You're not worried about Handy, are you?"

"In a way, yes," replied Nipper. "This affair is more serious than you think."

Tommy Watson came pushing through the crowd.

"What's the idea?" he demanded. "Aren't you fellows coming into tea? And where are the girls? I've been getting everything ready in Study C——"

"Sorry, old man, but the girls have gone," said Nipper. "Something's happened." He turned to the others. "Do be quiet, all of you," he added. "I tell you, this is serious."

And, as briefly as possible, he explained the circumstances.

"Well, well!" said Travers, at length. "So our own Handy has chummed up with a professional bag-snatcher?"

"Oh, I say, it's too thick!" protested Gresham.

Church and McClure, who had joined the throng, were looking very worried.

"I say, the girls must have been mistaken!" said Church. "It can't be the same fellow! Even Handforth wouldn't be idiot enough——"

"But it is the same fellow!" broke in Nipper. "How could they have failed to recognise him? From the Clock Tower we could see him as plainly as I can see you. Besides, isn't it obvious?"

"How?" asked McClure.

"Well, my dear chap, you know how easily Handy's leg can be pulled," said Nipper. "Haven't I explained to you how this young hooligan pretended to be crippled? He even deceived Irene and Doris for a minute or two, with his tale of starvation and hard luck. Irene gave him a shilling, and——"

"Yes, we're satisfied," put in Fullwood. "I suppose Handy ran across the fellow in one of the lanes, and got talking to him. He was in the mood to talk to any stranger."

"That's just it!" nodded Nipper. "He's got an idea that he's an outcast here, and that all hands are turned against him. So he struck up a kind of friendship with this ragged youth. And I dare say the fellow 'told him the tale.' You know—the usual thing. No parents—homeless—out of work—no food for two or three days. Handy, like the simple cuckoo he is, drank it all in. He took pity on the fellow, and then he got one of his fantastical ideas, and brought him here to tea!"

Vivian Travers grinned.

"Excuse the smile, dear old fellows, but I can't help it!" he chuckled. "Great Samson! What a situation! We'd better get a move on, or we may find our fountain-pens and silver pencils missing!"

"You've hit it, Travers!" said Nipper grimly. "You can be quite sure that this fellow came to St. Frank's with Handforth for the sake of what he could lay his nimble fingers on. He wants something more than a meal! He's after loot, and it's our plain duty to boot him off the premises!"

"Booting is too good for him!" said Gresham hotly. "He attacked those two girls, and tried to rob them. Why, the fellow ought to be handed over to the police!"

"We can't do that—because we haven't the evidence," said Nipper. "And, naturally, the girls don't want to give any information. We'd better keep mum about that incident."

"As long as we get the chap out of St. Frank's we shall have done all that's necessary. I'll bet he won't come again!"

And so it was decided.

Edward Oswald Handforth had been fooled by this "new chum" of his, but the other juniors had their eyes open. Thanks to the girls, they knew the full facts. For Handforth's own sake, this disreputable young rascal would have to be forcibly removed.

So, after a brief consultation, the "chuckers-out" were appointed. They consisted of Nipper, Travers, Potts, Gresham, Fullwood and Reggie Pitt. Church and McClure thought it advisable to remain out of this.

And so, while the little party marched off towards Study D, the others remained out in the Triangle—ready to witness the proceedings.



CHAPTER 15.

The Honoured Guest!

HANDFORTH grinned in quite his old way. "Well, my son, what about it?" he asked breezily.

Bert Hicks was sitting at the table in Study D, and he was looking bewildered and over-awed. He sat in his chair, looking up at Handforth with a dog-like devotion which Edward Oswald rather liked. He had always been sorry that Church and McClure had not looked upon him as their lord and master.

"It's—it's too much, young gent!" muttered Bert huskily. "You didn't ought to treat me like this 'ere! I ain't used to it!"

There was a catch in his throat, and he hung his head.

"Cheese it!" said Handforth uncomfortably. "How many more times have I got to tell you that you're my chum? I don't want that 'young gent' business! Pile in, my lad! Help yourself to anything you want!"

Without question, Bert Hicks was a cunning young rascal. He was clever, too. He had thought carefully before accompanying Handforth into St. Frank's—and now that he was here, he was determined to play his game of bluff for all it was worth.

So being an accomplished young actor—his precarious "profession" demanded that he should be that—he was now fooling Handforth more successfully than ever before. Ever since he had entered Study D, he had been awe-stricken. He had adopted that dog-like humility which Handforth found so embarrassing—and yet so gratifying, at the same time.

Having deposited Bert into Study D, Handforth had hurried out, and had returned a few minutes later, armed with bags. And now the study table was full of delicacies. The festive board groaned under its weight of rich and indigestible foods.

"I never see'd anything like it!" said Bert hoarsely, as he stared fascinatedly at the table. "Never, young gent! Lumme, what a spread! I've often envied you rich young fellers, but I never thought as I should be sittin' at a table like this—"

"Don't talk so much—eat!" interrupted Handforth briskly. "Try one of these pork-pies! They're Mrs. Hake's specials!"

Bert Hicks selected a pork-pie as though he had never tasted such a delicacy in all his life. He gave Handforth the impression that bread crusts had hitherto been his greatest luxury.

All this, of course, was being done with a definite object in view.

Bert was by no means averse to having a good meal while he was here, but his main object was to relieve his host of some money before parting. Bert was beginning to feel that with his cunning it would not be a very difficult task.

"Tea?" said Handforth cheerfully.

"Thank you kindly, sir!" said Bert, looking up eagerly. "Tea! I ain't tasted tea for weeks!"

Which, of course, was not merely a lie, but a thundering lie. Actually, in his own private mind, Bert had a very poor opinion of this feed.

But Handforth's gratification was intense when he saw the ecstasy in his guest's eyes as he bit into the pastries, and drank the tea. At least, Handforth mistook it for ecstasy. Actually, it was only a well-assumed imitation of the real thing.

"It must be nice for you young gents to live in a wonderful place like this," said Bert, after a while, as he looked round the room with that same air of awe. "Lumme! Blowed if it ain't like Paradise!"

"Oh, it's not so bad," admitted Handforth indulgently.

"Ah, I don't s'pose you appreciate it," said Bert, shaking his head. "But me—Well, I'm different. I'm a tramp, without no home. I ain't even got a place to sleep to-night—an' no certainty of a breakfast to-morrer. That's me, sir. If only I could get a job, I'd be happy!" he added, with a sigh. "But who'll take me, I ain't got the clothes! If only I 'ad a decent suit, I might get a job."

"Don't you worry," said Handforth lightly. "I'll see you right, Bert. Don't forget that you're my chum now."

Bert Hicks successfully concealed his cunning satisfaction.

"It ain't right that you should help me, sir!" he said earnestly. "I don't want it! It ain't my way to take charity. No, young gent! Please don't try to offer me—"

"Rats!" broke in Handforth. "We don't want to talk about it now, anyhow. Have some of these sardines. They're first-rate!"

Bert greedily took some of the sardines—although, secretly, he was in no way enthusiastic for them.

"I had a job—once," he said reminiscently. "I was cabin boy, on one o' them barges that



goes up an' down the canals. Decent sort o' job, too. Open air life—just what I like. Plenty o' hard work, an' good plain grub. But it didn't last long. The skipper, 'e died. An' although I 'ad a matter of a pound saved up, I was broke when I went lookin' for another job."

"How could you have been broke, if you had a pound?"

"I spent it, young gent," said Bert huskily. "I spent it—on a wreath for the pore old skipper!"

His voice broke slightly, and Handforth looked at him with new warmth. Certainly, Bert Hicks did it very well—so well that Handforth was completely deluded. This ragged fellow was certainly true blue! Thrown out of work, with no prospect of another job, he had spent his last pound on a wreath for his late employer! Handforth was greatly impressed.

Then came a tramp of feet out in the corridor, and Handforth frowned as the door suddenly opened. He looked round, and saw Nipper there, with Travers and Gresham and several others behind him. They were all looking into the study.

It was a strange scene they gazed upon.

Handforth was sitting at one end of the table, with Bert Hicks at the other. And there was Bert, pushing sardines into his mouth with his knife. In his other hand he held a saucer full of tea. But although he was considerably startled by this invasion, he continued his meal without interruption.

Handforth swung round, and glared at the intruders.

"I've made up my mind not to speak to any of you fellows again!" he said grimly. "But as you've come barging in here, I can't help myself! Clear out! That's all I've got to say—clear out!"

"Look here, Handy——"

"This is my study, and this chap here is my chum!" said Handforth defiantly. "I don't want any criticisms or advice! You can all go and mind your own business!"



CHAPTER 16.

The Order of the Boot!

BERT HICKS rose unsteadily to his feet.

"I'd better go, young gent!" he muttered sorrowfully. "I

can see I ain't wanted by your swell pals!"

Handforth compressed his lips.

"They're not my pals!" he said wrathfully. "You stay where you are, Bert! Sit down! You're my guest—my chum! As for these chaps, they're a lot of rotten snobs, and——"

"That's not true, Handy!" interrupted Nipper quietly. "You know well enough



While Handforth was held back by five juniors, Bert Hicks, panting, said: "You—you rotters!"

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his own good; he d

that we're not snobbish. But we happen to know that this fellow is not fit to associate with decent society——"

"How do you know it?" demanded Handforth, with unusual sharpness. "You've never seen him before! He's a stranger to you! How can you know anything about him?"



ed, hustled towards the door, and forced out of the study. He didn't realise that the juniors were doing this for Bert Hicks was really a rascal.

Nipper tried to remain calm.

"Look here, Handy, you're being fooled," he said steadily. "We know that this fellow is nothing more nor less than a young criminal, and he's been pulling the wool over your eyes. We want to give you the straight tip, before any of the masters or prefects——"

"Blow the masters and prefects!" interrupted Handforth fiercely. "And blow you! By George! I never thought it of you, Nipper! I never thought it of you other fellows, either! Just because this new friend of mine is ragged, you're against him!"

"It's not because of that!" said Nipper. "I tell you, we know perfectly well, that the young hooligan——"

"Don't you call my friend a young hooligan!" roared Handforth. "It's all right, Bert—you stay there! I'm disgusted with these chaps!" he added bitterly. "They're snobs—all of them! Miserable, unutterable snobs! They're down on you just because you're on your uppers! Well, it's made me more determined than ever to be your chum!"

Nipper strode forward, and seized Handforth by the arm.

"Look here, Handy, be sensible!" he said. "We're the last fellows in the world to be down on a man because he is poor or ragged. But this so-called friend of yours is——"

"I don't want to hear!" interrupted Handforth, wrenching himself away. "I won't listen! You've never seen the chap before in your lives, so you can't kid me that you know anything about him! He's ragged, and he's broke. That's why you're down on him! Well, I'm not down on him—I'm not so jolly stuck up!"

"Yes, my dear chap, but——"

"Don't you 'dear chap' me!" thundered Handforth. "I've done with the lot of you! This make me more firm than ever! I'm going to choose my own friends in future—and Bert Hicks is the first!"

He was boiling with indignation at this invasion, and he wouldn't allow Nipper, or any of the others, to get a word in edgeways. He refused to listen to the truth, and although some of the fellows tried to shout it out to him, he drowned their words by his own shouting. In the end, Bert Hicks clutched at his arm.

"Let me go, young gent!" he pleaded. "I can see I ain't

never before had his perversity and stubbornness been so apparent.

He was inexpressibly shocked. He honestly believed that these fellows—including Church and McClure, his old chums—were snobbish. He believed that they had kicked Bert Hicks out because he was merely ragged. And Handforth was stunned by this thought. His bitterness against the Remove was immeasurably intensified.

Thus, owing solely to his own blindness and obstinacy, he still had faith in the young scamp who had been deservedly pitched off the school premises. He ran down the lane, calling to his new "chum."

"Oh, what's the use?" said Church, appealing helplessly to the air. "What can you do with a chap like that?"

"Nothing!" said McClure thickly. "Blow him! I'm fed up with him!"

"And so say all of us!" growled Fullwood. "Anyhow, we've got rid of the rascal, and he'll never have the nerve to come back. That's one consolation!"

