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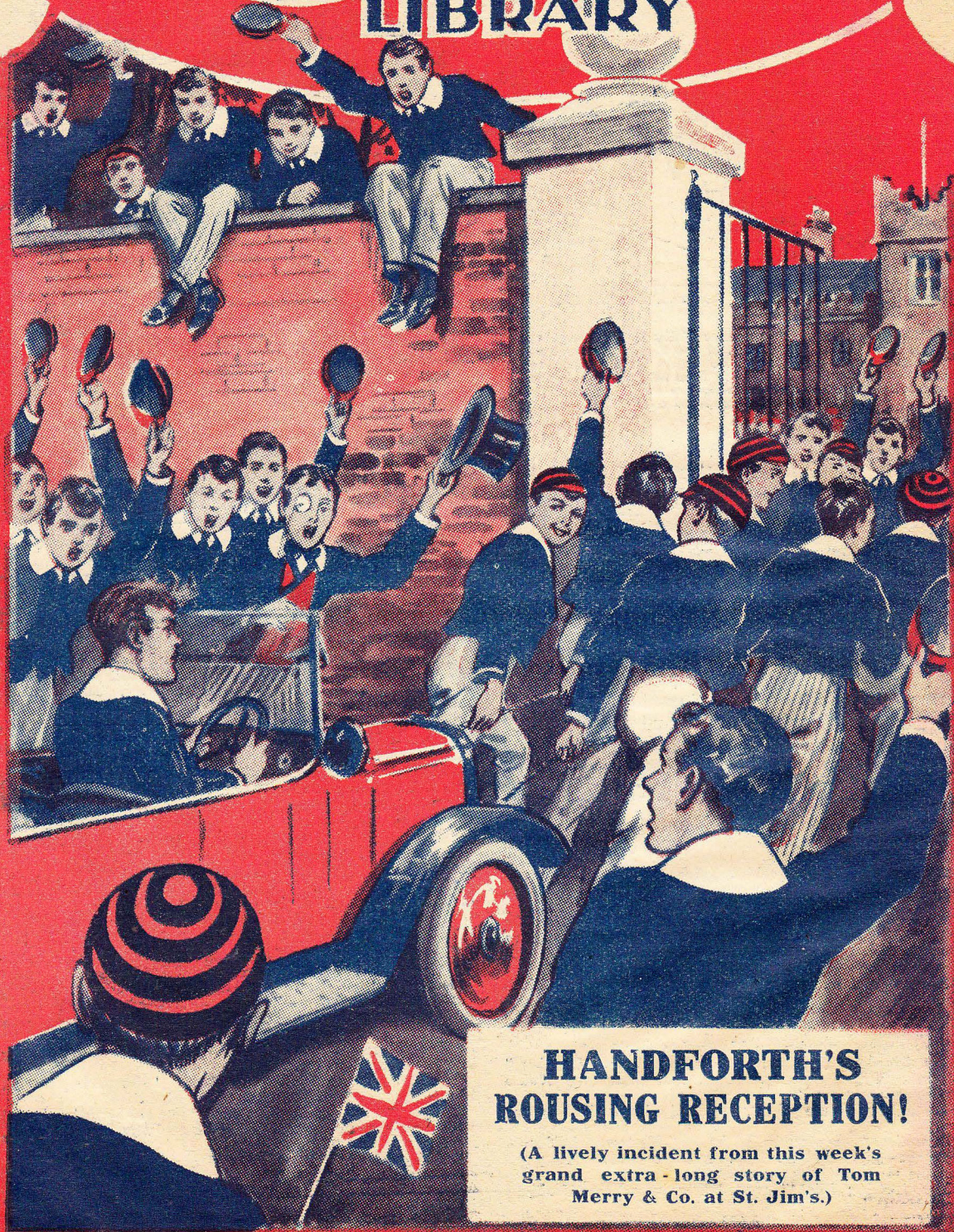
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EVERY
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HANDFORTH'S ROUSING RECEPTION!

(A lively incident from this week's
grand extra-long story of Tom
Merry & Co. at St. Jim's.)

A ROLLICKING LONG STORY OF TOM MERRY & CO., OF ST. JIM'S—

HANDFORTH at ST. JIM'S!

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

Handforth's leg was pulled unmercifully at St. Frank's, and half the time he was unaware of the fact. That's Edward Oswald Handforth all over. And when Handy's reputation precedes his arrival at St. Jim's, Tom Merry & Co. consider it a golden opportunity of showing the ex-St. Frank's junior just how St. Jim's can work a leg-pull!

CHAPTER 1.

Monty Lowther's Great Idea!

FIGGINS and Kerr and Fatty Wynn grinned cheerily as they entered Study No. 10, in the Shell passage of the School House at St. Jim's.

"Hallo, you School House wasters!" said Figgins, by way of greeting.

The study was already well filled, for it contained Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther, of the Shell, and Jack Blake & Co., of the Fourth.

"Come in!" said Tom Merry politely. "You're quite safe, Figgy. It's pax."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Just a friendly meeting—Monty's idea!" explained Blake.

"Then I don't think much of it," grunted Figgins, as he fanned himself. "What's the idea of squashing into this study, when we might be outside?"

There was something to be said for Figgins' point of view. It was a warm summer's afternoon, and the sun was shining out of a cloudless sky. And as there was no actual necessity to be indoors, this gathering in Study No. 10 certainly seemed senseless.

It was the day after the Whitsun holidays, and St. Jim's was all a-bustle with fellows constantly arriving and exchanging holiday yarns.

"Well, choke it up!" said Figgins, as he looked round. "Somebody told us that we were urgently wanted in this study, Tom Merry. Well, here we are."

"We thought it was a feed!" said Fatty Wynn, eyeing the empty table with disgust. "We might just as well not have come!"

Tom Merry chuckled.

"It's no good looking at me, Figgy," he said. "This is Lowther's idea. He's been mysterious for an hour past, and he suddenly decided to call a triple alliance of Study No. 6 and you fellows."

All eyes were turned upon Monty Lowther.

"Yes, it's about time you got it off your chest, Lowther," said Jack Blake pointedly. "Now that these New House dummies are here—"

"These New House what?" said Figgins & Co., in one voice.

"Dummies!" repeated Blake. "Wasters, half-wits, simpletons—anything you like! I don't care! They all mean the same thing!"

"You fooling idiot!" roared Figgins. "You frabjous School House lunatics!"

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"Peace, children, peace!" urged Monty Lowther, in a pained voice. "This is a peaceful meeting. It's a pity, I'll admit, that we've got to have these New House maniacs with us, but the fact is they're needed. So we can almost describe them as necessary evils!"

Figgins breathed hard, and Kerr and Fatty Wynn were red with wrath. Yet the New House trio felt that it would be most unwise to start any violent activity. They were in the heart of the enemy's camp.

"I wathah think, Lowthah, that you are twyin' our patience a little too fah," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, jamming his monocle into his eye, and inspecting Monty with sudden suspicion. "Bai Jove! I twust this is not your ideah of a pwaetical joke?"

"Dry up, Gussy!" said Blake impatiently.

"Weally, Blake—"

"Dry up, ass, and let Lowther do the talking!"

"I wufuse to dwy up!"

"Then ring off!" said Blake.

"You frightful ass!" exclaimed D'Arcy. "There is no difference between dwyin' up and wingin' off!"

"I know that!" said Blake. "So you can do both!"

"I uttably wufuse—"

"Put a sock in Gussy's mouth, somebody!" said Monty Lowther cheerfully. "Either that, or gag him! I don't care which!"

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Oh, cut the cackle, and get to the hosses!" said Tom Merry, soothingly.

"Right!" said Monty. "Well, there's a new fellow coming into the Fourth to-day."

"Yes, we know it," said Tom Merry. "Some chap named Handforth, from St. Frank's. What about it?"

"Well, it seems to me that something ought to be done," said Lowther thoughtfully. "That's why I called this meeting."

Blake grunted.

"My only sainted aunt!" he said, glaring at Monty. "You've called us together like this because a new fellow is due to-day?"

"Exactly!"

—FEATURING EDWARD HANDFORTH, LATE OF ST. FRANK'S!

"Then you're off your rocker!" said Blake. "Besides, it's like your nerve, you Shell ass! Handforth is coming into the Fourth, with us!"

"Yaas, wathah!" said D'Arcy, nodding. "I was talkin' with Mr. Lathom half an hour ago, and he expressly requested me to look out for the new fellow. I regard it as a mattah of duty to meet Handforth at the station—"

"Then you'll be unlucky, Gussy," interrupted Blake. "This chap, Handforth, is coming down in his own car."

"Bai Jove!"

"Nerve, I call it!" went on Blake indignantly. "None of us have got cars of our own. Yet this burbling duffer of a St. Frank's fellow owns his own Austin Seven!"

"Well, you needn't be jealous," said Tom Merry.

"I'm not jealous!" roared Blake.

"You sound like it!" murmured Tom. "But I must admit I'm puzzled," he added, glancing at Lowther. "What's the idea, Monty? Why should we interest ourselves in this new Fourth-Former? I should hope we're above taking an interest in the affairs of the mouldy Fourth!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"We're off, anyhow!" said Figgins, making for the door. "It's just like you School House idiots, to drag us here for nothing. We're not interested in your piffing new boys! Handforth is coming into the Fourth Form, I know. But what do we care? He's going to be a School House chap, and that means that he'll be no good!"

Monty Lowther deftly pushed his way through the others, and placed his back to the door.

"Just a minute!" he said calmly. "You're not going yet, Figg! I haven't explained my idea yet. Why the merry dickens can't you have a little patience?"

"Patience!" howled Figgins. "We've been here for hours already!"

Monty Lowther remained perfectly cool.

"The trouble is, you don't know Handforth," he said. "The name means nothing to you. But to me it means a lot!"

"Oh, does it?" said Blake curiously. "Have you met the fellow?"

"Never!"

"Then how the thump—"

"Wait!" interrupted Monty. "I haven't actually met Handforth, but I've heard all about him. And, believe me, what I've heard is an earful!"

Tom Merry laughed.

"Thinking of one of your practical jokes, eh?" he said. "Well, if you've a suggestion for ragging the new fellow, trot it out!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"It's our job to jape him—not yours!" said Blake pointedly.

"Who the dickens is Handforth, anyhow?" demanded Figgins. "I don't like his name, to begin with. It's a rotten name!"

"Well, the poor chap can't help that," said Monty Lowther. "His full name is even worse—Edward Oswald Handforth."

"Poor beggar!" said Herries sympathetically.

"I happened to meet a St. Frank's chap during the hols," went on Monty. "We had a chat about things in

general, and we rather wondered why the two schools didn't exchange matches, and all that sort of thing. Still, that's neither here nor there."

"I'm glad you realise it!" said Blake impatiently.

"But with regard to Handforth, the opportunity is too good to be missed," said Lowther. "I understand, on the best possible authority, that his leg was made, above all others, to be pulled."

"Oh!" said Tom Merry.

The meeting began to take an interest.

"This chap, Handforth, is the world's greatest chump," continued Lowther calmly. "By what I understand, he's recently been in some trouble at St. Frank's, and he was practically sacked from the school."

"Bai Jove!"

"But there was a mistake," said Lowther. "Handforth wasn't guilty, and the truth came out, and he was pardoned. But his pater had already been here, and had arranged with the Head for Handforth to join the School House force after the Whitsun holidays."

"Yes, we know all about that," said Blake, nodding.

"Well, Handforth got on the high horse," grinned Monty Lowther. "This St. Frank's chap I spoke to thought it was a huge joke. Handforth was the laughing stock of the whole school. He maintained that he had been unjustly kicked out, and he jolly well wasn't going back! He said that it would serve St. Frank's right to lose him! So, in a way, he's only coming here out of spite!"

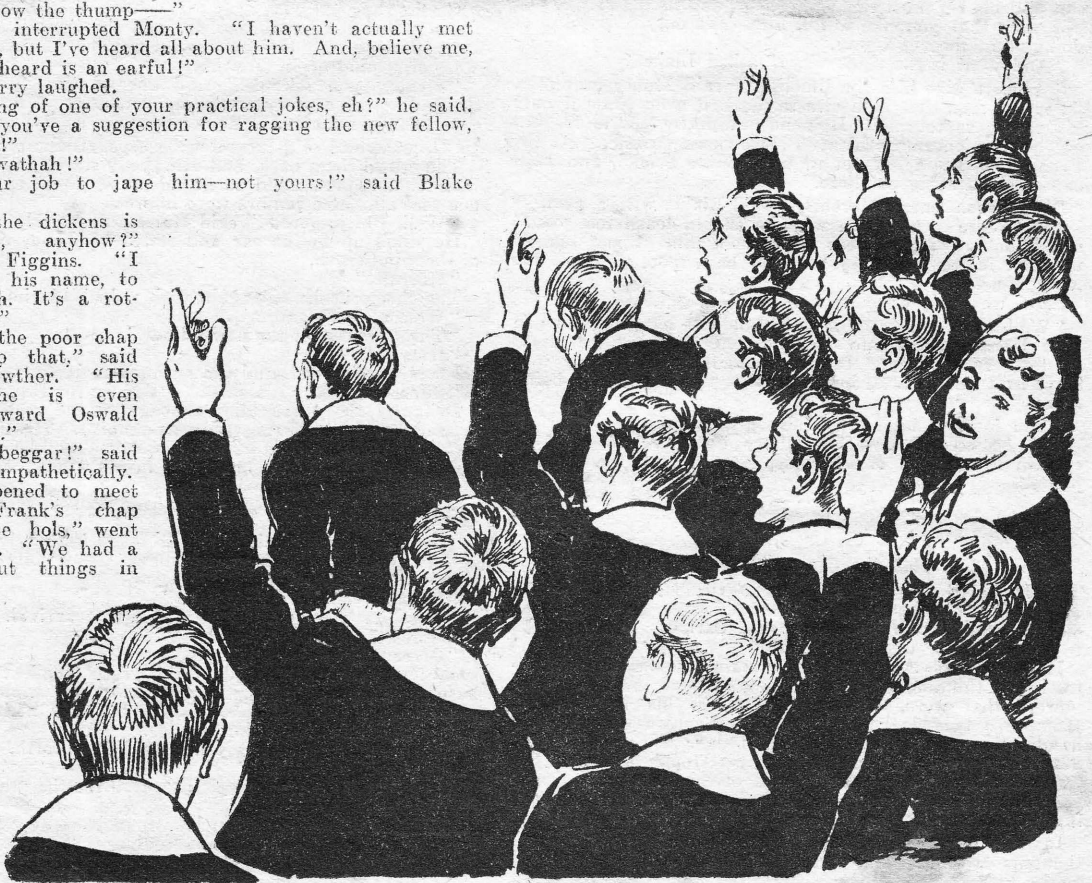
"Bai Jove! What a remarkable chap!"

"You're right, Gussy!" nodded Lowther. "But it just shows you the sort of fellow Handforth is. Perhaps 'spite' isn't quite the right word, though. The awful ass seems to think that it's a matter of duty for him to leave St. Frank's cold. It's a question of principle with him."

"Well, he must have some determination, anyhow," remarked Digby.

"Determination?" repeated Lowther. "Ye gods and little fishes! This fellow is as stubborn as a mule. He's big and brawny, with a rugged sort of face. He's got a punch like a steam-hammer, and his favourite pastime is to biff people over."

"A useful merchant, by the sound of him," chuckled Manners.



"He's a chap with fixed ideas, and nothing can shift them," continued Lowther. "As straight as a ramrod, and thundering good-hearted. In fact, there's nothing really wrong with him. The St. Frank's juniors are pretty cut up about losing him. But he's made up his mind, and nothing will shift him. She he's coming here."

"Like Alexander of old, he's seeking fresh worlds to conquer!" grinned Tom Merry.

"He'd better not try to conquer the Fourth!" said Blake darkly.

"My dear ass, that's just the point!" exclaimed Lowther. "Handforth isn't an ordinary new fellow. He doesn't really want to leave St. Frank's—he's only done it because of his dotty ideas about principle. And as he's an arrogant beggar, he'll come here full of determination to put St. Jim's on the map!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Aren't we on the map already?" roared Blake.

"Of course we are; but Handforth doesn't think so!" grinned Lowther. "He's got a rummy sort of mind. He thinks he's doing St. Frank's a permanent injury by leaving."

"Oh, my only hat!"

"Cheese it, Monty!"

"It's a fact!" said Lowther earnestly. "You wait until he comes, and then you'll find out that I'm right! Handforth believes that St. Frank's will go all to pieces because he's left, and it logically follows that he believes that St. Jim's will go off its head with delirious joy to welcome him into the fold."

"The fellow must be dotty!" said Herries bluntly.

"No, he's not dotty," replied Lowther. "He's only a born idiot!"

"Weally, Lowthah, isn't that the same thing?"

"Never mind, Gussy," chuckled Lowther. "Handforth is coming here this evening. He's making the journey by road, and Mr. Lathom told me that he's expected some time after seven. That gives us heaps of time to prepare."

"Prepare what?" demanded Figgins.

"There's one point I ought to mention—although I've already hinted at it," said Lowther. "Handforth is the most gullible merchant on earth."

"Gullible?"

"He'll believe anything," nodded Monty happily. "You can pull his leg until further orders, and he'll swallow any old yarn that you like to tell him. It's only a question of doing it in the right way."

"And what is the right way?" asked Blake.

"Why, to give him the limelight," said Monty promptly. "I understand that he'll rise to the bait every time if only his vanity is touched. He's not naturally conceited, but he's got an enormous idea of his own importance. At St. Frank's he was a big pot in the Middle School, and he'll expect to be a big pot here."

"He'll soon learn differently," said Blake, with a grin.

"But there's no reason why he should learn too soon," said Monty. "My wheeze is to spoof him. Spoof him as no other fellow in history has ever been spoofed. He's the ideal victim!"

"But where do we come in?" asked Figgins.

"Well, as a matter of fact, I shouldn't have invited you New House rotters into the game at all, only we might need Kerr," explained Lowther blandly. "We know that Kerr isn't ornamental, but he makes up for that by being useful."

"You footling idiot!" said Kerr wrathfully.

But he cooled down as Monty Lowther proceeded to explain the details of his scheme. And so the plotters plotted.

CHAPTER 2.

Hail the Conquering Hero!

EDWARD OSWALD HANDFORTH, late of St. Frank's, grunted with characteristic aggressiveness. "I'll show 'em!" he said darkly. "They'll be sorry for themselves now!"

It must be recorded, with a certain sadness, that Handforth was thinking of Dr. Malcolm Stafford, and the other powers that were, at St. Frank's. In his imagination, Handforth beheld the Head of St. Frank's wringing his hands with anguish on this fateful day. He pictured Dr. Stafford consulting earnestly with his Housemasters on the tragedy of losing the leading light of the Remove.

And it is fairly safe to say that Dr. Stafford had already forgotten Handforth's existence!

In this spirit, Handforth approached St. Jim's. His thoughts were still at St. Frank's—although, now and again, he was troubled by a twinge of doubt. What would it be like at St. Jim's? How would the fellows there greet

him? How would the school in general compare with St. Frank's?

But the die was cast, and Handforth was—as Monty Lowther had stated—a fellow with an iron determination. Other people, less polite, called it a pigheaded obstinacy.

The new fellow for St. Jim's was seated at the wheel of his Austin Seven, and the little car was humming along the road between Wayland and Rylcombe. Handforth was a big junior—rugged and brawny. He was hatless, for it was warm on this summer's evening, and his hair was tousled. In the rear of the car were two or three suit-cases, and some other odds and ends of luggage.

Handforth went everywhere in his Austin Seven. He had a special driving licence—"wangled" for him by a dotting aunt. And Handforth was thrilled by the thought that he would cause a sensation at St. Jim's. He knew well enough that the usual run of junior schoolboys did not own their own motor-cars.

Hours were within sight, and Handforth guessed that he was approaching Rylcombe. He had been told that St. Jim's was only a little way beyond the village. Dusk was falling, and it was growing late in the evening. But Handforth didn't care. It was the first day after the holidays, and he was a new fellow, and he wasn't likely to get into trouble.

He turned a bend of the road, and entered the old High Street of Rylcombe. He stared, automatically easing his foot from the throttle.

"Hallo!" he muttered. "What's all this?"

As far as he could see, the village street was crowded with juniors. They were so thick that he would either have to stop or run into them. Handforth was a reckless driver, but not reckless enough to take the latter course. He applied his brakes.

And while he continued to stare he heard shouts. It was obvious to him that these fellows belonged to St. Jim's. He recognised their caps. But he was puzzled by the fact that many of them were carrying big flags, and waving them enthusiastically. The old High Street was gay with colour, in spite of the falling daylight.

"Hurrah!"

"It's Handforth!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Three cheers for the new fellow!"

"Hip—hip—hurrah!"

Cheers rang out with lusty enthusiasm. Bewildered, Handforth pulled his handbrake on, and the Austin came to a stop. Immediately the car was surrounded. Excited juniors were swarming up in crowds.

"Steady, you fellows!" said one of the juniors in a shocked voice—a pleasant-looking youngster with curly hair—to wit, Tom Merry. "Remember who he is!"

"Great Scott! I'd forgotten!" gasped Blake penitently.

The crowd hung back, and everybody stared at Handforth with awe. There could be no mistaking those expressions; one and all, these juniors were impressed.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" said Handforth blankly.

He stood up in the car and rested his hands on the top of the windscreen.

"Hurrah!"

The cheers broke out again with redoubled vim.

"Welcome to Handforth!"

"Three cheers for the new fellow!"

"Hurrah!"

Flags were waved, and the enthusiasm increased.

"Silence!" went up a shout. "Silence for Handforth!"

Instantly the cheers died down, and the crowd waited, breathless with eagerness and excitement. Handforth was bewildered; he hadn't expected a reception like this! His imagination was vivid, but never in his wildest dreams had he pictured such a scene.

Tom Merry came forward, and he looked at Handforth with reverent respect.

"Is your name Handforth?" he asked hesitantly.

