

The

GEM

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EVERY
WEDNESDAY.



A CREDIT TO HIS SIDE!

*A "gripping" incident from this week's
fine school and sporting story of St. Jim's.*

A LONG SCHOOL STORY FEATURING TOM MERRY & CO.,

PLAYING *for the*



CHAPTER 1. Pulling Handy's Leg!

"I WONDER!"

Edward Oswald Handforth, the new fellow in the Fourth Form at St. Jim's, made that dreamy remark as he stood looking out of the window of Study No. 9, in the School House. And Cardew and Levison and Clive, who were just sitting down to tea, cast inquiring glances in Handforth's direction.

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"What are you wonderin' about, dear man?" asked Cardew languidly.

Handforth turned, and he frowned upon his studymates. He did not altogether approve of them. At St. Frank's—his old school—he had been the lord and master of his study, and he had treated his unfortunate studymates as though they were his slaves.

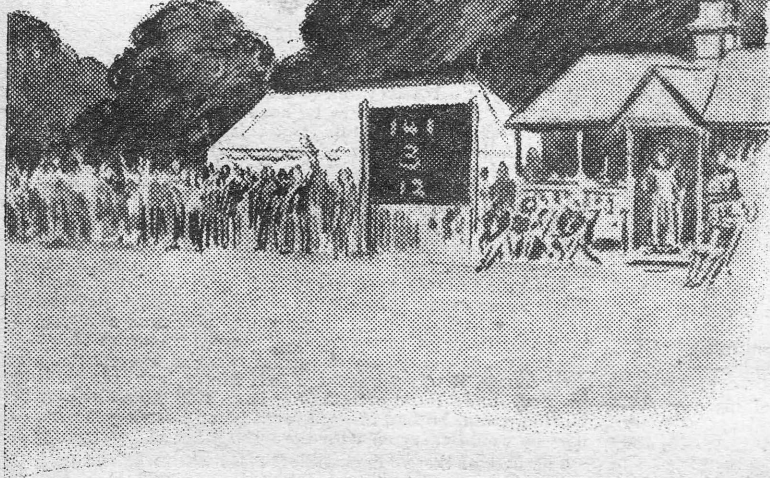
But at St. Jim's it wasn't so easy. Cardew and Levison and Clive, ridiculously enough, refused to be his slaves. When he gave an order, they ignored it; when he repeated the order they still ignored it; and if he was rash enough

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—OF ST. JIM'S, AND HANDFORTH—LATE OF ST. FRANK'S!

FIRST!

by
MARTIN
CLIFFORD



When Tom Merry & Co. kid Handforth of the Fourth that every new boy has to play for the First Eleven AND score a century, they little dream that such a seemingly impossible feat will come to pass. But then they don't reckon with Handforth's proverbial luck—or his grit!

to bawl out the order for a third time, they rose in their wrath, and hurled him out of the study.

This had happened several times, and Handforth was vaguely realising, at long last, that he was nobody of importance. At St. Frank's he had been a power in the land; at St. Jim's he was like unto the prophet of old, and of no account in his own country.

Tea was rather early this afternoon, for the June day was gloriously fine, and the juniors wanted to get out into the sunshine, and take full advantage of the remaining hours of daylight.

"Yes, I wonder!" said Handforth abstractedly. "If you're wondering about these pastries, old man, you'll be too late in a minute!" said Levison, grinning. "There's only one left."

"And that's mine!" said Clive, helping himself.

But Handforth did not seem interested in food. His rugged face was thoughtful, and his brow was puckered.

"Get it off your chest, old man," said Levison. "What are you wondering about so deeply? I know you're not broke, because I found a couple of ten shilling notes on the floor this morning. You're always dropping things out of your pockets—"

"I'm wondering about the cricket match!" interrupted Handforth bluntly.

"The cricket match?"

"Yes!" said Handforth. "Tom Merry is getting up a scratch game this evening—against the New House fellows."

"A trivial affair, dear man," said Ralph Reckness Cardew. "A mere knock-about game, just for the sake of something to do. Only a few of the stars will be appearing."

"I thought perhaps I'd get a chance," said Handforth. "In that scratch game?"

"Yes."

"Forget it, old fellow," said Cardew, shaking his head. "What folly is this? You are not seriously suggesting, surely, that you should ask for a place in this scratch game?"

"Why not?" demanded Handforth. "I haven't had a chance at cricket yet—and it's about time I was given a trial."

"Agreed!" said Cardew, with a wink at the others. "Dear man, my heart bleeds for you. It distresses me to

know that your talents are being wasted. But why think of throwing yourself away on a mere scratch game?"

"Well, it's the only game there is!" replied Handforth.

"This evening, perhaps," said Cardew. "But to-morrow, unless I am mistaken, the First Eleven is going off to Wensford, to play quite an important fixture."

Handforth stared.

"I know that!" he said. "But I can't play for the First, can I?"

"Nothing venture, nothing win!" murmured Cardew. "I understand that this is the very first time that the seniors have played against Wensford College. It isn't one of the ordinary fixtures, but a sort of fill-in."

"Oh!"

"Kildare may therefore be in a tractable mood," continued Cardew coolly. "In other words, dear man, now is the time to strike. You have been heard to express a desire, on several occasions, to play for the First. Well, why don't you beard Kildare in his den, and ask for your place?"

"By George!" said Handforth, his eyes gleaming.

"As this Wensford match isn't one of the regular fixtures, there is every chance that Kildare will welcome you with open arms," said Cardew, as he helped himself to a slice of cake. "I happen to know that he is short of men. Two or three members of the First Eleven are laid up, and Kildare is at his wits' end."

Handforth compressed his lips.

"Yes, it's a chance!" he said, breathing hard. "Do you really think, Cardew, that Kildare will listen to me?"

"Listen?" repeated Cardew, with a laugh. "Dear man, he'll welcome you like a long-lost brother!"

Levison and Clive had some difficulty in keeping their faces straight. Pulling Handforth's leg was a favourite game at St. Jim's—and it always seemed to succeed. In this present instance, Levison and Clive had never believed that the new fellow would "fall" for Ralph Reckness Cardew's nonsense. But he was drinking in every word!

"Yes, by George!" said Handforth. "Why should I bother about this silly scratch game?"

"Why, indeed?" murmured Cardew.

"Why should I cheapen myself by offering to play in such a ragtime affair?" said Handforth grimly. "What rot! I'll take your tip, Cardew, and I'll go and see Kildare!"

"Give him my love, won't you?" drawled Cardew, as Handforth moved towards the door.

"But don't tell him that we sent you!" added Levison thoughtfully.

"Why not?" asked Handforth.

"Well, we thought you might like to have the credit of thinking of this idea yourself," said Levison hastily. "Isn't that so, Cardew?"

"Positively, dear man!"

"Oh, all right!" said Handforth, nodding. "I hadn't thought of that! I'll go straight to Kildare, and I'll give him to understand that I thought of the idea myself. As a matter of fact, I did think of it!" he added airily. "Anyhow, I was just going to think of it when Cardew made the suggestion!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Idiots!" snorted Handforth wrathfully.

He went out of Study No. 9, and slammed the door. But there were no suspicions in his mind as he heard the chuckles which came through the panels. He thought his studymates were amused because he had claimed the idea as his own.

He strode down the passage, and Blake & Co. were just coming out of Study No. 6 as he passed.

"Hallo, Handy!" said Blake cheerily. "Coming down to Little Side, to watch the game?"

Handforth paused.

"Which game?" he asked, with exaggerated surprise.

"The scratch game against the New House chumps!"

"Do you call that a game?" said Handforth. "I've

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heard about it, of course, but I wouldn't waste my time by watching a fooling affair like that!"

"Bai Jove!"

"You silly idiot!"

"You burbling new kid—"

"Oh, cheese it!" said Handforth tartly. "I'm just going along to see Kildare, and I'm going to offer him my services for the Wensford match to-morrow."

"Gweat Scott!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus D'Arcy blankly.

And the other members of Study No. 6 stared at Handforth in wonder.

"You're going to do—which?" asked Blake, in an incredulous voice.

"I thought I'd give you a surprise!" grinned Handforth. "The idea occurred to me all of a sudden. At least, it would have occurred to me, only Cardew suggested it a minute beforehand."

"Cardew suggested it, eh?" said Blake, as a light dawned upon him. "My only Sunday topper! Do you mean to say that you're going along to Kildare now?"

"Yes, I am!"

"Weally, Handforth, I can only regard you as a twice-less duffah!" said Arthur Augustus, adjusting his eyeglass, and gazing at Handforth in wonder. "You must surely realise that Cardew was only pullin'—"

"Ass!" said Blake, giving Gussy a severe dig in the back.

"Yawoooooh!" hooted the swell of the Fourth. "You fwihtful wottah, Blake!"

"So you're going along to Kildare?" said Blake, turning to Handforth. "I wish you luck, old man!"

"Thanks!" said Handforth.

"There's nothing to beat these bold, he-man stunts!" went on Blake approvingly. "It's the timid fellow who gets left out in the cold."

"Just what I've always said," nodded Handforth. "Of course, I may have a bit of trouble with Kildare—"

"You may!" agreed Blake.

"But if he hasn't got any common-sense of his own, I'll soon drive some into him," said Handforth firmly. "After all, where's the sense in aiming low? In this world, the only thing is to aim high."

"Hear, hear!" said Blake & Co.

"Aim high, and you'll generally score!" declared Handforth. "So, instead of wasting my time playing in these fiddling junior games—"

"These what?"

"No offence!" said Handforth, grinning. "But you can't get away from facts, can you? I can't be bothered with these silly junior games!"

"Weally, Handforth—"

"So I'm going straight to Kildare, and I'm going to put it to him, as man to man," said Handforth. "He's the captain of St. Jim's, and it stands to reason that he's a man of sense. Therefore, he'll grab this opportunity with both hands."

"Which opportunity?" asked Blake, with interest.

"The opportunity of securing my services for the First Eleven," replied Handforth. "Cardew and Levison are pretty optimistic about it, I can tell you."

"Bai Jove!"

"If it comes to that, so are we!" said Blake firmly. "Go ahead, old man! Go in and win! If you put it to Kildare in the right way, you're bound to succeed. All you've got to do is to make him understand that you're indispensable. It may be a bit of trouble, because these seniors are generally pig-headed; but what do you care?"

"Nothing!" replied Handforth promptly.

"That's the spirit!" said Blake. "The bulldog breed! If you hurry up, you'll find Kildare in his study. I believe he's holding a committee meeting, so you couldn't barge in at a better time."

"Weally, Blake, I wathah think that Kildare will be fwihtfully upset if Handforth intewwupts a committee meetin'," said Gussy. "Howevah, if he is wash enough—"

"It's not a question of rashness, Gussy," said Blake. "Handforth is different from other fellows. It might be rash for you or I to interrupt one of Kildare's committee meetings; but you seem to forget that Handforth possesses the old pioneer spirit. Wherever he goes he conquers."

Handforth beamed.

"Well, I must say, Blake, you're a bit more sensible than I thought you were," he said genially. "The pioneer spirit, eh? By George! That's me all over! Wherever I go, I conquer!"

And he marched off down the passage, leaving Blake & Co. feeling rather dizzy.

"He means it, too!" murmured Digby. "He's actually going to Kildare's study!"

"The chap must be off his rocker!" said Herries.

"Well, if it pleases him to go about asking for trouble,

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why should we interfere?" said Blake, shrugging his shoulders. "It was like Gussy to butt in, and nearly spoil everything."

"Weally, Blake, I considah it is wathah too thick," said Arthur Augustus frigidly. "We all know that Handforth is an uttah ass, but it seems to be a wotten twick to send him to Kildare. It's pwactically the same as sendin' a chap to the slaughter!"

"Exactly!" agreed Blake, with a chuckle.

CHAPTER 2.

In the Lion's Den!

TAP!

"Come in!" said Kildare briskly. The captain of St. Jim's was "in committee" with Darrell, Baker, Langton, and one or two other prefects.

The door opened, and Handforth appeared.

"Well?" said Kildare, looking at him.

"I thought I'd come—" began Handforth.

"Then you'd better think you'll go!" interrupted Kildare politely. "I don't want to be hard on a new kid, and you probably don't understand. But this is a committee meeting, Handforth, and you're interrupting. Good-evening!"

"Don't forget to close the door," said Baker amiably.

Handforth's jaw dropped. This was hardly a good beginning. For some reason or other the seniors did not seem to be impressed. And yet he had deliberately entered with a bold stride, in order to give these seniors a correct idea of his importance.

The new fellow's eyes were gleaming. Coming along the Sixth Form passage, he had remembered his first day at St. Jim's; he had remembered the promise he had made, that he would undergo four very stiff "tests" in order to make himself eligible as a fully-fledged member of the Fourth.

Of course, it was all spoof. Tom Merry had been pulling his leg, and Handforth knew it. But Handforth was obstinate, and he had insisted, even after learning the truth, that he would carry on with the tests.

The first of these "impossible" feats was to fight a prefect and give him a thrashing. By a piece of pure luck, Handforth had encountered Knox of the Sixth, and had knocked Knox out. Not until the deed was done did Handforth know that he had unwittingly fulfilled the first test!

And then and there he had decided to go through with the whole programme. The Fourth and the Shell had shrieked with merriment, and this had only served to strengthen Handforth's determination.