So the juniors, feeling that they had done their duty, went indoors to tea. Happily, no masters or prefects came along to make inquiries, and so the incident was over. Even Nipper was satisfied that Hicks would not dare to come back, no matter what the pig-headed Handforth said to him.

Hicks himself was feeling both relieved and exasperated. He was relieved because he had got out of the school without any bodily hurt—and he was exasperated because he had not yet "touched" his victim. But perhaps this latter trouble could be put right.

For Handforth had just overtaken Bert, and he was now pulling him to a standstill.

"The cads!" said Handforth breathlessly. "Don't take any notice of them, Bert! I want you to be my friend—more than ever now! I've finished with them for good!"

"But it ain't fair, sir!" said Hicks, with a gulp. "I've got you into trouble! After you've been so kind to me, too! Oh, I could kick myself, young gent! Maybe they ain't to be blamed. I'm all rags an' tatters—an' they think I'm no good. Well, I don't bear them no ill-will."

This was exactly the stuff to give Handforth.

"You're true blue, Bert!" he said warmly. "You've proved that, old man. By George! You've taken the whole thing splendidly!"

Bert's hopes began to rise. Now was the time, surely, when the "touching" parting must take place. But again Bert Hicks was unprepared for the unexpectedness of Handforth.

"Let me go my own way, sir!" said Bert sorrowfully. "It's good of you to call me your friend, an' I can't tell you 'ow I appreciate it. But you've got your world, sir, an' I've got mine. Let me take to the road again, an' mebbe I shall be able to get a job."

"Rats!" said Handforth impulsively. "You can't get a job this evening."

"I might get one to-morrow, young gent

"And where are you going to sleep to-night?" demanded Handforth. "And what about your supper?"

Bert was silent—waiting for developments. Hang this young fool of a toff! Why didn't he come out with some money?

But Handforth had his own original ideas.

"Look here, Bert, my lad!" he said confidentially. "I want to make the other chaps believe that I've finished with you. See? For this evening, anyway. To-morrow they'll get a surprise, perhaps!"

"But I don't understand!" protested Bert.

"Of course you don't!" grinned Handforth. "But look here! You've got no supper to-night—and nowhere to sleep! All right! Come back to St. Frank's at half-past ten."

"Eh?" gasped the young scamp. "I can't do that, young gent! I was thinkin' that mebbe you'd help me on my way a bit, an'—"

"I'll help you all right!" broke in Handforth. "I'm going to help you all I can, Bert!"

"That's very kind of you, sir! I'd be glad of a few shil—"

"We'll talk about this later—in private," said Handforth, full of his own schemes. "Come back to the school after lights out. Be outside the window of Study D at half-past ten. You know the window, don't you? You've only got to get into the West Square through the left-hand arch as you come into the Triangle—and you'll easily spot the window of Study D."

"But why?" asked Bert, becoming secretly exasperated. "I daresn't come back, sir! It would be a lot better if you—"

"It'll be as easy as winking!" said Handforth. "Everything will be quiet at half-past ten, and it'll be pitch dark, too. You come into the West Square, and I'll be at the window of Study D—waiting. You can't miss me. Then I'll let you in, and I'll have a big supper for you. Yes, by George, and you can sleep in the study, too!"

"Sleep there!" gasped the startled rascal.

"Why not?" chuckled Handforth. "I'll bring down some blankets and things, and make you nice and comfy. You'll be able to slip off in the early morning, and nobody will be the wiser. Then we can arrange to meet somewhere to-morrow—and make fresh plans. See? I've got it all worked out!"

"Lumme! But I don't see 'ow I can come—"

"Yes, you can!" said Handforth, with a start. "My hat! Here comes old Crowell! I mustn't let him see me talking to you! So long, Bert! And don't forget—half-past ten! I'll be waiting for you at the window of Study D!"

Without another word, Handforth turned on his heel and strode off, his step light and springy. He hadn't the slightest doubt that Bert Hicks would come, according to the arrangement.

For Handforth had made up his mind to help this "waif" to the full extent of his power.

But the waif had very different ideas. At the moment, indeed, he was the most thoroughly disgusted person in the whole county of Sussex!



CHAPTER 18.

Birds of a Feather!

THE young fool!" snarled Bert viciously. "The blamed idiot! After all my trouble, I'm done! An' I thought 'e was good enough for a couple o' quid, at the least!"

As he spoke he kicked violently against a tuft of grass, and his grubby, cunning face was flushed with resentment and anger.

Bert had gone off into Bellton Wood now, and he was trudging along the footpath. His whole plan had failed. He had only gone with Handforth to St. Frank's because he had had hopes of laying his nimble fingers on to some money.

And now he had nothing to show for his pains!

A wasted afternoon—without the slightest prospect of converting this failure into a success. For Bert, of course, hadn't the faintest intention of returning to St. Frank's after darkness.

He wouldn't be mad enough to do a thing like that. And he was filled with amazement at Handforth's attitude towards him. But then, of course, Handforth hadn't explained things to Bert. Handforth had made no mention of his "feud" with the Remove, and of his own exile. Had Bert Hicks known of these things, he might have understood better.

As it was, he was puzzled. He set

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Handforth down as a crank. The idiot was obviously "touched." And as for going back to the school at half-past ten, and sleeping in that study—why, the idea was fantastic.

For one thing, it was too risky. If somebody spotted him getting into the school premises, he would be collared and handed over to the police. They wouldn't believe him when he explained that he was there at the invitation of one of the boys. Even if Handforth stood up for him, it might not help him. No, it wasn't worth the risk. At the most, he could only get a pound or two out of that fool boy; and for the sake of a pound or two, Bert wasn't going to chance his liberty.

When Bert got into the middle of the wood, in one of the loneliest spots, he sat down on an old tree stump, and waited. Every now and again he looked up, as though he expected somebody. His brow was black and sullen, and he was thoroughly fed-up.

Now and again he got to his feet and paced up and down, looking through the trees keenly, and listening. It was growing dusk when at last he heard sounds of movements.

"About time, too!" muttered Bert savagely.

He caught sight of two men amongst the trees — two disreputable-looking fellows, almost as ragged as himself. They were both pushing a well-loaded coster's barrow, and were dusty and tired-looking.

"We thought you'd be 'ere fust, kid!" said one of the men wearily.

"Look at 'im!" growled the other. "Lazy young swab! Pity 'e couldn't come along an' give us a 'and with the barrer!"

"Oh, don't start croakin', Jed!" said Bert Hicks. "If you two ain't strong enough to push that barrer, then you ought to be! This is the place we arranged for camp, ain't it?"

"Yus!" said Jed, as the barrow came to a halt.

Jed Monks was a thin, wizened-looking rascal of nondescript age. His face was leathery, and he was a tramp from the crown of his head to the toes. The other man was much younger, a burly, ruffianly-looking specimen, with several days' growth of beard on his chin.

"Well, we ain't done much to-day, kid!" said Jed Monks, as he started unloading. "Now then, Bill—lend a 'and! We want to get the tent up. Looks a bit like rain. An' what about some sticks for the fire, young Bert? Ain't you collected any, you lazy rat?"

Bert grunted.

"You an' Bill Weenen expect me to do all the work!" he said savagely. "I've 'ad a rotten day, Jed! Ain't done a thing!"

"Didn't expect you would!" said old Jed, with a sniff. "You'd best stick with us to-morrer, instead of goin' off on yer own. You never do no good by yerself!"

"I come jolly near touchin' two or three quid t'-day, any'ow!" said Bert. "I got 'old of one o' them school kids—proper mug, too. I thought it was all right until this evenin'.

But the young ijit done me brown, proper."

And, while Jed Monks and Bill Weenen busied themselves with the camp, Bert told the whole story.

He was feeling better after he had given all the details. By that time, too, the camp was well made, and a crackling wood fire was burning in the clearing. Kippers were sizzling in a big frying-pan, and the air was filled with an appetising odour.

"So, y'see, I didn't do nothin'!" said Bert, sprawling back in the dry grass. "'Ard luck, wasn't it, Jed?"

"This 'ere kid—'Andy, as you calls 'im—was took in, eh?" asked Jed thoughtfully, as he turned the kippers. "'E thinks you're a genuine case, eh?"

"'Course 'e does!" said Bert. "It was as easy as winkin'. I fooled the kid proper. But what's the good? D'you think I'm goin' back to that school to-night?"

"That's just what you *are* goin' to do!" said Jed Monks slowly.

"'Ere, come off it!"

"Why, you young fool, you don't seem to realise what this means!" said Jed, bending forward, his eyes gleaming out of his wizened face. "You ain't got no imagination! Just because you didn't touch the swell kid for a quid or two, you think the game's over. Why, boy, it ain't started!"

Bert looked a bit scared.

"Look 'ere, Jed, I ain't 'avin' nothin' to do with it!" he said uneasily. "You've made me do things afore, but you won't make me do this! Why, I might get pinched!"

"Pinched be blowed!" said the elder man. "See here, Bert, you've got to go back at 'arf-past ten, just as the young toff said! Understand? Think of it! A chance to get into a swell school like that! And a young ijit to 'elp you! 'E's goin' to leave you there all night, an' 'e ain't goin' to tell another soul! 'E believes in you—'e thinks you're genuine! Why, where's your imagination? Can't you see it's the biggest thing we've struck for months?"

Bert Hicks was now thoroughly startled.

"You—you mean——" he began hoarsely.

"Listen to me!" said Jed, his eyes gleaming evilly. "An' listen carefully, young Bert! 'Ere's your chance to do somethin' big!"

Thereafter, for a full hour, they talked—and so important was this talk that they completely forgot the sizzling kippers!



CHAPTER 19.

After Lights Out!

JUST a minute, Handy, old man!"

It was later in the evening, and Nipper had happened to run across Handforth in the lobby. For a moment

it seemed that Handforth was going to take no notice. Then he paused, and glanced round.

"Speaking to me?" he said gruffly.

"Yes, I——"

"Then don't call me 'old man,' please!"

Nipper bit his lip; then he smiled. After all, there was something very naive and childish in Handforth's behaviour.

"Why keep it up, Handy?" asked Nipper, with real friendliness. "Practically everybody in the Remove is ready to——"

"Forgive me?" said Handforth bitterly. "Well, I've done nothing to forgive! So you can save your breath!"

"I wasn't going to say that——"

"It doesn't matter what you were going to say," interrupted Handforth bluntly. "As I said before, I've finished with the whole Remove!"

"I was going to talk to you about that fellow you invited into your study," said Nipper steadily. "Honestly, Handy, that chap is an out-and-out wrong 'un. I want to give you a word of warning——"

"Bert Hicks is my friend!" broke in Handforth fiercely. "Understand that! By George! You're about the tenth fellow who has tried to speak to me about Bert Hicks this evening! I won't listen!"

"But, my dear old chap, it's not merely a question of prejudice," said Nipper, with rare patience. "We've got positive evidence."

"I don't want to hear your evidence!" said Handforth coldly. "And I'm not your dear chap, either!"

He turned on his heel, and strode off.

"But, Handy!" shouted Nipper. "If you won't believe me, perhaps you'll believe Irene? It was she who—— Confound the ass!"

For Handforth had turned the corner, and his fingers were stuffed into his ears—as a silent indication to Nipper that he did not want to listen. Nipper sighed, and turned. He found Vivian Travers contemplating him.

"A thankless task, dear old fellow," said Travers. "Three times this evening have I attempted to gain Handforth's ear. All to no purpose. He has definitely made up his mind that black is white, and he turns a deaf ear to every friendly voice. It would be far more profitable to address your remarks to a gate-post!"

"By Jove, I believe you're right!" grunted Nipper. "I'm blessed if he isn't worse than ever!"

"We are all discovering the same thing," murmured Travers, nodding.

In Study D, Handforth felt very pleased with himself. He considered that he had acted strongly—resolutely. It was all very well for these fellows to say that they weren't prejudiced, but that was rot! They'd never seen Bert Hicks before in all their lives, so they couldn't know anything about him. They were all against him because he was dirty and dishevelled.