"Why, yes," said the new fellow. "It's jolly decent of you—"

"Edward Oswald Handforth?"

"Yes, that's my name," said the new arrival. "I used to be at St. Frank's, you know."

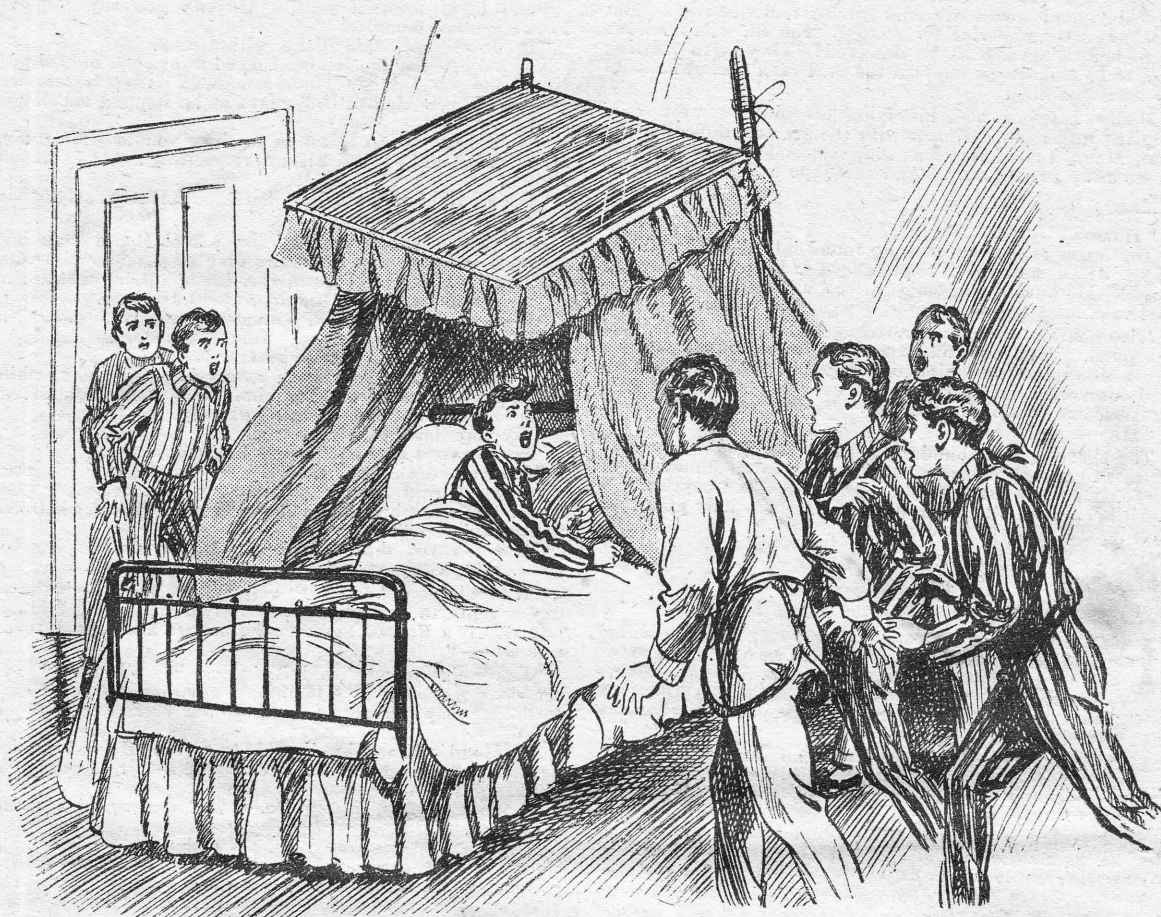
"Of course we know!" said Tom Merry. "Who doesn't know? Who hasn't heard of the great Handforth? Who hasn't whispered his name with awe and wonder? We welcome you to St. Jim's, Handforth! My name is Tom Merry, and I'm the junior skipper."

"Jolly pleased to meet you!" said Handforth, extending a huge paw.

Tom took it, but he wasn't prepared for the pressure that Handforth applied.

"Well, I'm glad that I'm known to you—by repute, anyhow!" said Handforth delightedly. "So you're Tom Merry, eh?"

"Yes, I'm in the Shell," replied Tom. "This chap is Jack Blake—the leader of the Fourth. You're going into the Fourth, aren't you?"



Handforth, opening his eyes, was just in time to see the canopy descending upon him like an avalanche. There was a splintering crash, a muffled confusion of thuds, and Handforth practically vanished. "Quick—quick!" yelled Blake. "To the rescue!" (See Chapter 6.)

"So I understand," replied Handforth, as he looked at Blake. "Pleased to meet you, Blake! So you're the leader of the Fourth, eh?"

"Yes!" said Jack Blake sadly. "But I don't suppose I shall be leader for long. Now that you've come, Handforth, I shall probably be a back number."

Handforth grinned with sheer delight.

"Well, of course, it's quite possible," he said genially. "As a matter of fact, I had already made up my mind to be the leader of the Fourth. But I'm jolly glad to hear that you're prepared to step down in my favour."

"What else can I do?" asked Blake humbly. "And you can rely upon us all to do our best to prove worthy of your presence, Handforth."

"Yaas, wathah!" beamed D'Arcy. "Blake, deah boy, kindly intwouce me!"

"This is Gussy—our pet dummy!" said Blake obligingly.

"Weally, Blake—"

"Leave it until afterwards, Gussy," interrupted Tom Merry briskly. "We mustn't forget our duty to the new fellow. It isn't every term that we get a new chap with such a reputation as Handforth's. Remember, too, what a marvellous school he has come from!"

"St. Frank's!" said Blake dreamily. "Yes, you're right, Tom Merry! All honour to Handforth, and let us hope and pray that we shall please him!"

"Hear, hear!" went up a reverent chorus.

Handforth swelled visibly. His face was flushed, his eyes were gleaming. And if there were one or two explosive chuckles from the rear ranks—emitted from sheer lack of self-control—he did not hear them.

And the St. Jim's juniors were not only amazed, but they were overjoyed. This new fellow was swallowing everything, exactly as Monty Lowther had predicted! Never for an instant did he suspect that he was being japed!

It was too good to be true!

But as the wily Monty had foreseen, Handforth's mind was very receptive for such a piece of fooling. He believed that St. Frank's was mourning over his loss—and thus it stood to reason that St. Jim's was rejoicing over its gain.

And once the initial stages of this gigantic jape were successfully negotiated, the rest would be easy.

And the initial stages were already over!

In a word, Handforth had not only swallowed the bait, but he had gulped down the hook, the line, and the sinker, so to speak.

"Now then, you fellows!" shouted Tom Merry briskly.

"Where are the ropes?"

"Hurrah!"

"The ropes—the ropes!"

With admirable precision numbers of fellows ran forward with ropes, and they proceeded to tie these to the front axle of the Austin Seven. Handforth regarded them in amazement.

"Hi!" he roared. "What's the idea?"

Tom Merry recoiled from that megaphone-like voice.

"We can't allow you to drive to St. Jim's," he said firmly. "We're going to pull you the rest of the way in triumph!"

"Great Scott!" said Handforth blankly.

"It's always done with famous men," said Monty Lowther gravely. "Please, Handforth, allow us to have this simple pleasure."

Handforth swelled visibly again, and one or two of his waistcoat buttons were in danger of bursting off.

"Oh, rather!" he said, waving a benevolent hand. "Go ahead! If it's going to please you fellows, I don't mind a bit!"

"Hurrah!"

"Good old Handforth!"

The cheers rang out again, and soon, amid much excitement and commotion, the teams got to work. They hauled on the ropes, and the Austin Seven was pulled through the village in triumph.

Flags were waved, and a number of other flags had been stuck into the rear of the car, and they billowed out majestically in the breeze.

And Edward Oswald Handforth sat at the wheel, glowing with delight.

In a vague sort of way, he had pictured his entry into the

quad at St. Jim's. The juniors would crowd round him, probably, and would ask him all sorts of questions. But this was too wonderful for words! The St. Jim's fellows were honouring him as he deserved! They were treating him as he had always felt that the St. Frank's fellows should have treated him!

Monty Lowther and his fellow-conspirators were only bottling up their merriment with the greatest difficulty. In fact, Monty's chief fear was that somebody would give the game away prematurely. And this jape had hardly started yet.

"Here we are!"
"Hurrah!"

The teams at the ropes swung round into the old gateway of St. Jim's, and the Austin followed, Handforth steering deftly. He hardly had time to look at the grey buildings, and to admire the picturesque, ivy-covered walls.

His attention was concentrated upon the crowds that lined the quad. And now more cheers were ringing out. On every side stood the juniors, waving their caps, jumping up and down with excited joy.

"Welcome to Handforth!"
"Hip-hip-hurrah!"

The cheering was thunderous. And Handforth expanded more and more, believing, in that celebrated innocence of his, that he was thoroughly deserving of this reception.

All his doubts were thrown aside. He was jolly glad now that he had come to St. Jim's!

CHAPTER 3.

Spoofing the New Fellow!

THE impression that was being systematically drilled into Handforth's mind was that he was a fellow of immense importance. Of course, he had always known this—but it was refreshing and exhilarating to find that the St. Jim's juniors were prepared to give him his rightful due.

Like the prophet of old, who was of no account in his own country, Handforth had always been bitterly disappointed at the utter lack of appreciation shown him by the St. Frank's fellows. In a sort of way he had been a celebrated character; but even he couldn't blind himself to the fact that St. Frank's, as a whole, had treated him as a joke.

How different it was at St. Jim's!

There were no derisive laughs—no rude interruptions—no disrespect. At last Handforth was enjoying that honour and respect which he felt his due. His lightest words were received with enthusiasm; these St. Jim's chaps hung on his every utterance.

"Hallo! What's all the excitement out here?" asked Bernard Glyn, as he emerged from the School House doorway. "My hat! Who's the funny-looking merchant in the exaggerated pram?"

Handforth's smile vanished, but before he could say anything, a chorus of shocked warnings went up. Blake dashed forward, his face full of dismay.

"Dry up, Glyn, you ass!" he hissed. "This chap is Handforth!"

Bernard Glyn started violently.
"Handforth?" he repeated, with awe.
"Yes, you footling idiot!"

"Oh, I say!" ejaculated Glyn penitently. "I'm awfully sorry! I didn't know! I—I suppose I ought to apologise?"

"Yaas, wathah!" said D'Arcy, jamming his monocle into his eye, and regarding Glyn with stern disapproval. "Weally, Glyn, I am surprised at you! Surely you could recognise that this—"

"All right, Gussy!" interrupted Glyn hastily. "But the light's failing, and I couldn't see properly."

He ran down the steps and looked at Handforth humbly.

"I apologise!" he muttered. "I do hope that you forgive me, Handforth!"

"Oh, that's all right!" said the new junior, waving a lordly hand. "We're all liable to make mistakes! Say no more about it."

"Oh, thank you!" gasped Glyn, with relief.

Handforth's sang-froid was restored. Little did he guess that this was merely another part of the general spoof! And the amazing thing to the majority of the juniors was that he swallowed it all!

"Now then—forward!" shouted Tom Merry briskly. "Stand back, most of you! Haven't you any respect? Forward—the committee!"

"By Jove—yes!" said Blake, with a start.

The majority of the fellows backed away, and only Study No. 6 and the Terrible Three remained. They surrounded Handforth as a kind of bodyguard as he stepped out of the Austin Seven.

"We'd like you to allow us to show you to your study, Handforth," said Tom Merry respectfully. "Is it all right?"

"It's all right with me," replied Handforth serenely. "Go ahead!"

And they solemnly mounted the School House steps and tramped indoors. Up the stairs they went, and when they got into the Fourth Form passage, Blake hurried forward in advance, and flung open the door of Study No. 6.

"Here we are!" he said, with deep respect.

"Walk into my parlour," said the spider to the fly," murmured Monty, under his breath.

All unsuspecting, Handforth strode into the study, while the committee made way for him. Just inside, Handforth came to a halt and looked round dazedly.

"My only hat!" he ejaculated.

"Isn't it good enough?" asked Blake anxiously.

"I twust, deah boy, that the studay meets with your approval?" said Arthur Augustus, with concern. "Bai Jove! How uttaly wotten it would be if Handforth failed to appreciate—"

"It's—it's not that!" broke in Handforth, finding his voice. "By George! Is—is this my study?"

"It'll suit you, won't it?" asked Tom Merry, evading a direct reply to the question. "I'm in the Shell, I know, and this is a Fourth Form study, but we naturally take an interest—"

"Leave this to me," said Blake, as they all entered, and the door was closed. "If there's anything wrong, Handforth, just say the word. We'll do our best to have it put right."

But Handforth was hardly able to speak. He was startled by the appearance of that wonderful study. Nothing at St. Frank's could compare with it!

In point of fact, Study No. 6 had undergone a transformation.

A soft carpet was on the floor, and near the hearthrug were two easy-chairs. A plush lounge reposed near the window, and a beautiful desk was set against the wall. The electric lights were shaded—delicately, artistically shaded. The whole study was suffused with a warm, eye-pleasing glow.

Handforth did not know that practically all this furniture had been borrowed, for this evening only, from some friendly seniors! And Tom Merry & Co. and Blake & Co. thought it unnecessary to mention the fact.

"Why, it's—it's wonderful!" said Handforth, at last.

A chorus of relieved sighs went up.

"Bai Jove!" said D'Arcy, beaming. "That's taken a fwrightful load off my mind, deah boys!"

"Rather!" said Blake, his tone full of delight. "Handforth likes it! He's satisfied, you chaps! That's fine, isn't it?"

"But—but look here!" ejaculated Handforth, staring at the solemn-looking juniors. "I can't understand it, you know!"

"Can't understand what?" asked Tom Merry politely.

"Why, this study."

"What can't you understand?"

"I mean, it's so thundering good!" said Handforth, still looking round. "At St. Frank's they haven't any studies like this. At least, not in the Remove."

"Well, of course, we mustn't let you get a wrong impression," said Tom Merry, smiling. "As a matter of fact, Handforth, this is the only study at St. Jim's with such wonderful furniture in it."

"The only Fourth Form study," amended Blake.

"That's what I meant," nodded Tom. "And, naturally, Handforth, we brought you to it."

Handforth's smile was becoming broader and broader.

"That was jolly decent of you!" he said contentedly.

"Well, what else could we do?" asked Tom Merry. "You've got to remember who you are, Handforth. All the rest of us pile three and four into a study, and it's just the same in the

The Solution of Last Week's Cross-Word Puzzle.

B	B	B	B	B	B	B	B
L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L
I	I	I	I	I	I	I	I
T	T	T	T	T	T	T	T
H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H
E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E
L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L
Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y

Shell. But you, being such a distinguished fellow must have something better."

"We don't mind a bit," said Blake eagerly. "As long as you're satisfied, Handforth, we shall be pleased."

"Yaas, wathah," agreed Gussy, nodding. "It'll be a fyghtful pleasuah to us, deah boy, to weceive your assuah-wance that ewevyth'in' in all wight."

Handforth sat down in one of the easy-chairs, and he tried to analyse his feelings. He knew that he was overjoyed. He knew, also, that he was amazed; but he tried not to reveal this latter emotion. He felt that it was up to him to take these gifts as a matter of course.

"I like St. Jim's," he said firmly. "I don't mind admitting to you fellows that I was just a bit uncertain about it. But now that I've arrived, I'm jolly glad I made the change."

"I'll bet they're dreadfully cut up at St. Frank's," said Monty Lowther sadly.

"Oh, well, I suppose they're a bit downhearted!" agreed Handforth, with a nod. "Still, it was their own fault. And now that I'm at St. Jim's, I mean to stick here!"

"It sounds too good to be true!" said Herries dreamily.

The japers felt that they could now say anything they liked. Handforth was well away on the flood tide of make-believe. Having gone thus far without suspecting the truth, he was an easy victim. The juniors were now convinced that Monty Lowther had been right when he had said that Handforth's leg could be pulled until further orders.

Tap, tap!

"There's somebody at the door!" said Blake, looking annoyed. "How dare they come in here now and interrupt Handforth?"

The junior from St. Frank's rose to his feet, freshly surprised.

"Don't the chaps barge in, just as they like?" he inquired.

His companions looked shocked.

"They might barge into other studies, Handforth, but not into yours!" said Tom Merry, shaking his head. "I should hope they'd have more respect."

"They didn't have much respect for me at St. Frank's," said Handforth feelingly.

"Ah, but you're at St. Jim's now!" pointed out Blake.

Tap, tap!

"Bai Jove! I wondah if this is Mr. Lathom?" said Arthur Augustus, taking his cue from Monty Lowther. "I shouldn't be at all surprised, deah boys! Pewwaps that accounts for his persistence."

"Mr. Lathom!" repeated Handforth. "Who's he?"

"The master of the Fourth," murmured Blake. "Our Form master, you know. Are you going to let him see you?"

Handforth stared.

"Let him see me?" he repeated.

"Because, if you don't want to, I'll just pop out and warn him," said Blake. "A word from me will be enough, of course. He'll go away, and come back when you want him."

"Bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus found it impossible to restrain that exclamation. Surely, Handforth would smell a rat now? But he didn't. He glowed with greater pleasure than ever. With a certain vague bewilderment, he was realising that his importance was even greater than he had even privately suspected. Form masters themselves were ready to bow to him.

"Oh, well, we might as well be friendly!" he said, with a magisterial wave of his hand. "Let Mr. Lathom come in. I don't mind seeing him."

Blake made a curious sound in his throat, and Herries and Digby were compelled to turn aside. Monty Lowther remained perfectly solemn, but Tom Merry and Manners had great difficulty in keeping their faces straight.

Blake opened the door, and the figure of Mr. Lathom stood outside.

"Er—I understand that Handforth, the new boy, has arrived?" said Mr. Lathom's voice.

"Yes, sir," replied Blake.

"May I have a few words with him?" asked Mr. Lathom hesitantly. "Pray, do not disturb him, if he is busy. I will come back later. Only I thought that the moment was perhaps opportune."

"That's all right, sir! Come in!" sang out Handforth boisterously. "I'll admit I'm a bit busy, but that doesn't matter. Come in, sir!"

Mr. Lathom entered, and Blake deftly closed the door. In the subdued, artistic glow of the study, Handforth saw a figure in cap and gown. He saw a smiling face, and he came to the conclusion that the Form master was good enough. He certainly did not suspect that "Mr. Lathom's" glasses were unnecessary, and that his hair was false. But, then, Handforth had never seen Mr. Lathom. And he was only seeing this newcomer in a subdued light.

"Ah, so you are Handforth?" said Mr. Lathom genially. "Splendid! I'm very pleased to meet you, Handforth! Indeed, I may say that I am proud to meet you!"

He slapped Handforth on the back, and then gripped his hand.

"Thanks awfully, sir!" said Handforth delightedly. "You're my Form master, aren't you?"

"Officially, yes," agreed Mr. Lathom, digging Handforth in the ribs. "But, unofficially, we can be a little more free and easy."

"By George!" said Handforth, with a gulp.

"Stand back, you other boys!" went on Mr. Lathom sternly. "How dare you crowd round Handforth in this way?"

"Sorry, sir!" gasped Blake.

"We forgot ourselves, sir," murmured Lowther.

"Then you must not forget yourselves again!" said Mr. Lathom, with dignity. "You will realise, Handforth, that it is necessary for me to be somewhat stern with the—ahem!—rank and file. You, naturally, come within a different category."

"Yes, sir," said Handforth helplessly. "Oh, rather!"

CHAPTER 4. Keeping It Up!

THE amazing part of the whole affair was that Handforth was "sucked in."

At any moment during the course of the jape, the practical jokers had been prepared to indulge in their long-pent-up laugh. But as long as the thing would keep going they were ready to carry on.

And it now seemed that Handforth was as innocent and unsuspecting as ever. He had got past the stage of being surprised, and he was now taking everything as a matter of course. And this was the cream of the joke.

Greatly encouraged, "Mr. Lathom" slapped Handforth on the back again.

"There are exceptions to every rule, my boy," he said, with a chuckle. "And you, being such a celebrated character, will naturally be an exception at St. Jim's."

"Thanks awfully, sir!"

"Dear me! My dear boy, why do you keep saying 'sir' to me?" asked Mr. Lathom mildly. "I want us to be friends. I want us to be familiar. These other boys are different. Naturally, they are different. I cannot demean myself by being familiar with every Tom, Dick, and Harry."

"Oh, rather not, sir!" said Handforth, regarding Blake & Co. as though they were so many microbes.

"I would mention that my Christian name is Philip," continued Mr. Lathom genially. "And among my very special friends I am always addressed as 'Phil.' You must remember that, Handforth."

He chuckled, and repeated the rib-digging process. "Ulp!" gasped Handforth. "Yes, sir! I—I mean, of course, I'll remember it!"

"Splendid!" beamed Mr. Lathom. "Now, don't forget—to my special friends, I am Phil. And I already count you as one of my special friends, Handforth. I trust you will not be offended if I call you Handy?"

"Oh, sir!" said Monty Lowther, in a reproachful voice. "Eh? Ahem! Well, perhaps it would be somewhat too familiar," said Mr. Lathom hastily. "Well, Handforth, I must be going. I can see that I am wasting your valuable time. Don't forget to come along to my study whenever you wish. Drop in at any old time. Look upon it as your own!"

And Mr. Lathom, waving his hand, bustled to the door and went out. Handforth sank back, and sat at the edge of



EDWARD OSWALD HANDFORTH, late of St. Frank's, thinks, in the fondness of his heart, that he's going to make St. Jim's sit up and take notice now that he's arrived in their midst. But he doesn't know Tom Merry & Co. as well as they know him!

the table. A few beads of perspiration were showing on his heated brow.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" he ejaculated blankly.

"Do you like our Form master?" asked Blake anxiously.

Handforth recovered himself.

"Like him?" he repeated. "By George! He's the most wonderful Form master I've ever met!"