The second "test" was even more fantastic than the first. In short, Handforth had undertaken to play in a First Eleven cricket match, and to score a century. It was the thought of this vow that had encouraged Handforth to come to Kildare's study.

After all, he couldn't expect to score a century for the First until he was given a place in the Senior Eleven. And it struck him that the Wensford match would be just his mark.

Of course, it would never do to tell Kildare the full facts. Handforth was determined to get his place in the eleven on his merits. And he had such confidence in his own ability that the fantastic feat seemed little more than a trifle to him.

"Did you hear me?" said Kildare.

Handforth started.

"Cheese it!" he protested. "I've come here to talk about the Wensford match."

The seniors regarded Handforth with new interest. This committee meeting, as a matter of fact, was dealing with the Wensford match at the present moment.

"Oh!" said Kildare slowly. "So you've come here to talk about the Wensford match?"

"Exactly!" said Handforth. "I'm here to offer my services."

"You're here to what?" said Kildare, staring.

"Offer my services."

"The kid's mad!" said Baker, tapping his head significantly. "Water on the brain!"

"Look here, Handforth, I'll give you two seconds to get on the other side of that door!" said Kildare, pointing.

"Of all the confounded impudence—"

"But—but I mean it!" shouted Handforth.

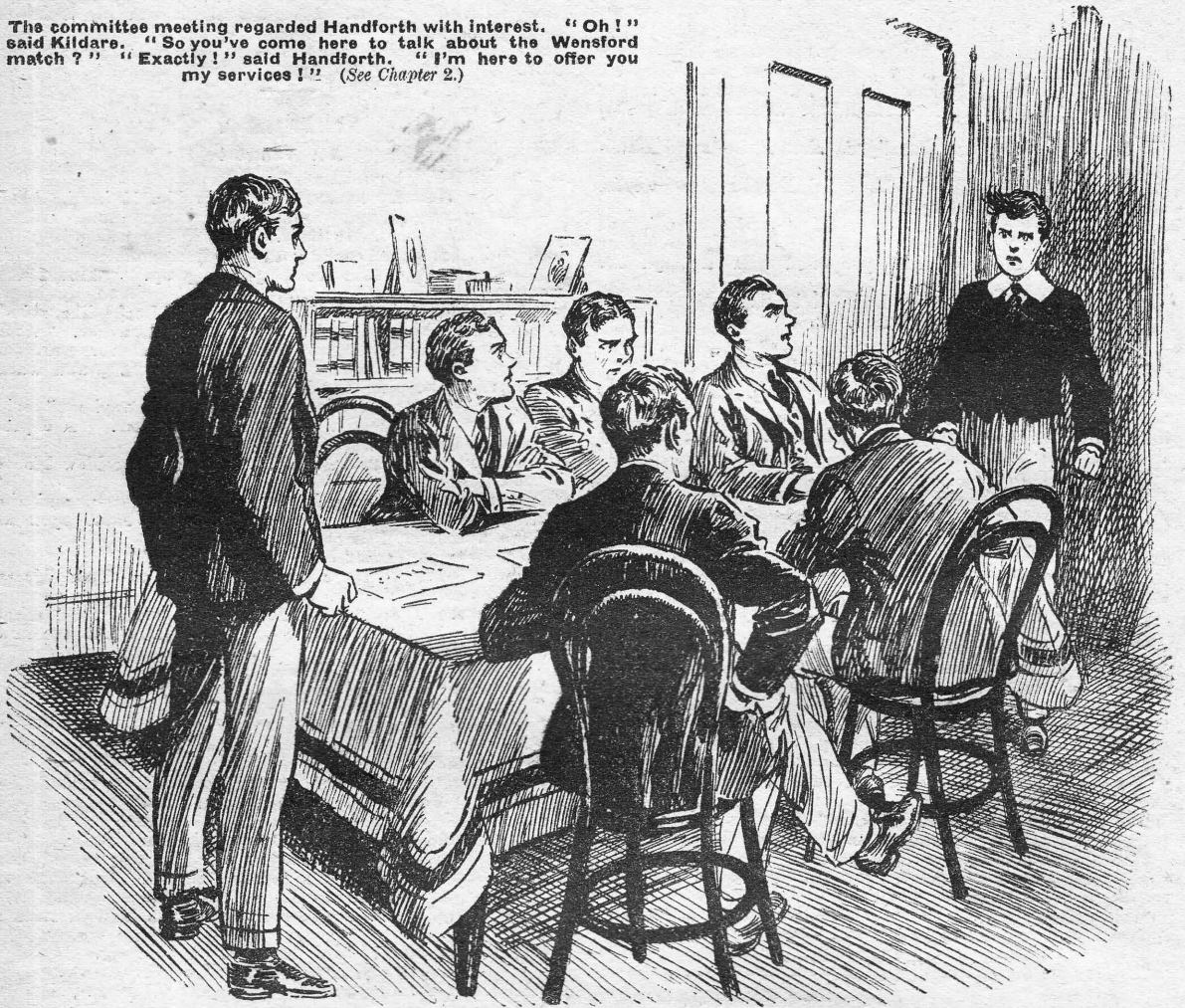
"Great Scott!"

"I thought I'd play for the Juniors at first, but then I gave up the idea," continued Handforth. "After all, I should only be wasting my talents in the Junior Eleven."

"Oh, my hat!"

"Of course, I'm only in the Fourth, but that's due to incompetence on the part of the Head," said Handforth coolly. "If the Head had any sense he would have shoved me into the Fifth—where I ought to be."

The committee meeting regarded Handforth with interest. "Oh!" said Kildare. "So you've come here to talk about the Wensford match?" "Exactly!" said Handforth. "I'm here to offer you my services!" (See Chapter 2.)



"I know where you ought to be!" said Kildare darkly. "But it doesn't make any difference, really," went on Handforth, failing to observe the danger signals. "A cricketer is a cricketer. At St. Frank's I was—"

"Never mind what you were at St. Frank's!" interrupted Kildare. "You're at St. Jim's now. If I didn't know you to be a hopeless young idiot I'd get my ashplant and give you a tanning. Get out!"

"What?" gasped Handforth.

"You heard what I said!"

"But I haven't finished yet!" roared Handforth.

"You cheeky young sweep—"

"I played for the First at St. Frank's!" shouted Handforth eagerly. "Look here, Kildare, it's only fair to give me a chance. I'm not actually demanding a place in the First Eleven, remember."

Kildare gasped.

"Oh!" he said. "You're not actually demanding a place?"

"Of course not!" said Handforth. "I'm perfectly willing to be given a trial."

"That's a great relief!" said Kildare ominously. "You've taken a load off my mind, kid. Before I put you in the First Eleven you'll show me what you can do, eh?"

"Exactly!" said Handforth eagerly. "My idea is that you should all come out to Big Side now. Let's have half an hour at the nets. And if I don't convince you that I'm good enough for the First I'll eat my hat!"

Kildare and the other seniors regarded this Fourth-Former in amazement. The extraordinary thing about it all was that he meant it! He was perfectly serious! At first Kildare had had an idea that Handforth was just indulging in a piece of cheek. But it wasn't that at all. Handforth was in deadly earnest!

"So you want a place, do you?" said Kildare grimly.

"That's it!" nodded Handforth.

"Well, now I come to think of it, there is a place for you," said the captain of St. Jim's thoughtfully.

"What?" gasped Darrell.

"Yes, there's a place for you, Handforth," said Kildare, performing a suggestive and sinister manoeuvre with his sleeves. "I thought so all along, and now I'm sure of it."

Handforth beamed.

"By George!" he said happily. "That's fine!"

"It all depends upon the point of view," said Kildare. "Personally, I think this place is first-class. But you may not approve of it."

"Oh, any old place will do, so long as it's in the Eleven," said Handforth obligingly. "I'm not particular. Of course, I won't insist upon bowling—"

"Great Scott!"

"The place for you, Handforth, isn't in the First Eleven at all," said Kildare grimly. "It's in Colney Hatch!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The other seniors roared.

"What?" gasped Handforth. "But you said—"

"I said that there's a place for you—and so there is," shouted Kildare wrathfully. "You're not merely a lunatic, Handforth—you're a dangerous half-wit! The trouble with you is that you don't realise your own idiocy!"

"But—but—"

"Still, we won't insist upon Colney Hatch!" went on Kildare firmly. "There's another place that will do. And that place is—outside!"

"But I've come here to join the First Eleven—"

"Outside!" roared Kildare. "You silly young sweep! I've wasted enough time on you already. Get out!"

"Yes, but—"

"Cut!"

"No jolly fear!" roared Handforth. "I've come here to insist—"

"Open the door, Baker, old man!" said Kildare, in a strained voice.

"With pleasure!" said Baker promptly.

The door was flung open, and Handforth backed away as Kildare and Darrell advanced upon him.

"Here, I say!" gasped the new boy. "You—you don't

understand! The fellows suggested that I should come and—"

"I'm quite ready to believe that your leg has been pulled," said Kildare. "But nobody but a born idiot would have come to me, asking for a place in the First Eleven! So, under the circumstances, I shan't come you. It's a true saying that the mentally deficient should be treated with gentle care!"

"Are you calling me mentally deficient?" bellowed Handforth wrathfully.

Kildare did not reply. In his opinion actions, not words, were required at that moment.

The St. Jim's skipper's idea of "gentle care" was evidently somewhat warped. He seized Edward Oswald by the scruff of the neck and propelled him through the doorway.

"Lend a hand, Darrell!" he said briskly.

"I'm your man!" said Darrell.

Bump!

"Yow!" howled Handforth. "I tell you—"

Slam!

Handforth looked round him dazedly. He was sitting in the middle of the Sixth Form passage, and he had a vague notion that he had just been hurled out of Kildare's study with anything but gentle care.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Handforth leapt to his feet, his face red, his eyes blazing. At the end of the passage a number of faces were visible. Blake & Co. were there, to say nothing of Cardew, Levison, and Clive, and several others.

"We've been waitin' for it, dear man!" explained Cardew blandly.

Handforth strode up.

"Waiting for what?" he demanded.

"Waitin' to see you booted out!" explained Cardew.

"And we did not wait in vain."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You—your spoofing rotters!" bellowed Handforth, as the truth dawned upon him. "You knew jolly well that Kildare would kick me out of his study!"

"Yaas, wathah!" said D'Arcy. "Weally, Handforth, you were an uttiah ass to go! I twied to warn you, but Blake wufused to let me."

"Of course I did!" said Blake. "Experience is a great teacher, Gussy, only Handforth never seems to learn."

Handforth suddenly cooled down. He became icily cold. This was one of his very characteristic changes, but the St. Jim's fellows were not quite used to him yet.

"All right," he said frigidly. "You're a lot of beastly spoofers, and I'm on to your game now!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"As for Kildare, I'm disgusted with him!" said Handforth bitterly.

"Did he turn you down?" asked Levison, in a sympathetic voice.

"Yes, he did!"

"Disgusting!" said Blake solemnly. "What could he have been thinking about?"

"He turned me down!" said Handforth sternly. "Of course, he didn't know what he was doing. He didn't realise his folly!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Fourth-Formers went off, cackling louder than ever. And Handforth, breathing hard, made his way downstairs, and paused on the School House steps. The sun was shining gloriously, although there were a few doubtful-looking clouds coming up.

"Dear man, let me give you a word of advice."

Handforth turned, and stared at Ralph Reckness Cardew.

"I don't want any more of your advice," he said coldly. "I've had enough of it!"

"Why blame me for Kildare's short-sightedness?" asked Cardew, in a pained voice. "Is that fair, dear man? I'll admit that I suggested your visit to Kildare, but how was I to know that he would treat you in such a cavalier fashion?"

"In such a what fashion?"

"Never mind," said Cardew. "I admire you, old man, for your strength of will. You were bold—you were determined. You went to Kildare, and you stated your case. It was merely Kildare's loss when he kicked you out of his study."

Handforth was somewhat mollified.

"Yes, and he'll find it out before long!" he said darkly.

"Without doubt," agreed Cardew. "But in the meantime why waste your talents? Why be content to remain idle? What, after all, is the matter with Tom Merry?"

"I don't know," said Handforth. "What is the matter with him?"

"Tom Merry," proceeded Cardew, "is the Junior skipper. Even at this minute he's getting up a team to play an

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evening match against the New House. Have you tried your luck, dear man? Half a loaf, it is said, is better than no bread!"

And Handforth, as innocent as a little child, accepted the bait!

CHAPTER 3.

Not Wanted!

"READY, you fellows?"

Manners looked into Study No. 10 in the Shell passage, and found Tom Merry and Monty Lowther fairly busy. Tom Merry was oiling his bat, and Monty was making some adjustments to his pads.

"Just coming," said Tom, glancing up. "How's the weather?"

"A bit uncertain," replied Manners. "Looks like rain."

"That's nothing to go by," said Monty Lowther. "With a climate like ours, you mustn't take it for granted. When it looks like rain it generally keeps fine, and when it looks like keeping fine it generally rains."

"Well, it's only a friendly little game, anyhow," said Tom Merry. "Ready, Monty? Come on! I expect Figgins & Co. are waiting for us."

"Let 'em wait," said Monty. "It'll do those New House bouncers good!"

A heavy footstep sounded out in the passage, and the next moment the door of Study No. 10 burst open as though a bullock had charged it.

"Oh, here you are!"

Handforth stood there, and he looked at Tom Merry with a cold, calculating, determined eye.