Besides, Handforth felt that he couldn't discuss Bert Hicks with anybody. He had

made a compact with Bert—a secret compact. He was going to help that unfortunate youth. What harm could there be, anyhow, in giving Bert a little supper, after lights out? What wrong would there be in asking him to sleep in Study D? Nobody but Handforth would know anything about it.

And so, when bedtime came, Handforth was not troubled by any further overtures from Nipper or the others. They were tired of him. They were tired of being rebuffed. They felt that it didn't matter now, in any case—since Bert Hicks had left the school, and was not likely to come back. After such a violent ejection, the young rascal would probably put a good many miles between himself and St. Frank's by the morrow. In fact, Bert was practically dismissed from everybody's mind.

But after lights out, when the Remove dormitories had quietened down for the night, and when the school clock had boomed out ten-fifteen, Handforth slipped out of bed, and quietly dressed.

He was as keen as mustard on this little scheme of his. For the time being, Edward Oswald was his old self. His heart was of generous proportions, and nothing pleased him better than to be extending a helping hand to one less fortunate than himself.

It didn't take him long to slip a few things on, and then, with his arms filled with blankets and a pillow, he stole out into the silent corridor. Everything was quiet. On tiptoe, Handforth proceeded towards the staircase, and then he padded silently down. There wasn't much chance of being discovered, for everybody had finally retired for the night by this time—except one or two masters, perhaps, and there was no reason to suppose that any of the masters would visit this part of the House.

Arriving at Study D, Handforth crept in, and noiselessly closed the door. He breathed a sigh of relief.

"Well, that's all right!" he murmured gloatingly. "By George! And there goes the half hour! The poor chap ought to be here any minute now. What a life, eh? Nowhere to sleep—no supper! Well, he'll be all right to-night!"

Curiously enough, Handforth never doubted for a moment that Bert Hicks would come. He was supremely confident. He bundled the pillow and the blankets upon the table, and walked across to the window.

As quietly as possible, he unfastened the catch, and pushed the window open. The West Square was gloomy and empty. Over in the West House, one or two gleams showed in an upper window here and there. But, for the most part, all the buildings were dark.

"Hist!" breathed Handforth, rather incautiously. "Are you there, Bert?"

There was no reply, but over near West Arch a shadow seemed to move. Handforth concentrated his attention upon it, and his heart beat more rapidly when he saw a



Handforth was enormously relieved when, entering the study, he saw that Bert Hicks was still there fast asleep. The other juniors had said that Bert was a rascal, but this proved otherwise.

black patch creeping nearer and nearer. At last it resolved itself into a human figure.

"Good man!" breathed Handforth contentedly.

The figure came nearer, sidling along the wall. And then, at last, it clambered nervously into the dark study.

"Well, I've come, young gent!" came Bert Hicks' hoarse whisper. "I've been rare scared about it—in case I was copped, but I'm 'ere!"

"You needn't have been scared!" said Handforth. "Even if you had been caught you wouldn't have come to any harm."

"I wasn't thinking about meself," muttered Bert cunningly. "I was thinkin', mebbe, that you'd get into trouble, sir! I don't know 'ow to thank you for all you've bin doin' for me. Especially arter the way them other young gents—"

"They're not young gents!" interrupted Handforth gruffly. "They're a set of cads! But why talk about them? You stand over here for a minute, Bert!"

Handforth was delighted. Exactly as he had expected, the unfortunate waif had come; and Handforth was happy in the knowledge—or in the belief, at any rate—that his judgment was sound. He softly closed the window, fastened it, and then drew the curtains.

"Wait a tick!" he whispered, as he fumbled in one of his pockets, and produced a

box of matches. "Here we are! How's that?"

A match flared up, and Bert's startled face was expressive of his feelings. He looked about him uneasily.

"It ain't safe, is it, sir?" he breathed. "Not to 'ave a light, I mean—"

"Safe as houses," smiled Handforth. "I'm not going to put the electric light on, of course—that would be a bit too risky, in case a few chinks of light got past the curtains. But nobody will ever see this candle. I've prepared it specially."

The candle was already on the table—fitted into a kind of wooden shield, which Handforth had knocked up earlier in the evening. All the light from the candle was thrown down upon the table, while the rest of the study remained in darkness. Thus it was extremely unlikely that anything would be noticed from outside.

"There we are!" said Handforth contentedly. "Now for the grub! I've got you a special supper, Bert, my lad! Ham sandwiches, beef patties, doughnuts, and a couple of bottles of ginger pop. How will that suit you?"

"Crikey, I ain't got no words!" muttered Bert, with a break in his voice.

He spoke in a fawning tone, too. He was like a faithful dog, and the unfortunate Handforth was fooled more thoroughly than ever before!



CHAPTER 20.

Doubts!

"COMFY?" asked Handforth softly.

"Not 'arf!" murmured Bert, with a grin. "My, but ain't

you a real toff!"

"Rats!" said Handforth. "It's a pity if I can't do a good turn for a poor chap who's down on his luck!"

The cunning Bert was coiled up in the big arm-chair, with his feet on one of the other chairs. Handforth had tucked him up with blankets, and had made him comfortable with the pillow—an unwonted luxury for the young rascal.

The supper had been disposed of, and the time was now well past eleven. Handforth had watched with interest while Bert had piled into the sandwiches and other good things. In fact, Handforth had been rather too interested for Bert's liking. Bert hadn't been particularly hungry, but he had been compelled to stuff the food down. It was necessary to give Handforth the impression that he was half starved.

"There's no reason why you shouldn't come to-morrow night, too!" murmured Handforth generously. "And the night after that—and the night after that, too! Just you leave it to me, Bert! You can always be sure of a welcome, and a jolly good supper, too!"

"You ain't 'arf a decent sort of cove!" said Bert, with mock gratitude. "I wish there was more like you in this world, young gent! Most always, I gets kicks an' cuffs. 'Tain't often I meets a swell o' your sort!"

"Don't keep talking such rot!" said Handforth uncomfortably. "I want to ask you about your plans for to-morrow. Have you got any?"

"Not as I know of, sir."

"You're not going out of the district?"

"I suppose I ought to," replied Bert slowly. "I mean, 'tain't right fer me to stay 'ere, spongin' on you. 'Tain't fair. Besides, somebody might get to know, an' then you'd be in trouble."

"How many times have I got to tell you that we're safe?" asked Handforth. "How the dickens *can* anybody know? You don't come until after lights out, and you'll be gone in the early morning. I suppose there's no question about your waking up early?" he added, as an afterthought.

"Me?" said Bert Hicks. "Lor' luv you, young gent, I couldn't sleep arter five o'clock, not even if I tried! I'm allus up at five. It's second nature to me. Don't you worry about that."

"Well, that's good," said Handforth, with relief. "If you get up at five, and slip out of here any time before half-past five, you'll be as right as rain. Nobody will be up

at that hour, and you can walk out as boldly as you please. In fact, the bolder, the better. There's no reason for you to sneak out, like a thief."

Bert gave a curious little gulp, but Handforth did not hear it.

"I'll do as you say, young gent!" he said. "I'll walk out, bold like. An' you needn't worry—I'll be gone by five o'clock. You can be quite sure that I shan't get *you* inter trouble."

"A fellow doesn't get into trouble for doing good," said Handforth lightly. "I don't want to boast about this, Bert, and it's all rot for you to say that you'll never be able to thank me. Still, some of the

NEXT WEDNESDAY!



masters here are a bit old-fashioned, and they might kick if they found out the game. So it's all to the good to keep mum."

"You bet it is!" murmured Bert, with conviction.

"Well, anyhow, I'll go for a walk down the lane after lessons to-morrow," said Handforth. "If you want to see me about anything, Bert, you can meet me there. Any time between four and five to-morrow afternoon. If I don't see you, I shall expect you here again to-morrow night. See?"

"It's too good of you!" muttered Bert brokenly. "I 'aven't the 'eart to impose on your good nature."

"Rats and rot!" smiled Handforth. "If you're still in the district to-morrow evening, Bert, don't forget to come here—for supper and a bed. Well, I'd better be clearing off now. It's late. Good-night, old son."

"Good-night, young gent!" breathed Bert. "It's things like this as a cove can't forget!"

Handforth blew the candle out, and tiptoed to the door. He whispered "Good-night!" again, and then closed the door silently. Five minutes later he was upstairs in bed, happy and contented.

But he didn't sleep. Midnight struck, and he was still gazing upwards at the gloomy ceiling. Somehow, he couldn't even close his eyes. He was very wakeful indeed.

"UNDER A CLOUD!"

Handforth little dreamed of the trouble he was storing up for himself when he made Bert Hicks his friend.

Anyone with half an eye, so to speak, could see that Hicks was a rascal. Yet for some inexplicable reason old Handy won't see what's in front of his nose.

That's Handy all over. But even the obstinate one-time leader of Study D has to admit that he's made a big blunder when he discovers that Bert Hicks and a couple of his rascally pals have ransacked the school. That discovery, however, doesn't come about until suspicion has settled on Handy's own shoulders. Then it's real trouble, big trouble for E.O.H.

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* * *

"THE AIR PATROL!"

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He was turning over everything that had happened since he had first met Bert Hicks. And insisently he kept thinking of the other Remove fellows. Repeatedly they had tried to warn him against Bert. He was grim as these thoughts came to him. The rotters! The snobs! What did they know about Bert, anyhow?

In spite of himself, however, Handforth found no peace. What *did* they know? Was it possible, after all, that there was something shady about his new friend? Oh, rot! Bert was as right as rain! Ragged and grubby, perhaps, but that wasn't his fault. What else could be expected of a fellow who was compelled to tramp the roads, never knowing when his next meal was coming?

But there was something inexorable in the process of Handforth's thoughts. He kept telling himself that everything was all right—and yet, notwithstanding this, doubts were beginning to creep into his mind. Doubts! Supposing, after all, this chap *was* a wrong 'un?

Handforth sat up, startled by the very nature of this thought.

It was ridiculous, of course—absolutely dotty! Still, here was this fellow in the school—and if anything was stolen, Handforth would have to pay the piper. It was he who had admitted the stranger into the premises, and—

"Oh, rot!" muttered Handforth stubbornly. "Of course he's not a wrong 'un! I'm a cad for thinking such a thing! It's all the fault of Nipper and Travers and those other chaps! They've been trying to turn me against my n' v chum!"

He settled himself down again, and composed himself for sleep. But sleep simply would not come. At last one o'clock boomed solemnly out over the old school, and Handforth knew, then, that his doubts were very real. He was tortured by them. Had he done right? Was his judgment sound?

At last he could stand it no longer.

He got out of bed, put his dressing-gown and slippers on, and padded to the door. His face was set. He told himself that there wouldn't be any harm in creeping down and making sure. He just wanted to have a look at Bert Hicks again—before finally settling down for the night. It couldn't do any harm—and that peep, at all events, would put an end to these wretched doubts.



CHAPTER 21.

The Test!

LIKE a shadow, Handforth stole silently down the corridor. He was extraordinarily careful. As a rule, Handforth was blundering and clumsy. He was dreadful lest his good-hearted game should be discovered. He wasn't thinking of any possible punishment—but of the embarrassing situation which would arise if he were called upon to explain. He hated to be discovered in the act of doing anybody a good turn.

Before he got to the end of the corridor he paused.

An idea had struck him. He was doubtful for a moment or so, and he almost went on again. Then, with a little tightening of his lips, he turned on his heel and retraced his steps.

"Might as well have it ready, anyhow!" he murmured. "It seems a rotten sort of thing, doubting a chap, but—but— Oh, well, there's nothing like being sure!"

Once again he crept into his bed-room. He was thankful, indeed, that he was occupying this little room entirely by himself. He was grateful to Church and McClure for having cleared out, leaving him in sole possession. The school authorities, of course, knew nothing of this change, for Handforth's dormitory was supposed to accommodate three. The matron knew, but she had been "squared." Not that this implies, in any way, the handing over of a bribe. But the matron was a wise woman, and when Church and McClure had confidentially told her that they were temporarily going into another dormitory, she felt that the best thing, in the circumstances, was to wink her eye.