"Yaas, wathah!" said D'Arcy. "I'm vewy much afraid that we shall soon be jealous of you, Handforth, deah boy! But, of course, Mr. Lathom can see the difference!"

Handforth was vastly impressed. Mr. Lathom's visit had left him feeling slightly weak. In his wildest dreams he had never imagined that a Form master could be so genial and friendly as Mr. Lathom had been. But then Handforth pulled himself up. He was remembering his importance! Everybody at St. Jim's knew of it, and, what was more to the point, everybody at St. Jim's appreciated him.

And appreciation was what Edward Oswald Handforth had always pined for. At St. Frank's he hadn't received it. The fellows had shown him a singular lack of respect.

As for the japers, they were heroes, one and all. It was only by the exercise of the greatest possible self-restraint that they kept it up. Their one desire was to burst into a yell of prolonged laughter.

But that would spoil everything.

"We're awfully glad that you like Mr. Lathom!" said Tom Merry, as a new idea came into his head. "He's not my Form master; but Blake, here, can tell you a few things about old Lathom."

"Rather!" said Blake. "He's pretty decent, on the whole, but he's never treated any of us as he treats you, Handforth. That's the best of being famous."

"Oh, well, of course!" said Handforth modestly.

"There's one thing that I think I'd better mention," said Tom Merry, becoming grave. "In fact, as junior skipper, it's my duty to mention it, Handforth."

"Go ahead!" said Handforth, who was now prepared for anything.

"Well, it's a warning," continued Tom. "Mr. Lathom was very nice to you just now, and everything seemed to be going smoothly. But it won't be all jam."

Handforth, who had been feeling that there was a catch in it somewhere, looked at Tom Merry quickly. He had received a jar. But he hadn't the faintest suspicion of the real truth.

"It won't be all jam?" he repeated.

"Well, there's a bit of a snag," said Tom, while the other juniors looked at him wonderingly. "You see, we've got a kind of unwritten law at St. Jim's, here. You can't possibly be fully recognised as a fully-fledged Fourth-Former until you have carried out certain tests."

"Tests?"

"Bai Jove!" ejaculated D'Arcy. "Weally, Tom Mewwy, I don't seem to wemembah—"

"That's enough, Gussy!" murmured Blake, stamping on D'Arcy's elegant toe.

"Yawwooooh!" howled Arthur Augustus wildly.

"You were saying, Tom Merry?" said Blake politely.

"Blake, you fwabjous dummay!" shouted D'Arcy. "You have wuined my shoe! You have ewushed my foot!"

"Never mind your foot, Gussy!" said Tom Merry. "I'm just explaining things to the new fellow. Well, Handforth, the fact is, every new chap at St. Jim's is supposed to tackle these tests. There are four of them, and they've all got to be polished off during the new fellow's first month."

Monty Lowther felt that this was going a little too far. He, as the prime practical joker, should have been told of this. But Tom Merry had only just thought of the scheme—although nobody would have suspected it, judging by the way he talked.

"I don't know what you mean—tests," said Handforth, staring.

"They're stiff!" said Tom solemnly. "They may even seem silly, when you hear them first; but that's not my fault."

"Don't forget that these tests are an unwritten law!" said Blake stoutly.

"Yaas, wathah!"

They hadn't the faintest notion what Tom Merry was getting at, but they felt that it was their duty to back him up.

"Being a new fellow, Handforth, you've got to do these four tests," said the Shell captain, lowering his voice to a mysterious whisper. "Firstly, you've got to fight a prefect, and knock him clean out."

"Fight a prefect?" repeated Handforth, staring.

"That's what I said!" replied Tom, as serious as an owl.

"Well, of course, that'll be pretty easy!" said Handforth, after a moment's thought. "I don't mind fighting anybody! There was hardly a chap at St. Frank's that I couldn't lick with one hand!"

"By Jove, that's fine!" said Tom eagerly. "Then we can

dismiss the first test with a light heart. The second is a bit more difficult. You'll have to score a century, batting for the First Eleven!"

"Oh, crumbs!" breathed Blake, under his breath.

Herries and Digby nearly shrieked with laughter, but Blake stopped them in the nick of time. And Handforth, as serenely innocent as ever, merely grinned.

"Score a century for the First Eleven?" he said. "Oh, that's nothing!"

"Nun-nothing?" gasped Manners.

"Nothing at all!" said Handforth lightly. "I've played for the First Eleven at St. Frank's before now."

"And did you score a century?" asked Lowther, in an awed voice.

"Well, no," admitted Handforth reluctantly. "Not exactly! But if some silly ass hadn't caught the ball—"

"Ha, ha, ha! Ahem! Sorry!" said Blake hurriedly.

Tom Merry was racking his brain for the other two mythical tests, and his face suddenly cleared.

"Thirdly, you have to sleep at least one night in the Housemaster's bed," he said, as solemn as a judge. "That's a very important thing, Handforth, so don't forget it."

"Sleep in the Housemaster's bed?"

"For one night!" said Tom firmly.

"But—but why?"

"It's no good asking me why," replied Tom. "How should I know? This unwritten law, you know—"

"By George, yes! I'd forgotten the unwritten law!"

"And finally, you'll have to raid Rylcombe Grammar School single-handed," said the Shell captain. "What's more, you'll have to bring back a signed declaration from Gordon Gay to the effect that the Grammarians aren't fit to clean our boots!"

"Gordon Gay is the Grammarian Junior leader," explained Blake kindly.

"Here, I say!" protested Handforth. "How can I raid a school single-handed? I've never seen the place, and I don't know—"

He broke off as he saw that the juniors were regarding him with amazement.

"Bai Jove!" burst out D'Arcy. "You're not weally tellin' us, deah boy, that you can't do it?"

"Nun-no!" gasped Handforth. "I—I was only thinking that—"

"You!" said Blake incredulously. "The great Handforth, the famous Handforth of St. Frank's! Why, you're trying to kid us! You can do anything, Handforth! There's nothing in the world that's beyond your powers!"

"Nothing!" said Tom Merry, wagging a finger at Handforth. "We know about you, old man, so you can't fool us!"

Handforth gulped and pulled himself together.

"Oh, rather!" he said breathlessly. "These tests don't scare me! They're nothing! At least, they're nothing to me!"

The japers were nearly convulsed. They felt annoyed with Tom Merry for not having warned them. He might have spoilt the whole joke by taking them unprepared. Not that they need have worried. Handforth was being carried completely away by his own importance.

"I thought I'd better tell you about these tests, you know," said Tom Merry. "They've all got to be done during your first month, and—"

"That's all right!" interrupted Handforth, with a lofty wave of his hand. "Leave everything to me, Tom Jerry!"

"My name is Tom Merry!" said Tom humbly.

"Sorry!" grinned Handforth. "What's the difference?"

"Not much," agreed Tom. "Well, you see, unless you do all these things during your first month at St. Jim's you'll never be officially recognised as a member of the Fourth."

"I think I had better point out," said Blake, "that if you're successful, Handforth, you'll naturally be the leader of the Form."

Handforth's eyes gleamed.

"Then I've got to be successful!" he said promptly.

"Even before I came here I'd made up my mind to be the leader of the Form before the end of the first month!"

"Great Scott!"

"And now I think I'd better go and see the Head," remarked Handforth contentedly. "I must say, you chaps, that I'm pleased with St. Jim's. It's the most wonderful school I've ever been in!"

"Joyous, happy words!" murmured Lowther, in a dreamy voice.

"Yaas, wathah!" beamed Gussy. "It makes us vewy relieved to heah you ewackin' up St. Jim's, Handforth."

"Well, I believe in speaking as I find it!" said Handforth.

"I'm jolly pleased to know that you fellows are ready to knuckle under to my rule. I'm a born leader, as you've probably seen, and there must be something about my personality that compels respect and obedience."

"He knows it, you see?" said Tom Merry, glancing at the others.

"And now, about the Head," went on Handforth. "It's

getting a bit late, isn't it? I'm supposed to report myself to your headmaster, and there might be a bit of trouble if I forget him. I know what headmasters are! So if you'll excuse me—"

He broke off, looking at the juniors in astonishment, for they were all grinning and chuckling.

"What's the joke?" demanded Handforth.

"My dear chap, you will have your fun, won't you?" grinned Tom Merry. "Fancy telling us that you're going to see the Head! It's the Head's place to come to see you!"

"Wha-a-at?" gasped Handforth.

"Of course it is!" said Blake boisterously. "Any other new boy, naturally, would go to the Head. But you, being such a great man, mustn't lower yourself like that, Handforth."

CHAPTER 5.

Too Good to be True!

"GREAT SCOTT!"

Handforth pulled himself together with difficulty.

Tom Merry & Co., and the rightful owners of Study No. 6, were half-expecting the new fellow to look

Handforth's complacent countenance satisfied the japers that he was still serenely unconscious of the true position.

"Run out and fetch the Head, Herries!" said Blake quickly.

"I'll go like the wind!" said Herries.

He blundered to the door and escaped. He was only too glad to get away, so that he could stagger to the end of the passage and give vent to his bottled-up laughter.

"I'll go, too!" said Manners, in a strained voice.

He staggered out, and when he reached the end of the passage he fairly shrieked with laughter. Herries was already there, holding his sides in pain, and tears were streaming down his cheeks.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Dry up, you silly asses!" said Bernard Glyn, shaking them. "How's everything going?"

"Don't ask us!" sobbed Manners. "The new chap is spoofed up to the collar!"

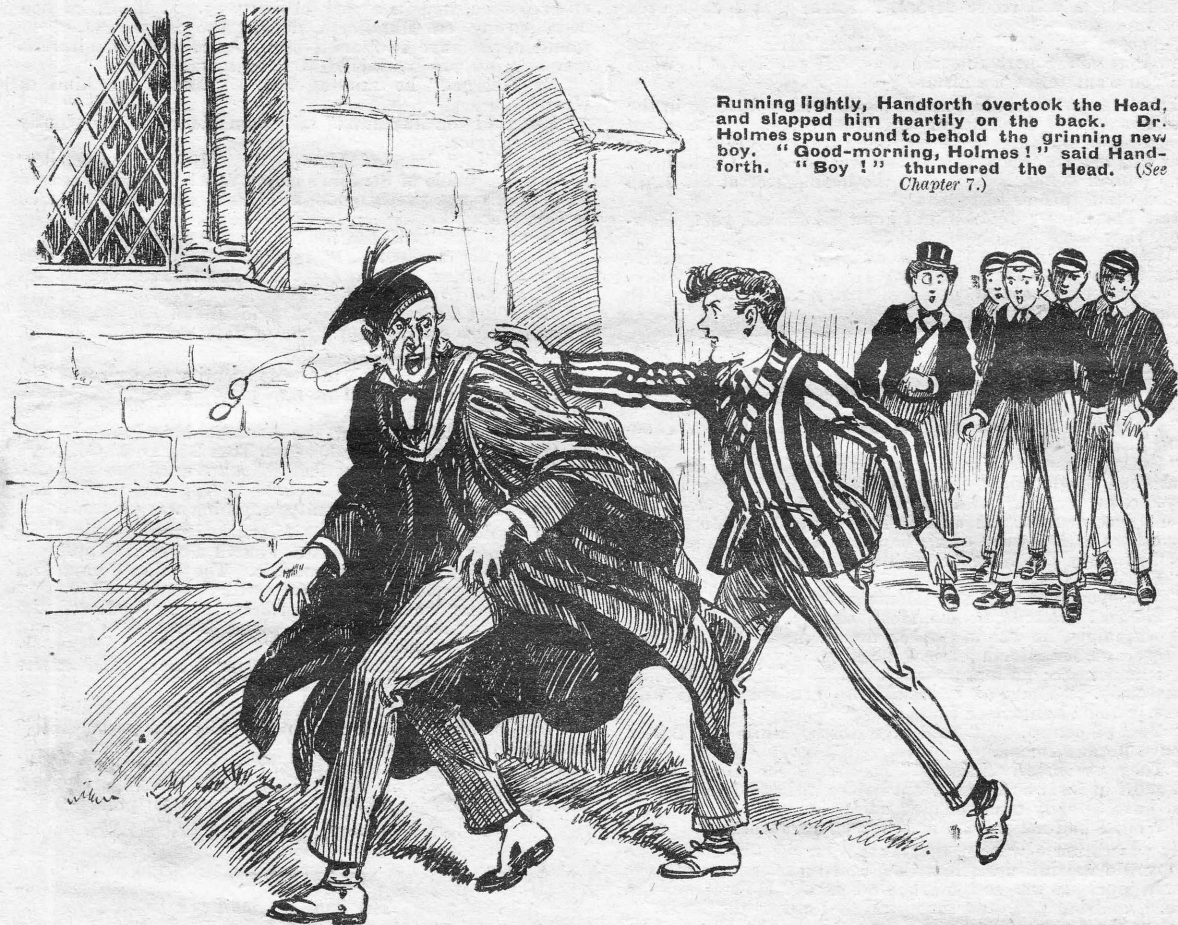
"Ha, ha, ha!"

"He's drinking it all in like champagne!" moaned Herries.

"Yes, but what's happening in there?" demanded Levison.

There were a good many juniors collected at the corner, and they were all eager. Hovering in the doorway of a neighbouring study, a dignified figure could be seen—a figure

Running lightly, Handforth overtook the Head, and slapped him heartily on the back. Dr. Holmes spun round to behold the grinning new boy. "Good-morning, Holmes!" said Handforth. "Boy!" thundered the Head. (See Chapter 7.)



at them suspiciously. But he didn't. A slow smile of gratification was spreading over his rugged features.

"I hadn't thought of it in that way!" he said at last.

"The Head's got to come and see me, eh?"

"Rather!"

"You think I should be lowering myself if I went to him?"

"It would be most frightfully infwa dig, deah boy," said D'Arcy, shaking his head. "Not with the avevage wun of juniahs, you undahstand, but you're a special case."

"A very special case," said Monty firmly.

Handforth nodded.

"Well, I suppose I'd better wait until the Head comes," he said, sinking into one of the chairs. "Perhaps somebody would be good enough to tell the Head that I'm ready to see him?"

"Oh crumbs!" gurgled Blake.

Handforth had swallowed this, too! And there he sat, like some Indian potentate, graciously consenting to see the Head! It was too good to be true! But one glance at

surprisingly like Dr. Holmes, the reverend Head of St. Jim's. Only this particular Dr. Holmes was grinning in a most un-Head-like manner.

"What about me?" he inquired. "Where do I come in?"

"Now!" gurgled Herries. "We've come to fetch you! Handforth has consented to see you at once!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Don't give the game away, you chaps!" begged Manners, with tears of mirth in his eyes. "Oh crumbs! This is too rich for words! Monty said that we could pull this chap's leg—and he's a scream! Let's keep it up for all it's worth—until to-morrow morning, if we can!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

In Study No. 6 Handforth was settling himself more comfortably in his chair. He now felt that he was firmly established. The juniors held him in awe; his own Form master had treated him with deference; and now he was waiting to graciously interview the Head.

Tap!

"Here he is!" breathed Tom Merry. "Look out, you chaps!"

"Bai Jove! My tie isn't stwaight!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, in anguish.

The door opened, and Dr. Holmes walked in. At least, he looked like Dr. Holmes—and when he spoke he spoke like Dr. Holmes, and surely this was good enough for Handforth? And in the subdued glow of the study the newcomer undoubtedly looked like the genuine article.

"Er—may I come in?" inquired the Head, with a nervous cough.

"Rather, sir!" said Handforth, without even rising. "The fellows said that you wanted to see me, so I told them to bring you along."

"It was very considerate of you, Handforth, I am sure!" said Dr. Holmes, as he advanced and hesitatingly took Handforth's hand. "I had been hoping that you would find time to see me. And, needless to say, I am gratified at your singular generosity."

"That's all right!" said Handforth kindly. "Of course, to-morrow would have been soon enough, really. Strictly speaking, I don't like to be bothered during my first evening—"

"Dear me!" said the Head in alarm. "In that case, Handforth, I will retire at once! I fear that I have been presumptuous—"

"Not at all, sir!" interrupted Handforth. "Don't go! Now that you're here you might as well get it over! What did you want to see me about?"

That Handforth could actually believe himself to be in the presence of his headmaster was incredible. The other occupants of the study were well-nigh stunned. Was it a fact that this extraordinary new fellow was fooled? Could he, a sane human being, believe that the headmaster of St. Jim's would come to him like this?

But Tom Merry & Co. didn't know Handforth yet! However, they were rapidly learning!

"Really, Handforth, there is nothing that I particularly want to see you about," said the Head, in a flurried voice. "But it is only natural, perhaps, that I should be eager to make your acquaintance."

"Yes, of course, sir!"

"You are no ordinary new boy, Handforth, as, no doubt, you are well aware," continued the pseudo Head. "And at St. Jim's we are not particularly formal, as you may have discovered."

"I think it's a fine system, sir!" said Handforth enthusiastically.

"But you must realise that we have to be very careful," continued the Head. "Do not imagine that I allow all my boys to be familiar with me: Such riff-raff as these are beneath contempt!" he added, indicating Tom Merry and the others with a wave of his hand. "As you have seen for yourself, they are little better than microbes!"

"Bai Jove!"

"You—you burbling New House rotter—"

"Silence!" thundered the Head sternly.

Fortunately, he was in time to drown the chorus that had arisen, and Handforth noticed nothing.

"I must be patient with them," said Dr. Holmes generously. "You and I, Handforth, can sympathise with them in their half-witted imbecility."

"Yes, of course, sir," said Handforth; while the School House juniors fumed.

"They are merely infants!" continued the Head sadly. "Youths in form and figure, but babies in brain! Doubtless you have already observed this curious fact?"

"Well, I had noticed it; sir!" agreed Handforth.

It was rather a wonder that Tom Merry & Co. and Blake & Co. did not fall upon him then and there, and wreck the whole jape. It was as remarkable that Dr. Holmes was not seized, and bumped, and shot head first out of the study.

They were prevented from doing this by the clanging of a distant bell.

"Bai Jove!" ejaculated D'Arcy, with a start. "Bed-time, deah boys!"

"Well, I'm blessed!" said Blake.

And I've just wemembahed that we've not had suppah!" went on Gussy. "How fwightfully wotten! Weally, Blake, I wegard you as an ass! You should have weminded us—"

"Dry up, Gussy!" growled Blake. "Remember who's here!"

"Blake—D'Arcy!" rapped out the Head. "You will each write me five hundred lines as a punishment for these impertinent interruptions!"

"Why, you—you— Yes, sir!" gasped Blake.

"Bai Jove! I uttahly wefuse—"

"Since it is bed-time, Handforth, I must leave you," said Dr. Holmes, turning to the new fellow again. "Well, don't forget to look me up."

"Look you up, sir?"

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"And it is quite unnecessary for you to 'sir' me," continued the Head genially. "My name is Holmes. Call me Holmes, if you like."

"Oh, dear!" said Handforth feebly.

"I would mention that my full name is Dr. Richard Holmes," continued the Head. "Dicky, for short. Well, my boy, this is a proud moment for me! Here you are, in my school! Handforth—the wonderful Handforth! It is something that I have dreamed about, but something that I hardly believed possible!"

He shook Handforth's hand warmly again, and beamed with delight.

"Well, well! Good-night, Handforth!" he added, while the new fellow was still speechless. "Don't forget what I have told you! Drop in whenever you like! My study is yours! My entire house is yours! Whenever you would prefer to have dinner with me, or even breakfast, don't trouble to give me any warning. Just walk in!"

And Dr. Holmes waved his hand, strode to the door, and passed out.

"My only sainted aunt!" breathed Handforth dazedly. Surely he had guessed? But not a bit of it! There was only one Handforth, and he had long since passed the point when he might have suspected. This jape had been worked up crescendo, and in a very brainy way. If the Head had been sprung on Handforth during the initial stages he would never have swallowed him. As it was, Handforth's unique mind was bewildered, but innocent.

"By George!" he said at last. "That's the kind of Head!"

"I'm glad you like him!" said Tom Merry, in a curiously strangled voice.

"Like him!" laughed Handforth. "He's a top-notch! In fact, the whole of St. Jim's is first-rate! I always thought St. Frank's was pretty good, but it's a dusthole compared to this place!"

"Hear, hear!" said the juniors, in one voice.

"Absolutely a dusthole!" repeated Handforth. "At St. Jim's they know how to treat a fellow! They realise his worth at the first glance!"

"Ahem! Let's be going!" said Blake diplomatically. "You'll allow us to escort you upstairs to the dormitory, won't you, Handforth, please?"

Fortunately, Handforth made no mention of supper. The japers had deliberately kept him here, in Study No. 6, so that he would have no opportunity of going into Hall. For there he would have met the genuine Mr. Latham, and possibly the genuine Head. And Tom Merry & Co. were anxious to keep this practical joke up until the morrow. It seemed incredible that it could be kept up until then; but with Handforth, apparently, anything was possible.

The juniors tramped upstairs, with Handforth in their midst. They got him into the Fourth Form dormitory as quickly and as adroitly as possible. They didn't want him to meet any prefects or masters until the morrow.

"Well, here we are!" said Blake, as they entered the dormitory. "Not much of a place, I'm afraid, without a special bed for you, Handforth."

"Don't be silly, Blake!" said Tom Merry. "Of course there's a special bed for Handforth!"

"You clear out, you Shell boulder!" frowned Blake.

"We just came in to see Handforth nice and comfortable," murmured Lowther.

A good many other Fourth-Formers were crowding round now, eager to join in this colossal rag. But they all took care to keep the joke up. It was too good to spoil!

CHAPTER 6.

The Fun Begins!

"H'M! Not so dusty!"

Thus Edward Oswald Handforth.

He had inspected the Fourth Form dormitory, and although the juniors wanted to fall upon him and smite him, they manfully restrained these warlike urgings.

"I'm afwaid it's pwetty wotten, weally," said Arthur Augustus apologetically.

"Well, at St. Frank's we had our own bed-rooms," said Handforth. "You know—small dormitories; two or three fellows in each. But I suppose this is all right. That's my bed over there, eh?" he added, pointing.