"Yes, here I am," said Tom Merry humbly. "What have I done? Please, please tell me! Can't you see how I'm trembling?"

"Don't rot!" frowned Handforth.

"All right, please, Handforth."

"And don't say 'please' to me!"

"No, thank you, Handforth!"

"And don't say 'thank you,' either!"

"No, Handforth."

"And don't keep calling me 'Handforth!' " booted the new boy. "You're only rotting, you rotter!"

Monty Lowther shook his head.

"There's no pleasing this chap," he said sadly. "If you're polite to him he doesn't like it. If you pull his leg he thinks you've done him an injury. And even if you boot him out of the study, as he deserves, he gets peeved. What the merry dickens can you do with such a fellow?"

"He's a problem!" said Tom Merry feelingly.

Handforth breathed hard.

"I haven't come here for any of your rot!" he said darkly.

"Understand that!"

"All right; we understand it," said Tom Merry. "Then why have you come?"

"I want my place in the Junior Eleven!"

"Is that all?"

"Yes, that's all."

"Nothing easier," said Tom Merry obligingly. "Your place in the Junior Eleven, Handforth, is already settled." Handforth calmed down.

"Oh, it's settled?" he said. "Well, I'm jolly glad to hear it!"

"Settled long ago," said Tom Merry, nodding. "Your place in the Junior Eleven is that of general help."

"General which?"

"General help," said the Junior skipper patiently. "Let me explain your duties, Handforth. All you've got to do is to hold yourself ready at all times for immediate service. Whenever a fellow breaks his leg, you'll be needed to take his place. Whenever a fellow gets brained during a game, you'll have to come in and deputise."

Handforth stared.

"But the chaps don't break their legs!" he snorted.

"And they don't get brained, either!"

"Then I'm afraid you'll have to wait a long time before you deputise for anybody!" said Tom Merry gravely.

Handforth suddenly went red.

"You rotters!" he roared. "You're spoofing me!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry & Co. roared.

"My poor benighted imbecile," said Monty Lowther, "spoofing you is one of the easiest jobs under the sun. You take everything so literally."

Handforth began rolling up his sleeves.

"I'm fed-up!" he panted. "Put up your hands, you bouncers!"

"Pax!" grinned Tom Merry. "Only our little joke, Handy. I'm sorry about your place in the eleven, but it can't be did!"

"Why can't it?"

"Because every place is filled," replied Tom. "Quite

apart from that, it's not my policy to give new fellows a place in a House match."

"I don't care about your policy——"
 "But I do!" said Tom sweetly. "You see, I happen to be the Junior skipper. There'll be a trial game—a School House practice match—towards the end of the week, and you'll get your chance in that. If you're not satisfied, you'll have to be the other thing."

Judging by his expression, Handforth seemed to be the other thing.

"Why not go to Kildare?" suggested Monty Lowther. "You haven't forgotten that second test, have you? You've got to score a century in a First Eleven match, remember you."

"I've been to Kildare!" said Handforth, turning red. "Wha-a-at?" gasped the Terrible Three. "I've just come from Kildare, as a matter of fact!" said Handforth indignantly. "I offered him my services, and he turned them down!"

"Ye gods and little fishes!" murmured Manners. "Is there no end to this lunatic's folly? It's a wonder he wasn't slaughtered on the spot!"

They grinned with appreciation as Handforth gave them an account of his interview with Kildare. The cream of the joke was that Handforth believed that he had been treated badly.

"I'm afraid that second test will be one too many for you, old man," said Tom Merry, shaking his head. "Scoring a century for the First is a hefty proposition. There aren't many seniors who can do it, and if you manage it during your first month at St. Jim's, you won't be a schoolboy at all—you'll be a wizard."

"Never mind about that!" frowned Handforth. "What about my place in the Junior-Team? I want to play in this game this evening."

"Well, there's nothing like being persistent," grinned Tom. "All the same, I shall have to disappoint you. As I said before, there'll be a practice game towards the end of the week, and if you show up well in that you might get a chance to play for your House. That's all I can say."

"Oh, is it?" roared Handforth. "Well, look here, I can say a lot more." "Then say it to yourself, old scout!" said Tom genially. "Ready, you fellows?"

"Long ago!" said Monty Lowther. And the Terrible Three marched out of Study No. 10, leaving Handforth stranded in the middle of the floor. He uttered a snort of disgust, and followed the Shell fellows out into the passage. "Hi!" he bawled.

But it was no good. For some extraordinary reason Tom Merry & Co. refused to listen to the great Edward Oswald. His voice echoed down the passage, but that was the only answer he received.

He thrust his hands deep into his trousers pocket, and tramped downstairs. Like Rachel of old, he mourned, and would not be comforted. He was nobody's darling. It was all very exasperating, for he was itching to play in a cricket-match. He prided himself on his prowess at the great game, and it was galling to be turned down like this.

In the School House doorway Tom Merry & Co. had joined forces with Study No. 6, and they were all standing there, looking out into the quad. A few drops of rain were falling in a half-hearted manner, and the sky had become clouded.

"Rotten!" said Blake, with a grunt. "Yaas, wathah!" agreed D'Arcy. "I'm afraid the match is off, deah boys."

"Rubbish!" said Tom Merry. "It's only a shower." Handforth came barging into them.

"Look here, Tom Merry, what about it?" he demanded. "Am I going to have a place in this game or am I not?" Tom Merry turned, and sighed.

"I'm jiggered if he hasn't bobbed up again!" he said. "What the merry dickens can we do with the chap?" "Bump him!" suggested Blake practically.

"Keep your hands off me!" roared Handforth. "This is only a scratch game, you fellows, and you might as well give me a chance in it!"

"Ready?" said Tom Merry, looking at the others. "Yes!" they answered in one voice.

"Good!" Handforth was seized and whirled into the air by many willing hands.

Bump!
 "Yaroooh!" howled Handforth.
 Bump!

"Satisfied?" asked Tom Merry. "No, I'm not!" howled Handforth. "You—you rotters! Lemme go! I'm going to fight the whole crowd of you one after the other!"

"Then we'd better not let him go!" said Monty Lowther. "Ha, ha, ha!"
 Bump!

Handforth was given a final swing, and he hit the floor with a thud that shook the hallway. And Tom Merry & Co. and Study No. 6, feeling that they had done their duty, strode out, and made their way to Little Side.

Handforth picked himself up, breathing hard. "The rotters!" he muttered. "That's all the appreciation I get. And at St. Frank's I was one of the leading lights of the Junior Eleven! Blow 'em! I've a jolly good mind to leave 'em cold—and to go back to St. Frank's!"

A footstep sounded behind him, and he turned, and found Skimpole of the Shell blinking at him.

"Really, my dear fellow, is anything the matter?" asked Skimpole mildly.

"Yes, something is the matter!" roared Handforth. "Those rotters have refused to give me a place in the Junior Eleven!"

The genius of the Shell recoiled. "I am pained to observe this violence, my dear fellow," he said regretfully. "Cricket, at the best, is only a reckless and foolhardy pursuit. There is nothing to be gained by the chasing of a leather sphere, and your attitude is therefore to be deplored."

"Why, you—you——"
 "Let me urge you to forsake these unprofitable leanings. I have here my latest treatise on the great problems of determinism."

He exhibited a bundle of papers, and Handforth glared at them ferociously.

"If you will come to my study I shall have much pleasure in reading you this work," continued Skimpole obligingly. "Without doubt, my dear fellow, you will see the light of reason after I have presented my arguments to your notice. Determinism, as you probably know, is the doctrine that motives invincibly determine the will."

Handforth nodded. "Then I must be a determinist!" he said thickly.

"Excellent!" beamed Skimpole. "Already I am having an influence——" "Of course I'm a determinist!" declared Handforth. "Anyhow, my will is determined now, and you'll soon find out what my motive is."

He reached out a hand and dragged Skimpole's straw hat down over his eyes.

"Really!" shrieked Skimpole. "Yow! I must protest, my dear fellow——"

Ripp!
 The brim of Skimpole's hat came away under Handforth's forcible determination of will; he seized Skimpole firmly by the top of the head and pushed him down to the floor. Skimpole's feet skidded from under him, and he sat down violently. Then Handforth wrenched the "latest treatise" away, tore it into shreds, and scattered the remnants like snow over Skimpole's head.

"Oh dear!" moaned Skimpole feebly. "And the next time you come to me with your dotty ideas I'll slaughter you!" said Handforth.

He strode out, feeling considerably relieved. Skimpole had come along at just the right moment. At least, so Handforth thought. Skimpole's ideas on the subject were probably quite different.


CHAPTER 4.

Where There's a Will There's a Way!

"NOBODY here!" said Blake gruffly. The School House cricketers had reached Little Side, but Figgins & Co. were conspicuous by their absence. Not that they were to be blamed for this; rain was now falling pretty heavily, and Tom Merry's shower promised to be quite a downfall.

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"I expect they've given it up," said Manners, in disgust. "Just our giddy luck! The weather was glorious during lessons. Now that we're ready to start the blessed game it's got to rain! Blow it!"

"Well, it's no good grumbling," said Tom Merry philosophically. "If it rains, it rains. I may be a poor prophet, but I don't think this shower will last long. The clouds are breaking already."

"But what about the wicket?" asked Blake.

"Well, it'll be the same for both sides," replied Tom. "Anyhow, it's no good making a fuss."

They were standing in the shelter of the pavilion, listening to the drip, drip of the water as it fell from a crack in the gutter. It was not a cheerful sound, and the School House junior cricketers were thoroughly depressed.

Handforth, as he mooched about in the quadrangle, was uncharitable enough to feel slightly happy. This rain gave him a certain amount of pleasure.

"Well, anyhow, there'll be no giddy game!" he told himself. "They wouldn't let me play, and this is their punishment! Retribution, by George!"

Finding that he was getting wet, he sought shelter in the doorway of the gymnasium. He leaned against one of the doorposts, staring moodily in front of him.

Truth to tell, Handforth was greatly exercised in mind over his recent interview with Eric Kildare of the Sixth.

Handforth had received a jolt. By all appearances he didn't stand an earthly chance of appearing in a First Eleven match. Anybody else in the Junior School could have told him that ages ago; but it needed practical experience for Handforth to realise it. And this fellow from St. Frank's had a perfect horror of looking small.

He had stated to all and sundry that he would fulfil those four fantastic "tests." He had accomplished the first one by sheer luck, and he had been optimistic enough to believe that his strength of will and his determination would carry him through with the others.

But Handforth never considered the difficulties of any project. He just blundered on, and went ahead with a bald-headed obstinacy. It was only when he came up against the snags that he found that any such snags existed.

And this particular snag, at the moment, had assumed the proportions of Mount Everest. He couldn't even get a place in a scratch Junior game! How, therefore, was there any possibility of him playing for the First?

It was, as anybody in the Fourth or Shell would have told him, a sheer impossibility. But Handforth had a habit of laughing at impossibilities. There was no such word as "impossible" in his dictionary. And even now, although he felt baffled, he was by no means beaten. Handforth never did know when he was beaten. Any St. Frank's fellow would have agreed to that.

The sound of voices attracted him. He glanced up, and saw a number of figures in white flannels leaving the New House. He started.

"By George!" he muttered.

In his preoccupation he had omitted to notice the weather conditions. The shower had passed, and, although the quad was considerably damp, the sun had come out again. The blue sky was appearing once more, and there was very little prospect of any further rain.

Figgins & Co. were venturing forth to battle.

"It'll be all right," Figgins was saying. "The wicket may be a bit damp—but who cares? It'll only give the game more interest."

"Well, let's buck up!" said Kerr. "There's none too much time, and the School House chaps are out on Little Side already."

The lanky Figgins was frowning.

"When Redfern comes back from the village, I'll jolly well tick him off!" he said darkly. "It was like his nerve to go away and leave us in the lurch!"

"Oh, draw it mild, Figgy!" protested Fatty Wynn. "He came and told you that he was going, didn't he?"

"Well, yes."

"And you said that he might as well go," went on Fatty. "We all thought that the game was off ten minutes ago. How were we to know that the shower would clear away, and that the sun would come out again?"

"Well, never mind about that," said Figgins argumentatively. "We've only got ten men, and we shall be handicapped."

"Don't you believe it!" laughed Lawrence. "Even with a man short, we can wipe up those School House fatheads!"

"Oh, rather!" agreed Figgins promptly.

All the same, he was annoyed. All his available reserves were out of reach—owing to the shower. The juniors had taken it for granted that the game would be abandoned, and they had engaged themselves in other pursuits.

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Handforth found his heart beating more rapidly as he observed the New House cricketers passing along the quad.

"I say!" he burst out impulsively.

Figgins & Co. and the other New House juniors turned. "Hallo!" said Figgins. "Here's that new freak in the School House! What's the trouble, Handforth?"

"Did you call me a freak?" demanded Handforth, striding up.

"I believe I did," agreed Figgins amiably.

"Why, you—— Well, never mind!" said Handforth, swallowing hard. "I'll overlook it for this once!"

"Thanks awfully!"

"The fact is, I've got a suggestion to make," said Handforth. "If you like, I'll play for you."

"What on?" asked Figgins curiously. "I didn't know you were a musician."

"I'll play cricket, you ass!" roared Handforth, turning red as the other juniors chuckled.