Handforth fumbled about in the dark for a few moments, and put one or two objects into the pockets of his dressing-gown. Then, once again, he crept out.

Sleep was impossible for him until he had been downstairs—until he had taken another look at his guest. He wanted to be quite, quite sure that Bert Hicks was trustworthy. He hated himself for doubting his new chum, but the thing simply had to be done.

This time, Handforth had armed himself with a little electric torch. He had intended to bring it earlier, but had forgotten it. The battery was very weak, and the torch only shed a yellowish glow. But it was quite sufficient for Handforth's purpose. Indeed, the weakness of its beam was rather an advantage.

At last he arrived at Study D. Cautiously, slowly, he turned the handle of the door, and applied pressure. For a moment he thought that the handle was locked—he believed that Bert had turned the key. But no; the door opened at last, giving a little creak which, in the silence of the night, sounded to Handforth like a gun-shot.

"My hat!" he breathed, startled.

He waited, his heart beating rapidly. He expected to hear Bert's voice calling—in alarm and fear.

"It's all right, Bert—only me!" whispered Handforth reassuringly.

But there was no reply. Then, as he stood there in the darkness, he heard the sound of heavy breathing. He pushed the door open an inch or two, and listened carefully. It wasn't merely heavy breathing—but snoring. It was steady and sound.

"Idiot! Ass! Fathead!" muttered Handforth to himself. "It's a pity you couldn't have a bit more faith in your new pal! Of course he's all right! I was sure of it from the very first! I'm only a rotter for coming here and disturbing him like this!"

His relief was enormous. All his doubts had been unwarranted. For now he was in the study, and the faint beam from his electric torch was playing upon the sleeping figure in the big chair. There was Bert Hicks, sound asleep. This was no assumed slumber—but the real thing.

However, Bert had long since grown accustomed to sleeping with "one eye open." Whether it was the light on his face, or whether Handforth had made some slight noise, cannot be told; but Bert suddenly sat up, blinking.

"Who—who's that?" he panted, in a hoarse, frightened voice.

"Shsssh!" hissed Handforth warningly.

"Is it—you?"

"Of course it's me!" said Handforth softly. "Don't be so jolly scared, Bert!"

"Lumme! You give me a awful turn!" said Bert, with perfect truth. "What's the idea, young gent? I thought you'd gone to bed? What 'ave you come back for?"

This was a poser, but Handforth was ready for it. He could not explain that he had had doubts regarding Bert's integrity.

"Oh, nothing!" he whispered. "I—I just wanted to see if everything was O.K. Sure you're comfortable, old man?"

Bert was inclined to be exasperated—but he did not dare to show his true feelings.

"That's very kind an' thoughtful of you, sir!" he said, with assumed gratitude. "Fancy you comin' down agin, just to see that I was all right! Well, you are a good 'un!"

Handforth, who was feeling thoroughly uncomfortable—and very guilty—switched off his electric torch.

"That's all right!" he whispered. "Now that I know you're comfy, I can go to sleep in peace."

He hesitated for a moment or two near the table. He was doubtful as to whether he should carry out that idea which had come to him in the upper corridor. He was angry with himself for having doubted Bert Hicks. And the thing that he was now about to do implied the harbouring of those very same doubts. As he hesitated, Handforth again remembered his Form-fellows' warnings—warnings which had been most emphatic and sincere.

Well, it wouldn't do any harm. Silently, he took those objects out of his dressing-gown pockets, and he placed them on the table without making a sound.

"Well, good-night, Bert!" he murmured. "Awfully sorry to have disturbed you, but I just had to see that you were nicely settled."

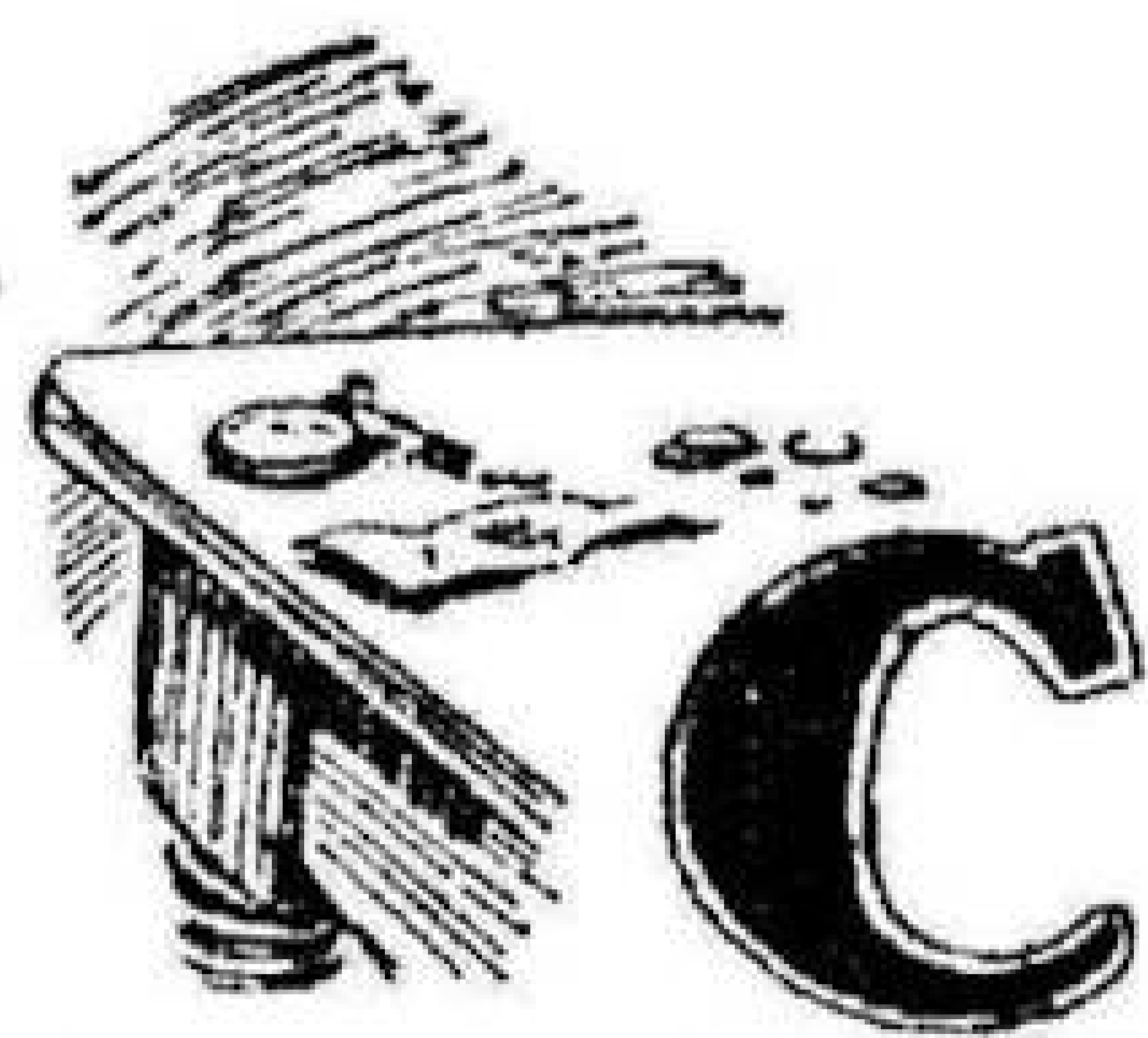
"Thanks, young gent, good-night!" mumbled Bert sleepily. "Don't you worry about me. I'm all right, sir! Never been so comfy in all my life afore!"

Handforth went out, and silently closed the door. And, outside in the passage, he breathed hard. He was thinking of the thing that he had just done.

On the study table he had placed his watch—quite a good watch—and some money. He had placed these things in such a prominent position that Bert, when he awoke in the early morning daylight, could not fail to see them!

CHAPTER 22.

The Result !



CLANG! Clang!

The rising bell awoke the echoes with its unwelcome note. In many a dor-

mitory, the fellows turned over, grunted, and made uncomplimentary remarks about rising bells in general, and this rising bell in particular.

But there was one fellow in the Ancient House who obeyed that call on the instant.

Edward Oswald Handforth sat up, blinked, and then leapt out of bed. It was probably his record. As a general rule, he treated the rising bell with lordly contempt. Why worry about it, anyhow? It was only the first bell! Nobody ever dreamed of getting up until the second bell had ceased to clang, and even then it was considered bad form to turn out until at least five precious minutes had elapsed. The scramble in the bath-rooms, when the juniors finally did get a move on, was always a mild imitation of pandemonium—and not so mild, at that!

When Handforth hurried out, he had the House to himself. The first rising bell was still going, and nobody had put a foot out of bed yet. Handforth hadn't even troubled to dress. He had thrown his dressing-gown on, and he had even forgotten to don his slippers.

With bare feet, he skimmed down the corridor, flew down the stairs three at a time, and raced off to his study.

He was still very sleepy-eyed. He had slept like a top, after bidding Bert Hicks "Good-night" for the second time. There had been no doubts in his mind then. Immediately his head had touched the pillow he had gone off into a deep slumber.

And now, owing to the abruptness of his awakening, he was dull and heavy. Moreover, he had had several hours lopped off his usual spell.

He opened the door of Study D, and strode in. It must be confessed that, at that particular moment, he was rather worried. If Bert Hicks had overslept, and was still here, there would be the dickens own trouble to smuggle him out.

"Good egg!" muttered Handforth, with intense relief.

He leaned with his back against the study door, and looked round. Again there had been no need for his fears. The study was empty. The curtains were drawn back, and the early morning sunshine was streaming into the little room. The window was closed, the big armchair was in its usual place, and everything was normal.

Bert Hicks, true to his promise, had departed in the early morning, long before any members of the domestic staff had stirred. He had kept faith.

Handforth's gaze strayed to the table, and he took another deep breath.

"I knew it!" he said gloatingly. "By George! And those chaps were trying to tell me that Bert was a wrong 'un! Well, here's the proof all right! Not a penny touched!"

There, on the table, just as he had left it, was the money. And there, too, was his watch, ticking away merrily.

There was something else, too.

Handforth walked round the table, and picked up a sheet of exercise paper. It had been placed right next to the money—indeed, was partially overlapping it—and there, in the middle of that sheet of paper, was the one word—"Thanks!" It was printed in rough characters, and Handforth knew immediately who had written it.

"Good old Bert!" he murmured. "Jolly decent of him to leave this here!"

That word from Bert Hicks, too, was significant. It proved, conclusively, that he had been able to see what he was doing on the table. Thus, he must have seen the money and the watch. And yet he had left everything untouched!

Handforth swelled with triumph—and who could blame him? He had tested this new friend of his, and Bert had come through with flying colours.

Whatever doubts Handforth may have had before, they were now cast aside for good and all. Bert Hicks was all right! He was true blue—as honest as the day!

What else was Handforth to think? Why shouldn't this vagrant have taken the watch and the money, and have cleared off? The temptation must have been very great, and yet he had resisted it. He could have got clear away with the spoils, knowing full well that Handforth would never trouble to give any information against him. No, Bert's very action in leaving the watch and the money there proved that he was honest. At least, it was proof enough for Handforth—and that was the main thing.

The blankets and the pillow seemed to be missing, however. Handforth looked round the study, but could see no sign of them. Just for a moment he wondered. Then he went to the cupboard, and opened it. There, neatly folded, were the blankets, with the pillow on top. Handforth's eyes glowed.

"Good man!" he said approvingly. "He probably thought that some of the domestics would come in here before I was up. So he put these things away in the cupboard! That's the kind of chap he is! And those rotters said that I was a fool for chumming up with him! This settles it! I've always found that my judgment is soundest in the end, and this is good enough for me. I was a beastly cad to have any rotten thoughts about Bert!"

He was so pleased with himself that he even began to lose his resentment against the Remove. He wanted to go upstairs, and tell everybody all about it. He wanted to gloat openly—to prove, to the whole Remove,

that his new friend was as straight as a die.

And then, at the thought of the Remove, he suddenly frowned.