"Yes, please, Handforth!" said Blake humbly.

Actually, he wanted to punch this new chap hard—and frequently. Handforth's condescending air was irritating.

It had been impossible to make many drastic alterations in the Fourth Form dormitory. By dint of a little bribery and corruption, however, in which certain maidservants were concerned, a special bed had been prepared for Handforth.

It was quite a good affair, fitted up with an ornamental

canopy, to say nothing of silk curtains. It stood out from the other beds like a rose amongst weeds.

"We prepared this in your honour, Handforth," said Blake simply.

"Oh, I see!" said Handforth. "That was jolly decent of you!"

"Not at all!" put in Levison. "Nothing is too much trouble where you're concerned, Handforth. My name's Levison—Study No. 9. Hope you don't think it's cheeky of me to talk to you like this?"

"Not a bit!" said Handforth. "Go ahead!"

"Well, we'll be going!" said Tom Merry, with genuine reluctance. "Come on, Monty! You, too, Manners!"

"Yes," said Monty Lowther miserably. "We shall have to curb our impatience until to-morrow. But we can get up early and be the first to greet Handforth when he comes down!" he added, brightening up.

The Shell fellows departed, hoping against hope that the lunatics of Fourth-Formers would not give the game away prematurely. Now that the jape had extended so far, it was imperative that it should continue until the morning.

Handforth undressed and got into bed, and every now and again one junior or another was brought forward and humbly presented. By this process Handforth's belief that he was a junior in a thousand was not only strengthened, but verified. One and all, these St. Jim's juniors were paying him homage.

To Handforth it was like a dream coming true.

"Well, the prefect will soon be here to see lights out," said Blake, as he jumped into his own bed. "If I were

you, Handforth, I shouldn't say much to him. It doesn't do to be too familiar with the prefects."

"Prefects!" said Handforth scornfully. "My dear chap, I shall ignore him!"

He was in bed now, and he lounged back on his pillow with his hands behind his head. He was very comfortable, and his mind was at rest. Never had he known such joy as this. At St. Jim's he was somebody. He felt that power was within his grasp. Already these juniors were eager to obey his every whim. Before long they would be his slaves.

"By George," murmured Handforth, as he closed his eyes, "there's no mistake about it! St. Frank's is a dust-hole compared to this place!"

His thoughts were interrupted by a fiendish yell.

"Look out!"

"Hi! It's falling! It's falling on Handforth—"
Crash!

Handforth, opening his eyes, was just in time to see the canopy descending upon him like an avalanche. There was a splintering crash, a muffled confusion of thuds, and Handforth practically vanished.

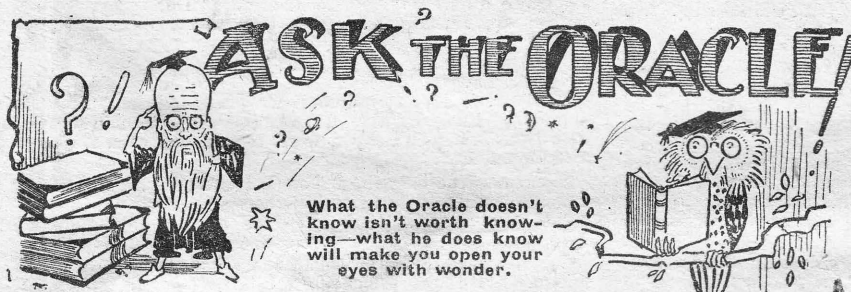
"Oh!"

"Baf Jove!"

"Quick—quick!" yelled Blake. "To the rescue!"

He permitted himself a wide grin, and he congratulated himself upon the deft manner in which he had pulled the hidden string. Stentorian shouts were coming from beneath

(Continued on next page.)



What the Oracle doesn't know isn't worth knowing—what he does know will make you open your eyes with wonder.

Read the illuminating answers given by our tame oracle to these questions, some of which have been sent in by readers of the GEM.

Q. How can cats see in the dark ?

A. By the fact that their eyes, unlike our own, are made so that the pupil, or black part, will dilate when darkness descends. No living creature could see in absolute darkness, but dim rays of light exist in any ordinary dark night, and the enlarged pupils of the cat's eyes permit these faint rays to enter and supply better vision than we have.



A dusky hunter from India—a shikaree.

Q. What is a shikaree ?

A. A native Indian hunter. If ever you are in India and engage upon a tiger "shikar," or hunt, you should engage some of these fellows to put you up to the ropes. It's rotten fun acting as dinner for a tiger!

Q. Why does the Hyena laugh ?

A. The hyena lives in the gloomy forests of Africa where it is hot enough to moult the hair out of its ungainly body. It drinks only once a day and eats only once in two days; it is chased by lions, pelted by monkeys, and stung by mosquitoes. And what the thump it has to laugh at no one has ever found out!

Q. What are the scuppers ?

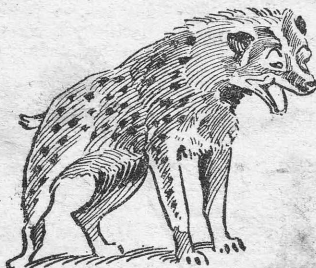
A. This interesting nautical question was sent to me by young George Renton, the son of an honest British farmer in Worcestershire, where the sauce comes from. Scuppers are openings, or drains, in the bulwarks of a ship for carrying overboard water from the decks. When a vessel ships a wave aboard her, most of the water washes away down the scuppers. They are easily the most useful part of the ship to the writer of sea stories, for when the bullying bo'sun gets fresh, the young hero invariably knocks him like a felled ox into the scuppers—thus! To get "scuppered" is to get killed. This is a sea term implying that a sailor "laid out" in action or for any other cause, would naturally roll into the scuppers as the ship heeled to the seas.

Q. Who was Darwin ?

A. Charles Darwin was the great exponent of the theory of evolution. He believed that man was descended from monkeys, and in some cases he was just about right.

Q. Where is the Sargasso Sea ?

A. In the North Atlantic on a latitude



"Ha, ha, ha!" The laughing hyena enjoys a joke.

Q. What is the difference between "bulls" and "bears" on the Stock Exchange ?

A. The lad who asked me this question stated that since the big boom this year on the London Stock Exchange, he has heard a deal of talk about these curious animals. Simply, "bulls" are those speculators who buy shares in the hope of a rise in value; the "bears" are those who sell shares believing that there will be a fall in prices.

Q. What is a shillelagh ?

A. Obviously, the chum who sent in this question has never had a crack across the head with one or he wouldn't have asked. Nor could he ever have lived in Ireland. A shillelagh, in short, is an Irish cudgel usually made of blackthorn or oak, and capable of giving ye the divil of ye a headache bedad!



A Shillelagh, the Irishman's "rib-tickler."

Q. What is it to be loco ?

A. Potty—crazy—mad—imbecile—off your rocker—brains dusty—addle-pated—asinine—idiotic—bughouse—have a screw loose—cracked—with an upper storey to let—insane—unhinged—have bats in the belfry—dead from the neck up—touched—have a bee in the bonnet—up the pole—oh, you know what I mean, and if you don't, please send a three-ha'penny stamp for further information.

the folds of the canopy, and the thing was heaving like an angry sea.

"Hi! What the— What's happened?" spluttered Handforth, as he struggled. "Lemme get out!"

Juniors ran up from all sides. They bumped into the bed violently, and it rocked and heaved.

Then suddenly the bed itself collapsed.

Crash!

Down it went, the head slithering against the wall and the foot sagging over. The main section took a sharp list to starboard, and Handforth was deposited on the floor with a fearful bump. The sheets and the blankets covered him like a shroud.

"Wh-what's happened?" came a muffled gasp from the disordered pile.

"Oh, quick!" shouted Blake, in anguish. "It's Handforth! Somebody will get the sack for this to-morrow when we find out the truth! Oh, what carelessness!"

"Awful!"

"Let's all help Handforth, you fellows!"

And the Fourth-Formers proceeded to help Handforth. The wrecked bed was straightened out somewhat, and the sheets and blankets and the canopy were hauled away. Handforth sat up in the middle of it all, gasping. His face was red, and he was bewildered.

"How did it happen?" he panted.

"Goodness knows!" said Blake penitently. "Oh, Handforth, how can you forgive us!"

"Why, you didn't do this, did you?" demanded Handforth, with the first flash of suspicion.

"Nunno!" gasped Blake. "I—I mean—that is to say, I hope you'll forgive us for allowing this to happen, Handforth! It's terrible! You—you, the great Handforth! We ought to be kicked—every one of us!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"We gave special instructions about that bed, too!" said Blake darkly. "By Jove, somebody's going to pay for this to-morrow! Come on, you fellows! Let's get this bed up again! Under the circus, we'd better dispense with the canopy!"

Which was just as well, for the prefect, coming to see lights out, would undoubtedly have asked some awkward questions about that canopy. By this little stratagem the dormitory was made to look normal again, and Handforth suspected nothing.

The juniors almost fell over themselves in their eagerness to set the bed to rights. Handforth wasn't allowed to touch anything. He was requested to stand aside, and then, with lightning speed, the bed was erected—quite securely this time—and made.

"There you are!" said Blake breathlessly at last. "Hop in, Handforth! It's time for lights out! Please, for our sake, don't say anything to the prefect!"

"That's all right!" said Handforth gruffly. "I'm not a chap to make a fuss!"

He was greatly impressed by their breathless apologies. And when, a minute or two later, Darrell of the Sixth came along to turn out the lights, he noticed nothing suspicious.

"Well, thank goodness!" said Herries softly, after the door was closed behind the prefect.

"Yes, rather!" murmured Blake. "We're safe now! Good-night, Handforth!"

"Good-night!" said the new fellow.

"Good-night, Handforth!" echoed every voice in the dormitory.

"Eh?" gasped Handforth. "Oh, I see! Good-night, you chaps!"

Never had he received such attention; never had he had such adoration. Until they had all said "Good-night!" to him, they couldn't compose themselves for sleep.

And Edward Oswald Handforth snuggled down drowsily, picturing the triumphs that he would encounter on the morrow.

If all this could happen during his first hour or two, what would not the morrow bring forth? He could see himself condescending, with much graciousness, to have a few words with this junior or that junior. He would go round the school and inspect the buildings, and he was sure that he would have an escort of humble Fourth-Formers and Shell fellows.

And in this deliriously happy frame of mind Handforth fell asleep. It seemed to him that no time at all had elapsed before he was awakened by a discordant clanging.

He sat up in bed, blinking around.

"By George!" he muttered sleepily.

The summer sunshine was streaming through the dormitory windows, and fellows on all sides were sitting up and stretching themselves. Just for a moment Handforth did not know where he was. Then, in a flash, he remembered.

"My only hat," he said aloud, "I'm at St. Jim's!"

In a flood he remembered all the happenings of the

previous night. His first momentary sensation of strangeness passed. Here, at St. Jim's, he was somebody!

"Hallo, Blake!" he said cheerily.

Jack Blake grunted and turned over in bed.

"Shurrup!" he mumbled. "Go and eat coke!"

"Eh?" gasped Handforth.

"Lemme alone!" murmured Blake sleepily. "What's that rotten noise?"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, fearful lest Blake should give the game away in his half-wakeful condition, leapt out of bed.

"Weally, Blake, I'm surprised at you!" he said severely.

"Burrurr!"

"I do not regard that as an intelligible remark, Blake!" said Gussy. "You have appawntly forgotten that Handforth is with us!"

"Eh?" said Blake, with a start, as he turned over. "Handforth? Oh, by Jove!"

"I am pleased to see that you've wemembahed yourself!" remarked Gussy frigidly. "I was afwaid, Blake, that you were goin' to be wude to the new fellow. However, there is still time for you to wepaih the damage!"

Blake, sitting up, gazed somewhat sleepy-eyed at Handforth.

"Why, yes—the new fellow!" he said. "Morning, Handforth!"

"Time to get up, eh?" said Handforth.

"Nunno! Not at all!" said Blake hastily, as he leapt out of bed. "At least, not for you! All the rest of us must hurry, but you're different."

"Oh, well, of course—"

"Quite different!" put in Levison. "Don't you trouble to get up, Handforth! You stay there, and take your ease!"

"But won't there be trouble?"

Ernest Levison laughed.

"There would be trouble if we presumed to do it," he replied. "But why should you worry? The masters you saw last night won't say a word to you—not even if you're two hours late!"

This was true enough, although Handforth didn't see the inner meaning of Levison's words.

"In that case, I think I'll have another ten minutes," said Handforth luxuriously.

He felt that it would be a wrong policy to get up with the rest. He was somebody special—a privileged person. It would never do to lower himself to the level of the rank and file!

And so, while the Fourth dressed, Handforth lolled in bed. It wasn't until almost the last fellow had gone that he condescended to "show a leg." And then he only did so because he was anxious to get down—to add further laurels to his victories.

But, downstairs, crowding round the open doorway of the School House, the juniors were not merely chucking, but they were yelling with laughter. They were waiting for the cream of the joke.

At last the moment was arriving when the truth would hit Handforth like a bombshell. And the Fourth and the Shell felt that life was indeed worth living!

CHAPTER 7.

The Climax!

CAVE!

"Here he comes!"

"Bai Jove!"

The crowd had increased. It was overflowing down the School House steps, and into the quad. Everybody wanted to be on the spot when Handforth came down.

And now he was coming.

He had appeared at the top of the stairs, and he was attired in the full glory of white trousers and blazer. Strictly speaking, he should have been wearing Etons; but he was so imbued with his sense of security that he had decided to startle the natives by coming down in flannels. Besides, they were much more comfortable during the hot weather.

"Hurrah!"

"Here comes Handforth!"

The new fellow beamed genially. It was just the same! This morning, indeed, the juniors seemed to be more enthusiastic than ever. Here they were, cheering him to the echo, bowing to him, just because he had appeared at the top of the stairs!

He didn't know that Tom Merry and Blake had led those cheers—mainly to drown the many titters of laughter that had gone up. Also, a perfect gasp of anticipation had sounded. For, by a piece of luck that could only be

described as phenomenal, Mr. Lathom himself had just walked out of the passage. He and Handforth were bound to meet down in the hall.

It wasn't merely lucky—it was providential. "Dear me!" said Mr. Lathom mildly, as he blinked round. "What is all this commotion, boys?"

"Handforth's just coming down, sir," said Blake, with the utmost gravity.

"Handforth?" repeated Mr. Lathom. "I do not seem to remember the name—"

"The new fellow in the Fourth, sir."

"Ah, yes!" said Mr. Lathom, nodding. "Mr. Railton informed me before going away—"

"Hallo, there!" roared a cheery voice.

Clap!

Handforth had come downstairs, and, to the overwhelming joy of the crowd, he had clapped the sedate little Mr. Lathom on the back! The master of the Fourth was nearly startled out of his skin, and he jumped a foot into the air.

"Good gracious!" he gasped. "What—what on earth are—"

"Morning, Phil!" grinned Handforth genially.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The crowd nearly expired with suppressed merriment, and Mr. Lathom wondered if he had suddenly gone out of his mind.

"How—how dare you!" he said angrily.

"Eh?" gasped Handforth, with a start. "Here, come off it! Cheese it, Phil!"

"You impertinent young rascal!" ejaculated Mr. Lathom, aghast. "I refuse to cheese it— That is to say—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Handforth was surprised—and just a little bewildered. He had recognised Mr. Lathom on the instant. True, he had only seen him once before—and then in the subdued light of the study. But he couldn't possibly have been mistaken.

"You're Mr. Lathom, aren't you?" he demanded.

"That is my name, young man!" snapped the Form master. "But I would remind you—"

"Then what's the giddy wheeze, Phil?" grinned Handforth.

"Phil!" breathed Mr. Lathom, dazed.

"We're going to be pals!" said Handforth, thumping Mr. Lathom on the back. "These other fellows, of course, are different. We—"

"How dare you!" shrieked Mr. Lathom wildly. "You— you impertinent young rascal! Never in the whole of my life, have I been so grossly—"

"Gweat Scott! The Head!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had been unable to restrain himself. And Handforth, looking round, saw the dignified figure of Dr. Holmes passing by the School House outside. And Handforth's eyes gleamed.

"I shall make it my duty to report you at once to Dr. Holmes!" Mr. Lathom was saying excitedly. "I think you must be mad! How can you have the impudence to— to slap me on the back, and— and— Good gracious! Boy! Come here! Come here at once!"

But Handforth, to the delirium of the juniors, had walked off, without even waiting for Mr. Lathom to finish!

"Good heavens!" muttered the Form master dizzily.

Handforth was striding down the steps of the School House; and now, indeed, the juniors were on the qui vive for the next bombshell. Over by the New House, Figgins & Co., and all their kind, were waiting and watching.

"Weally, Lowthah, I am beginnin' to wegwet my part in this howwid jape!" murmured Gussy, in distress.

"Ass!" said Monty Lowther briefly, but to the point.

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Ring off, Gussy—it's zero hour!" murmured Lowther.

"Yaas, wathah! But at the same time, deah boy, isn't this wathah a dirtay twick on this new fellow?" asked Gussy dubiously. "It was quite all wight up to a certain point, but there's goin' to be a fwightful wow in a minute!"

"We're waiting for it," grinned Monty softly. "And don't be an ass, Gussy. Handforth is a new fellow, and that's why we can play this jape on him. The Head—and old Lathom, too—will soon realise that the chump has been fooled. So they'll go easy with him!"

"I twust you are wight, Lowthah," said D'Arcy with concern.

Most of the others were crowding out into the quad. Mr. Lathom had gone down the steps, in the wake of Handforth; but now he paused—chiefly because his legs refused to carry him any farther. He wasn't quite sure that his eyes were functioning. For the thing he saw—or thought he saw—was too startling for words.

Handforth, running lightly, had overtaken the Head near the chapel, and the "thud" as he clapped Dr. Holmes on the back was heard all over the quad. Every voice had

been silenced—everybody was waiting, with bated breath, for what would happen.

"Good heavens!" ejaculated the Head, with a violent start.

He spun round, his mortar-board cocked over one ear at a grotesque angle. He beheld the grinning Handforth, and his glasses dropped from his nose and dangled on their cord.

"Boy!" he thundered.

Even Handforth recoiled under the stern voice. "Good-morning, Holmes!" he said, recovering himself instantly.

"Oh, hold me, somebody!" moaned Blake. "Take me away to die!"

"Shush!" warned Tom Merry. "Don't laugh, you idiots! This is too good to be missed!"

Dr. Holmes seemed to be experiencing some difficulty with his larynx. But at last he got it into working order again.

"What is your name?" he demanded, in a terrible voice.

"Come off it!" grinned Handforth. "You know jolly well that my name's Handforth—"

"Ah, yes!" broke in the Head. "Handforth! You should have come to me last night, boy! What do you mean by having the audacity to strike me?"

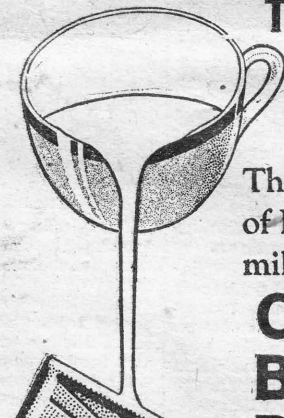
"Rats!" said Handforth, to the Head's stupefaction. "I was only thumping you on the back! You told me that we were going to be pals, didn't you? Cheese it, Dicky!"

"Dicky!" babbled the Head, in a hoarse whisper.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

(Continued on page 16.)

ATHLETES TRAIN ON IT.



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The ST JIM'S NEWS

Edited By TOM MERRY.

EDITORIAL!

By Tom Merry.

THE St. Jim's Swimming Gala took place last week, being held as usual, in that portion of the Rhyl adjacent to the boat-house, as we have no covered swimming bath at St. Jim's. It is rather unfortunate for us that this is so, since it limits our swimming to the summer months for the most part, few of the fellows caring to venture into the Rhyl during the winter.

The result is that swimming does not hold the same position in the athletic life of St. Jim's as cricket and football does.

But, all things considered, we don't do so badly, and every encouragement is given to fellows to learn the art of keeping their heads above water.

Baggy Trimble seems to have acquired this art without any tuition whatever. This is easily understood when one is reminded of the fact that the fat porpoise of the Fourth and water are the bitterest of enemies.

Why, he would miss his morning ablutions if it were possible to do so.

Among the juniors I should be inclined to say that Monty Lowther is the finest all-round swimmer, though Dick Julian is pretty well his equal. Figgins can hold his own in the New House, though he's not up to the form of Monty and Julian—in fact, there are half a dozen chaps at least in the School House who are a good match for the New House leader. Digby is the pick of Study No. 6, though both Blake and Gussy can make him go all out to beat them. In the Upper School Kildare, Rushden, and Lefevre of the Fifth can hold their own against all comers, and there isn't much to choose between them. Yesterday, for instance, Rushden won the senior hundred yards, with Kildare and Lefevre a dead heat for second place a yard behind him, and last year Kildare had got home by about the same distance from Lefevre, with Rushden a good third.

In a week's time the Greyfriars water polo team is visiting us, when we hope to have our revenge for the defeat we sustained last year, the result then being two goals to nil in favour of Greyfriars. The fact that they are able to practise all the year through is undoubtedly a great factor in their favour; but our team, by working hard, have made tremendous headway during the past couple of months, and I rather think we're in form to give Greyfriars a shaking up this time.

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THE GALA!

By Dick Brooke

THE following short account of the St. Jim's swimming gala, and the results of the various events will no doubt prove interesting to readers of the "St. Jim's News."

The junior hundred yards was won by Monty Lowther, Dick Julian coming in second, and Digby third. This was a scratch race.

The junior hundred yards handicap was pulled off by Figgins, with Blake and Clive second and third respectively—and a very good second and third at that. Monty Lowther and Julian were hopelessly handicapped in this race, though they made a sporting attempt to win.

The junior two hundred yards (twice the length of the course) was won by Dick Julian, with Tom Merry and Talbot second and third. This was the first event of the day for which the two last named had entered.