"Oh, cricket!" said Figgins. "Well, I'm jiggered! Did you hear that, you chaps? He says he can play cricket!"

"Just one of his little jokes," said Kerr.

"I'm serious!" roared Handforth. "You're a man short, aren't you?"

"Yes."

"Then I'll fill the place, if you like."

"What weird and wonderful ideas these School House burlbers get!" said Figgins wonderingly. "He knows that we're a man short, and he offers us a monkey!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Are you going to take me, or not!" bellowed Handforth. "I've made you the offer, and you'd better decide quickly. If you don't, I might change my mind."

"Well, I'm jiggered!" said Figgins, staring.

It filled him with wonder that this new fellow could actually be serious.

"My poor idiot!" said Figgins sympathetically. "Why did they let you escape?"

"I haven't escaped!" hooted Handforth.

"Then somebody's been very careless," declared Figgins. "You ought to have been put away years ago. It's not fair to yourself, or to the general population, that you should be at large."

"Oh, come on!" said Lawrence impatiently. "Tom Merry and his men are waiting for us."

"All right! Go ahead!" said Handforth, in a bitter voice. "Nobody wants me! Nobody cares twopence about me! But, by George, you'll be sorry for yourselves one day!"

Figgins, ever soft-hearted, was struck by the new fellow's tone.

"Look here, Handforth, all rotting aside," he said. "You're surely not serious, are you, when you suggest that you should play for the New House?"

"Yes, I am!"

"But, my dear ass, it's all wrong!" grinned Figgins. "Why is it?" demanded Handforth. "You're a man short!"

"Yes, I know that——"

"And I'm ready to fill the place," said Handforth.

"What more do you want?"

George Figgins hesitated.

"By Jove, why not?" he chuckled, turning to the others. "Eh?"

"What?"

"I say, Figgy, cheese it!"

"Why not?" repeated Figgins, with twinkling eyes. "After this shower there isn't any too much time, and it'll only be a ragtime game, at the best. Why shouldn't we have some fun?"

"Perhaps you're right," said Kerr, with a grin.

"Everybody knows it's not a proper match," continued Figgins. "We can easily whack those School House wasters with only ten men. And it will give us a bit of a handicap if Handforth is on our side."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, will it?" shouted Handforth, turning redder than ever. "If I play for you, Figgins, it'll make certain of a New House win!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'm fed up with my own House!" went on Handforth relentlessly. "I want to teach Tom Merry a lesson. I'm not a traitor to my own House, but the circumstances demand drastic measures!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Handy, old man, you're a scream!" said Figgins cheerily. "All right, we'll have you!"

"Honest Injun?"

"Honest Injun!" said Figgins.

"Good!" ejaculated Handforth eagerly. "You won't regret it, you grinning hyenas! Just wait until you see me playing!"

The New House juniors were thoroughly amused. As Figgins had said, the game was quite likely to be a "rag-

time" affair. And it would be rather a joke to see Handforth skittled out first ball. Then the other New House fellows would go in and win and have a real laugh over Tom Merry & Co.

That was Figgins' idea. It was just another case of Handforth's leg being pulled.

It would certainly be a glorious joke to play a School House man, and to see him make a hopeless mess of things. Figgins & Co. were so confident of their ability to win the match that Handforth's inclusion in the team was regarded as a matter of no importance. Besides, nothing could alter the fact that they were a man short—and Handforth was probably better than nobody.

"Not the ghost of one," said Tom promptly. "That's good!" said Figgins, with pretended relief. "I was afraid that you might think it was out of order for us to play a School House fellow."

"Not in the least," replied Tom Merry. "Go ahead—and do your worst. For once this grave irregularity can be allowed."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The School House fellows were highly amused. But, although they didn't quite realise it, they were all struck by Handforth's determination. He had made up his mind to have a game, and he was going to have one!

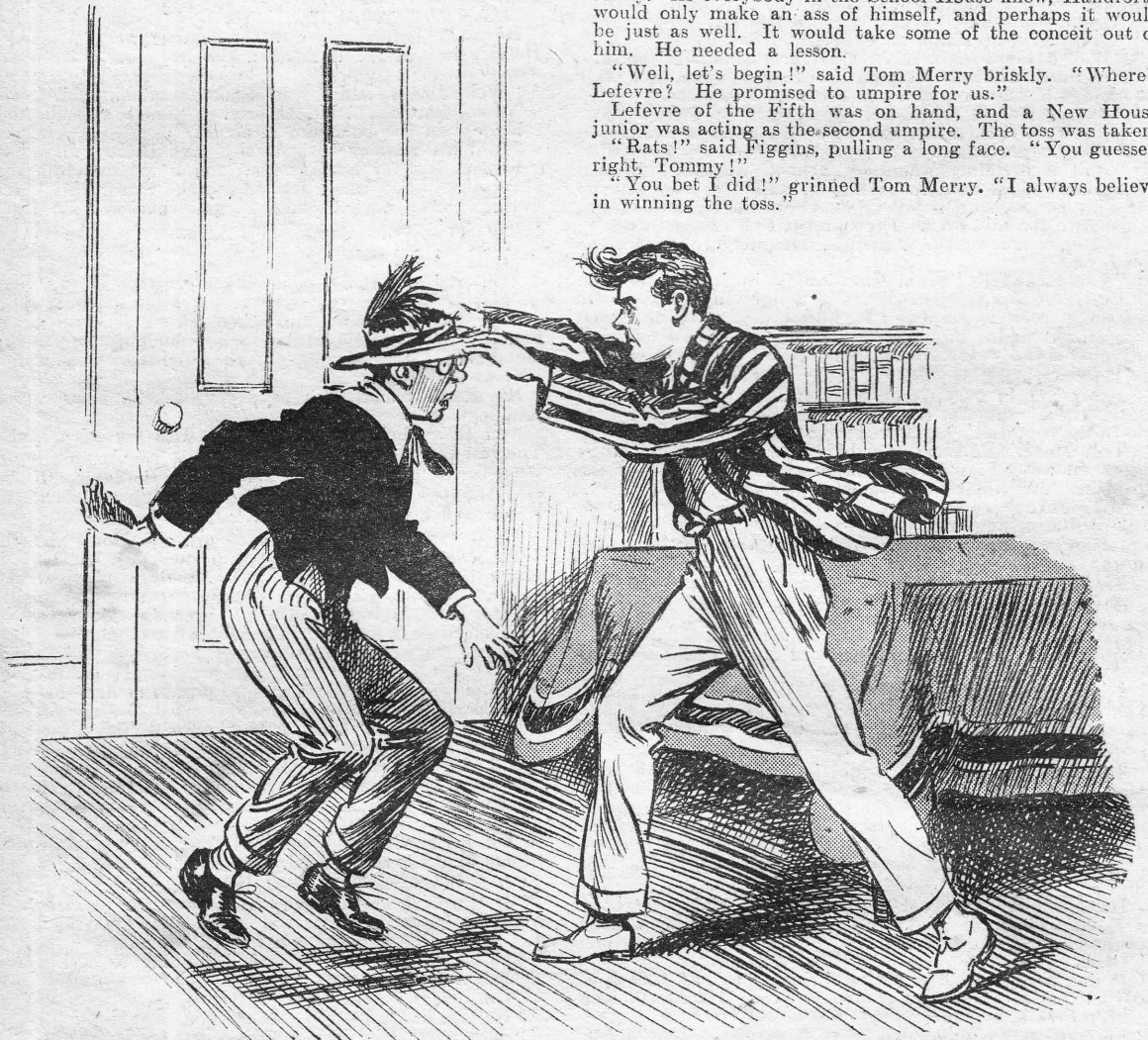
As for minding the "irregularity," the idea was quite funny. As everybody in the School House knew, Handforth would only make an ass of himself, and perhaps it would be just as well. It would take some of the conceit out of him. He needed a lesson.

"Well, let's begin!" said Tom Merry briskly. "Where's Lefevre? He promised to umpire for us."

Lefevre of the Fifth was on hand, and a New House junior was acting as the second umpire. The toss was taken.

"Rats!" said Figgins, pulling a long face. "You guessed right, Tommy!"

"You bet I did!" grinned Tom Merry. "I always believe in winning the toss."



"If you will come to my study I will present my arguments on determinism!" said Skimpole. "Well, I am a determinist!" declared Handforth. "Anyhow, my will is determined now, and you'll soon find out what my motive is!" And he reached out and dragged Skimpole's straw hat down over his eyes. (See Chapter 3.)

So, in a solemn crowd, the New House cricketers marched up to the pavilion. There were many ejaculations from the School House crowd when Handforth was seen.

"What's that chap doing with you, Figgy?" asked Tom Merry.

"Oh, he's filling a vacant place," replied Figgins calmly.

"What?"

"Fact!" said Figgins. "He offered himself, and I accepted him."

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus. "You don't weally mean to say, Figgay, that Handforth has agreed to turn out against his own House?"

"He wants to teach you fellows a lesson," explained Figgins.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"That's right—cackle!" said Handforth. "But you'll laugh on the other side of your face before I've done!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You don't mind, I suppose?" went on Figgins, looking at Tom Merry earnestly. "You're not raising any objections?"

"Ass!"

"And I shall be obliged if you fellows will take first knock," proceeded Tom sweetly. "Awfully sorry, but I'm afraid we're going to skittle you out like ninepins!"

"Don't be so jolly sure!" said Figgins gruffly.

CHAPTER 5.

Surprising the Natives!

FIGGINS knew, before he had even taken guard, that the wicket was going to be tricky. It was the worst possible piece of bad luck to have lost the toss. The School House fellows had every advantage, and Tom Merry was wise in sending his rivals in to bat.

The wicket was damp, and the sun was hot and piercing. The School House bowlers would have everything their own way on this drying wicket.

"Cheer up, Figgy!" said Kerr, with a grin. "It's only a bit of fun. Nothing depends on this match."

"You're right!" said Figgins, brightening up. "Not that we stand much chance now. The wicket will be in a lot better condition after we've had our knock, and these School House asses will have all the advantage. Still, we'll show 'em something!"

"When do I go in?" asked Handforth.

"Last man!" said Figgins briefly.

"Why, you silly ass—" began Handforth.

"Why not let him open the batting with you, Figgy?" suggested Kerr dryly. "There's nothing like doing the thing properly."

Figgins stared.

"Lawrence is coming in with me!" he replied.

"Don't mind me!" said Lawrence politely.

A slow grin appeared on Figgins' face.

"Well it won't make much difference, after all," he said. "Handforth will only walk out to the wicket and then walk back again, and then you can come in, Lawrence."

"Exactly!" said Lawrence.

Handforth opened his lips, but, with great self-restraint, he closed them again.

"And it certainly would be a good wheeze!" grinned Figgins. "This new School House duffer was ass enough to play for us, so it'll jolly well serve him right to be dismissed in the first over. Then we shall be 'as you were'—with our own ten men. All right, Handforth. Shove some pads on!"

"Thanks awfully!" said Handforth, with intense sarcasm. But there was a grim, determined light in his eyes. He had only been at St. Jim's for just over a week and even the fellows of his own House did not quite know him yet. Figgins & Co. were certainly ignorant of his qualities.

They were letting him go in to open the batting with Figgins just in a spirit of fun. Handforth's jaw became set. These were the conditions that he revelled in; they were the conditions that brought out his best.

Tom Merry had already set his field, and a great laugh went up when Figgins and Handforth marched out of the pavilion, with their bats tucked under their arms.

"Bai Jove!"

"Well, I'm jiggered!"

"They're letting Handforth open the batting with Figgy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

A considerable number of spectators had collected round by now, and they were all amused. This match was going to be funny—particularly in the opening over.

"You can start the scoring, old man," said Figgins generously.

There were further chuckles as Handforth took guard, and prepared to face the bowling. The idea was to get him dismissed with the very first ball of the game. Unquestionably it would be a scream.

Tom Merry himself delivered the first ball of the over, and for a moment, in the kindness of his heart, he had thought about giving Handforth an easy one. Perhaps it was a bit rough on the fellow to show him up so badly. Then Tom Merry changed his mind. It wasn't fair to make any exceptions. It was his job to play his best, and so that first ball was a teaser.

Handforth's bat went up recklessly and everybody grinned. The ass hadn't even the sense to display a little caution during the first over!

Crack!

It was only a slight sound, and there was just a flash of red as the leather soared across the field. Handforth took a deep breath, and his coolness was now perfect.

Figgins, at the other end, gave a gasp of astonishment, and then prepared to run.

"Don't trouble!" sang out Handforth. "It's a boundary!"

"Bai Jove!"

"What a fluke!"

Of course it was a fluke. Everybody was quite certain of that. By one of those queer chances Handforth had managed to score a hit, and so the big laugh was delayed.

Handforth himself leaned carelessly on his bat while the ball was being returned. Every atom of uncertainty had gone; he was supremely confident. All his senses were on the alert, and never had he felt fitter.

He was steeled, too, by the knowledge that Figgins had made him open the innings in a sheer spirit of mockery. All these fellows were expecting to see him clean bowled. All right! He would show them something to be going on with!

Ordinarily, Handforth was a reckless batsman. He himself would not have admitted this. He held that it was his job to get as many runs as he possibly could, and to get them as quickly as possible. If he took any chances it was all in the game.