"No, I'm hanged if I will!" he told himself. "Not likely! They're a crowd of suspicious bounders, and I'm blessed if I'm going to have anything to do with them! This absolutely settles it! I said I'd finished with the Remove, and I meant it!"



CHAPTER 23.

The Conspirators I

JED MONKS peered anxiously through the undergrowth of Bellton Wood.

"Can't make it out, Bill!" he said. "Why don't the kid come? He ought to 'a' bin 'ere an hour ago!"

"Young fool's overslep' hissself, I shouldn't wonder!" said Bill Weenen.

"If 'e 'as, I'll 'arf skin 'im!" said Jed savagely. "Arter all our plannin'—"

"'Old on! I can 'ear 'im comin'!"

A moment later, both the men were relieved to see the figure of Bert Hicks approaching. Old Jed ran forward, his wizened face fixed in a scowl.

"About time, too, kid!" he said harshly. "I thought you said you'd be 'ere afore six? It's nigh on seven now!"

"Keep your 'air on!" said Bert. "What's the scare? I thought I'd 'ave a little walk round afore disturbin' you. We needed some breakfast, didn't we?"

He proudly exhibited a dead chicken. Jed Monks snatched it, and felt that it was still warm.

"Where did you git this?" he asked suspiciously.

"Garn!" grinned Bert. "A kind lady gave it me!" he added sarcastically. "Told me I could come for one every mornin'!"

"I don't want none o' your sauce, young Bert!" said Jed Monks, with a scowl. "An' look 'ere, it ain't safe to do this sort o' thing. Partic'l'y as we've got a big game on. Where did you git this chicken from?"

"Oh, cut it out!" said Bert, with a snort. "I didn't take no risks, if that's what you mean. The chicken ran right acrorst the road in front o' me, an' I couldn't do nothin' else but 'elp it through the 'edge. But the silly thing went an' broke its neck tryin' to get through!"

Bill Weenen grinned.

"The kid's all right, Jed!" he said. "I'm a bit partial to chicken meself—when it's safe. 'And it over, an' I'll be pluckin' it!"

But Jed Monks knew Bert too well to believe his story. It was far more probable that Bert had penetrated a farmyard, or the chicken-run belonging to a cottager, and Jed didn't believe in taking such risks. However, he dropped the subject.

"Well, what about the swell kid at the school?" he asked abruptly.

Bert didn't reply for a moment. He flung himself down in the grass, near the fire. The sun was filtering through the trees, and it was very pleasant there, in that little clearing.

"Well?" said Jed impatiently.

"Oh, chuck it!" growled Bert. "There's nothing to tell. What did you expect? You knew what I was goin' to do, didn't you? The kid let me in, as arranged, an' I slep' in that blamed chair until five o'clock. Then I come away."

"Then everything's all right!" said Jed, with a slow nod. "I s'pose you used a bit more soft soap with the young swell—hey?"

"Oh, you needn't worry about 'im—'e's as loony as they make 'em," said Bert Hicks bitterly. "Yes, an' I'd like to know what you mean, Jed, by tellin' me to keep my fingers off any valu'bles. I was a darn fool to give you any promise larst night."

"It wasn't a promise!" said Jed Monks. "It was an order. I told you that if you laid your dirty 'ands on anything valu'ble in the school, I'd tan the life outer you. What's bitin' you, any'ow?"

"Yes, you may well arsk!" said Bert savagely. "Look 'ere, Bill!" he added, turning to the other man. "What do you think?"

"Ask me!" said Bill briefly.

"When I got up this mornin', at five o'clock, I could 'ardly believe me eyes!" said Bert. "There, on the table, was a watch—a gold watch, too. Yes, an' some money, too! All there—on the table! What do you think o' that, Bill? Arskin' to be lifted!"

"You didn't take that watch an' that money, did you?" asked Jed Monks sharply.

"No—not arter what you said!" growled Bert, with a sullen look. "But I tell you straight it was a near thing!"

A gloating light came into Jed's old eyes.

"Well done, kid—well done!" he said, sinking his voice. "Do you know if that money an' the watch was there when you went to sleep?"

"Not as I knows of," replied Bert. "I never saw it, any'ow!"

"Then it was put there a'purpose," said Jed, nodding. "That young swell left it on the table, so's you would be tempted. Don't you see, you young ijit? He was doin' it to test you!"

Bert Hicks started.

"Lumme!" he said, sitting up. "That's about it! 'E come down arter I'd gone to sleep, an' I thought it seemed a bit queer. 'E must 'a' come down espeshully to put that money on the table!"

"Sure as you're alive!" said Jed Monks cunningly. "Don't you see, Bert? You left that money there, an' the watch, too. Well, when the young toff comes down this mornin' 'e'll be as pleased as a cat with two tails! 'E'll trust you with anythin' after this!"

"Crikey!" said Bert slowly. "So that's it?"

"Couldn't you see that at first?" asked the old man. "That's why I told you not to lay your dirty 'ands on any valu'bles! Why, the thing's a cinch now! You've got this young swell's confidence, an' after this he'll trust you with any mortal thing! Nothin' could 'ave 'appened better!"

Bert's eyes were glowing with cunning, too.

"Jed, I b'lieve you're right!" he said. "You better kick me for bein' such a ijit! An' I came nigh on liftin' that money, too!"

"Well, it's a good job you didn't!" said Jed. "What about to-night?"

"It's all right. I can go back at the same time."

"Good!" said old Jed. "An' don't forget, you've got to git all the informashun you can. One or two visits, Bert, an' then we shall be all set! But we've got to be careful—we've got to go easy! An' it all rests with you, kid!"

"Don't you worry about me," said Bert complacently. "I've got that blamed young fool in the 'oller of my 'and, an' we can look upon this job as a cert!"



CHAPTER 24.

Not Very Peaceful!

IVIAN TRAVERS paused in mild surprise on his way downstairs.

"Well, well!" he said languidly. "I can quite believe, Handforth, dear old fellow, that the raiment is comfortable. But do you think that the masters will approve?"

Handforth glared, and made no reply. He pushed past, on his way upstairs, and was conscious that he had coloured.

The fact was, he had lingered too long in Study D over his thoughts. He had been rather startled, in fact, to hear voices out in the passage—denoting that some of the juniors were already down. And here he was, still in his dressing gown—and bare-footed!

He had to pass a good many other juniors on the way to the dormitory, too, and they were all full of facetious remarks. They had forgotten, long since, that they had sent Handforth to Coventry. In fact, he was out now, and if he had had less obstinacy his "feud" with the Remove would have been over.

And just this small matter of his forgetfulness changed his whole attitude.

While in Study D, he had toyed with thoughts of gloating openly over the Removites. He had had a mind to tell the fellows that he had proved his new chum's integrity.

But just because he had forgotten the passage of time, and because he was chipped on his way upstairs, he slipped back into his

old moroseness. Then and there he told himself that he would remain aloof. He was happy in this new friendship of his, and the Remove could go to the dickens!

As it happened, Church and McClure, having finished their toilet, were having an earnest little talk in one of the bath-rooms. They were alone, for it was practically breakfast-time, and everybody else had gone down.

"It's all very well for us to say that things can go on as they are," Church was saying. "But it's no good, Mac. The whole situation is rotten."

"But what are we to do?" asked McClure helplessly. "Every time we go near Handy, he tries to bite us! We're willing enough to take him back on the old terms——"

"That's just it!" said Church. "We're willing to take him back! And Handy can feel that that's our attitude, too."

"I don't see what you're getting at."

"Well, we want to use diplomacy," said Church. "In other words, our only policy is to fool him. We'll make him think that he's taking us back. Why not pretend that we're in the wrong, and that we're sorry for everything?"

"But, hang it, isn't that a bit too thick?" protested Mac. "Handy brought everything on his own head——"

"I know that," said Church. "But just for the sake of peace. Isn't it worth it, Mac?"

McClure sighed.

"Yes, by Jove!" he said wearily.

Handforth's chums were, indeed, tired of the present situation. Day dragged on after day, and there was no change. They wanted to get back into Study D—they wanted to have their old beds. In a word, they wanted to resume their normal lives, with Handforth as their leader. And, although they felt they were rather weak in doing so, they were prepared to humour him. After all, it was all for the sake of peace.

As luck would have it, Handforth himself came charging into the bath-room at that minute. He was late, and he hadn't washed yet. He paused as he caught sight of his chums standing there—right in front of the very bath that he wanted to use.

"Do you want the whole giddy room?" he asked coldly.

"Handy, old man!" said Church, taking a quick breath. "Look here, let's forget all this rotten trouble. We're both sorry."

Handforth stared.

"Sorry?" he repeated. "What are you trying to get at?"

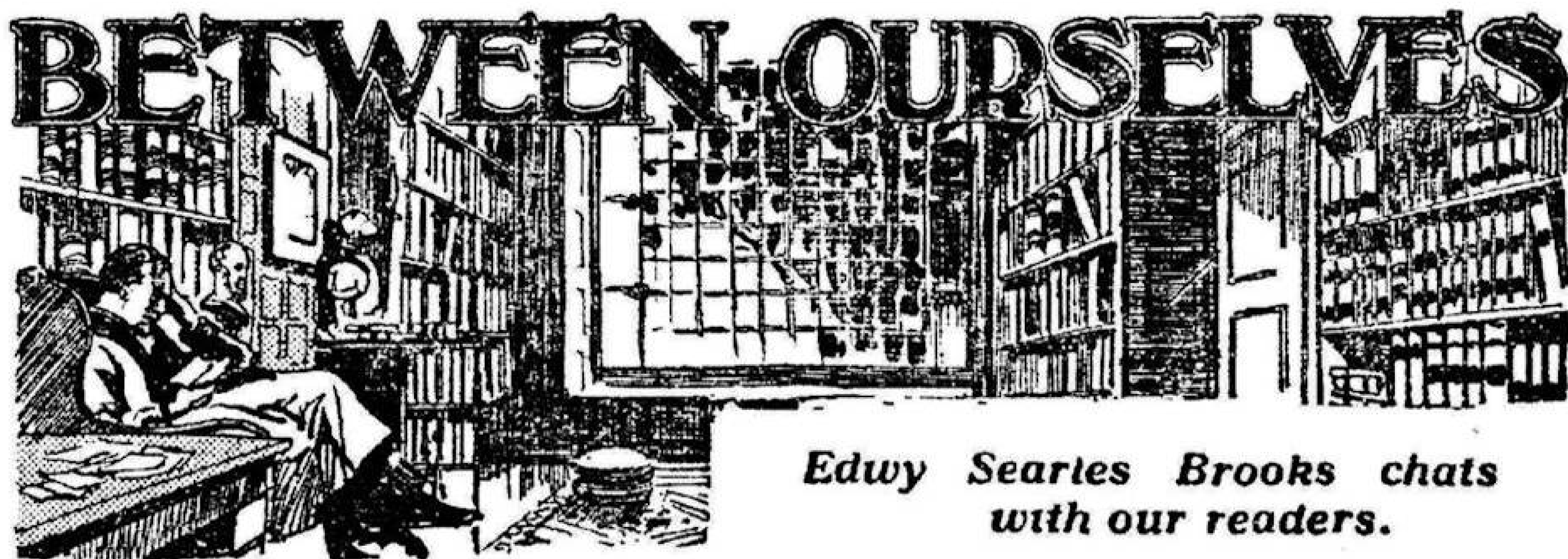
"We apologise!" said Church. "Perhaps we've been in the wrong——"

"There's no perhaps about it, my lad," said Handforth, thawing perceptibly.

"All right, then, we have been in the wrong," said Church quickly. "And we want you to forgive us, Handy. I say, old man, let's be done with all this bickering."

"Won't you forgive us?" asked McClure.

(Concluded on page 44.)



Edwy Searles Brooks chats
with our readers.

So here you are again—George Burgess* (Arundel)—and I can tell you I'm always glad to see your handwriting, in spite of the fact that it's nothing to crow about. But it's always very readable, and always worth reading. Thanks very much, George, for your promise of a second, and later, photograph. I'll be real glad to have it—especially from such a consistently good correspondent.