The plank race proved both fun and excitement. In this race two swimmers were harnessed to a long plank by means of ropes, a Third-Former sitting astride the plank and acting as driver of the team. It was by no means easy for the fags to keep on their planks, and most of them spent a good deal of their time from the beginning to the end of the race in falling off and struggling on again, greatly to the joy (!!!) of their "steeds," who were compelled, by the rules of the race, to stop every time their "driver" parted company with his plank until he had regained his place. Hampered as they were with ropes round them, the only stroke the swimmers could employ was the breast-stroke, so the race was favourable to those chaps who specialise in that stroke in preference to the more attractive "trudgeon" and "crawl." Clive and Levison, with Levison minor as "driver," would probably have won had not, by some means or other, Levison become entangled with his ropes, so that for half the race he was struggling along with one of them round his throat, half throttling him.

The fact that the team came in third under such conditions suggests that but for the handicap under which Levison was swimming they would have pulled off the event. As it was, Digby, D'Arcy, and D'Arcy minor; and Noble, Dane, and young Gibson were first and second.

In the ornamental diving contest Julian gained the highest number of points, with Talbot as runner-up.

TRIMBLE, THE TADPOLE!

By BAGGY TRIMBLE.

THEIR are fellows at St. Jim's who fancy themselves at swimming, but none of them can hold a kandel to me, and they all no it tho they never confess it bekaus they're jellus-minded and try to keep me out of the credit that's due to me. Butt you can't keep a good man down, an' won of these days I shall come forward and surprize evveryboddy, and taik sum of the cocky rotters down a peg or too. You watch me.

I'm a natural born swimmer. It comes natural to me to swim, and I never had to learn. (Part of that is true, at least—the bit about not learning, as anyone who witnessed Baggy's remarkable antics in the foot or so of water beyond which he is careful never to venture, would realise at once.—R. R. Cardew.)

I am really more at home in the water than on dry land, and sum of the fellows who have seen me doing clever tricks in the water have nicknamed me "Trimble, the Tadpole," as a mark of their admiration.

Of coarse, one of the grate advantages I possess is my magnificent figger, which is just the tipe for the perfect swimmer. It's no good skinny chaps trying to swim. They aren't built for it. And big podgy chaps with no mussel are just as bad.

I'm espeshully grate at diving and water-polo. What I don't no about water-polo isn't worth knowing. A week ago I offered Tom Merry the chance to coach the St. Jim's teme ready for when they meat Greyfriars, and he hadn't got the sence to jump at the offer. Annyway, he won't be abel to blame me when they're licked this year like they were last, and I hope they are, too, and then peraps Tom Merry will wish he'd taken my offer, bekaus if he had done, he would have licked Greyfriars hands down with my valluable advise on playing water-polo.

But it's all you can ekspect of Tom Merry. He nose nothing at all about swimming. Why, onse he tried to swim the Channell, and had to give it up. Now, if it had been me, I shuld have swum there and back and thought no moor of it than annybody would think of crossing a street.

Probably during this summer I shall swim the Channell. I want it to be understood first, tho, that no newspaper representatives accompany me on the swim. I absolutely lothe publicity.

I tell you, I'm not called Trimble, the Tadpole, for nothing.

“WHAT about a swim?” suggested Digby, in a tired sort of voice.

In the circus it was no wonder that his voice sounded that way. The only wonder was that he'd got energy enough to speak at all. We hadn't got enough to answer him, anyway, and as he hadn't sufficient to repeat the remark, the conversation, such as it was, languished for a while.

It was one of those sweltering hot days that descended upon us a few weeks ago, when everybody felt like glancing through the “Situations Vacant!” columns in the newspapers to see if there happened to be any jobs in ice-cream factories going begging.

That particular day chanced to be a half, and so after dinner we found ourselves in the blissful position of being free to do exactly what we jolly well liked, which, in view of the sun's bit-of overtime was—precisely nothing.

Digby's notion of a swim was really a top-hole one if only we could have summoned up sufficient energy to put it into operation. It was all very well to talk about having a swim; it was quite another matter to fag about getting towels and costumes and dragging ourselves all the way to the river.

Curiously enough, about five minutes after Dig had made his bright little suggestion, Tom Merry came barging into No. 6 with a towel round his neck, and started calling us lazy slackers and similar endearing terms, finishing up by inviting us to go with him down to the swimming-pool.

Well, of course, that did it. We didn't really feel fit to turn out, but we weren't going to let a Shell blighter have the laugh of us, so we managed to pull ourselves together and start out.

When we got down to the river we found half St. Jim's already there. Seniors and juniors and fags were splashing about in the respective pools allotted to them. I've never seen the Rhyl so crowded since I've been at St. Jim's. It didn't really look as if there was any room for any fresh additions to the merry family. Even Skimmy in a bathing-costume of a vivid scarlet—goodness alone knows where he'd dug it up from—was wading about in the shallowest part of the learners' end of the Lower School pool.

I couldn't understand for the life of me what he was actually supposed to be doing, but he was holding a small paper-covered book in one hand, which he was earnestly reading while he made feeble little pats at the surface of the water with his other hand.

“What's that silly idiot think he's doing?” growled Herries disgustedly.

“Do you mean Skimmy?” said Gore.

“He's learning to swim!”

“He's what?” gasped Tom Merry.

“Learning to swim!” repeated Gore, with a chuckle. “It's a fact. He's bought a book on ‘How to learn swimming in six easy lessons,’ and he's practising.”

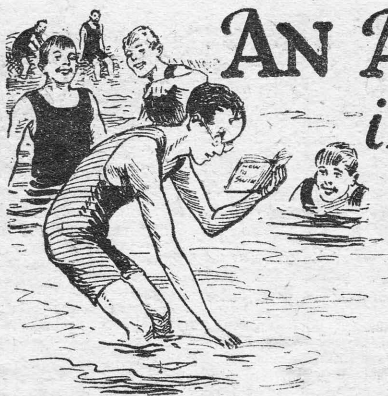
“Ha, ha, ha!”

“Some hopes he's got,” growled Herries.

“Come on, let's get in.”

It didn't take us long to slip out of our togs and into our costumes, and we were soon enjoying ourselves in the cool water that afforded such a relief to the heat of the sun. Herries isn't much of a swimmer, and he set to work endeavouring to improve his breast-stroke in the hope of passing out of the Learners' Class, in which he still is.

Dig, Gussy, Tom Merry and I swam down as far as the Miller's Pool, where there was some racing going on. That lanky blighter, Figgy, was pretty well



AN AFTERNOON in the RHYL or “LEARNERS' POOL.”

By Jack Blake.

cock of the walk until we came along, and though I only just managed to hold my own with him, both Tom Merry and Digby rattled his bones up and licked him by a few yards in the width of the pool. Soon after that Monty Lowther and Manners came along and joined us, and though Manners doesn't amount to much as a swimmer, Monty Lowther is within measurable distance of being the best in the Lower School.

When we swam back to the Learners' Pool, we found Grundy there busily engaged in teaching Wilkins and Gunn to swim, in spite of the fact that both his pupils are quite creditable



Grundy bounced up and down on the spring-board till at last he shot off into the water with a loud plop!

swimmers, and he himself can't swim at all. But that's just like Grundy.

“Now, look here, you two,” he was saying, as we passed by, “just watch me, and you'll be able to see how it's done. You just lean forward and throw up your feet and make as much splash as you can—so!”

He kicked his legs clear of the bottom and wallowed about on the surface for five seconds or so, after which he slowly sank.

“Glug—glug—glug—glug—ug!”

He disappeared from sight. Five seconds more, and then—

“Whoosh! Perrumps!”

He had come to the surface and was spouting water like a blessed whale. Considered as a demonstration of swimming to the bottom and back it was perfection itself. When he had got rid of the three or four gallons of the Rhyl that he had taken in during his performance, Grundy turned his attention again to his pupils.

“There you are!” he announced, in a highly-satisfied tone. “Perfectly easy! It may look hard to you, but if you'll only stick at it and study my methods closely, you'll both be able to do the

same, nearly, if not quite as well as I do it, one of these days.”

And then the silly ass turned round the next moment and wanted to know what we were all laughing at. We were obliging enough to tell him, and even then he wasn't satisfied. I don't know what he wanted, I'm sure. A plain answer to a plain question ought to be enough for anybody, surely.

Poor old Skimmy was still continuing his self-tuition, with the aid of his little book of words. He wasn't getting on very well, though. He explained that he was encountering some quite unexpected difficulties. He had come to the conclusion that there must be some misprints in the book, because it said quite definitely and clearly that if he did certain things with his arms and legs he would find himself swimming easily and safely through the water, whereas when he actually did those various things in the manner described he eventually found himself at the bottom, instead.

He could only account for it by supposing that the printers must have got the pages mixed up somehow, and he had been reading the instructions for swimming under water, which, he understood, was quite an advanced stage in the art of swimming, and one which he had not yet reached.

Tom Merry good-naturedly gave him a short lesson, but Skimmy was perfectly hopeless, though not perhaps quite as hopeless as Grundy, who is by way of being past merely hopeless. Skimmy knows he doesn't know, and is almost pathetically willing to learn. Grundy is perfectly convinced that nobody else knows anything at all. So that he neither admits that he needs instruction nor that anyone is qualified to give it.

But he did put his foot in the soup when he offered to teach Wilkins and Gunn how to dive, and started fooling about on the spring-board. Because the diving-boards are reserved for the use of swimmers, being at the far end of the pool, where the water is about seven feet deep.

Grundy bounced up and down on the spring-board till at last he shot off into the water, and then he suddenly discovered what a sad mistake he'd made. He splashed and struggled and floundered about, but he went under all the same for that, and though he came to the top again shortly afterwards, it was only for a few moments or so, and then down again he went.

Half a dozen of us watched him bobbing up and down, and when his struggles began to grow more and more feeble and his periods under water longer and longer, Wilkins and Gunn jumped in and lugged him out by his hair. He was none the worse for it all, really, only just winded and very full of water, but despite that lesson George Alfred is still convinced that he knows everything there is to know about the aquatic art.

HANDFORTH AT ST. JIM'S!

(Continued from page 13.)

"Oh crumbs!" wept Tom Merry. "This is too much! Ow! I'm in pain!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Handforth was looking at the Head in a bewildered way; even he could now see that Dr. Holmes was purple with wrath.

"What's the matter, sir?" he asked. "Didn't you invite me to call you by your Christian name? Didn't you say that I could come into your house whenever I liked, and that I could look upon it as my own?"

"Silence!" thundered Dr. Holmes angrily. "Handforth! Your father told me something of your character, and I have been given to understand that you are an exceptionally headstrong boy. Are you deliberately insulting me?"

Handforth fell back a pace.

"Nunno, sir!" he gasped. "But—but you told me last night—"

"Rubbish! I did not see you last night!"

"But you did, sir!" shouted Handforth. "You came to my study, and you told me—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

This time it was a perfect roar, although the source of the laughter was mainly invisible. Most of the juniors had thought it politic to get beyond the range of the Head's eagle eye.

"Handforth, calm yourself!" said the Head sternly. "Are you seriously telling me that you believe that I came to your study last night?"

"But you did come, sir!"

"Nonsense!" said Dr. Holmes. "By what flight of imagination do you presume that I should come to your study?"

"But—but—"

"I can only assume, young man, that you have been made the butt of a practical joke!" said the Head. "There can be no other explanation of this extraordinary belief of yours."

"Sir!" panted Mr. Lathom, running up. "This boy—this young rascal has been incredibly impertinent—"

"Please calm yourself, Mr. Lathom!" interrupted the Head. "There is some mistake. Handforth is new to this school. He only arrived last evening. It is quite obvious that he is bewildered and dazed—and I can only conclude that he has been made the victim of a practical joke."

Handforth tried to speak, but he couldn't. His throat worked up and down, and his face went as red as a beetroot.

"In the circumstances, Handforth, your gross impertinence will be overlooked," went on the Head kindly. "At the same time, I cannot possibly imagine how you could have been so foolish. I think it will be better, on the whole, if I do not make a pressing inquiry. But in future you must be more careful."

"I—I—I—" began Handforth, gulping.

"You will report to my study after breakfast, Handforth!" said Dr. Holmes. "By that time, I hope, you will be fully conversant with the true state of affairs. Come, Mr. Lathom!"

The two masters vanished into the Cloisters, and, as though by magic, the quad filled with juniors. The quad also filled with yells of laughter. On every hand juniors were doubled up, they were sobbing, they were fairly shrieking with merriment.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Poor old Handforth!"

"The jape of the year, by Jove!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Edward Oswald Handforth stood there, going red and pale in turns. If a bombshell had exploded on the other side of the quad he could not have been more staggered. In a flash—in a blinding blaze of realisation—the stunning truth had come upon him. It had seared into his brain.

He had been fooled!

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove, I wathah think the Head acted like a wippah, deah boys!"

"He did!" panted Blake. "But we knew the idiot wouldn't get into much trouble! Oh, my sides are cracking!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The New House juniors were now taking part in the general hilarity. One and all, the Shell and the Fourth, were wondering how Handforth would take this climax. The chances were that he would bolt—that he would scuttle away and hide his diminished head.

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But they didn't know Handforth!

His powers of recovery were remarkable. And while the quad was ringing with laughter he clenched his fists, and he swung round upon his tormentors. He knew the truth now! He wasn't the big power that he had imagined himself to be! He was just the victim of a jape! But Handforth's head was in no way diminished!

"You rotters!" he thundered furiously.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You—you spoofing bounders!" hooted Handforth.

"Come on! I'll fight the lot of you! I'll take you one by one, and reduce you to pulp!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The laughter was greater than ever. Was there no end to this new fellow's idiocy? The entire Shell and the entire Fourth were surrounding him, and he was ready to fight the lot!

CHAPTER 8.

Looking for Trouble!

TOM MERRY stepped forward, smiling and cheery.

"Well, that's that!" he chuckled. "Just our little joke, Handforth!"

The new fellow glared.

"By George!" he breathed. "You're the Remove captain, aren't you?"

"No; I'm the Shell captain."

"What's the difference?" bellowed Handforth. "You're the chap who spoofed me last night!"

"One of them!" said Tom modestly. "The chief honours go to my distinguished friend on my right—Monty Lowther."

Lowther bowed.

"This is so unexpected!" he murmured.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You rotters!" roared Handforth. "I'm going to smash you into a jelly!"

"Oh, please, Handforth!" said Blake in an awed voice.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Further shrieks went up—and Handforth knew, even more than he had known before, that his dream was only a dream. Here, just the same as at St. Frank's, he was regarded as a joke! His vision of Power crumbled to dust.

"Don't look so wild, old man," chuckled Tom Merry. "We've heard about you—"

"Put up your hands!" hooted Handforth, rolling up his sleeves.

"And we've no reason to believe that you're not a sportsman," went on Tom. "Isn't it rather a usual thing to jape a new fellow, Handforth?"

Handforth's arms fell limply to his sides. Then, in a moment, his warlike looks vanished; a weak grin spread itself over his good-natured face.

"All right!" he said gruffly. "I've been properly dished—and I hope I'm sportsman enough to take it in the right spirit."

"Good man!" said Tom Merry heartily.

"Bai Jove!" said Gussy, pushing forward. "I must remark, Handforth, that you have taken it remarkably decently."

Handforth grunted.

"All the same, you're a lot of spoofers!" he said darkly.

"What's more, I'll get my own back!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Handforth strode off towards the School House, and the juniors were well pleased with him. The last veil had been pulled from his eyes, and yet he was, on the whole, good-tempered about it.

"Hold on!" sang out Blake. "Where are you going to, Handforth?"

"To my study!" snorted Handforth.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

It wasn't a laugh that went up, but a yell.

"Anything funny in that?" roared Handforth, coming to a halt, and turning.

"You bet there is!" grinned Blake sweetly. "You haven't got a study!"

"What?"

"That study we took you into last night is ours!" explained Blake. "We borrowed the furniture for the occasion."

"Oh, crumbs!" said Handforth blankly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You'll have to wait until Mr. Raiton comes," pursued Blake. "He's our Housemaster, you know. He's not coming along until this afternoon. He'll probably bung you in with Trimble and Mellish, or somebody like that! Poor old scout! What a shock!"

"I say, I hope Handforth is really put into our study!" said Baggy Trimble eagerly. "He's going to be one of my pals—"

"Clear off, Trimble!" frowned Blake. "How did you know that Handforth had any money?"

"I didn't know!" roared Baggy in confusion.

"Well, scoot!" said Blake curtly.

Monty Lowther wore an innocent smile as he strolled up to Handforth.

"Oh, by the way," he said. "What about knocking out the prefect, Handforth? What about scoring a century in a First Eleven match? What about—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

A yell went up, and Handforth started.

"By George!" he gasped. "Was that spooof, too?"

"Ye gods and little fishes!" murmured Monty, fanning himself. "He's even ready to believe that Tommy was serious!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Sorry, old man—but everything was spooof!" explained Tom Merry, with a chuckle.

"Oh, was it!" shouted Handforth, his face red with wrath. "All right, you rotters! I'll show you!"

"What will you show us?"

"I jolly well will thrash a prefect, and sleep in the House-master's bed, and do those other things!" thundered Handforth, with an impetuosity that was all his own. "You've practically dared me to do them, and I'll—"

But his voice was drowned in the chorus of laughter that went up.

"Oh, this chap'll be the death of me!" sobbed Blake dizzily. "He means it, you fellows! He actually means it!"

"Yes, I do mean it!" shouted Handforth. "When I say a thing, I mean a thing—and I do a thing!"

It was the general hilarity that had goaded him to make this rash statement.

"And look here," went on the new fellow, as a sudden thought struck him, "who were those masters I saw last night?"

"Sorry, old man, but they were Kerr, of the New House," said Blake cheerfully.

"They were Kerr?" repeated Handforth. "You don't call that grammar, do you?"

"Mr. Lathom was Kerr, and the Head was Kerr!" smiled Jack Blake. "Don't you understand? He impersonated the two of them! Kerr is our pet impersonator!"

Handforth took a deep breath.

"Where can I find him?" he demanded fiercely.

Monty Lowther, scenting more fun, looked round.

"Well, he doesn't seem to be here, at the moment," he put in. "Most of the New House juniors have gone indoors. Do you really want to find Kerr?"

"Yes, I do!" said Handforth sulphurously. "You fellows aren't so much to blame as he is! It was he who spooofed me about those masters, and I'm going to smash him!"

"Go ahead!" said Blake cheerfully. "You'll find Kerr in Study No. 4, Fourth Form passage, in the New House. That ramshackle barn over there!" he added, pointing.

Half a dozen fellows eagerly gave Handforth full directions as to how he could reach Study No. 4. They were rather surprised at Handforth's new attitude. As yet, they did not know that it was quite usual for him to blow hot and cold with great rapidity.

And as Handforth rushed off to the New House, Tom Merry & Co., Blake & Co., and hosts of other School House fellows, collected on their own side of the quadrangle, waiting to see what they would see. They had little doubt as to what this would actually be.

Any fellow who barged, singlehanded, into the New House, was not asking for trouble, but yelling for it.

It said much for the spirit of this remarkable new fellow that he should thus go on the warpath. Tom Merry & Co. were quite pleased with their new recruit. There was promising stuff in Handforth, it seemed.

In the New House, Handforth rushed up the stairs, three at a time. He blundered into the Fourth Form passage like a human avalanche, and when he arrived at Study No. 4, he "knocked" on the door with his foot.

Crash!

The door flew open, and Handforth burst in.

"Hi!" came a yell. "That door was locked—"

"Well, now it's unlocked!" roared Handforth. "Where's the chap who fooled me last night? Where's— Oh, my only hat!"

He broke off blankly. Standing in front of the mirror was a most unpleasant-looking master. At least, Handforth thought so for the moment. Then he saw that this "master" was just affixing a side-whisker to his face.

"You're the chap!" hooted Handforth, jumping to the truth.

Undoubtedly he was right. The fellow at the mirror was none other than Kerr, the canny member of the celebrated New House "Co."

But if Handforth was infuriated at the sight of Kerr, Figgins & Co. were infuriated at the sight of Handforth. They were greatly annoyed. They had locked the door, and they had believed themselves to be private. They had not been prepared for Handforth's violent methods.

In fact, they had hurried indoors, with the idea of perpetrating an additional jape upon the new School House fellow. Figgins and Fatty Wynn were to get friendly with Handforth by the use of honeyed words, and then they were going to introduce him to "Old Ratty," their Housemaster. And the results, they had planned, were to have been vastly entertaining.

And now it was all spoilt!

Handforth had charged in, and he had seen Kerr in the act of making-up. The lean Figgins went red with anger, and his hand strayed towards a cricket-stump.

"That's done it!" said Kerr, with regret, as he pulled his wig off. "The jape's off, Figgy!"

"Oh so you were going to spooof me again—oh?" said Handforth thickly. "You're the chap! You're the rotter who fooled me last night!"

"Come on!" hooted Figgins wildly. "Buck up, New House!"

George Figgins didn't argue. He considered that it was a waste of time to bandy words with this cyclonic School House fellow. There was only one thing to be done.

"Here, what the—" began Handforth.

Crash! Thud! Biff!

"Yarooooooh!" howled Handforth desperately.

The thing was done very adroitly, and the good work proceeded with machine-like precision.

(Continued on next page.)



The Schoolmaster Manager!

A First League team in charge of a cranky schoolmaster!

That's what's happened to the Blue Crusaders. Mr. Piecombe—old Piecan as they call him behind his back—is something quite new in football managers! You'll get a heap of laughs out of his amazing stunts! There's not a livelier bunch of chaps than the Blues. Fatty Fowkes, for instance. He weighs sixteen stone, and keeps the best goal in England. Between the posts, in a scrap, or at meals, you can't beat him. Next to him is Tich Harborough, the lightning school-boy winger. Then there's Ben Gillingham. He never took first prize in a beauty competition, but he's real grit all through. Get to know the whole cheery team this week, in

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With one accord, Figgins & Co. fell upon Handforth. They seized him, they bowled him over, and they whirled him out into the passage.