As a matter of fact, this fellow from St. Frank's was an excellent cricketer. He was impetuous, and he was daring;

and, indeed, at times, he was exceedingly rash. But his on-driving was a beauty to see, and the force he put behind his strokes was startling. A muscular fellow, he opened his shoulders, and let himself go. And he was never any different. Right from the start of an innings he was just the same. He never took the trouble to "play himself in." His eye was true, and the faster the bowling the better he liked it.

The second ball came down, and Handforth's bat swung round.

Clack!

It was a totally different stroke this time, and the leather sped humming over the turf, missed by two fieldsmen, one after the other.

"Come on!" yelled Handforth.

He and Figgins ran, and the leather was retrieved by Herries just before it reached the boundary. That strike scored three.

"Well, I'm blessed!" said Blake, scratching his head.

"Yaas, wathah!" said D'Arcy. "There appears to be somethin' in the boundah, aifah all!"

"And it's a tricky wicket, too!" said Blake wonderingly.

Figgins had the bowling now, and it was something akin to poetic justice when the ball broke awkwardly on the drying wicket, curled round Figgins' bat, and set the off stump awry.

"How's that?"

"Out!"

"Oh crumbs!" said Figgins blankly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

A yell went up from the School House fellows. Figgins had come out with Handforth for the sole purpose of making Handforth look ridiculous. And Figgins himself was the butt of the laughter.

Handforth remained in, and very shortly Kerr came to join him.

And Kerr, being canny, opened with excessive caution. The rest of the over was tame.

"Now we'll see what this new ass can do against Blake!" said Manners. "Of all the nerve! Playing against his own House and hitting boundaries!"

"You can't blame the chap!" grinned Monty Lowther. "We scorned him, and Figgins shoved him in the New House team for fun—so it's up to Handy to prove what he can do. Good luck to him!"

"But he's playing against us!" protested Manners.

"That doesn't matter; it's only a jazz game!" grinned Monty.

But "jazz game" or no, it was providing Handforth with the opportunity of showing his prowess. And he seized the opportunity with both hands!

He treated Jack Blake's bowling with the utmost contempt—much to Blake's stupefaction. He slogged amazingly, and during the over he scored two boundaries in succession, two twos, another boundary, and then a single. This had the eminently satisfactory result of giving him the bowling again.

"Oh, my goodness!" murmured Tom Merry. "He's scored twenty-four already—off his own bat!"

"It's unbelievable!" ejaculated Bernard Glyn.

"He's a dark horse!" growled Tom. "I'm pleased in one way; but it's a bit thick that he should be playing against us! Not that we didn't ask for it!" he added.

The New House fellows were beginning to buck up considerably.

"Go it, Handforth!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Show these School House idiots how to play cricket!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Figgins & Co. were feeling very cheery. If things went on like this, their School House recruit would win the match for them. It wasn't a very pleasant reflection, but the satisfaction of the moment was intense.

Tom Merry was bowling again now, and he put all he knew into his work. But Handforth, with the utmost sangfroid, hit out as though he were dealing with the bowling of a novice.

Clack!

Away soared the ball, up, up—right over the field, to fall well behind the pavilion.

"Oh dear!"

"He's done it again!"

A couple of seniors paused near Little Side and watched. They were Kildare and Darrell, and they glanced at one another wonderingly.

"Did you see that, old man?" asked Darrell.

"I did!" said the St. Jim's skipper.

"A pretty hefty hit, eh?"

"Yes, but there's something wrong!" said Kildare, frowning. "That batsman is Handforth—and the School House juniors are in the field. What's he doing, playing against his own House?"

"By Jove! I hadn't noticed that!" said Darrell. They made inquiries.

"There's been a little mistake, dear men!" said Cardew, shaking his head. "Figgins & Co. played Handforth, just for fun, you understand. But Handforth didn't see the point of it, and so he's making the fur fly. Not, of course, that Figgins & Co. mind. But I gather that Tom Merry is slightly peeved."

Darrell grinned.

"We'll watch this for a bit!" he said.

And they watched. They watched with growing wonder. Everything seemed alike to the dashing Handforth. The damp wicket, under the drying sun, was in a terrible condition. But it didn't seem to make any difference to the new junior. He just leapt forward at every kind of ball, and smote with all his strength.

From a spectacular point of view, it was splendid. It was the kind of cricket that arouses spectators to enthusiasm. But to a critical mind it was painful. Scientifically, Handforth's batting was horrible. He wasn't a pretty player; but for hard work, and for run getting, he was a demon.

"He's too reckless!" said Kildare at length. "Too ram-headed!"

"Yes, but hang it, he's getting the runs!" protested Darrell.

A sudden roar went up.

"How's that?"

"Out!" went up a general yell.

But it was Kerr who was out—neatly caught in the slips. The next man came in, and Handforth now felt settled and comfortable. He didn't care what the bowling might be—he didn't care how bad the wicket would get. He was set. And he was glorying in the knowledge that he was "showin' 'em." Perhaps they wouldn't laugh so much after this!

They weren't laughing, either.

The School House fellows were looking exceedingly annoyed; and Figgins & Co. were beginning to chortle.

Yet there was satisfaction for all. For, although Handforth was giving his display in favour of the New House, Tom Merry & Co. could not forget that he was really a School House fellow. Therefore, they would have the benefit of his prowess in all future games. Figgins & Co.'s triumph would be shortlived.

"This man is a wonder!" said Manners, as Handy's score mounted up.

"Seems to be!" nodded Tom Merry. "I thought it was only a flash in the pan at first, but he's keeping his end up all right. There's no fluking about his hitting now. The chap knows what he's doing!"

"You bet he does!" agreed Blake gruffly. "We can't touch him! Think of it! This—this new duffer! And we can't even get him out!"

It was very exasperating, and yet, in another way, it was very satisfactory. So, on the whole, it was Figgins & Co. who felt most alarmed, although, at the moment, they didn't quite realise it. But they all knew that they would have this hefty cricketer against them in the future. At least, they would in House games.

"He's still at it!" said Darrell, after the new man had come in, and had scored a single. "By Jove, look at that!"

It was a terrific on-drive, and the leather hissed across Little Side, and sent the fieldsmen hunting.

"Pretty smart work!" commented Kildare, as the ball was returned. "Only a two for that—and it was nearly a boundary."

They continued watching, and were impressed.

"You can't get away from it," said Darrell. "The kid's good!"

"Well, he's certainly a lot better than I expected," said Kildare. "All the same, it was like his nerve to offer himself for the first! Still, he's a sound man, and his recklessness isn't quite so foolhardy as I at first thought. It's only his way. The man's a born slogger."

The game ended in a very tame sort of way.

There wasn't a great deal of time, so Figgins declared with the score at 115 for six wickets.

And Handforth, to the accompaniment of loud cheers from the players and spectators, carried in his bat intact—47—not out.

"Jolly good, old son!" said Figgins heartily.

"Thanks!" said Handforth flushing. "But what's the giddy idea of declaring? I wanted to score a century!"

"Good old Handy!" grinned Tom Merry, who was in no way upset. "You're a pretty good player, after all!"

"Thanks awfully!" said Handforth, with sarcasm.

Figgins & Co. and Handforth took the field, and then the slaughter began. In putting Figgins & Co. in to bat first, Tom Merry had counted on skittling the New House eleven out very quickly. But Handy's long stand had had the result of cutting the wicket up very badly, and the School House wickets fell like ninepins.

However, there was a good stand by Tom Merry and Levison, and ten minutes before calling-over Levison was caught in the long field. What was more to the point, he was caught by Handforth.

And the game was over—School House only scoring 87—all out.

That catch of Handforth's had been a spectacular one. He had run like mad towards the boundary, and with outstretched hand he had just managed to grip the ball in the nick of time. He had earned a tremendous cheer for himself.

"You fellows did jolly well!" said Figgins heartily. "It's a wonder you scored anything over fifty, considering the state of the wicket!"

"Bow-wow!" said Blake.

And later on, ripples of laughter ran through the entire school. Handforth had played against his own House, and had brought about its defeat! Figgins & Co. were highly amused, and so were all the seniors.

But, somehow, the School House juniors didn't quite see the point of the joke.

CHAPTER 6.


Handy is Fed Up!

MUST be a mistake!"

Thus Edward Oswald Handforth, as he stood in front of the notice board, in the School House.

It was the next morning, and Handforth was one of the first fellows down. To-day, as he knew, was a half-holiday, and the St. Jim's Junior Eleven was due to play against Rylcombe Grammar School. It was an away match.

(Continued on next page.)



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"Of course it's a mistake!" said Handforth.

He was looking at the list of players on the notice board. And, much to his disgust, his own name was not included in the eleven. After what had happened yesterday, he had taken it for granted that he would be in the team. It was a perfectly glorious June morning, with the sun shining brilliantly, and with every promise of a hot, sunny afternoon.

He heard voices on the stairs, and he turned. The Terrible Three and Study No. 6 were coming down, and, as was only natural, their conversation was solely confined to cricket.

"Hi!" bawled Handforth.

"Weally, Handforth, is it necessary to woaah in that mannah?" asked D'Arcy mildly.

"I'll roar as much as I like!"

"Weally, Handforth—"

"I'm not roaring at you, anyhow!" went on Handforth.

"I want to speak to Tom Merry!"

"Well, here I am," said the junior skipper smilingly.

"What's the meaning of this?" said Handforth, pointing accusingly at the list.

"Meaning of what?"

"Isn't there something the matter with that list?"

"Not that I can see," replied Tom, examining it. "There are one or two blots, perhaps, but—"

"Never mind the blots!" interrupted Handforth.

"Where's my name?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors gathered round, grinning and chuckling.

"Your name?" said Tom Merry thoughtfully. "Ahem! It doesn't appear to be there, Handy!"

"It's not there, you ass!"

"You're quite right—it's not there!" said Tom, in surprise.

"Bai Jove! Handay's name is not theah!" said Gussy.

"Not there!" echoed the others in wonder.

"You—you fatheaded idiots!" howled Handforth. "Don't I keep telling you that my name isn't there? Why isn't it there?"

"Why isn't it there?" demanded Lowther, turning to Tom Merry.

"Because I didn't write it down!" replied Tom. "Very careless of me!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look here, I've stood enough of this rotting!" said Handforth threateningly. "The Junior Eleven is going to play against Rylcombe Grammar School this afternoon. Well, if you've got any sense, Tom Merry, you'll strike somebody's name off, and substitute mine!"

"Then I'm afraid I haven't got any sense!" said Tom Merry promptly.

"Does that mean that I'm not going to play?"

"I'm afraid it does," said Tom.

"But why not?" demanded Handforth indignantly.

"My dear chap, haven't I already explained to you?" said the junior skipper, with patience. "You're only a new chap, and—"

"What difference does that make?" insisted Handforth. "And what about my play yesterday evening? Doesn't that count for anything?"

"It counts for a lot," replied Tom Merry. "You're a jolly good man, Handy, and I'll see that your name is down for the next House match!"

"Blow the next House match! What about to-day's game?"

"Well, you see, the eleven is already chosen, and I can't very well alter it now," said Tom, shaking his head. "It wouldn't be fair to the players. They've had notice, and they're expecting to turn out. Besides, you'll have your big chance in the practice match, later on in the week."

Handforth fairly danced in his exasperation.

"What's the good of a practice match to me?" he shouted excitedly. "I don't want to waste my time in practice matches! I want to play in a big game—for the school! In fact, I want to play in this game this afternoon!"

But Tom Merry was quite firm.

"Sorry!" he said. "Nothing doing!"

Handforth was amazed. After his performance of the previous evening he had taken it for granted that he would be promptly placed in the Junior Eleven. And now, it seemed, he was as much scorned as ever.

"Is there no justice in this world?" he asked bitterly. "What's the good of me showing you chaps what I can do? I play against my own House, and beat it, and I don't even get any thanks!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We're hardly likely to thank you for bringing about our defeat, old man!" chuckled Tom Merry. "Still, that scratch game served a good purpose. And, as I said before, you'll get your chance later on."

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All arguments were in vain.

Tom Merry, according to Handforth's view, refused to see reason. And Handforth raged up and down the School House like a bull. Not that it made any real difference. Everybody continued to grin at him. But there was a noticeable change in these grins. They were no longer pitying. Everybody was amused at the new fellow's excited anger; but everybody knew, also, that he was a first-class cricketer, and that he would ultimately make good for the House.

"Patience, dear man—patience!" murmured Cardew, when Handforth brought him his troubles. "Your time for doing deeds of derring-do will surely come!"

"But what about to-day's game?"

"Can't you put on a new record, or change the needle, or somethin'?" asked Cardew patiently. "Hasn't Tom Merry already explained to you that to-day's team was selected some time ago? All the fellows are fit, and they naturally want to turn out."

"And I'm left in the cold—eh?"

"Alas, so it seems!" sighed Cardew.

"Well, it's rotten!"

"Dear man, I agree with you!" said Cardew. "But put yourself in the place of a member of the team. Supposing you were he. Would you like to be biffed out, to make room for a new fellow—even allowin' for the fact that the new fellow was a giant amongst men?"

Handforth grunted.

"H'm! I hadn't looked at it like that!" he admitted. "Well, perhaps you're right!"

And now that he saw the truth of it he held his tongue. Not that this was much consolation.

After dinner he stood by in the quad, his brow troubled, as the Junior cricketers went off with their bags. As the distance was so short, the majority of them were walking.

"Aren't you coming along, Handy?" sang out Blake.

"Eh?" said Handforth, with a start. "Who? Me?"