Your main question—"The Anonymous Two"* (Eastbourne)—or, at any rate, the one most likely to hold interest for a majority—is this: "Why can't the girls of Moor View School have a weekly book for girls at the same price as the 'Nelson Lee Library'?" Well, a subject like that has to be dealt with by my Chief—in other words, the good old Editor—as Archie Glenthorne would say. Personally, I'm rather disposed to doubt if girls would support such a paper to the same extent as they do Our Paper. Nor do I think our readers—particularly you boys—would fall over yourselves to become regular subscribers to it.

Thanks for your very interesting letter, "Betty" (Melbourne.) Handforth & Co. were already at St. Frank's when Nelson Lee and Nipper arrived there—related in No. 112 of the Old Paper, dated July 28th, 1917, and entitled, "Nipper at St. Frank's." Willy Handforth's advent was described in No. 386, published week ending October 28th, 1922, under the title of "Handforth Minor." The Moor View girls cantered into the yarns in the story called "A Rod of Iron," which formed No. 436 of Our Paper, and appeared under date, October 13th, 1923. Guy Sinclair, of the Sixth, is still at St. Frank's, quartered in the East House, sharing Simon Kenmore's study.

I believe you've touched on a really popular topic—H. Humphries (Wolverhampton)—as you are only one of many hundreds who have been clamouring to have "The St. Frank's Magazine" back again. In fact, the demand has been so large, and so persistent, that I believe this little journal—edited and contributed to entirely by the St. Frank's

schoolboys (with occasional contributions from the Moor View girls)—will be back with us again before the year is out.

* * *

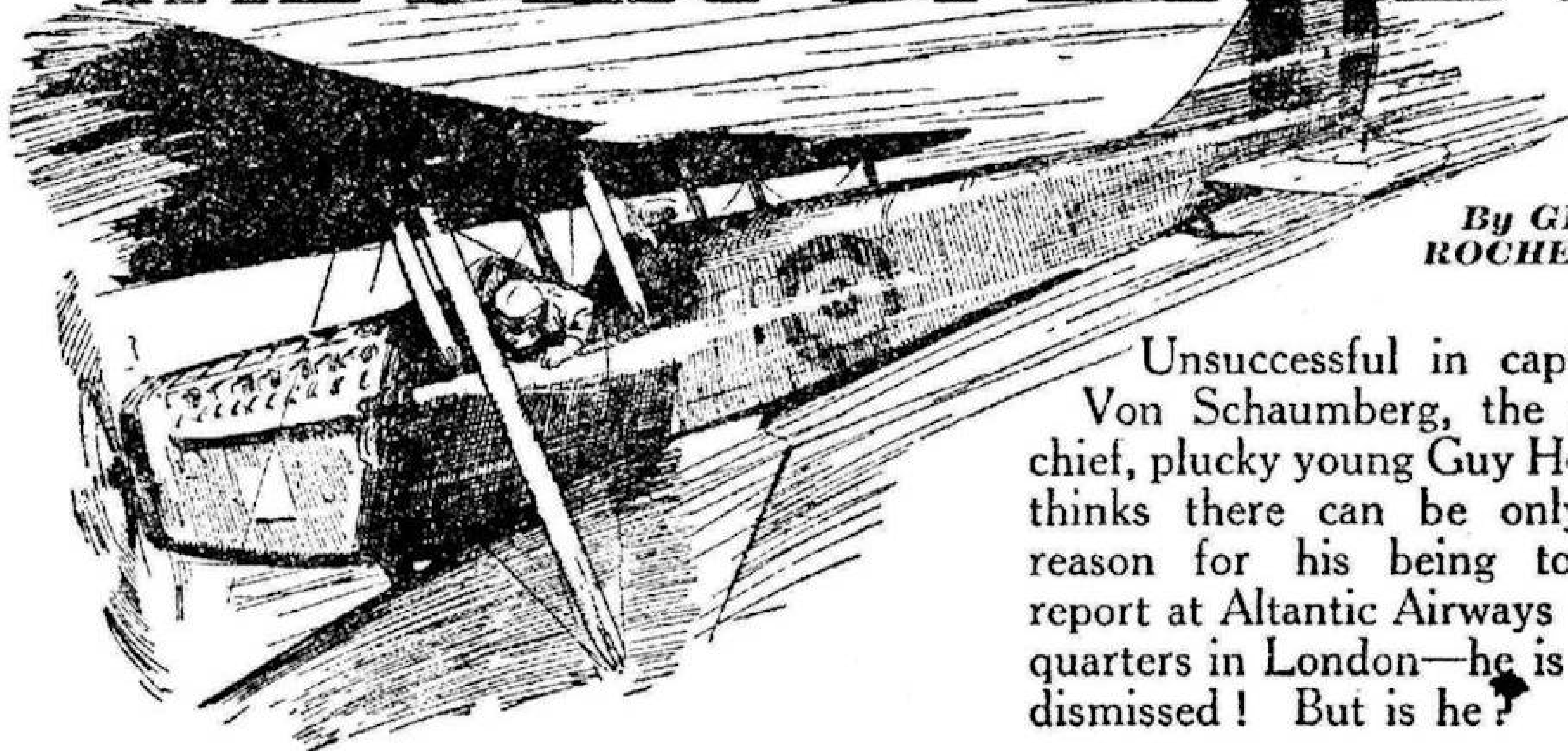
Nothing of the kind—F. C. Camfield (Wood Green)—and I hope what I'm going to say to you will jolt you—yes, and many more among you, too—back on to the right track. So you think that I "take up a certain letter, find a question in it, and answer that. Then, on the strength of having answered *one* question, you let hundreds of others slide, soothing your conscience with the reflection that 'they weren't of interest to more than one or two readers.'" I repeat, nothing of the kind. I never pass an item in any letter which I honestly feel will be of real interest to a majority of you. That's the whole principle upon which my chat to you is based, and I stick to it through thick and thin. But, here's your trouble, F. C. C.—and also the trouble of the large number who have stepped off the track with you. You shoot at me all sorts of questions which are really the direct concern of the Editor. The Editor is also the Chief Officer of the St. Frank's League. Therefore, will you all please *get* this—and never *forget* it? All purely editorial matters, and all purely League subjects, should be taken up direct with the Editor and Chief Officer.

* * *

Your letter was one long grouch, F. C. Camfield, but I hope you will now see that it was entirely unjustifiable. I have just read it through again, in the attempt to find one item of general interest which *I* can answer. But I cannot—unless it's this: "Is there any prospect of an American series yet?" But, as you say "an"—not "another"—you are evidently unaware that two American series have already appeared in Our Paper.

This Grand Air-Adventure Serial Gets More and More
Interesting!

THE AIR PATROL!



By GEO. E.
ROCHESTER

Unsuccessful in capturing Von Schaumberg, the pirate chief, plucky young Guy Howard thinks there can be only one reason for his being told to report at Atlantic Airways headquarters in London—he is to be dismissed! But is he?

WHAT'S ALREADY HAPPENED:

GUY HOWARD, youngest and most intrepid "scout" in the Atlantic Rangers—whose duty it is to guard the air routes between Britain and America—is attached to Aerodrome D, one of the six huge floating aerodromes placed across the Atlantic Ocean. Just recently the big bullion and passenger-carrying air liners have been attacked by air pirates, whose leader is VON SCHAUMBERG. The headquarters of the pirates is unknown. Guy has sworn to exterminate them, and Von Schaumberg, on his part, has vowed vengeance against Guy for killing one of his confederates. Guy obtains a roving commission, and, discovering the pirates' headquarters, succeeds in capturing Von Schaumberg. The ranger takes his

prisoner to Vladmir, a small whaling station, but he is released by Vorzetzen, the pirate leader's chief lieutenant. They take refuge in an out-of-the-way place named Zedrich, and there Von Schaumberg tells his companion that soon he will "strike in a manner which will startle the world!" Later Guy comes along accompanied by two other machines. There is a fight; the pirates succeed in getting away, and one of Guy's companions, Major Boyd, is killed. Before dying the major gives Guy a letter, which he asks him to deliver to his son in England. Soon after an ambulance-plane from H.M. Aircraft-carrier Eagle comes to fetch the body of the dead airman.

(Now read on.)

"You Will Report at Headquarters!"

WITH the dawn, the big twin-engined ambulance-plane arrived back at Von Schaumberg's island base, off which the Eagle was lying. It landed on the flying deck of the powerful aircraft carrier, and Major Boyd's body was taken reverently below.

After a hot bath and breakfast, Guy, who had returned with the ambulance machine, obeyed a summons to report to Captain Ellison.

He found the Commander of the Eagle seated writing at the table in his cabin. Captain Ellison returned the young ranger's snap salute with a nod and a grave smile.

"So you are back, Howard!" he said quietly.

"Yes, sir! And regret to report the failure of our mission," replied Guy grimly.

"No blame attaches to you for that, Howard," responded the captain. "We thought three machines sufficient to effect the capture of Von Schaumberg. We were, unfortunately, mistaken."

There was a certain dryness in Captain Ellison's tone as he voiced this latter remark, which was not lost upon Guy.

"But we'll get him, sir!" the ranger said. "I'll endeavour to pick up his trail at once."

Captain Ellison looked at him strangely.

"I'm afraid not, Howard!" he replied. "Following a wireless report, which I put through after Henderson arrived here yesterday afternoon with word of Von Schaumberg's escape, you are instructed to report

at Atlantic Airways headquarters in London, without delay!"

Guy's hands clenched. He had to report at headquarters without delay. What could that mean? Only one thing, he assured himself bitterly—the sack. He had failed to get Von Schaumberg—had failed to bring in his man.

"Very good, sir," he said, and the words cost him an effort.

Captain Ellison rose to his feet and handed Guy a heavily sealed envelope.

"This contains my own personal report of all that has transpired since the Eagle was ordered north to this base of Von Schaumberg's," he said. "You will hand it to Sir Seton Milvain, president of the Atlantic Airways."

"Very good, sir."

The ranger took the sealed envelope and placed it carefully in his tunic pocket.

"I have arranged for you to take one of our fast fighting scouts," went on the captain. "You will get off at once."

"Very good, sir."

Guy stepped back, saluted smartly, and turned towards the door.

"Oh, Howard!"

Captain Ellison, bent over the papers on his table, spoke quietly. The ranger wheeled.

"Yes, sir?" he said.

Captain Ellison looked up, his kindly eyes on the boy's grim face.

"I should not be too pessimistic about your forthcoming interview at headquarters, Howard!" he said. "Remember, you have done well, very well indeed!"

"Thank you, sir," replied Guy, but he knew the cheering words were prompted solely by a feeling of sympathy.

And he wanted no man's sympathy. He had failed and he would take his medicine!

The Interview at Headquarters!

"YOU have Captain Ellison's report, sir?"

"Yes, here it is!"

Guy handed the sleek, well-groomed, soft-footed, suave-voiced secretary the sealed envelope which had been given him by the commander of the Eagle for delivery to Sir Seton Milvain.

The secretary took it in a well-manicured hand, peered curiously at Guy through rimless pince-nez, sighed, then retreated, softly closing the door of the luxuriously furnished waiting-room.

The young ranger crossed to the window and stood staring down with unseeing eyes at the whirling traffic in Kingsway.

It was two days ago that he had left the Eagle. He had landed at the London Air Port the previous evening, and had, this morning, reported at the sumptuous offices of Atlantic Airways, in Kingsway.

He knew that in Sir Seton Milvain's room a full directors' meeting was in progress.

They didn't want to see him yet, he reflected, a trifle bitterly. They had just sent for Captain Ellison's report. It would take 'em another half an hour to wade through that. Then he would be summoned to the official sanctum—and dismissed.

He had quite made up his mind as to what was going to happen. The code of the rangers was rigid. Get your man!

Well, he hadn't—he'd failed. That was all there was to it. He bore no grudge for what was coming to him but, dash it, he did feel that, instead of bringing him home, they might have allowed him to follow Von Schaumberg to the end of the trail.