"Whoa!" shrieked Handforth. "You—you silly asses! Oh, my hat! Just you wait until I— Yow!"

Bump!

Handforth was whirled to the top of the stairs, and then he was whisked down with incredible speed. The next moment he reached the doorway, and the manner in which he flew down the New House steps was remarkable.

He landed at the bottom, upside down, and his beautiful flannels were a picture. He was dusty, dishevelled, and dazed. And, on the other side of the quad, the School House fellows looked on in their wisdom.

"Well, he asked for it!" said Monty Lowther sadly.

"Yaas, wathah!" agreed D'Arcy. "I must wemark that the deah boy appears to be a feahful ass!"

Figgins, on the top of the New House steps, dusted his hands.

"Now you can clear off!" he said breathlessly. "That's what we think of School House rotters!"

And Edward Oswald Handforth, sitting there in the quad, was under no misapprehension regarding Figgins & Co.'s opinion of School House rotters!

CHAPTER 9.

Rough on Ratty!

"H'E'S all right!" said Tom Merry firmly.

"If you mean that he doesn't know when he's beaten, I agree," said Blake. "And we can do with that sort of fellow in the School House."

"Yaas, wathah!" nodded Aruthur Augustus. "Howevah, I am inclined to wegard Handforth with a certain amount of caution. I am afraid he is wathah a wuff customah!"

"The rougher, the better!"

"Weally, Blake——"

"He's a fighter!" said Blake. "The more fighters we can get in the Fourth, the better we shall like it. Then we might be able to keep these Shell Fellows in their place!"

"Glad you admit that you can't do it now!" said Tom Merry sweetly.

"We can!" roared Blake, turning red. "But Handforth is in the Fourth, and don't you forget it! He's ours!"

"You're welcome to him!" said Monty Lowther sweetly. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy adjusted his monocle.

St. Frank's Without Edward Oswald Handforth!

The celebrated Handy has left St. Frank's, and no doubt he thinks the famous old school will go all to pieces without him. But, strange to say, nothing of the kind happens; indeed, his absence is hardly noticed—except, perhaps, by his two chums, Church and McClure. For tremendously exciting things are happening!



The two brothers of that elegant and popular St. Frank's junior, Archie Glenthorne, have decided to attempt to break the world's non-stop flight record by flying from Canada to England. And when the school learns that the intrepid airmen intend to land near St. Frank's, it is quite understandable that old Handy should be forgotten in the resultant excitement. If you are looking for a really enthralling school story, you can't do better than read "ATLANTIC FLYERS AT ST. FRANK'S!" which appears in this week's

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"Pway cease this squabblin', deah boys!" he said. "Pewwaps it would be a good ideah for me to have a few pwivate words with Handforth. It needs a fellow of tact and judgment——"

"Then don't go, Gussy!"

"Weally, Blake——"

"He's no ordinary new chap," went on Blake. "He may be several kinds of an ass, but at St. Frank's he had the reputation of being a terrific fighter. And he's liable to lash out at the slightest provocation."

"Bai Jove! I twust he would wefwain fwom lashin' out at me!" said Gussy with dignity. "Weally, if the new chap reveals any of that spiwit, I shall be obliged to give him a feahful thwashin'!"

"Well, now's your chance, Gussy," said Blake, grinning. "By the look of him, Handforth is about all in."

"If you are dawin' to insinuate that I could not administah a feahful thwashin' under normal cires., I must pwotest!" said D'Arcy warmly.

"Oh, go and dig a hole, and drop into it!" growled Blake.

"I uttably wefwuse to dig a hole and dwop into it!" said Gussy. "I wegard you as a fwabjous ass, Blake!"

On the other side of the quad Handforth was just getting to his feet. He was watched by many eyes. Figgins & Co., and a number of other New House juniors, were ready for trouble—if any trouble developed. Near the School House the Shell fellows and the Fourth-Formers were quite peaceful, however. They had no intention of butting in. Handforth had asked for this trouble, and he had only himself to blame for getting a chunk of it.

"All right!" panted the new fellow from St. Frank's, as he rose unsteadily to his feet. "All right, you rotters! Just wait until I know you a bit better—until I get shaken down! Then I'll show you something!"

He made these remarks to the thin air, for none of the New House juniors were within earshot. From some mysterious cause they had all vanished.

But the mystery was soon cleared up.

While Handforth was trying to dust himself down, a figure appeared at the top of the New House steps. Handforth paused in his task, and his eyes suddenly blazed.

"By George!" he breathed wrathfully.

He beheld a figure in cap and gown—an unpleasant-looking man with side-whiskers, and with an expression so sour that the very morning seemed to turn dull. In a word, Mr. Horace Ratcliff, the Housemaster of the New House.

Handforth gave one look, he gave one bellow, and he charged at Mr. Ratcliff as a bull charges at a red flag.

It was an unfortunate mistake on Handforth's part. In Study No. 4 he had seen Kerr making up as a master—complete with side-whiskers.

Handforth jumped to a conclusion on the spot. Kerr had completed his make-up, and had dared to emerge, fondly believing, perhaps, that he would still be able to pull the leg of this new fellow. And Handforth was filled with a burning indignation.

"Gweat Scott!" gasped D'Arcy. "He's goin' for old Wattay!"

"Pax, you fellows!" panted Redfern, of the New House. "This is going to be rich! Handforth has made a bloomer! He found old Kerr making up as Ratty, and he thinks that the real Ratty is Kerr!"

"Oh, crumbs!" breathed Blake.

"My sons, Fate is kind to us!" murmured Monty. "Watch closely, and I haven't the slightest doubt that we shall get an eyeful!"

Mr. Ratcliff had given Handforth a rather suspicious glance as he descended the New House steps. He wondered who this fellow in dusty flannels could be. But he was certainly beneath Mr. Ratcliff's dignity.

"You spoofing rotter!" bellowed Handforth wildly.

Crash!

Mr. Ratcliff gave a fiendish yell. His mortar-board went in one direction, his glasses in another. With a terrific impact Handforth had collided with him.

"Good gracious!" panted Mr. Ratcliff. "What the— Boy! You rascally young——"

Mr. Ratcliff broke off. At least, no further words were distinguishable. His voice had become a scream of rage and pain.

"Take these rotten things off!" hooted Handforth.

Grabbing with both hands, he seized Mr. Ratcliff's side-whiskers and pulled. And, as those side-whiskers were quite real, Mr. Ratcliff suffered.

He suffered such intense agony that tears sprang into his eyes. Choking cries came from his wide-open mouth. And Handforth hung on, shaking the unfortunate Housemaster like a rat.

"I'll teach you to play these tricks on me!" said the new fellow fiercely. "You rotter! Even if your whiskers won't come off, I'll soon have your wig!"

He released one of the side-whiskers, and made a grab at Mr. Ratcliff's scanty hair.

"Oh, this is more than I can bear!" said Blake weakly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

On the other side of the quad the juniors were shrieking with merriment. But here, near the New House, Mr. Ratcliff was shrieking with pain.

"Ow! Release me!" he screamed. "You young maniac! How dare you? Release me at once!"

"That's right?" snorted Handforth. "Keep it up! But you can't kid me!"

He grabbed both Mr. Ratcliff's side-whiskers again, and he was vaguely astonished when he found that they refused to part company with Mr. Ratcliff's face.

"Help!" bellowed the Housemaster. "Help, help!"

There was something so frantic about Mr. Ratcliff's cries that even Handforth was shaken. And then, with a dull feeling of horror, Handforth saw that his victim's cheeks were ballooned outwards, owing to the pull on his whiskers. There could be only one explanation; the whiskers were real!

Handforth suddenly released them as though they had become charged with electricity. He staggered back, and his one coherent thought at that dreadful moment was a hope that the quadrangle would yawn open and swallow him.



Handforth seized Mr. Ratcliff's side-whiskers and pulled hard. "Take these rotten things off!" he hooted. But as those whiskers were real they didn't come off, and the New House master let out a howl of pain. "Oooooow! Help! Help!" (See Chapter 9.)

For, now that it was too late, Handforth realised that he had blundered again! This newcomer wasn't Kerr at all—but a real master!

"Oh, my goodness!" said Handforth in a choking voice.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Handforth only heard that laugh in a detached kind of way. He was staring dazedly at the ground. There, sitting at his feet, was Mr. Ratcliff.

He wondered how the Housemaster had got there. But nobody else wondered, for Handforth had released Mr. Ratcliff so abruptly that the wretched man had sat down with fearful violence.

"Oh!" he moaned. "Help! Oh dear! Oh!"

In these circumstances, perhaps, nine fellows out of ten would have bolted. But not so Edward Oswald Handforth. As soon as he realised that he had made a mistake his penitence was sincere and genuine. And to run away was the last thought that would have occurred to him.

"Good man!" murmured Tom Merry, as Handforth leapt forward.

"Oh, I say, sir!" gasped the fellow from St. Frank's. "I—I didn't know! I'm awfully sorry, sir! I—I made a mistake—"

"Don't touch me!" screamed Mr. Ratcliff, leaping to his feet with singular agility. "You dangerous young maniac! You unmitigated rascal!"

"I didn't know it was you, sir!" panted Handforth desperately. "Honestly, sir, I'm most frightfully sorry—"

"I don't know who you are, but you are coming with me!" ejaculated Mr. Ratcliff, making a sudden grab at Handforth's collar. "Good heavens, you have injured me! I am in mortal agony! And you, sir, shall suffer—"

"But it was a mistake, sir!" interrupted Handforth hoarsely. "I'd no idea—"

"Silence!" shouted the Housemaster, his voice shrill and cracked with excited rage. "You will come with me to the headmaster! It was a deliberate assault! A premeditated attack! You abandoned wretch!"

"Here, I say! I tell you that—"

But Mr. Ratcliff wouldn't listen. He was beside himself with fury, and he dragged Handforth away and whirled him off to the Head's house. Tom Merry & Co., and Blake & Co., and the others were somewhat dismayed.

They hadn't expected this development, but nothing could

be done. It was impossible for them to rescue Handforth from the hands of Mr. Ratcliff.

Dr. Holmes was genuinely startled when the door of his study was flung open and Mr. Ratcliff charged in, dragging Handforth after him.

"Really, Mr. Ratcliff—"

"This boy has assaulted me, sir!" panted Mr. Ratcliff hoarsely. "Never in my life have I been so grossly attacked!"

The Head looked stern.

"I must request you, Mr. Ratcliff, to compose yourself," he said quietly. "Will you kindly tell me, in the briefest possible terms, what has happened?"

Mr. Ratcliff told him, but his terms were by no means brief. He went into the most exacting details.

"Listen to me, sir!" broke in Handforth, before Mr. Ratcliff had half finished. "It was all a mistake! I—I didn't mean to—"

"How dare you?" stormed Mr. Ratcliff. "You deliberately attacked me—"

"Please, sir!" said Handforth, appealing to Dr. Holmes. "I'll admit that I deliberately attacked him, but it was a mistake!"

The Head looked grave.

"If you deliberately attacked him, Handforth, how could it have been a mistake?" he asked.

"Because I—I thought he was somebody else, sir!" said Handforth desperately. "I—I thought—"

He broke off, realising that it was impossible for him to say much more, and Dr. Holmes, being a man of wisdom, and knowing what he did about Handforth already, slowly nodded.

"Handforth, you can go!" he said quietly.

"Thank you, sir!" gasped Handforth.
He was out like a shot, and Mr. Ratcliff gazed in amazement at his escaping prey.

"Really, sir," he protested, "I fail to understand—"
"Please be calm, sir!" said the Head. "This boy is a newcomer to the school, and I have no wish to punish him on his very first day."

"But—but he assaulted me—"
"An error, Mr. Ratcliff," said the Head. "I am quite satisfied that Handforth mistook you for—ahem!—a junior schoolboy who, has possibly been impersonating you. It would be most unfair to inflict punishment."

"But is there to be no inquiry?" asked Mr. Ratcliff shrilly. "Are these young reprobates not to be discovered and punished?"

"Upon the whole, Mr. Ratcliff, I think that we had better drop the matter," said Dr. Holmes gently.

And so Mr. Ratcliff received no satisfaction. It was all very well for the Head to talk like that, but Mr. Ratcliff had been the victim!

And Handforth, getting off scot-free, was lucky indeed!

CHAPTER 10. No Followers!

MR. RATCLIFF, as he walked back to his own House, gave an excellent imitation of a raging bull. He fumed, he snorted, and he stamped.

There was bitterness in Mr. Ratcliff's soul. It seemed to him that all justice was dead in the world. He had been struck by a human battering-ram, his whiskers had been pulled, and he had been sat forcibly on the ground. And yet there was no redress!

Possibly, the Head believed that Mr. Ratcliff had exaggerated. The Housemaster of the New House was prone to make a hullabaloo over trivialities.

There was justice in Dr. Holmes' decision.

He knew, from his own experience, that Handforth had been fooled by the juniors, and the nature of Handforth's mistake, in this latest adventure, was obvious to the Head. Upon the whole, it was far better to let the thing drop.

It was breakfast-time when Handforth left the Head's study, and after the meal was over he felt at a loose end.

Everything was so different.

He wasn't the lion that he had imagined himself to be! He had no study to go to, and his fellow Fourth-Formers, instead of bowing low at his approach, went off into shouts of laughter.

"You were jolly lucky to get off scot-free, old man," said Tom Merry, when he heard about the new fellow's interview with the Head. "By Jove, it's a wonder you didn't pull old Ratty's whiskers clean out!"

"I thought he was that idiot Kerr, or whatever his name is!" growled Handforth. "I nearly had a fit when I found that his whiskers wouldn't come off!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"That's right—laugh!" said Handforth, glaring.

"Thanks!" said Blake. "We will! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Idiots!"

"Not so much of your 'idiots,' my lad," frowned Blake. "Don't forget that you're a new kid, and new kids are sat on if they get cheeky!"

Handforth breathed hard.

"You're off your perch now, old man," said Monty Lowther gently. "We no longer hang upon your words. In fact, your focus needs to be adjusted."

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy came up.

"I have been thinkin', deah boys!" he announced, beaming upon all and sundry.

"What with?" asked Lowther politely.

"I uttably wufuse to be dwawn by your wotten insinuations, Lowthah!" said D'Arcy. "I have been thinkin' about Handforth."

"Nothing in that, Gussy," said Blake. "We've all been thinking about Handforth."

"We have had our fun with the new fellow, and I wathah think that it is up to us to show him that we are friently," continued Gussy.

"Is that the net result of your profound thinking?" demanded Blake tartly. "Because, if so, you'd better go away and think again! Handforth already knows that we're friently."

"Weally, Blake—"

"He's a sportsman, and he can take a joke," added Blake.

"All right! We'll forget all about it!" grunted Handforth. "All the same, I'm going to make you fellows sit up one of these days!"

"Bai Jove, I twust there is no ill-feelin'?" said Gussy anxiously. "I think it would be a wippin' ideah if some of us showed Handforth wound the school! Aftah all, he is practically a stwangah within the gates."

There were many juniors willing enough to escort Handforth round. The Terrible Three offered themselves on the spot; Blake and Herries and Digby were equally obliging. Bernard Glyn and Clifton Dane came along. Levison and Clive seemed quite anxious to show their friendliness towards the new fellow.

But Handforth, like Rachel of old, mourned, and would not be comforted. He was shown all the sights; he was taken to the playing fields; he was shown the startling beauties of the River Rhyl. But all to no purpose.

When it was time for lessons he was still looking grim. The fact of the matter was, he hadn't yet got over the shock.

At St. Frank's he had had two special chums of his own—a long-suffering pair named Church and McClure. And, although the Remove in general hadn't allowed Handforth to have much rope, he had, at least, done very much as he had pleased with his own study-mates.

But at St. Jim's it was totally different.

Now that the joke was over, the juniors were quite polite to him, and they were friendly enough. But, as for taking any notice of what he said, he might as well have been a gramophone. They listened, they smiled, and they hinted that it was time he changed the record.

Arthur Augustus made a point of attaching himself to Handforth, and, although Gussy meant well, his efforts were not appreciated. The swell of St. Jim's little realised it but he came precious near to having his noble nose punched more than once during that morning. For Handforth was in an exasperated mood, and he was ready enough to hit out at the slightest provocation. Only Gussy's obvious desire to please saved him.

When lessons were over Handforth received an intimation that Mr. Railton wanted to see him. The Housemaster had arrived during the morning, so Handforth went off to Mr. Railton's study and had a brief interview.

When he came out there was a somewhat happier expression on his rugged face. He seemed more settled. In the passage he encountered Baggy Trimble.

"I want, Study No. 9!" he said, looking at Baggy ferociously.

"I'll show you the way, Handforth!" said Trimble in an eager voice. "I'm always obliging, you know!"

Handforth was nothing if not blunt.

"I don't like the look of you!" he said coldly. "I don't know your name, and I don't want to know it! What's more, I don't want to know you!"

"Oh, I say!" protested Baggy feebly. "I—I rather thought that we should be good friends—"

"Then you'd better rather think something else!"

An unpleasant expression came over Baggy Trimble's face.

"You'd better be careful to keep on my right side!" he said warningly. "I'm an important chap in the Fourth, you know! My people at Trimble Hall are jolly influential! They've got tons of money!"

Handforth was satisfied that his original summing-up of Baggy had been correct.

"I don't want to hear about your beastly people!" he said tartly. "And it doesn't matter to me whether they're rich or whether they're paupers! I don't judge people by how much money they've got! I'm not one of those snobs, thank goodness!"

"I—I was only trying to be pally, you know!" said Trimble insinuatingly. "In fact, if you can lend me five bob, old man, I'd be awfully obliged! You see, I'm expecting a big remittance from Trimble Hall—"

"That's all right!" growled Handforth, diving a hand into his pocket.

Much to Trimble's amazement, he produced the five shillings, handed it over, and passed-on. This fellow from

Mr. Amateur—YOU

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St. Frank's was noted for his open-handed generosity. Handforth himself considered that it was well worth five shillings to be rid of Baggy Trimble.

When he arrived at Study No. 9 he hammered on the door, burst it open, and strode in. He found Ralph Reckness Cardew chatting with Levison and Clive.

"Ah, our genial friend from St. Frank's is paying a call!" murmured Cardew languidly. "Walk in, dear man! Pray don't trouble to knock!"

"I did knock!" said Handforth.

"Sorry!" said Cardew. "I thought you were trying to push the door in!"

"In any case, I don't see why I should knock on the door of my own study!" went on Handforth, his eyes gleaming.

"Open the door, Clive, old fellow!" said Levison coolly.

"With pleasure!" said Clive.

"These little operations are distressin', but very necessary!" said Ralph Reckness Cardew, as he rolled up his sleeves. "I think we are all agreed, dear men?"

The chums of Study No. 9 advanced upon Handforth in a body.

"Here!" ejaculated the new fellow. "What the dickens do—"

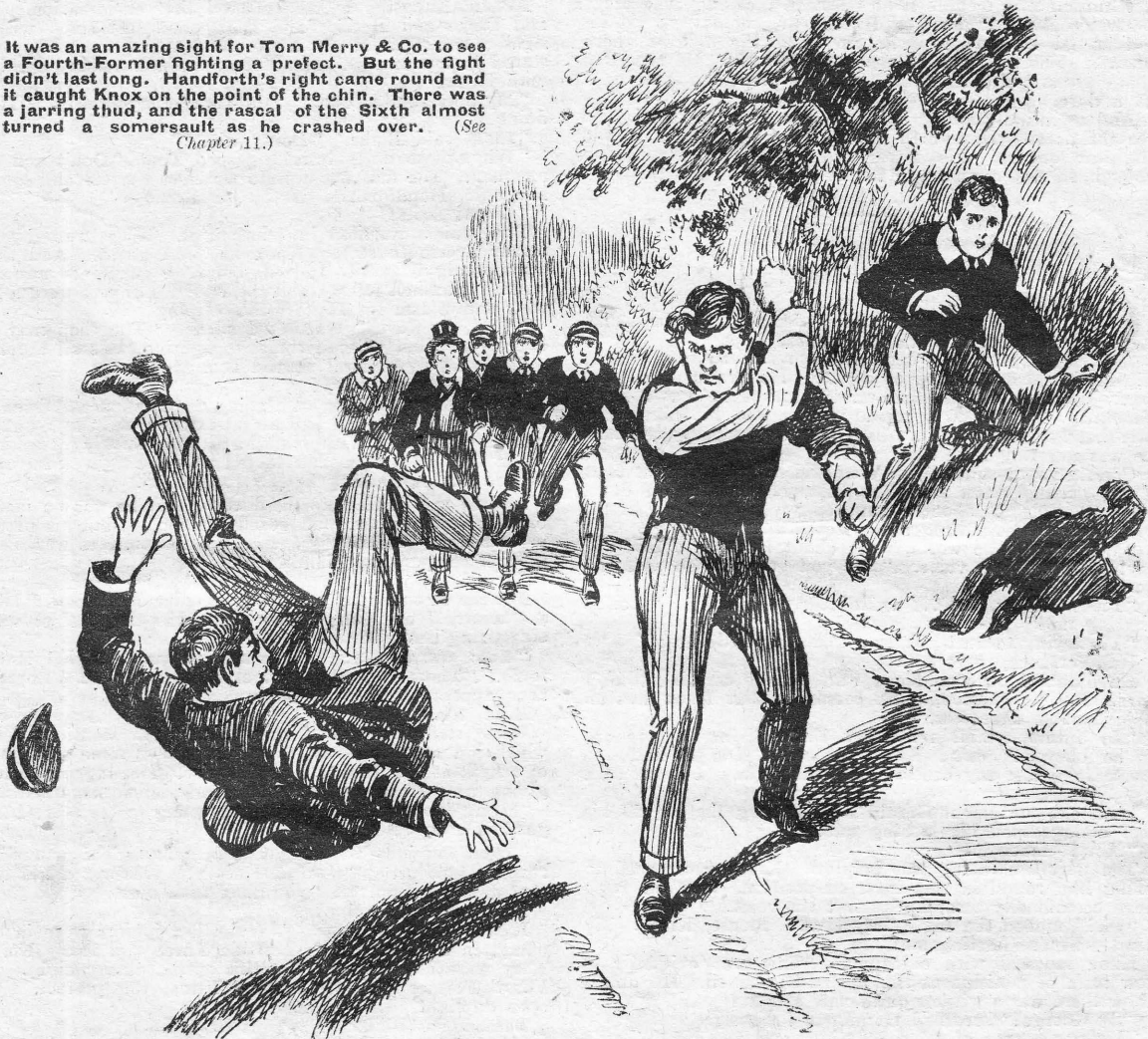
He broke off with a wild yell. Heavy hands were laid upon him. He was seized, he was propelled out into the passage, and he was humped.