"Yes."

"No, thanks!"

"Hang it, you're not going to be sulky, are you?"

"Don't be an idiot!" shouted Handforth. "Of course, I'm not sulky!"

"Then why not come along, and cheer us up with your encouraging presence?"

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus nodding. "Pway do the sportin' thing, deah boy, and join the thwong."

"If I can't play, I don't want to watch," said Handforth bluntly. "It'll only make me irritable. I'm an active chap, and I don't like idling."

"Well, there's something in that point of view," admitted Blake. "I'll tell you what, Gussy. Why not stand down and give Handforth your place?"

"By George," said Handforth, "that's a good idea!"

Arthur Augustus jammed his eyeglass into his eye, and regarded Blake stonily.

"It is a frightfully wotten ideah!" he said. "Weally, Blake, I cannot imagine that you are sewious!"

"But we want to win, old man!" urged Blake.

"You uttah ass!" shrieked Gussy. "That is why I am determined to play!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'm surprised at you, Gussy!" said Blake. "Any fellow, with real feeling for his side, ought to sacrifice his own personal inclinations. All the morning we've been expecting you to stand down in favour of Handforth; and even now, when I give you the straight tip, you won't take advantage of it!"

"Be a sportsman!" urged Handforth eagerly.

"I uttably wufuse to be a sportsman!" retorted Gussy. "Bai Jove! I mean, you burblin' duffah, Blake!" he added hotly. "You know vewy well that Tom Mewwy is welyin' upon me to make a big score. After you fellows have come a muckah, I shall step into the bweach, and wetwieve the situation!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And the cricketers went off, much to Handforth's disgust. The fellow from St. Frank's had had a wild idea for a few moments that Gussy would stand down in his favour. He was ever ready to have his leg pulled; he hadn't realised that Blake had been spoofing.

And Handforth had spoken the truth when he said that he did not want to go to Rylcombe Grammar School and watch the game. It would only exasperate him; it would only make him feel more fed-up than ever. He loved cricket intensely, but unless he was playing he only became irritated. It would be far better for him to stay away.

Yet there was nothing much for him to do at St. Jim's.

The old school seemed quiet and deserted. Even the seniors were absent, since they were playing at Wensford. All the fellows who had remained behind had gone off to the river, or were reading under the shady trees. A kind of drowsy laziness had descended over St. Jim's, and this atmosphere was distasteful to the energetic Handforth.

He felt that he had to be doing something; it was necessary for him to work off some of his surplus energy.

"I know!" he muttered disconsolately. He went round, and got out his little Austin Seven. He was the only junior in the school to own a motor car of his own. True, it was a very small one, but nobody could deny that it was a car. And Handforth climbed into it, started the engine, and drove off.

It didn't matter much to him which direction he took. He was disgruntled and disappointed. He set off at random, purring over the country roads, unmindful of the glories of the afternoon.

And yet, had he only known it, this ride of his was to be a fateful one!

**CHAPTER 7.
Crooked!**

"GOIN' anywhere in particular, old bean?" Ralph Reckness Cardew of the Fourth eyed Handforth with languid interest. He had recognised the Austin as it hummed down the old High Street of Rylcombe, and he had stepped out into the road, with hand upraised.

And now Handforth, like the ancient gentleman who feared the Greeks when they came with gifts in their hands, regarded Cardew with some suspicion.

"As a matter of fact, I'm not!" he replied, bluntly.

"Good!" drawled Cardew.

"What do you mean—'good'?"

"If you're goin' nowhere in particular, you might as well

run me into Wayland," explained Cardew. "I shall be awfully obliged for the lift, old scout!"

Handforth's face cleared.

"All right!" he said. "Jump in!"

Cardew jumped in.

"Fed-up—what?" yawned the dandy of the Fourth, when they were humming along.

"Yes, I am!" replied Handforth gruffly. "Fed-up to the neck!"

"Thought so!" murmured Cardew. "Dear man, you look it!"

"Well, who wouldn't be?" said Handforth fiercely. "I was expecting a place in the eleven this afternoon, and—"

"Quite so!" interrupted Cardew. "But life is too short for all these details, old bean. Besides, I know them. Between you and me and the speedometer, I don't wonder that you're peeved. A fellow of your aboundin' energy is naturally fed-up when he gets left out in the cold. But why worry? I know quite a decent place in Wayland where they have a rippin' billiards-table."

Handforth stared.

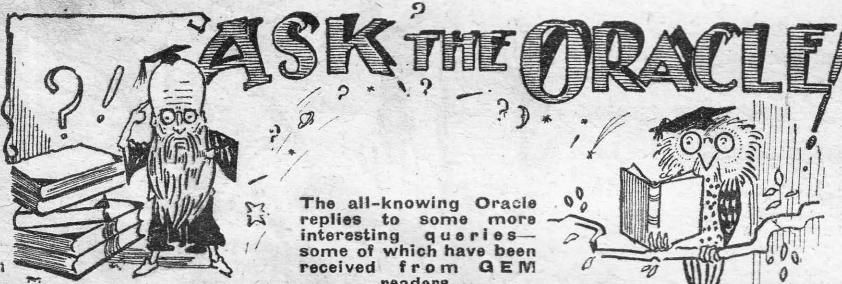
"Do you mean a pub?" he demanded suspiciously.

"I'm afraid I do," said Cardew, nodding.

"Great Scott!" ejaculated Handforth, reaching for the hand brake. "I'm jolly well going to stop this car, and you're going to get out, you rotter! I'm blessed if I'll give you a lift if you're only going to play billiards in a rotten pub!"

"Don't get so excited, old thing," said Cardew gravely. "I was only puttin' it to you as a suggestion. If you don't

(Continued on next page.)



The all-knowing Oracle replies to some more interesting queries—some of which have been received from GEM readers.

called in the Navy as well. Paybob is used also in both the Navy and Army, while an assistant paymaster in the senior service is commonly known as a tizzy snatcher.

Q. What is a bawley ?

A. A clincher-built type of fishing smack most commonly used in the estuary of the Thames. Chiefly they are engaged in the whitebait, sprat, and shrimp fisheries.

Q. What is the difference between a gourmet and a gourmand ?

A. These words from the French both refer to a fellow who is fond of good tuck. More precisely, a gourmet is one who is a real judge of table delicacies; while a gourmand is a chap fond of stuffing himself—a glutton, like the famous Fatty Wynn of St. Jim's.

Q. Why does a boomerang come back ?

A. This curious weapon made of hardwood and used with deadly effect by the aborigines of Australia in the chase, is so shaped that parts of it offer more resistance to the air than others. The result is that the boomerang travels on the curve, and can be flung so that it will come back to a very practised thrower. It, however, it strikes a bird or any other object, the boomerang merely drops to the ground and does not then return as some fellows imagine.



The Boomerang—the weapon of the Australian aborigines.

Q. What is zero ?

A. Figure 0. No quantity or number, nil. To be found on any ordinary, good looking thermometer. During the Great War the time that the boys went "over the top" was commonly known as zero hour. It is no relation at all, John Muttley (who sent in this question) to the notorious Roman emperor, Nero. I'm afraid, therefore, that you lose the tame rat to your school pal.

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Q. Which is the largest church building in the world ?

A. St. Peter's in Rome.

Q. Where does Canterbury lamb come from ?

A. New Zealand. The Canterbury province in the South Island is noted for its sheep farms, and exports a great deal of frozen mutton and much wool to Great Britain.

Q. What is the difference between a skink and a skunk ?

A. Chiefly the smell. A skink is a small-limbed lizard, whereas a skunk is a black and white, bushy-tailed animal about the size of a cat that lives in North America. As it is able to emit a most appalling stench from a liquid secreted in certain glands for defensive purposes, a good many people know about it, too. A fellow who becomes too pally with a skunk in fact, usually has to retire from human society for about a week. Skinks are useless; without skunks it is difficult to guess how the American comedy film industry could exist for long.



The man who pays the Army is commonly called the "Buckshee King."

A. A fellow who becomes too pally with a skunk in fact, usually has to retire from human society for about a week. Skinks are useless; without skunks it is difficult to guess how the American comedy film industry could exist for long.

Q. Who are the Death or Glory Boys ?

A. The 17th Lancers. This famous British regiment was raised as long ago as 1760, and their nickname is derived from

their badge, a death's head with the words "Or Glory."

Q. What is a simoom ?

A. A hot, dry wind of the Arabian deserts. It moves fiercely along a straight and narrow path, and usually is so laden with sand and dust that it half suffocates any luckless traveller caught by it.

Q. What is a sinapism ?

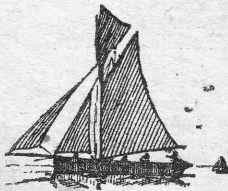
A. If you don't know what this is, boys, you're lucky. Between ourselves, I only slipped in this question to show the editor I know a bit of Greek. It is derived, you see, from the Greek word *sinapismos* (*sinapizo* cover with *sinapi* mustard). In other words, as Mr. George Robey would say, a sinapism is simply a mustard plaster.

Q. Why is an Englishman called John Bull ?

A. It originated from a sketch written by John Arbuthnot, a friend of Swift and Pope, who lived between 1667 and 1735. His playlet, a political one, dealt with various countries and England was produced under the name of John Bull. Curiously enough, a doctor of music named John Bull lived between 1562 and 1628, and it is claimed for him that he was the composer of our National Anthem, though there is no definite proof of it.

Q. Who is the Buckshee King ?

A. An Army paymaster; sometimes so-



Setting out for sprats. A "bawley" in full sail.

like it, you can leave it. As a matter of fact, I'm goin' into Wayland to have a painful, but necessary, interview with my dentist."

"Oh!" said Handforth, accelerating again.

"Teeth," said Cardew, "are a mixed blessing. One cannot deny that they are useful for crackin' nuts, or for chewin' the kind of meat they whack out to us at St. Jim's; but it's a frightful bore when the dashed things have to be stopped, or the nerves tickled, or somethin' equally ghastly."

Handforth was not listening. He wasn't interested in Cardew's idle chatter. Besides, he hadn't the faintest suspicion that Cardew had invented this visit to the dentist on the spur of the moment.

They arrived in Wayland, and Handforth drew up in the High Street. Cardew got out.

"Thanks most awfully, old bean!" he said languidly. "Whereaway now?"

"Don't know!" grunted Handforth. "Anywhere will do."

"You're easily pleased."

"Well, I don't know these roads much, anyhow," said Handforth. "One way is just as good as another. I'm just out for a run—that's all."

"Then why not run along to Wensford and see how the seniors are gettin' on?" suggested Cardew.

"Blow the seniors!"

"Wensford isn't very far," said Cardew. "You go straight along until you're on the Abbotsford road, and Wensford's three miles farther on. A renowned beauty spot, I understand."

"I don't want to see any beauty spots!" replied Handforth gruffly.

He nodded, engaged his gears, and went off. Cardew, smiling to himself, went off on his own pursuits—which were probably questionable. On the other hand, they may have been entirely innocent. One never quite knew with Ralph Beckness Cardew.

Handforth drove out of the town, and although he told himself that he would go anywhere rather than Wensford, he took the Abbotsford road.

And when he saw on a sign-post, "Wensford, 3 miles," he carried on. It was even necessary for him to take a secondary road in order to reach this destination, but he took it.

Truth to tell, Handforth's heart was in cricket. It was the one subject he thought of on a summer's afternoon. Motoring was all very well in its own way, but he considered that motoring was a mere waste of time. Cricket, on the other hand, was an irresistible lure.

Not that he cared a hang about the First Eleven. Why should he? Kildare had treated him with scorn, and there didn't seem to be a chance in a thousand that he would ever be able to fulfil that second "test." The thought of this made Handforth gloomy. Yet, at the same time, there was a determined light in his eyes. By hook or by crook he would have his way! He might have to wait a week or two—

Handforth had just swung round a bend in the road, when his thoughts were interrupted by the sudden appearance of a stationary van ahead of him, blocking his path.

Zzzzzzzzz!

Handforth sounded his electric horn impatiently, but without avail. The van seemed to be standing alone, without anybody in attendance. And there wasn't room to pass, since the lane was narrow and the grass banks were rather high. Even the handy little Austin couldn't squeeze past.

"Careless idiot!" grunted Handforth wrathfully. "What the dickens is the idea of leaving a bus standing in the middle of the giddy road?"

He hooted again, and looked up and down. The van, as could be seen by the inscriptions on the bodywork, belonged to a Wayland baker, and near by stood a little cottage.

"It's a pity the chap can't deliver his bread without blocking up the road!" said Handforth indignantly.

He climbed out of the car and moved forward. But at that moment he gave a start. Lying on the grass, quite near to the van, was a bicycle. And the bicycle was wrecked.

"My only hat!" muttered Handforth.

He was startled. An explanation of this deserted van had suggested itself to him. There had been a mishap! The bicycle, as he could see, was badly battered. The front wheel was completely crushed, and the handlebars were twisted and distorted.

"Phew!" whistled Handforth. "Must have been a pretty smash!"

He looked at the van, but there was no sign of damage. He was walking round the vehicle when a hail came from the doorway of the neighbouring cottage. He turned, staring.

"I say, sir!" shouted a voice. "Just a minute!"

Handforth saw a smallish man in the doorway of the

cottage—a man dressed in breeches and leggings. Obviously the baker's man.