And what was to happen when he'd been kicked out by the august assembly of directors? He could always get a job piloting on some of the smaller air routes. But could he? Perhaps after this he'd be cold shouldered.

Well, there was always the big European companies: Continental Airways, Ltd., Asiatic Airways, Ltd., the Franco-Japanese Company, whose fast-flying passenger machines were amongst the finest in the world.

But all that would mean taking a job with the foreigners, and he wanted to fly British machines with a British company, if possible.

The door opened softly, and the sleek head of the secretary slid round it.

"Will you kindly step this way, sir?" he purred.

Guy turned from the window. Of course, those words were a prelude to a hauling over the coals and a chucking out.

He followed the secretary along the corridor to heavy ornate folding-doors. The secretary knocked discreetly, then stood aside to usher Guy into the large, magnificently-fitted directors' room.

They were seated at a long, polished, mahogany table were those gentlemen, with their president, Sir Seton Milvain, at the head. In front of each were pens and papers. It was Sir Seton Milvain who first spoke, and his voice was very courteous.

"It gives us infinite pleasure to see you here this morning, Howard," he said. "In your endeavour to bring Von Schaumberg and his air pirates to justice you have, more than once, been very near to death!"

Guy was silent. There seemed so little he could say. But he hoped these dignified gentlemen weren't going to waste too much time in sugaring the pill of dismissal.

"We have before us," continued Sir Seton, "two detailed reports. One is from Colonel Malcolm, in command of D aerodrome, the other is Captain Ellison's. Both these reports speak in the very highest terms of your courage and devotion to duty!"

A murmur of assent ran round the directors' table. Guy flushed. If this was a prelude to the sack then it was a strange one. Perhaps, after all—

"We are satisfied," went on Sir Seton, "that, directly through your efforts, Von

Schaumberg has been rendered powerless! His gang is broken—the majority being under arrest, the remainder being dead. Only Von Schaumberg and his lieutenant, Vorzetzen, remain at large. They, we confidently expect, will be apprehended within a very short time by the police of whatever country they make for. The police of the civilised world have been circularised with a full description of these two men.”

He paused and consulted a paper on the table in front of him.

“Before you reported for duty with

and highly efficient pilot, whose devotion and loyalty to our interests has earned the unstinted appreciation and deep gratitude of my colleagues and myself!”

Again a murmur of approbation punctuated Sir Seton's words.

“We have, therefore, Howard,” continued Sir Seton quietly, “decided unanimously to promote you from the rangers and, as some token of our confidence in you, we are placing you in command of our super-airship ZX.I, which is nearing completion on Salisbury Plain!”

Guy gasped. He had heard of ZX.I, the largest airship in the world, designed exclusively for long trans-continental and trans-oceanic flights.

“But—but, sir,” he stammered, “surely there are other—other pilots with a better claim than—than me?”



“We have decided to promote you from the rangers, and we are placing you in command of our super-airship, ZX,1!” said Sir Seton smilingly, and he rose to his feet and shook hands warmly with the bewildered Guy.

Atlantic Rangers, Howard,” he continued, “you had taken a special course in airship navigation?”

“Yes, sir!” replied Guy wonderingly.

“You may wonder,” went on Sir Seton, with a smile, “why we have recalled you from duty. As I have said, however, we were convinced that the power of Von Schaumberg is broken, and that his apprehension by the police is merely a matter of time. You have proved yourself to be a courageous

Sir Seton Milvain smilingly rose to his feet, and held out his hand.

“Not in our opinion, Howard!” he said. “We have the greatest of confidence in you, and you have well earned your promotion. Good luck to you, boy!”

They all shook hands with him, every one of those austere, dignified gentlemen. One of them, in fact, so forgot dignity as to pat the new airship pilot on the back.

“You may have a fortnight's leave!” said

Sir Seton. "Then report at Stonehenge, where the airship will shortly be ready for her preliminary trials!"

Guy's face became suddenly grave. In his pocket-book was Major Boyd's letter, which he'd pledged himself to deliver.

"I will take just this afternoon from duty, if I may, sir?" he said. "And will report at Stonehenge to-morrow. I—I don't want leave, sir. I've nowhere important to go, and I'd only be miserable!"

"Very good, Howard. Report to-morrow," said Sir Seton.

And, out in the corridor again, Guy encountered the sleek, smiling secretary.

"Congratulations, sir!" purred that worthy, and shot back a cuff from the well-manicured hand which he extended to Guy.

"I say, did you know—that this was coming off?" demanded the ex-ranger.

The secretary coughed gently.

"I—er—had some little knowledge of the matter," he murmured.

"Oh, had you?" retorted Guy, and tried vainly to conjure up a scowl as he took the long pink hand. "Well, I wish you hadn't been so blessed secretive! My hat, you don't know what I thought was coming off!"

The secretary bent forward. His was the air of a conspirator.

"It was all arranged," he breathed, "after Colonel Malcolm's report came through!"

A Promise Kept!

"BOYD, Mr. Davis wishes to see you in his study!"

The voice of Mr. Hickson, Fourth Form master at St. Freda's, was curiously quiet, curiously gentle. It was not always thus, but he felt the deepest sympathy for Eric Boyd, on whom, two days beforehand, tragedy had descended with such crushing suddenness.

The news of the death of Major Boyd, Eric's father, had come like a bolt from the blue. Even now Eric could scarcely believe it was true. His dad dead—his best pal. The Head had suggested that he might like to go home for a few days. But his father had been a widower, and there was no one at home save an elderly caretaker. So Eric had stayed on at St. Freda's, and everyone, from the skipper of the school to the grubbiest fag, had been so decent to him—so jolly decent.

"I would go at once, my boy!"

"Yes, sir!"

Eric rose and left the Form-room. He had scarcely been aware, at first, that Mr. Hickson was addressing him. Making his way to the study of Mr. Davis, his Housemaster, he knocked and entered. Mr. Davis was standing by the window, which opened on to the playing-fields. With him was a young fellow clad in the blue uniform and wearing the golden wings of an Atlantic Airways pilot.

"Ah, Boyd," said the Housemaster kindly. "Come in, my boy. This is Mr. Howard of the Atlantic Rangers. He was with your father when he died!"

Guy saw the lad start forward, saw the eager eyes, the trembling-lips. He held out his hand and, in that clasp, a staunch friendship was born.

"I will leave you with Mr. Howard, my boy," went on the Housemaster. "You are excused all lessons this afternoon."

With that he left the study, quietly closing the door. Eric laid his hand on Guy's arm.

"Tell me about him—about dad," he said huskily.

And, staring out across the greensward of the old playing fields, Guy told the story of that ill-fated dawn when Von Schaumberg had been run to earth at Zedrich. And, when he had finished, he turned to the boy, a folded piece of paper in his hand.

"Your father sent this message to you—before he died!" he said. "You'll find me on the playing fields after you have read it."

It was an hour later when Eric joined him under the old elms. A subtle change had taken place in the boy. He was still very pale, but his shoulders were squarer and his head more erect.

"I—I feel different now," he said, as he and Guy paced slowly up and down. "It seemed so rotten for him to go out like that—without a word! That's what hurt. But it's different now—now that I have his letter."

He and Guy had tea with Mr. Davis. The Housemaster was still a young man, and had served in France with the Air Force during the war days. He had known Major Boyd, out there, and Ponsonby, who was now with Atlantic Airways.

And, as he talked of those hectic days of war, recalling deeds of valour in the air which had thrilled the Empire, a flush crept into Eric's cheeks, for some day he, too, was going into the Air Force.

Maybe the Housemaster had a deeper motive in talking than was apparent. It was with approval that he noted the boy's eager face. For he knew that the first grief was over, now, and that Time, the great healer, would do the rest.

He talked of Captain Ball, of Captain Bishop, of others who had died in France. And he spoke of that strange but gallant personality who was known throughout France as the "Mad Major."

You have heard of him, have you not? That British officer whose amazing courage was a by-word both east and west of the trenches. You know how he used to go into the mess a few minutes before lunch and say: "I'll go up and have a fight now, if I can find anybody to fight with!"

Time and again he escaped death by a hair. Once, whilst in a captive balloon, taking note of enemy movements behind the line, he was shot down in flames by a German aeroplane.

The winch party frantically hauled the flaming balloon to earth before it was too late. Out stepped the major. How indignant he was with them for pulling him down before he'd settled with the Boche who had set him afire.

So back to the aeroplanes he went, voting the balloons not exciting enough. And one afternoon he flew over a deserted German aerodrome. Indignant because no Boche machines came up to fight him, he dropped a note, saying:

"I shall come back at three o'clock. Send somebody up to fight me!"

Back he went at three o'clock. Thirty minutes later a German machine dropped the major's uniform on the major's aerodrome. Attached to it was a note, the essence of terseness, but telling its own tale. It stated simply:

"We fought!"

Thus passed the "Mad Major." But wherever airmen gather, there you will hear tales of his magnificent courage, his supreme daring, his superb contempt for danger.

Dusk had fallen when eventually Guy bade Eric good-bye. He had motored down to St. Freda's, and as he drove Londonwards again, a full moon swung slowly up into a cloudless sky.

Strangely peaceful was the sleeping countryside that night; the trim hedges, the dark shadows of wood and copse, the white ribbon of roadway stretching ever ahead. The purr of the engine was the only sound which broke the hush that brooded over all. And, as Guy passed through quiet villages and sleeping hamlets, mellowed in the soft light of the moon, there came to him some realisation of that great work of God—the soul of mighty England!

Over England!

AND that same night, thirty-five thousand feet above the waters of the grey North Sea, there crept towards the shores of England the shadowy bulk of a gigantic airship.

Her great cigar-shaped hull was a full eight hundred and fifty feet in length, and one hundred and fifty feet in diameter. Below that mighty hull was her long gondola, divided into cabins, berths, dining-rooms, and lounge, with the control cabin at the front.

Three seven-hundred-and-fifty h.p. Stahlfeder engines were slung in their semi-circular cars on the starboard side of the gondola and three on the port side.

The windows of the brilliantly-lighted lounge, directly in the rear of the control cabin, were carefully curtained. Not a chink of light betrayed her as, grey and ghostly, she crept towards the coast.

Yet one momentary beam of light did

show as the hand of Von Schaumberg drew aside the curtain of his cabin window, and his bearded face was pressed against the triplex glass. He peered down into the moonlit night. Far below was the grey sea, divided from the darker land mass by a thin white line of breaking water.

"See, Vorzetzen!" he said rumblingly. "It is England—England against whom I have sworn to be revenged. They have caused me to be hounded out of all the civilised countries in the world, and for that they shall suffer—suffer dearly!"

Vorzetzen nodded.

"And you will strike—when?" he asked.

Von Schaumberg let the curtain fall back into place and turned, gripping his lieutenant savagely by the arm.

"With the dawn, I strike!" he snarled. "And cursed England will know the power of Von Schaumberg!"

He glanced round his luxuriously-furnished cabin, with its armchairs, settees, bookcase, polished tables, gilded fittings, and heavy pile carpet. The thunder of the great Stahlfeder engines was but a muffled drone inside that cabin.

"Ah, Vorzetzen!" he said, and now there was something of pride in his growling tones. "Did I not tell you that I was powerful? I ask you again, what think you of this great airship of mine, built for me on the lonely shores of the Baltic? Is she not superb? Thirty-five thousand feet now, and she will rise to forty-two thousand. What aircraft can reach us here?"

"No fighting aircraft that I know of!" grunted Vorzetzen.

Von Schaumberg nodded, rubbing his hands in self-approbation.

"No fighting aircraft, as you say!" he grinned. "And in our hull we carry eight small fighting scouts. By thunder, I have given you a floating aerodrome, Vorzetzen, and when you swoop downwards in your fighting scout you will have for your comrades seven of the finest fighting pilots in the world!"

He broke off as a bell in the cabin trilled loudly. Crossing to the table, he unhooked the receiver of a short-length telephone.

"Yes?" he said harshly.

"Zuchtlos speaking from control cabin, sir," came a guttural voice. "We are passing over Norwich. Our height is thirty-five thousand, one hundred feet. Our speed is one hundred and five miles per hour. We shall reach the borders of Salisbury plain in eighty minutes!"