"Hi!" he roared. "You howling lunatics—"

Slam!

The door of Study No. 9 closed, and Handforth picked

It was an amazing sight for Tom Merry & Co. to see a Fourth-Former fighting a prefect. But the fight didn't last long. Handforth's right came round and it caught Knox on the point of the chin. There was a jarring thud, and the rascal of the Sixth almost turned a somersault as he crashed over. (See Chapter 11.)



"Your own study?" said the trio, in one voice.

"Yes!"

"Do you mean to say that old Railton has bunged you in with us?" asked Levison indignantly.

"Mr. Railton told me to come to Study No. 9, and this is Study No. 9!" said Handforth aggressively. "I don't know exactly who you fellows are, but I take it that I've got to share this study with you!"

"Seems like it!" said Clive sadly.

"Life is full of these little worries!" murmured Cardew.

"Life will be full of some big worries before long!" retorted Handforth. "Now, my lads, we'd better understand one another right at the start!"

"There's nothing like it!" agreed Levison, nodding.

"Good! I'm glad you agree!" said Handforth. "Well, I'm the leader of this study from now onwards! Do I make myself plain?"

"I imagine, dear man, that Nature did that!" replied Cardew smoothly.

"You silly ass!" roared Handforth, colouring. "By George, I can see that I shall have to start by biffing you about! As I said before, I'm the leader of this study—"

himself up, breathing harder than ever. Cardew & Co. had said very little, but they had clearly given Handforth to understand that as a leader he wasn't wanted.

He took himself off, boiling.

Downstairs he ran into Blake & Co.

"Wherefore this thussness?" inquired Blake. "Why the ruffled brow?"

"I'm fed-up!" said Handforth fiercely.

"Bai Jove! I twust—"

"I'm jolly sorry I came to this rotten school!" roared Handforth.

"This what school?" demanded Study No. 6, in one voice.

"I won't stay in it, either!" continued Handforth threateningly. "I'll jolly well go back to St. Frank's!"

"What about your boast?" asked Herries.

"My what?"

"Didn't you say that you were going to accomplish all those dotty things that Tom Merry trotted out last night?"

"Weally, Hewwies!" said D'Arcy. "You know vewy well that Tom Mewwy was only wottin—"

"I don't care whether he was rotting or not!" broke in

Handforth. "You fellows seem to think that I'm made of gingerbread! Well, I'm not! And when I say a thing, I mean it! I've made up my mind to undergo those tests—and I'll do every one of them!"

"Within the month?" chuckled Blake, hugely amused. "Yes, blow you—within the month!" said Handforth aggressively. "And after that I'll go back to St. Frank's!" "You'll deserve to go into a king's palace if you do all those things!" grinned Blake. "Don't be such an ass, Handforth! You know it was only a joke, and—" "All right! Just you wait!" interrupted Handforth darkly.

He strode away, and passed out into the quadrangle. He tramped out through the gates and turned down the lane.

"The burbling idiot!" said Blake, frowning. "He'll only get himself into trouble if he sticks to those dotty ideas!"

They couldn't understand Handforth's mentality. At his old school he was well known; and the fellows there knew it at he took such things very seriously. He regarded those "tests" of Tom Merry's in very much the same light as a dare.

And so, blindly and grimly, he meant to go ahead. As for the details, Handforth didn't worry over them in the slightest degree. He never did. And, extraordinarily enough, in nine cases out of ten he blundered through.

CHAPTER 11.

Handforth's Luck!

"GREAT SCOTT!"

Handforth was staring down Rylcombe Lane, his brow as black as thunder.

Until a few moments ago he had been sitting disconsolately on the top of a gate. His troubles weighed heavily upon him. To find suddenly that he was a mere nonentity, instead of being a leader, had hit him hard. His first hours at St. Jim's had been very joyous; and now he was suffering from the reaction.

Certain vague squeals had attracted his attention at first. Then, getting down from the gate, he had looked down the lane. There, about a hundred yards away, a tall St. Jim's senior was pulling the ear of a diminutive fag.

"Well, you little worm, what about it?" the senior was saying, in a harsh voice. "Are you going to do as I tell you, or not?"

"Please, Knox, don't!" wailed the fag shrilly. "You're hurting me!"

"I'm trying to hurt you, you snivelling little brat!" Handforth began to boil.

He didn't know who Knox was, and he certainly didn't care. But he guessed, quite correctly, that Knox was an objectionable character.

"In future, you'll remember that all my orders are to be obeyed!" came Knox's voice. "You've had the nerve to ignore my orders—and this is how I treat such kids!"

With one movement Gerald Knox swung the fag off his feet and grasped his lashing ankles.

"Now!" snarled Knox.

The unfortunate fag was helpless. Knox commenced to swing him round in this inverted position, with the fag's head occasionally scraping against the road.

"Oh!" sobbed the fag. "My head! Please, Knox! My head! You're hurting me!"

Knox laughed with enjoyment. This was evidently a new form of punishment that he had invented. He didn't know there was a witness quite close at hand.

"By George!" breathed Handforth furiously.

This was a case of sheer bullying, and Handforth hated bullying like poison. Already the fag's head had touched the ground with some violence two or three times, and the youngster was in danger of being seriously hurt.

"Stop that, you cad!" roared Handforth, as he ran up.

Knox was so surprised that he dropped the fag like a hot brick. The frightened youngster was on his feet in a moment. He staggered, ran blindly into the hedge, and then got his bearings. But neither Knox nor Handforth noticed him now.

"Who the thunder do you think you're talking to?" snarled Knox.

"I'm talking to you!" said Handforth, whipping off his jacket. "Put up your hands, you bullying hound!"

"Why, confound you—"

"Put 'em up!" shouted Handforth.

Knox was not only startled, but he was furious. This chap was a junior—and evidently a new fellow, too. Knox hadn't seen him before.

"Do you know who I am?" he said, in a terrible voice.

"I don't care if you're the Grand Vizier of Siam!" yelled Handforth. "Take that!"

Biff!

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Knox took it. He couldn't do anything else. For Handforth, without any further argument, had sailed in. In any moment of emergency Handforth never wasted any time. He acted.

"Yaroooooh!" hooted Knox wildly.

Crash! Biff! Thud!

"You—you young demon!" shrieked Knox, backing away and trying to ward off Handforth's blows. "I'll get you sacked for this—"

But Handforth, serenely indifferent as to his fate, was continuing the good work. Incidentally, he was enjoying himself. He was revelling in this "mill."

He had been exasperated ever since breakfast-time, and now, at last, he was able to let off some of his steam. He went for Knox with enthusiastic vigour.

"Bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy uttered that exclamation. He and Blake and Herries and Digby had just come within sight. And Tom Merry & Co. were there, too. They all stared in amazement. Handforth, the new fellow, fighting with Knox!

"My only sainted aunt!" said Tom Merry faintly. "He's doing it!"

"Eh?" said Blake. "Doing what?"

"Why, those dotty tests!" gasped Tom. "Don't you remember? The first one was to thrash a prefect and knock him out. Handforth is on the job already!"

"Gweat Scott!"

The juniors watched in amazement. They were by no means averse to seeing Knox battered about. And they were seeing it now! Indeed, before a couple of minutes elapsed the Shell fellows and the Fourth-Formers were filled with enthusiasm for Handforth's display.

"Well, by Jove!" ejaculated Blake. "The chap may be a prize ass; but when it comes to fighting, he's all there!"

"He's a holy terror!" agreed Tom Merry.

Tramp, tramp, tramp!

Handforth and Knox were going at it hammer and tongs. Knox of the Sixth had had no intention of fighting; but he had no option. With Handforth aggressively attacking, Knox had been compelled to put up his hands. And once he had started fighting he had to keep on.

And he was finding, to his dismay, that he was no match for this burly junior. His reach was longer, but his breath was shorter. And the power behind his punches was insignificant compared to Handforth's.

Crash!

For the second time in quick succession, Handforth landed a "beauty" on Knox's nose. The rascally prefect went staggering back, howling madly.

"Yes; and now you'll take another one!" yelled Handforth. "Those eyes of yours look a bit baggy. I'll improve their appearance!"

Biff! Slam!

With sledgehammer blows, Handforth continued his whirlwind attack. Knox, who had put up some semblance of a fight at first, was now in disorder. He staggered back, giving way, his arms flying wildly, his defence smashed.

"Stop!" he snarled. "You—you young fool! Stop, I tell you! I'm a prefect, and—"

"Then you jolly well ought to be ashamed of yourself!" roared Handforth. "And if I see you treating a kid like that again, I'll pulverise you more than ever!"

Tramp, tramp, tramp!

It was soon over now. A few other juniors were in the offing, in addition to the Terrible Three and Study No. 6. They were all fascinated by this extraordinary sight. A Fourth-Former fighting against Knox, the prefect. In open daylight. In Rylcombe Lane!

The end, as Blake put it, was beautiful.

Handforth's right hand came round, and it caught Knox on the point of the chin. There was a jarring thud, and the rascal of the Sixth almost turned a somersault as he crashed over.

He lay sprawling on the ground, just as he had fallen—out!

Handforth stood over him, breathing hard.

"Well, that's that!" he panted. "You haven't had half what you deserve, but it'll do!"

He turned on his heel, walked back along the lane, and picked up his coat. Then, feeling thoroughly pleased with the world in general, he strode off towards St. Jim's.

And Gerald Knox, crawling dizzily to his feet, made a wild plunge through the nearest hedge, so that he could get out of sight. It was necessary that he should get out of sight, too. He wasn't a pretty picture.

And the astonishing thing about the whole incident was that Handforth did not even know that he had fulfilled the first one of those preposterous "tests"!

He ran into Blake & Co. and the others almost before he knew it.

"Good old Handforth!" they shouted, in a triumphant chorus.

Handforth started, and looked round at the flushed faces. "Cheese it!" he grunted. "I don't want any more of your spoof!"

"My dear chap, it isn't spoof!" said Tom Merry enthusiastically. "Good man! That scrap of yours was worth a guinea a box!"

"My hat!" ejaculated Handforth. "Were you fellows looking on?"

"We saw everything!" replied Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!" chipped in Gussy. "Weally, deah boy, you have done wondahs! Any fellow who can administah a feahful thwashin' to that wascal, Knox, is my fwient."

"He was bullying a fag!" said Handforth, frowning. "Not ordinary bullying, either; but downright savage cruelty! Who is he, anyhow?"

"Knox of the Sixth!" said Tom Merry.

"He's a prefect!" put in Manners.

"Yes, so he told me," said Handforth coolly. "I don't care!"

"But you'll be slaughtered!" said Herries.

"Will I? Who's going to slaughter me?" retorted the new fellow. "Besides, do you think Knox is going to tell anybody that he was thrashed by a junior? I'm not boasting, because the fellow couldn't fight for toffee. But if I know anything about bullies, he'll keep mum."

"The chap's right!" said Tom Merry, nodding. "Knox will probably do all he can to make Handforth's life a misery, but he daren't report him—it would be too risky. Besides, he'd be the laughing-stock of the school in less than half an hour!"

Handforth was greatly bucked when he saw the enthusiastic faces round him. His exhibition of fighting strength had made a big difference. The St. Jim's juniors were ready to take him to their bosoms.

"Great Scott!" he ejaculated suddenly. "Did—did you say that that fellow is a prefect?"

"Yes," grinned Tom Merry. "Just thought of something?"

"Why, I've fulfilled the first of those tests!" roared Handforth excitedly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You certainly have!" grinned Blake.

Handforth was flushed with triumph.

"Didn't I tell you that I'd do 'em?" he exclaimed. "And that's only the first! Now I'm going straight ahead and I'm going to do the other three things!"

"Bai Jove!"

"And all within my first month!" said Handforth firmly. "I may leave St. Jim's after that, or I may not. But I'm blowed if I'll shift a foot until I've completed all the four tests!"

And, amazingly enough, Edward Oswald Handforth was in deadly earnest!

The juniors of St. Jim's were just beginning to understand this extraordinary new fellow.

CHAPTER 12.

Handforth Means It!

TOM MERRY chuckled. "Come off it, Handforth!" he said smilingly.

"Come off what?"

"Well, my dear old scout, you can't be serious," said Tom. "You know as well as I do that you fulfilled the first of those giddy tests by accident."

"Yaas, wathah!" nodded D'Arcy. "When you thwashed Knox, deah boy, you didn't even know that he was a pwpfect."

Handforth's face became stubborn.

"What difference does that make?" he asked.

"Nothing much!" grinned Blake. "Only that your ignorance made the thing possible."

"My what?"

"Your ignorance!"

"Look here, you silly ass——" began Handforth.

"No offence!" grinned Blake. "Can't you understand

what I'm driving at? If you had known that Knox was a prefect, you wouldn't have gone for him."

Handforth laughed aloud.

"That's all you know!" he retorted. "Knox was bullying that fag, and I didn't care whether he was a prefect or not!"

"But a fellow can get flogged for attacking a prefect," said Herries.

"What do I care?" demanded Handforth aggressively. "If I'm flogged, I'm flogged! It wouldn't be the first time that I've been a martyr! I shouldn't have left St. Frank's, only I was accused of something that I didn't do. It was all cleared up before I left, but I wasn't going to stay at a school that couldn't take my word!"

"Ahem!" murmured Tom Merry. "As it happens, I don't think there's much risk, Handforth. Knox isn't likely to make any report. It would be a bit too risky—for himself."

And, as it turned out, these surmises were correct.

A little later, after Handforth had washed himself, and had removed most of the marks of the recent battle, he encountered Knox at the top of the stairs in the School House.

Knox was not a pleasant sight.

He had done wonders in the way of concealing the scars, but nothing could hide the fact that his nose was too large for his face; the feverish application of raw steak had done little to reduce the greeny-bluish tinge round his eyes. And one ear was definitely puffy and swollen. Altogether, Knox of the Sixth looked a wreck.

"I've been looking for you!" he said, in a low voice, as he glared at Handforth.

"Well, you've found me!" replied the new fellow.

They glared at one another. Handforth was quite at ease, and he was in no fear of this prefect. Indeed, there was a contemptuous light in his eyes.

"Come to my study!" said Knox curtly.

Handforth shrugged his shoulders, and accompanied the prefect to the Sixth Form passage. Knox led the way into his study, and Handforth followed.

"Now!" said Knox, as he closed the door.

"What's the idea?" asked Handforth guardedly. "You'd better not start any hanky-panky——"

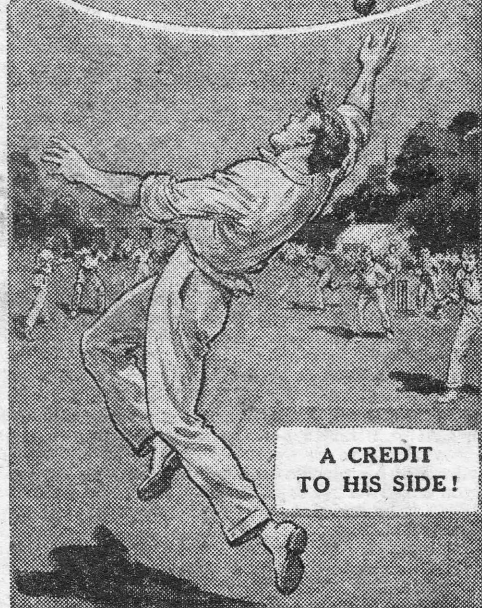
"I've found out who you are!" interrupted Knox harshly. "You're a new kid in the Fourth, eh? And your name's Handforth?"

"What's the idea of these silly questions?"

"Look here, Handforth, I want a private word with you!" said Knox tensely. "Out in the lane you attacked me, and——"

(Continued on page 23.)

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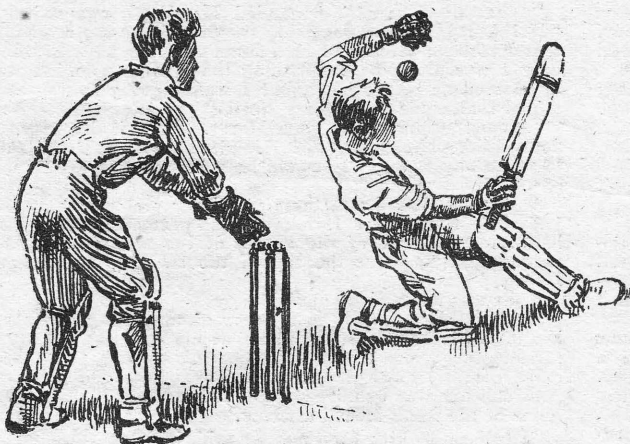
THE SECOND TEST!

By sheer chance, and an overdose of luck, Handforth has got away with his first test. But it would seem a million to one chance against him fulfilling the second—that of playing for the First Eleven AND scoring a century. Handforth, however, isn't daunted by the obvious difficulties that hedge Test No. 2. Not a bit of it! He sets about his task with his usual obstinacy, and that, combined with another slice of luck and grit, brings about an astonishing result, in:

"PLAYING FOR THE FIRST!"

"Gemites" will find this a real treat of a yarn. Make certain of it by ordering next week's GEM To-day!

THE ORDER OF THE BOOT! They've sacked young Dick Dare from his office job, but he doesn't care a snap of the fingers. The only thing that matters to him is cricket, and by jingo, boys, you should just see him handle the willow and the leather. He's playing this week!



The LUCK of the GAME!

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A GRAND NEW CRICKET STORY, DEALING WITH THE ADVENTURES OF A BOY WHO LOVES THE GREAT SUMMER GAME, AND IS A MASTER AT IT, TOO.

WHAT HAS HAPPENED.

Driven to rebellion by the tyranny of an overbearing manager, young Dick Dare, a clerk in the Marchester Fire and Life Insurance Society, leaves the office in defiance of orders, determined to spend the afternoon at the game he loves—cricket. On his way to the ground he displays great presence of mind in saving the life of John Ainsley, the man who has brought Markshire into the forefront of cricketing counties, who asks Dick his name. Dick arrives at the ground too late for his match, and he eagerly accepts an offer from Neville Tryon, an old boy of his school, to play in a club and ground side against Wickhamdene on the county ground. At last the chance has come Dick's way to show what he is made of, and there is a determined light in his eyes as he runs up to the wicket to deliver his first ball.

(Now read on).

Knocked Out!

BLAIR, the Wickhamdene batsman, played the first ball with care, for it broke in sharply from the off at a good pace. The second was slower and plainer; it was one of those which Dick often gave the batsman in whom he wanted to inspire a feeling of confidence.

Blair employed one of his best strokes—a forcing shot which sent the leather well clear of both short-leg and mid-on, and generally meant four.

It was four this time, Blair smiled a superior smile. He had not met Dick before, though Dick had seen him bat, and now he fancied himself Dick's master.

The next ball showed him he was wrong. Delivered with just the same action, without an extra yard of run, it was half as fast again.

Blair was still playing at that ball when his middle stump reeled. The ball had risen quickly from the pitch, and broke in quite four inches.

Swinging his bat angrily, with a scowl instead of the superior smile a moment before, Blair made his way to the pavilion.

Tryon slapped Dick on the back. "That's the stuff to give them!" he said applaudingly.

Blair turned, hearing. His scowl deepened. Tryon grinned in cheery fashion. He was, what Blair would never be, a cricketer at heart.

With Blair self came before side. "Can't give them much of it, though," said Dick. For he had found that the extra effort demanded for that faster ball gave him a nasty twinge about the shoulders.

It was hardly to be wondered at; for he was still feeling the effects of his plucky dash to Mr. Ainsley's rescue.

Tryon asked for no explanation. He would not have been given one if he had done so.

Another batsman came in, took guard, and succumbed to his first ball. He had looked for something like Blair had received; he got in place of it a slow that found him playing as much too early as Blair had too late.

It was a good start for the weak Club and Ground side. But it was not maintained.

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Very soon Dick realised what probably Tryon already knew. The team, a man short—for Blair had not offered a substitute in the field, and Tryon would not ask for one—was terribly weak in catching.

The skipper himself was all right. The wicket-keeper, a youngster on the staff who hoped one day to fill the place in the county team now occupied by the veteran Nevern, was nailing good. It was of his batting Tryon had spoken when saying he was nothing great. The other colt could field.

But not one of the rest seemed able to hold the simplest catch. And Dick was the only bowler of any class on the side.

He pegged away at medium pace, with an occasional slow. The use of his fast ball meant risking a bad strain, and it would be sheer folly to take that risk at the beginning of the season, when care to-day and a few days' rest and massage would put the damage right.

Two men who had both been missed before they reached double figures put on over seventy, with three or four chances each meantime.

Then Tryon made a brilliant catch at cover, and one of them had to go. A few minutes later four more wickets were down, with only half a dozen runs added. The young stumper had done what was required of him when Dick had enticed two of the batsmen outside the crease; Dick himself had taken a hard return; and a leg-break from him had made a sad mess of number six's wicket.

There came another stand, and Tryon saw that it was time Dick, who had accounted for all the five wickets thus far, was taken off.

"Anything wrong, Dare?" he asked. "Say if you'd rather keep on, but if not I'll have a stab at them."

"There's nothing really wrong, but I've hurt my right shoulder a bit," Dick answered. "I should be glad of a spell."