"Hallo!" sang out Handforth. "What's the matter?"

"Do you mind coming in, sir?"

Handforth ran towards the cottage gate, and a moment later he was at the door.

"Had a bit of a mishap, sir," said the baker's man.

"Nothing much, thank goodness! But there's a young gent in here as wants a message taken."

"That's all right," said Handforth. "I don't mind—"

He was interrupted by an exclamation from within the cottage.

"I say, is that you, Handforth?" came a familiar voice.

"Yes!" said the new fellow.

"Good man! Come in here a minute!"

Handforth went in, and he was rather surprised to find Darrell of the Sixth sitting in a chair. The good lady of the cottage was hovering about him, looking anxious and worried.

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



"This is jolly lucky!" exclaimed Darrell. "You couldn't have come at a better moment, young 'un! I was hoping that a stranger might be willing to take a message for me, but you're the very man for the job."

"What job?"

"I want you to hurry along to Wensford with a message to Kildare," said Darrell. "Tell him I've had a mishap—"

"Hold on!" said Handforth. "What's happened?"

"Never mind what's happened."

"But I want to know."

"Oh, confound it, nothing much!" said Darrell impatiently. "My front wheel caught in a rut just as I was passing the baker's van, and in trying to get out of the way I went over."

"One of the nearest things I ever see!" declared the van driver. "By a piece of luck the young gent rolled on to the grass, and I only went over his bike. But it give me a turn, I can tell you! I thought I'd gone over the young gent, too!"

"Then you're not hurt?" asked Handforth.

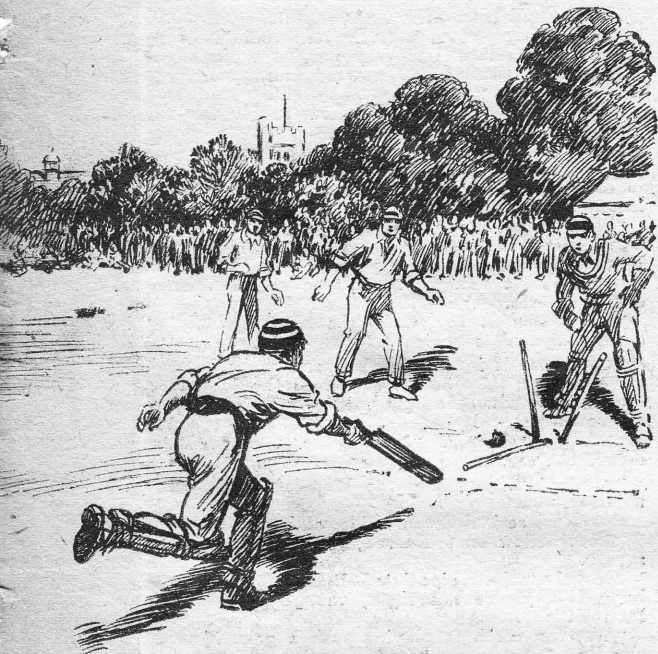
"Yes, I am!" growled Darrell. "I must have caught my foot when I rolled in the grass, and I've sprained my ankle. Look at the size of it!"

"Hard lines!" said Handforth, as he looked at Darrell's swollen ankle.

"Can't use it, of course," went on the Sixth-Former. "But never mind about me. This chap is going to take me back to Wayland in his van, and I can easily get to St. Jim's from there. I'm worrying about the eleven."

"Oh!" said Handforth.

"You see, I promised to be at Wensford on time," went on the prefect. "I had a call to make in Wayland, so I went round that way, and Kildare is expecting me. I was a bit late, and that's why I was hurrying. More haste less speed—eh?"



Just as they were nicely set, Baker called to Kildare to run for a risky single. "No, no!" shouted Kildare. But Baker was half-way down the pitch, and before he could get back again, his wicket was shattered. "How's that?" "Out!" (See Chapter 11.)

"So you want me to tell Kildare that you can't turn up?"

"Yes, that's all," said Darrell, nodding. "It's rotten hard lines on me, but it'll be a bit rotten for the team. Kildare hadn't taken any reserve with him, so he'll have to play with only ten men, or else use a Wensford substitute. Anyhow, it's necessary that Kildare should know the truth at once, because he's expecting me."

"Right you are!" said Handforth promptly. "I'll buzz along and tell him."

"Good man!" said Darrell, relieved. "Pedal hard, because it's nearly time for the start."

"Pedal be blown!" said Handforth. "I'm here in my car."

Darrell gave a grin.

"Sorry; I forgot," he said. "Nothing so common as a bike for you—eh? All right. Step on the gas, then!"

Handforth nodded, and went to the door. Then he paused, and looked back:

"But can't I do anything else?" he inquired. "Wouldn't you like me to send a doctor, or something?"

"No; I shall be all right."

"I think the young gentleman had better call at Dr. Brent's," said the woman anxiously. "It's only just up the road, and—"

"Thanks all the same, but it doesn't matter at all," said Darrell hastily. "Hang it, it's only a sprain! I hate making a fuss over a trifle. I'm crooked for the game this afternoon, but I'm not bad enough to see a doctor. Cut off, Handforth!"

And Handforth cut.

By this time the van-driver had moved his vehicle, and as Handforth drove away he reflected on the curious nature of this little affair. He had only gone along the Wensford road by mere chance—by taking notice of Cardew's suggestion. And he was glad that he could be of some service to the stranded senior.

Handforth now had something to do—he had an objective. And anything was better than meandering over the countryside at random.

And as he "stepped on the gas," and grew nearer and nearer to Wensford, an idea came to him. It was a startling idea—a staggering, stupendous idea. In fact, it not only took his breath away, but he swerved so violently in his sudden excitement that he nearly drove into the ditch.

CHAPTER 8.

Handforth's Luck!

EDWARD OSWALD HANDFORTH was thrilled. His heart was thumping rapidly, his face was flushed, and his eyes were burning. The audacity of his latest idea had positively thrilled him in every fibre, and when he was jarred by one of his own ideas there was certainly something extraordinary about it.

"Darrell's crooked," he muttered, "and Kildare hasn't got any reserves! By George, why not? It's a chance! If I only do the thing in the right way, and carry Kildare off his feet, I might be able to work it!"

Handforth's brain was singing with excitement. He remembered his boast—his promise to fulfil those "tests." He had told Tom Merry & Co. that he would play for the First Eleven, and that he would score a century. Tom Merry himself had made that ridiculous stipulation, and Handforth, in his rashness, had undertaken to essay the seemingly impossible feat.

And now, like a bolt from the blue, Fate had played right into his hands!

He had been refused a place in the junior game, and he had come wandering over the countryside in his Austin. Now, by sheer chance, he had found Darrell crooked, and was on his way to Kildare, with a message to the effect that Kildare must elect a substitute from the "enemy."

In cricket, of course, it was quite a commonplace thing to play a substitute from the opposition, if a team happened to be a man short. It was always being done.

But why play a substitute belonging to Wensford when a St. Jim's man was actually on the spot?

That was Handforth's overpowering argument.

"I'm only a junior, of course, and under ordinary circumstances Kildare wouldn't even look at me," he muttered. "But, hang it, I'm better than a Wensford man! Any St. Jim's fellow, junior or not, is a better substitute than one of the giddy enemy!"

Unquestionably the argument was sound. But would Eric Kildare see it?

Handforth was full of doubts and uncertainties as he drove headlong towards Wensford. All sorts of possibilities crowded into his mind. What if St. Jim's had won the toss, and were batting first? The chances were that Kildare would ring up St. Jim's, and tell another senior to hurry along, and the senior would arrive in plenty of time to take his knock. Wensford was only seven or eight miles from Rylcombe.

Even supposing St. Jim's had lost the toss, and were in the field, Kildare might do the same thing. A First Eleven substitute could be over within thirty or forty minutes, and Kildare might prefer to play a man short until—

"Oh, blow!" muttered Handforth. "I'm not going to think of any such rot! Darrell's crooked, and I'm on hand, ready. I'm in flannels, and everything. I'll put it to Kildare, as man to man, and unless he's a born idiot he'll play me! If I don't grab this chance I'll never get another."

There was certainly a lot of truth in that last reflection. And there was no time for any further thoughts, for Handforth had just caught sight of some red brick buildings in the distance, and then he swung round the bend and found himself at the gates of Wensford College.

It was a comparatively new school, very modern and up-to-date, and this was the first time that the St. Jim's fellows had been invited to a match.

Several seniors were hanging about the gateway as Handforth came into sight, and his sudden appearance had an immediate effect. Handforth did not know that his proverbial luck was about to play him a singularly kindly trick.

He waved to the Wensford fellows, and drove straight into the big Close.

"Hey, half a minute, Darrell!" sang out one of the seniors.

Handforth was already pulling up, and now he brought the Austin to a standstill and leapt out. The seniors fell upon him like a pack of hungry wolves.

"By Jove, you're just in the nick of time!" ejaculated one of the Wensford men. "Come on! We're just starting!"

"But look here——"

"No time to talk!" said the other. "Your skipper has lost the toss, and our men are taking first knock. You're needed in the field, Darrell."

"Darrell!" gasped Handforth. "But—but——"

"They were just going to start without you," interrupted the Wensford fellow. "Our skipper has agreed to let you come on after the game has started. But you might as well be there at the beginning now."

"But hold on!" ejaculated Handforth, startled. "I've only come——"

"Never mind about that!" broke in the other. "You're here, and that's good enough. We're going to rush you on to the field!"

"Rather!" said the others.

And Handforth was whirled away in the centre of the crowd of Wensford fellows.

His mind was in a tumult. He was just beginning to see that these seniors had mistaken him for Darrell. They thought that he was the regular member of the First Eleven, and not merely a messenger.

And, certainly, the Wensford men could not be blamed for their mistake.

They had been told that a fellow named Darrell was expected—one of the St. Jim's prefects, and a highly important member of the team. They had gone to the gates to keep a sharp look-out for Darrell. And when they had seen a burly St. Jim's fellow coming along in flannels, and driving an Austin Seven, they had jumped to an obvious conclusion.

Handforth was bigger than the ordinary run of juniors, and it was by no means the first time that he had been mistaken for a Fifth-Former or a Sixth-Former. Besides, the very fact that he was driving a car seemed to be definite proof that he was at least seventeen or eighteen.

And this mistake, of course, helped Handforth enormously.

If the Wensford seniors had recognised Handforth as a mere junior, arriving with a message from Darrell, they would have left him there in the Close. They would have taken his message and conveyed it to Kildare, and, in all probability, Handforth would never have had the chance of getting anywhere near to the St. Jim's skipper.

As it was he was rushed straight on to the cricket-field, and his luck did not end here, either.

"Good egg!" said one of the Wensford fellows, as they came within sight of the pavilion. "They haven't started yet. But the umpires are ready, and Taylor is preparing to bowl. Just in time, Darrell!"

"He might as well go straight on the field—eh?" said one of the others. "No need to take him to the pavilion."

"No need at all," agreed the first Wensfordian. "All right, Darrell, skip on to the field. We'll tell Kildare that you're here."

Handforth gulped. Being as honest as the day, he could not possibly allow this deception to go through without protest. He couldn't allow himself to be bundled on the field in this way. In his opinion it wasn't playing the game. He would simply be taking a mean advantage of the circumstances.

"Hold on!" he panted. "I want to see Kildare!"

"But the game's just starting, and——"

"I can't help whether it's starting or not!" broke in Handforth. "I've got to see Kildare. I've got a message, and you've made a mistake!"

"You can leave your message until the tea interval!" said the Wensfordian spokesman, who was an aggressive sort of fellow. "Never known such a jabberer! Why waste time in talk?"

"Yes, but——"

"Hallo! There goes the first ball!" said one of the others. "Buck up, Darrell, for goodness' sake! There's been enough delay already!"

And Handforth was unceremoniously pushed through the spectators near the boundary line, and bundled on to the field. And the Wensford fellows hurried off to the pavilion, feeling that their duty had been done.

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CHAPTER 9.

The Substitute!

KILDARE, as Handforth ought to have known, was not available to take any messages. He was in the field directing his forces.

The game was, indeed, on the very point of starting.

There had already been a delay of nearly a quarter of an hour, while the Wensford cricketers had good-naturedly waited for Darrell to arrive. The Wensford skipper had won the toss, and had elected to take first knock. So it was rather important that all the eleven St. Jim's men should be on the ground.

Kildare had been offered a substitute, but he had politely refused, being certain that Darrell would turn up at any moment. Kildare was very puzzled regarding Darrell's lateness, for Darrell had assured him, positively, that he would be there well before the start. And Darrell was certainly not the kind of fellow to let his side down. Quite the contrary.

When, therefore, Kildare saw a group of Wensford seniors hurrying along from the Close, with a white figure in their midst, his relief was great. Darrell had arrived—at the very last minute.

"About time, too!" remarked Baker.

"Oh, I expect he's got a good reason for being late!" said Kildare good-naturedly. "There's no reason why we shouldn't start straight away," he added, turning to one of the Wensford batsmen.

"No reason at all," said the latter politely. "I hope everything's all right now."

"Of course it is," smiled Kildare, as he gazed across at the supposed Darrell. "But what's the idiot doing down there? He knows perfectly well that I wanted him to open the bowling——. By Jove! Just a minute, umpire!" added the skipper sharply. "Awfully sorry to cause a further delay, but something seems to be wrong."