"Very good, Zuchtlos," replied Von Schaumberg. "Keep her going as she is!"

He laid down the receiver on its rest, and turned to Vorzetzen.

"Bring Kurz here!" he said sharply.

(Many exciting instalments of this fine serial have already appeared, but next week's—in which Von Schaumberg makes the first move in his scheme of revenge against England—must surely be reckoned as the most thrilling yet. Look out for it, boys!)



Our Weekly Pow-Wow!

By
The Editor.

Your Editor welcomes letters from all his readers: send him one now. Address it to: The Editor, "Nelson Lee Library" Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

What's It Like?

A READER of the old paper who is following our air story with great keenness wants to know what it feels like flying at an altitude of twenty-five thousand feet. It was fortunate that Mr. Geo. E. Rochester happened to drop in to the office for a chat just then. I put the query to him. By the way, Mr. Rochester served as a pilot during the Great War, so I knew his reply would be "straight goods." "Twenty-five thousand feet!" he mused. "Well, I've flown at twenty-three thousand feet, and the sensation at that height must be pretty much the same as at twenty-five thousand feet. You tell your correspondent that the feeling is one of being at rest with everything. As a general rule all one can see below is a rolling expanse of snowy white clouds, just like a huge snow-field. Up aloft there's an unending expanse of blue, through which filters the glittering rays of the sun. Peacefulness sums up the feeling better, perhaps. The earth is forgotten; it is out of sight, except for occasional glimpses of it through the breaks in the clouds, and save for the purring of the 'plane's engine all is still. A feeling of tiredness—a pleasant feeling, believe me—steals over the chap in the 'plane. This is due to the rarefied air. As a general rule, the airman flying at such a height is equipped with an oxygen cylinder, and the necessary apparatus for inhaling the gas. When he feels that dreamy feeling creeping over him, he "doses" himself with the oxygen, and that revives him. But it's difficult to give a very accurate account of

the sensation one experiences at great heights, for height affects people differently."

A Cyclist's Grouse!

"T. J." of Reading, spends a lot of his leisure-time on his trusty old "jigger," but he says that cycling these days is anything but pleasant. T. J. has got it in for the motorists—those of the road-hog variety—for he says that they whiz along the road as if it belonged to them, and have very little regard for the chap on the push-bike, and force him in to the side of the road as if he were a beetle, to be crushed on sight. Some of what T. J. says, alas! is only too true. There are motorists and motorists. There are cyclists and cyclists, by the same token. I have often seen fellows on push-bikes roaming all over the road, "as if it belonged to them." What is more, I have seen cars overtaking the cyclist merchant; I have heard the prolonged sounding of horns to warn the cyclist that a car wants to pass him. But does the chap on the push-bike take much heed? Not a bit of it! He still wobbles all over the place until he has satisfied himself that he's held up the motorists, and then graciously draws in to his left. I don't say this sort of thing is general, but the bad cyclist is, in my opinion, just as much in evidence on our roads to-day as the bad motorist. It behoves the cyclist, the motor-cyclist, and the motorist to observe the rules of the road at all times. If all showed that little courtesy on the road, a great number of accidents would be avoided, and tempers would be far less strained. I'm not getting at you, T. J., for I imagine you're

LEAGUE MEMBERS PLEASE NOTE.

From now onwards all correspondence appertaining to the St. Frank's League must be addressed to: St. Frank's League, 5, Tallis House, Tallis Street, London, E.C.4.

a careful sort of fellow on a bike, but next time you're out-of-doors just keep your eyes on the fellows on push-bikes as well as on those road-hogs johnnies you complain about, and see how they compare.

The King's Cup!

"Loyal Reader," of Manchester, wants to know if Sir Alan Cobham, the famous airman, ever won the King's Cup. He did. Sir Alan won a 1,000 miles race on August 12th, 1924, flying at an average speed of 106½ miles an hour. His 'plane was a De Havilland, fitted with a Siddeley Puma engine. Last year the King's Cup was won by Captain W. L. Hope, whose average speed was 92.8 miles per hour.

A Driving Licence!

You're quite right, "Masters," of Southport. Five shillings is the cost of a driving licence, whether you are driving a car or a motor-cycle. Application for such a licence should be made to the Council of the County or County Borough in which you reside. The licence holds good for twelve months.

CORRESPONDENTS WANTED.

George Jennings, 63, Hatfield Road, Stratford, London, E.15, wishes to hear from G. Hurst (Teignmouth), or any other reader who wants back numbers of the N.L.L.

Isidore Goldberg, 6, Sidney Street, Stepney, London, E.1, wishes to correspond with readers in America, ages 15-16.

George M. West, 15, Grunhane, Strood, Kent, wishes to hear from readers in Australia, New Zealand, Straits Settlements, Honolulu, Suva, Hawaii.

P. George, 2, Woodside End, North Finchley, London, N.12, wants numbers of the N.L.L. back to November, 1927.

Len Bowden, 25, St. John's Avenue, Harlesden, London, N.W.10, wants to form a social club in his district, and would like to hear from readers. Also wishes to correspond with readers in South America and Spain.

W. Stanley Dean, 43, New Chester Road, New Ferry, Cheshire, wishes to correspond with readers (ages 16-18) interested in sport or autograph collecting; also with readers in U.S.A., Africa, or any part of Europe. All letters answered.

Thomas W. Gibbs, 1, Railway Terrace, Wool, Dorset, wishes to hear from readers, especially those overseas, who will join his Imperial Correspondence Club. Will London chums write to F. W. Minde, 100, Dalston Lane, Dalston, London, E.8, as he is the club's London secretary.

Arnold Wade, 5, Crossley Yard, Clackheaton, Yorks., wishes to hear from readers in South America, New Zealand, South Africa, and India. Interested in cycling, swimming, and football.

Ralph Bray, 33, The Crescent, Wimbledon Park, Wimbledon, London, S.W.19, wishes to correspond with readers in the Dominions.

Eric Wells, 18, Baker Street, Weston-super-mare, wants N.L.L.'s, old series, and No. 1 to No. 68, new series. State price.

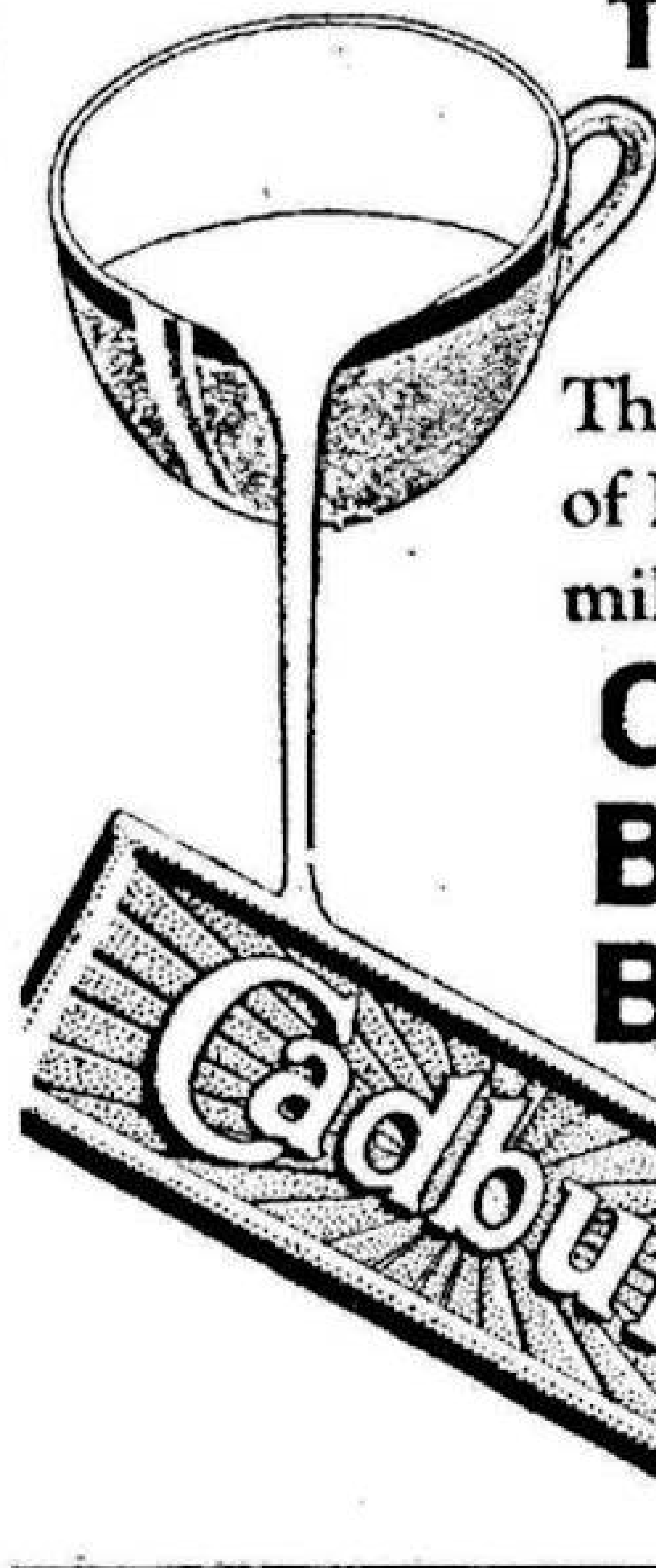
Ivor Gosling, 41, Arno's Street, Knowle, Bristol, wishes to correspond with readers at home and overseas.

Miss Violet A. Brae, White Rock Café, St. Peter Port, Guernsey, Channel Islands, would like to hear from girl readers in the Dominions, also in England.

H. Brae, White Rock Café, St. Peter Port, Guernsey, Channel Islands, wishes to hear from readers in his district with the object of forming a football, sports, and social club.

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(Continued from page 35.)

Handforth, thus appealed to, melted like butter before a hot sun, and it almost seemed, in that moment, that Church and McClure were about to work the miracle. For, once they were on good terms with their leader again, he would soon be his old self once more. The rest of the Remove would back Church and McClure up directly they gave the tip all round.

"All right," said Handforth gruffly. "Since you've apologised, and asked for forgiveness, perhaps I'll take you back."

"Oh, good man!" said Church happily.

A thought occurred to Handforth.

"But look here!" he said darkly. "Last night you fellows tried to tell me that my new chum was a wrong 'un. You said that Bert Hicks was no good. Do you still think that?"

Church hesitated.

"Do you still think it?" demanded Handforth.

"Well, hang it, old man, what else are we to think?" protested Church. "The whole Form knows that the chap is an out-and-out ruffian!"

"What!" thundered Handforth.

"But it's been proved!" shouted Church desperately. "You've only got to ask Irene, and she'll tell you how that cad—"

But Handforth was shouting at the top of his voice, and he wouldn't listen.

"That's enough!" he bellowed. "By George! And I nearly took you back again! I thought you were in earnest—I thought you meant it! And here you go, saying rotten things against my chum, Bert!"

"But that chap is a hooligan!" hooted Church.

"He's a thief!" yelled McClure.

Handforth took a deep breath. His eyes glinted. Both his fists shot out, and Church and McClure went over backwards. Unfortunately, the bath tub was just behind them, and some careless ass had forgotten to empty it!

Splash!

Fully dressed, the two unfortunate juniors sat in the bath, side by side, and cascades of water spurted out and sloshed all over the floor. Handforth, without another word, turned on his heel and strode out.

There were three members of the Remove late for breakfast that morning—and any hope of a re-union between the chums of Study D seemed for ever doomed. Certainly Church and McClure would never approach their leader again. They had done their all. It was up to Handforth, now, to ask for forgiveness!

And Handforth, serene in his new friendship, cared little. He did not realise what he was letting himself in for!

THE END.

(Poor old Handy! Poor old "blind" Handy! If he could only see the trouble which is in the offing through his associations with Bert Hicks he would drop that worthy like a hot brick. But Handy can't, and so he has to suffer. You will know all about it in next week's grand yarn, which is entitled "UNDER A CLOUD!" Make sure you don't miss it next Wednesday.)

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