So the skipper tried his luck, with fast stuff that would have been quite good if it had only possessed length and direction. The pace was there; but not more than one ball in an over was straight, and that one was usually short.

Nevertheless, he got a wicket in his second over, surprising the batsman with one on the middle, and was encouraged by this success to keep on. He had not much choice; for Dick, the rest were no better than he.

The score leaped up. But everyone, even his own side, was surprised when Blair emerged from the pavilion and shouted to Tryon that he declared the innings closed.

"What, at 123?" said Tryon. "Great Scott, he holds us cheaply, I must say! If we can't get that little lot we ought never to play again!"

But the fact was that Blair, having been dismissed for four, wanted to make up for it by bowling out the other side, and cared little about the result of the game if he could win personal distinction.

"Like to go in first, Dare?" Tryon asked.

"Suits me all right," Dick replied.

His partner was the young pro who had kept wicket, Edmead by name.

Edmead had defence, but at present hardly a scoring stroke. To put him in first was no mistake, though. Blair had left Tryon's side any amount of time in which to make the runs, and if Edmead could stay he would be useful.

Dick had cast a glance at the telegraph-board on the neighbouring ground from time to time, and it had shown him that West Court had scored fast and freely against the office bowling. Now he had another glimpse of the figures just before they were taken down. While Wickhamdene had made 123, West Court had totalled more than double that figure. Dick wondered whether his chum Andy had been given a chance to exploit the googly he claimed to have cultivated.

He wondered, too, whether he himself would ever play for the office side again. But he put that thought from him. Confound old Filer! His departmental chief would do his worst, no doubt. Let him do it!

Blair took the first over. He was a far better bowler than Tryon, with pace as great and straight enough. But Dick revelled in fast bowling short of first-class calibre; and there are few first-class fast bowlers in these days.

He hit Blair from the first—two fours and a brace in the opening over.

Edmead played the rock. Even in defence he was rather clumsy; but he managed to get his bat in the right place, and he stayed. Dick saw that he did not like the fast stuff, and contrived to get most of it himself.

Fifty went up in under twenty minutes. Tryon chuckled as he sat and watched. Blair had bitten off more than he could chew, he fancied.

Then Edmead had to face Blair, and was beaten by the pace. He had only made five, but he had been of use.

The next man went first ball, bowled middle stump. His successor cocked one up in the slips, and was taken. Blair had done the hat-trick!

But he was not satisfied, for Dick Dare was still there, and his chief desire was to get Dick.

"Blair's a greedy bounder!" said Tryon, a minute later. "The hat-trick ought to be enough for anyone! Four in four balls is too much!"

For Blair had sent the off stump of No. 5 reeling, and 51 for no wicket had become 51 for four wickets, which looked none too good.

The other young pro was next on the list. He scratched about rather helplessly when opposed to Blair, but scored a few off the other bowler. When he left the score was 73.

Tryon came in. Blair was tiring a little by this time. His failure to get Dick annoyed him, and his bowling grew wild. Tryon hit him over the ropes, and his wrath grew hotter.

A single brought Dick opposite him again, and a full-pitch sang past the batsman's head.

"I say, Blair, I don't call that bowling!" snapped Tryon, moved out of his wonted good humour.

Blair did not answer—in words, anyway. But his next ball was of the same type. Dick's bat went up just too late to shield him. The ball took him on the left temple, and he crashed down.

The End of the Game!

TRYON dropped his bat, ran up the pitch, and lifted Dick's head.

Others crowded round.

"Oh, give him air!" protested Tryon.

The man who had done the damage was not among the crowd. He stood a few yards past the wicket from which he had bowled, his arms folded, his face still scowling. He spoke no word of regret.

"You might at least say you're sorry!" spoke Tryon hotly.

"Naturally, I'm sorry! But it's all in the game, and I couldn't help it!" Blair answered sullenly.

Dick stirred, and opened his eyes. Tryon and one of the Wickhamdene men helped him to his feet, and, leaning on them, he made his way to the pavilion. He was stunned and dizzy; it was quite out of the question that he should go on with his innings then.

Another man came out, but did not last two overs. Tryon hit hard whenever he had the chance, but no one else could do anything. Blair had gone off, and his place had been taken by a steady, medium-pace bowler of the type generally too good for tail-enders.

The eighth wicket fell at 107. The side was still a man short. Blair started for the pavilion.

"Thought I'd risked too much by declaring, didn't you, Tryon?" he remarked sneeringly.

"I did, and I still think so," Tryon replied. "We haven't done yet! Here comes Dare back!"

"No go! Anyone who has retired hurt can only bat again

with the consent of the other side's captain, and I don't agree!" said Blair triumphantly.

But at this there rose a chorus of objection from his own men.

"You can't do it, Bertie! It isn't decent to refuse!" said one outspoken cricketer.

"He can do it," Tryon said quietly. "But I really think he'd better not, for it's not the way things are done on this ground."

"Oh, all right! Let him come in again," Blair growled.

He could not maintain his position, with the opinion of his own team dead against him. And he did not think now that after all it could make much difference.

Dick's walk was unsteady. His head still hummed and buzzed, and he could not see very clearly. But while there was a chance of victory he would not give in, and the fact that Neville Tryon was still at the crease meant that the chance was still there. Only seventeen runs were wanted. If he could but keep up his end Tryon might get them.

"I wouldn't if I were you, Bertie," said the same man who had protested before when Blair took the ball again at the end of the over.

But Blair gave him only a scowl by way of reply.

He was very careful, however, to bowl no more full-pitches, let alone full-pitches head high. If he hurt Dare again nasty things might be said about him. On the other hand, he could not rest satisfied unless he could get Dare's wicket, and he thought, failing that, he had a better chance of getting Tryon's than anyone else had. It would be a sort of consolation prize; Blair felt bitter against Tryon.

Dick got his bat in the way of three fast balls dead on the stumps, though he did not sight one of them clearly. Then a ball that he did not see at all touched the edge of his bat, and sped between two slip fields to boundary.

"Stay where you are!" sang out Tryon. "That's four!"

Then somehow Dick's vision cleared. He glanced over the fence. The telegraph-board there showed 67 for ten, and the middle was vacant. The team from the office was beaten already, and might yet suffer the indignity of an innings defeat.

The knowledge gave him no pleasure; but somehow it bucked him up for the task before him. Things would not have gone so badly on the other side of the palings if he had been there, he was sure; and on this side Tryon was relying upon him. He must not let Tryon down!

But Dick's head was still muzzy, and his legs felt weak under him, and every time his bat and the ball met there was a jarring pain in his shoulders. That four had been sheer luck. He must not count on any more such luck. What he had to do was to let Tryon make the runs while he merely kept up his end.

Blair was bowling at his best again, and the man at the other end was well on the spot. Tryon would not risk another big hit. His teeth were set. The skipper of the Ground and Club team was bent on victory, but very anxious about his partner.

Chiefly by twos and by singles at the end of an over when Tryon had the bowling, the score crept up to 120. Then Dick faced Blair again.

He cast a look at the board. A boundary would do the trick. He saw Tryon's hand go up in warning. But he did not heed the warning, for he knew that to delay would be fatal. He could not stand up at the crease much longer.

Fairly and squarely he met a ball good enough to have bowled most men, and thrilled as he felt it right in the middle of his bat. The next was shorter, and just off the leg stump. He swept round at it.

"Done the trick!" yelled Tryon; and exultant shouts from the pavilion answered his yell.

The ball had sped to boundary.

"Come along, Dare!" Tryon said, running down the pitch in time to grab Dick's arm as he reeled.

"Aren't you going to finish the innings?" demanded Blair.

"Not worth while. We've beaten you, and Dare's had just about enough."

Applause greeted the plucky pair as they came in. Most of the Wickhamdene men joined in it. They were disgruntled with their captain.

One or two of them did not hesitate to say so. Blair, who had gone straight to the dressing-room, which for the moment he had to himself, heard things that were very far from pleasing him.

Then there came to his ears words that brought him out only half-clothed.

"That wasn't any accident!"

Tryon was the speaker. Tryon's tongue was an unruly member.

But Blair fancied that Dick had spoken. He would have been angry at hearing those words from Tryon, none the less angry because they were true. He was infuriated at hearing them, as he imagined, from Dick.

"I'll call upon you to prove that, Dare!" he shouted.

It might have been better had Dick replied that, not having said it, he was certainly not called upon to prove it. But in his heart he believed it true, and he did not care to see trouble between his friend and this fellow who seemed bent on being his enemy.

"I don't think it's necessary," he answered coolly.

With a howl of rage Blair flung himself at Dick. He was in vest and trousers, his braces dangling, with socks only on his feet—plainly in no condition for a fight.

But they gave him small chance of getting at Dick. A heavy foot, a foot belonging to a member of his own team, came down quite accidentally upon his instep, and half a dozen hands seized him. He gave vent to a yell of pain, then howled with rage again as his hands were forced behind him and bound with his braces.

He was hustled back into the dressing-room. Not a man present had the slightest sympathy for him.

"That's his first and last match as the Wickhamdene skipper," said one of the visitors.

Blair heard that, and knew it was true. And he put it down to Dick Dare, and hoped that the chance might come to revenge himself upon Dick.

Monday Morning!

"THE old File will have your scalp for that, Dick!" said Andy Whelan, when he heard what had happened at the office.

"I suppose so. But I don't see how I could have done anything but what I did," Dick answered.

"I don't, either, though I'm not sure I'd have had the pluck to do it in your place. Well, it may not be so bad. Perhaps he'll be ashamed to report you."

"Not he! I shall be reported all right, and I shall be sacked, for I can't expect to make the Chief see it as you and I see it. Even if it's admitted that Filer was a bit too much down on me, I shan't be forgiven for manhandling him. We musn't take our official superiors by the scruff of the neck, you know, Andy."

Not a word did Dick say about his rescue of John Ainsley.

Sunday was a bad day for him. He stayed in bed late, with an aching head and a general feeling of sickness and strain. He ate hardly anything, and Andy felt quite worried about him.

But by breakfast time on Monday he was very much himself again, and showed it by making a hearty meal.

"I say, that was my egg!" protested Andy, as Dick helped himself to the last rasher and the last egg on the dish.

"That's all right. You wiped up my sausages yesterday morning, I guess," replied Dick.

"Yes. But you didn't want them. I wanted that egg."

"Doesn't matter. You can always make them—you made two on Saturday," was Dick's crushing rejoinder.

Andy grinned at that. The office side had been beaten in an innings, and Andy had not made a run. But he never really expected to do much at cricket, though he was keen enough.

He was more nervous than Dick when they made their way to the office together. Dick would not have cared much had it not been for his guardian. This would give old Hassall a chance to say again that he was no good.

Mr. Filer was already there when they entered.

"It is hardly worth while to start work, Dare," he said icily. "The moment the Chief arrives I shall see him, and after I have seen him I think your stool will be vacant."

"May as well get on while I'm waiting," said Dick. "After all, I'm not sacked yet."

He got on with his work as coolly as though no sword of Damocles hung over his devoted head. His attitude annoyed Mr. Filer—as Dick well knew it would.

The Chief was seldom at the office before eleven on Mondays. Dick saw that Mr. Filer was keeping his ears pricked up for any sound of his arrival. The Chief's chauffeur usually sounded the horn as the car swung into Bank Street, and every man in the office knew the note of that horn.

There it was!

Dick slipped from his stool. Mr. Filer, at the door, found him alongside. Mr. Filer did not like it one little bit. He had intended to tell his story first.

But at the door of the sanctum Dick drew back.

"After you, sir!" he said.

Good-bye to the Office!

FOR the moment the wind was taken out of Mr. Filer's sails. His carefully thought out story of the trouble between him and Dick fled from his mind. That story made him absolutely blameless, though he knew that he was not so. He had kept Dare out of sheer spite, and out of sheer spite had delayed over his luncheon, that he might keep the boy longer. The big mistake he had made was to let Dare know that he had done it by way of punishment. That mistake troubled him now.

But he pulled himself together, told his story as he had meant to tell it.

The Chief looked from one to the other when Mr. Filer had called Dick in at his command. He saw that it was the man, not the boy, who was nervous. Perhaps his sympathies were with Dick. But discipline must be maintained; and there would be an end of it if, under any provocation whatever, a junior was allowed to stay with the company after assaulting a departmental head.

"Mr. Filer complains that you laid violent hands upon him on Saturday, Dare," said the great man. "Do you deny it?"

"No, sir," answered Dick.

"Have you anything at all to say in extenuation of the offence?"

"Nothing that's of any use, sir."

For what was the use of saying that from his first arrival at the office Mr. Filer had been down on him? What was the use of saying that Mr. Filer had punished him twice for one fault, had tried to rob him of his half-holiday? His offence would still remain.

"You know what this means, Dare?"

The Chief's tone was not unkind. Mr. Filer thought it altogether too kind, and still felt uneasy.

"Yes, sir."

"There is no more to be said then, except that I am sorry you should go like this. I will instruct the cashier at once

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With a howl of rage, Blair flung himself at Dick. But members of his own team promptly seized him, and Blair was jerked roughly back. (See page 26.)

that you are to have the current month's salary. You can go to him within five minutes."

It was over, and Dick heaved a sigh of relief. He held the door open for Mr. Filer to pass out, a courtesy of which that gentleman took no notice whatever, though the Chief noted it with approval. He liked a youngster who could keep a stiff upper-lip in the face of misfortune.

Dick went back to the office. There were a few personal belongings in his desk, that he must clear.

"Sacked!" he told Andy.

Andy blinked. He felt like crying. Dick Dare had been his hero as well as his chum at school. It had been sheer joy to Andy when Dick joined the office staff.

"Expect I'd better see old Hassall," said Dick, stuffing his pockets with odds and ends. "If I write he'll think I'm afraid to face him. I don't half like it, I'll own."

Andy rubbed his thatch of red hair.

"He's rather an old hunk, isn't he?" he said.

"He isn't an agreeable person. And he likes me about as much as Filer does," Dick answered.

"You would do better to get on with your work, Whelan," came the harsh voice of Mr. Filer.

Dick went. There was no need to say good-bye to Andy, and none of the others really mattered to him.

Mr. Thomas, the cashier, had a few sympathetic words to say.

"Wish you luck, my boy," he said kindly. "This isn't the end of the world for you, by long odds. But I know you're not the sort to take it that way. Why, bless me, you've a living in your cricket, if you care to turn pro!"

Then Dick remembered what Tom Deeks had said on Saturday, and changed his mind about travelling over at once to Wickhamdene to see his guardian.

He would go to the county ground first. The secretary would tell him whether there was any chance of a place on the staff. If he could get a show he thought he could make good. And Tryon would speak up for him—he was sure. He did not want to ask Mr. Ainsley.

At the moment when he passed out of the office door, however, John Ainsley was with the chief. These two were old schoolfellows and fast friends.

"Hallo, John! What's happened?" asked Mr. Arnold, the man whom all his staff called the "Chief."

For Ainsley's right arm was strapped to his side, and his face bore signs of pain.

"Shoulder hurt, Arnold. Horse's hoof. Might have been worse, but for a plucky youngster whom you know. You've a lad named Dare on your staff, I believe?"

"We had," replied Mr. Arnold.

"Had? What do you mean? He told me on Saturday he was here."

"He's no longer here. Sacked this morning."

"That's bad! But—"

"Oh, for nothing disgraceful! It was a matter of discipline. He took his departmental head by the scruff of the neck in order to remove him from his path. I have not heard Dare's version of the trouble. It was not needful that I should. He could not stay after a performance of that sort, not even if I moved him to another department. It would be an incitement to others to emulate him, and—though I wouldn't say this to another man—I wonder it has never happened before."

"I see. Well, Rod, the boy did me a service, and I want to do something for him. It looks as though I might have the chance. He's not a duffer, I take it?"

"Not by any means. Even Filer found no great fault with his work. But his heart wasn't in it. He's a born cricketer."

"You mean that he's really good? I can trust your judgment, Rod."

"It happens that I've never seen him play. He only came here last August, and I was away then. But I hear good reports of him."

"That may simplify matters. Frost can do with help in the office regularly, and if Dare is promising there's no reason why, in time, he shouldn't have a chance for the county while remaining assistant-secretary. You wouldn't have his address, I suppose? But, no doubt, you can get it for me."

"I have it, as it chances. Here we are: 51, Kingsland Street. He shares diggings with another of our youngsters."

"Thanks, old fellow! I'll go and look him up at once. He jumped into my car from the pavement, and snatched me aside just in the nick of time to prevent my being brained by a horse rearing."

"Good! I was sure he had pluck. I hope your shoulder will soon be all right, John. As for young Dare, I shall feel easy about him, now that I know you are looking after him."

Left hand gripped right, and John Ainsley went.

"Mr. Filer will not be pleased when he hears," murmured the Chief to himself, smiling. "Thank goodness, three years will bring him to superannuation!"

Thus Dick had hardly lost one post before another was ready for him. But whether he would accept the new post was another matter.

(Well, chums, isn't this serial the real goods? Wouldn't your chums just enjoy it? Get busy now, and tell them all about it. Meanwhile, look out for next week's instalment, it will grip you from beginning to end.)

HANDFORTH AT ST. JIM'S!

(Continued from page 23)

"Gave you a good hiding," nodded Handforth. "Well?" Knox went red.

"As you're a new kid, I'm inclined to overlook the offence!" he said, in a snarling voice. "But if ever you lay fingers on me again, I'll have you kicked out of the school!"

"Rats!"

"Are you saying 'Rats!' to me?" roared Knox.

"Yes, I am!"

"Why, you infernal young hound—"

"Better be careful!" interrupted Handforth darkly. "I've thrashed you once, Knox—and I can do it again! I may be a new kid, but I'm not frightened of your threats! There are one or two bullies at St. Frank's—so I know the ropes! That's how much I care for you!"

And he snapped his fingers contemptuously in the infuriated Knox's face.

"Get out of here!" snarled the prefect. "And if any master asks you if you've been fighting with me, say you haven't!"

"Great Scott!" ejaculated Handforth, staring. "Are you ordering me to tell lies?"

"You heard what I said!" snapped Knox. "Some of the juniors are talking about that affair, but there's just a chance that the masters won't hear of it. I don't want to get you into trouble—"

"You mean, you don't want to get yourself into trouble, eh?"

"So if you're questioned, say that you didn't fight me at all!" added Knox, breathing hard.

Handforth eyed him with scorn.

"I wonder why they made you a prefect?" he said, in astonishment. "But you needn't be afraid! I'm not a sneak! If I'm questioned I shall say that I've been fighting—but I won't say who with."

A look of relief came into Knox's eyes.

"That's enough, then!" he said. "Now you can get out!"

"Thanks—I'm going!" replied Handforth. "The air in this study doesn't suit me! It reminds me of hogs!"

He strode to the door and opened it.

"Hi!" shouted Knox furiously. "What did you say?"

"Go and eat coke!"

Handforth went out and slammed the door. He wasn't acting with any bravado; he was just himself. He was famed at St. Frank's for his recklessness and plain speaking.

In the Fourth Form passage he ran into Blake & Co. as they were about to enter Study No. 6.

"Somebody said you've been to Knox's study," remarked Blake curiously.

"So I have!" grunted Handforth.

"What did he do—swish you?"

"Don't be an ass!" said Handforth. "He's frightened out of his skin! He only took me there, because he wants that fight hushed up. But he needn't have worried—I'm not in the habit of sneaking."

"Well, I'm glad it's settled," said Blake. "And I dare say that hiding will do Knox a lot of good. All the same, it was a bit of a nerve for a new chap to thrash one of our prefects."

"And now he's going to score a century in a First Eleven match!" said Herries, with heavy sarcasm.

"Bai Jove! Weally, Handforth, I twust you will think bettah of your wash pwomise," said Arthur Augustus, with concern. "As a fellow of tact and judgment, pway allow me to offah you a word of advice—"

"Rot!"

"Weally, Handforth—"

"Go and fry your face!"

"I uttably refuse to fry my face!" said Gussy indignantly. "Bai Jove! If this is the way you treat a fellow who is offahwin' you some sound advice—"

"Oh, leave him alone, Gussy!" interrupted Blake. "He's only gassing! He's only letting off steam!"

"I am afraid you are wight, Blake," said Gussy frigidly. "It is a wightful blow to wealise that the new fellow is a bwaggart!"

Handforth breathed hard.

"A braggart, am I?" he said, glaring. "Well, that remains to be seen! Tom Merry told me that I had to undergo those four tests—"

"But he was only rotting; you burbling chump!" roared Blake.

"I don't care whether he was rotting or not!" snapped Handforth. "There's something else I remember, too! You're supposed to be the leader of the Fourth, aren't you, Blake?"

"No, I'm not supposed to be!" replied Blake. "I am the leader!"

"Well, you told me that if I was successful in those tests, I'd naturally be the leader of the Form!" said Handforth, with gleaming eyes.

"Bai Jove!"

"Do you admit it?" demanded Handforth.

"Well, yes—"

"Then I'm going to step into your shoes before the end of my first month!" said Handforth triumphantly. "I've fulfilled the first condition, and now I'm going ahead to fulfil the others!"

"Why, you—you—"

Blake was almost at a loss for words, but he suddenly broke into a yell of laughter.

"Ha, ha, ha!" he howled. "You frabjous ass! How do you think you're going to score a century for the First Eleven? And what about sleeping a night in the House-master's bed? And how the merry dickens are you going to raid the Grammar School—"

"If you wait, you'll see!" said Handforth calmly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The new fellow strode off, his jaw set and his eyes gleaming. And Blake & Co., weeping with mirth, went into Study No. 6.

"Oh dear!" said Blake weakly. "He'll be the death of us before he's done!"

For it was as obvious as daylight that Handforth meant every word that he had said! And the St. Jim's fellows decided that he was a perfect scream.

But still, nothing could alter the fact that he had fulfilled the first condition! As for the others— Well, St. Jim's was beginning to get a true glimpse of Edward Oswald Handforth's character—but, as yet, they didn't know of his proverbial luck!

THE END.

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