"My hat!" ejaculated the Wensford batsman. "What's up now?"

But Kildare had drawn aside, and was talking to Baker. "That fellow isn't Darrell," the St. Jim's skipper was saying.

"Not Darrell!" ejaculated Baker. "Oh, I say! I'm hanged if you're not right, though! He certainly isn't Darrell!"

"Who on earth is playing such a game?" said Kildare angrily. "I've never heard of such——"

He broke off, as a hail came from the pavilion.

"It's all right, you fellows! You can go ahead!" sang out a voice. "Darrell's just come, and we've bunged him on to the field!"

Kildare opened his eyes wider.

"Just a minute!" he said, turning to the nearest umpire. "I've got to speak to this fellow. You men think that he's Darrell, but he isn't!"

"Well, what does it matter?" asked the umpire. "He's a St. Jim's man, isn't he? Why all this fuss?"

"I am sorry you think I'm making a fuss," replied Kildare quietly. "But I'm not in the habit of putting men in the field unless I know exactly who they are."

"Perhaps you're right," grinned the umpire.

Kildare hurried off across the turf, and he could now see that two or three other members of his eleven were signalling rather excitedly to him. They were quite close to the new arrival, and the latter was gesticulating and talking.

"Great Scott!" shouted Baker suddenly. "It's that kid, Handforth!"

"What!" gasped Kildare.

But a second later he knew that Baker had spoken the truth. The newcomer was Handforth, of the Fourth Form. And there he was, taking his place on the field, as large as life, as though he had a perfect right to be there. Kildare's face became clouded with anger.

He ran up at top speed.

"Handforth!" he shouted, as he approached. "What's the meaning of this?"

"There's no need to roar at me!" said Handforth. "You needn't get wild!"

"Needn't get wild!" repeated Kildare furiously. "What do you mean by masquerading as Darrell, and fooling these Wensford men——?"

"I didn't fool them!" protested Handforth.

"Well, whether you fooled them or not they're fooled!" said Kildare grimly. "They just sang out to me that Darrell had arrived, and I find you here!"

"Well, it's not my fault if they make silly mistakes!" said Handforth tartly. "I tried to explain to them, but they wouldn't listen. They bundled me on the field while I was still trying to explain. You don't think I'd deliberately play a trick like this, do you, Kildare?"

The St. Jim's skipper cooled down.

"Well, what's the explanation?" he asked grimly. "I tried to get a word with you, but they wouldn't listen to me," pursued Handforth. "As soon as I drove up in my Austin, they practically dragged me out of the car and pushed me along, and shoved me on to the field—"

"Yes, you said that before," broke in Kildare. "What are you doing here, anyhow? And do you know anything about Darrell?"

"Of course I do!" said Handforth. "That's why I came. And now that I'm here, why don't you let me play?" he went on eagerly. "I know I'm only a junior, but surely I'm a better substitute than one of the Wensford men?"

"Substitute!" ejaculated Kildare. "What on earth—"

"And I'll promise to do my best!" said Handforth earnestly. "If you'll only let me play, Kildare, I'll go all out! I'll play the game of my giddy life! It may be a bit irregular, according to the St. Jim's practice, but there's an exception to every rule, isn't there? And you know jolly well that you haven't any reserves, and—"

"Hold on!" gasped Kildare. "What's all this nonsense about playing a substitute?"

"That's what we've been trying to find out!" said one of the other St. Jim's seniors. "But we can't get a word out of the young idiot! All he's thinking about is playing in the game himself! He must be mad!"

"But I've explained!" protested Handforth. "I've already told you that Darrell can't come."

"You've told us nothing of the sort!" said Kildare sharply. "What do you mean—Darrell can't come? Why can't he come?"

"Because he's crocked!"

"Crocked?"

"Of course he's crocked!" said Handforth. "Look here, Kildare, be a sport! I dare say one of these Wensford men will help you out, but it isn't to be supposed that the rival skipper will let you play one of his best men. I don't want to boast, but surely I'm better than a Wensford reserve? Anyhow, I do belong to St. Jim's, and—"

"Stop!" shouted Kildare desperately.

"Eh?"

"Why isn't Darrell here?" went on Kildare, grasping Handforth's arm, and shaking him. "Why on earth can't you explain?"

"But I've been explaining all the time!"

"You exasperating young sweep!" said Kildare sulphurously. "You've only told me that Darrell is crocked, and that he can't play! What's happened to him? Out with it, confound you!"

Handforth took a deep breath.

"My hat!" he said. "Didn't I tell you? I was out in my Austin, and I came across Darrell in a little cottage two or three miles away. He nearly collided with a baker's van, and fell off his bike and strained his ankle. He was lucky not to go under the van with his bike!"

"Great Scott!" said Baker. "Is this true?"

"Of course it's true!" said Handforth indignantly. "Darrell asked me to bring a message to you, Kildare. He says he can't play, and—"

"Oh!" said Kildare slowly. "So that's it! What a wretched piece of luck! Poor old Darrell! Is he badly hurt?"

"Nothing much; only a beastly swollen ankle!" said Handforth. "He's properly cut up about it, and he's going back to Wayland in the baker's van."

"Thanks!" said Kildare. "I can understand now. Well, Handforth, you'd better cut off!"

"Cut off!" said Handforth blankly.

"That's what I said!"

"But—but what about the game?" asked the new junior.

"Aren't you a man short?"

Kildare hesitated.

"I am!" he admitted at length. "Still, a good many fellows came along to watch the match—"

"Nobody you can play, though!" put in Baker pointedly.

The Wensford captain came over, good-humoured, but politely impatient.

"Isn't this game ever going to start, Kildare?" he inquired. "I don't want to be critical, but is this delay necessary?"

"I'm sorry!" said Kildare. "But there's been a bit of a mix-up. Darrell, one of my best bowlers, has had an accident, and he sent this junior along with a message. I'm a man short in earnest now."

"Hard lines!" said the rival captain. "But what's wrong with this fellow?"

"He's a junior."

"He looks hefty enough, anyhow!" grinned the Wensford skipper. "Can't he play cricket?"

A vision of Handforth came into Kildare's mind—a vision of Handforth slogging away in the previous evening's match against his own House. And Kildare thought rapidly.

It was true that he had no available substitute; it was equally true that Handforth was a useful sort of cricketer,

although there was no telling how he would shape in a First Eleven match. But it could not be denied that St. Jim's was a man short. And here was this remarkable fellow from St. Frank's. After all—

"Hang it!" said the Wensford skipper. "Why not let him play? Don't you think that it's about time we started?"

Kildare nodded.

"All right!" he said. "As old Darrell is crocked, we shall have to get along without him. Handforth, you can play!"

"Good egg!" said Handforth breathlessly.

He felt grateful towards the Wensford captain. Without doubt, his arrival at that critical moment had influenced Kildare's decision. The Wensfordians were impatient, and Kildare did not like to keep them waiting any longer. And it had struck Kildare, too, that it would seem peculiar for him to ask for a home substitute when a St. Jim's cricketer was actually on the ground. Junior or no junior, Handforth was given his place.

"You'd better stay out here just where you are, young 'un!" said Kildare briskly. "Now, then, let's get going!"

"That's the most sensible thing you've said yet!" remarked the Wensford captain genially.

And at last the game started.

The delays had seemed long, but actually the first ball was delivered only twenty-five minutes after the pre-arranged time. And as the weather was perfect, and the

(Continued on next page.)

PIECOMBE THE PRICELESS!



Pained!

You ought to meet Ulysses Piecombe, the cranky manager of the Blue Crusaders. He used to be a school-



Perplexed!

master and he's always up to some queer game. The Crusaders are a jolly lot of lads. There's Fatty Fowkes, the genial, sixteen-stone goalie. Between the posts, in a scrap or sitting down to a good feed, you can't beat him. His great pals, Ben Gillingham, the fierce-faced, bow-legged back, and "Tich" Harborough, the midget schoolboy winger, are real good sorts, too. Why not meet them this week in the corking close-season yarn of footer and thrilling adventure—

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June evenings were long, there was nothing to worry about. Moreover, this was only a single innings match, so that it was exceedingly probable that it would be played to a conclusion.

The wicket was dry and in tip-top condition. It was essentially a batsman's wicket, and during the first two or three overs the Wensford opening pair played themselves in. They started cautiously, but soon opened out and began to score freely.

Handforth, fielding near the boundary, was afire with eagerness and determination. Here was his chance—his great opportunity! In spite of all the seemingly insurmountable difficulties, he was playing in a First Eleven match!

The seniors had scorned him; even Tom Merry & Co. had scorned him. Well, now he would prove to the whole of St. Jim's that he was made of the right stuff! Failure in this game would mean complete ignominy.

So Handforth was keyed up to a pitch of perfection that was quite unusual, even to a fellow of his unbounded energy. He was on tiptoe all the while, a veritable human electric battery.

In very much the same way as a professional footballer will play far above his usual form in a crucial cup-tie, Handforth was now excelling himself. Never before had so much depended upon his prowess. He was quite a good cricketer at any ordinary time, but to-day he was exceptionally good. The circumstances made him so. His opportunity had come, and he was not wasting it.

And during the first quarter of an hour's play Kildare received one or two surprises. For Handforth's work in the field was of outstanding merit. Whenever the leather came in his direction he was after it like a greyhound after a hare. Never once did he fumble; never once did he make a mistake.

And on three separate occasions he saved almost certain boundaries, returning the ball so smartly that only two were scored.

"By Jove, that kid's good!" remarked Baker approvingly.

"Yes; he's doing famously!" agreed Kildare.

The St. Jim's skipper was feeling more settled in mind. He felt that he was justified in playing this junior. No doubt there would be a lot of criticism from the St. Jim's Upper School when the facts came out, but Kildare did not care. He was a strong captain, and he was not in the habit of being influenced by the opinion of the multitude.

At the same time, it was an undeniable fact that Kildare's position would be much stronger if Handforth played a consistently good game. And by the way things were going, Handforth was out to make St. Jim's history!

CHAPTER 10.

Something Like a Surprise!

"HERE we are!" said Dick Julian, of the St. Jim's Fourth.

The chums of Study No. 5 dismounted from their bicycles. Julian and Hammond and Kerruish were looking hot. Having nothing better to do, they had taken it into their heads to go for a ride on that fine afternoon, and, finding themselves in the neighbourhood of Wensford, they had decided to have a look at the First Eleven game.

They were naturally curious, because Wensford was not one of the ordinary schools that played against St. Jim's, and they wanted to see how things were going.

"Phew! Half an hour under the trees will do us good!" said Hammond, as he mopped his brow. "And, if we're lucky, some of these Wensford chaps might stand us a tea!"

"Stranger things have happened!" grinned Julian.

They left their bicycles in the Close and strolled leisurely towards the playing fields. There was nobody to direct them, but they could easily find their way, for continuous shouts and applause came floating through the warm air.

The Wensford fellows were taking a very keen interest in the game. They regarded it as a very high honour that St. Jim's should come over to play them, and practically the whole school had turned out to watch.

But the three St. Jim's juniors had no difficulty in getting near to the boundary line at one of the corners of the field.

"Our men are in the field!" said Kerruish, as he sprawled on the grass. "What's the score?"

Dick Julian was examining the board.

"Forty-eight for one wicket!" he replied. "They can't have been going very long, and they seem to be giving our seniors a twisting. Hallo! Did you see that? By Jove, that was a swipe!"

"Boundary!" said Hammond briefly.

The batsmen were running, and the red leather was hissing.

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ing across the turf, en route for the boundary. It seemed impossible that any of the St. Jim's fieldsmen could reach it.

But it was reached.

With terrific energy a St. Jim's fellow was running, and, with the ball only a foot from the boundary line he flung himself downwards, and clutched at the leather in the nick of time. A roar went up as it was seen that he held the elusive sphere. And, with all his strength, without rising, he flung it wicketwards.

"Oh, jolly good!" said Kerruish enthusiastically.

"Smart work!" agreed Dick Julian. "Who is the chap? I don't seem to recognise him."

"They all watched as the fieldsmen rose to his feet, and trotted back to his position.

"That's rummy!" said Julian, frowning. "I could swear that—"

He paused, and Hammond grinned.

"Better not!" he advised. "Bad language isn't allowed."

"Ass!" said the Jewish boy. "But, look here! That fellow isn't one of our seniors! He looks just like— Oh, but it's impossible! He can't be!"

"My only sainted aunt!" gasped Kerruish. "It's Handforth!"

"What!"

"It is!" insisted Kerruish, in a startled voice. "It's Handforth—that new chap from St. Frank's! There aren't two fellows in the world with a figure like his! What the merry dickens—"

"We shall wake up in a minute!" said Hammond dazedly. "Handforth playing for the First!"

"And what about that promise of his?" put in Julian wonderingly.

"What promise?"

"Didn't he say he'd score a century for the First Eleven, according to Tom Merry's potty stipulation?" asked Julian.

"Everybody yelled at him, and told him that he was off his rocker. And yet here he is—actually playing for the First!"

"We must be mistaken, after all!" said Hammond, frowning. "It can't be Handforth! I say, let's run along, and get a closer look!"

They all went, and a minute later their doubts were set at rest. Without question, that particular fieldsmen was Edward Oswald Handforth of the Fourth!

Kerruish turned to some of the Wensford spectators.

"I say," he burst out, "do you know why this fellow is playing?"

"That's easy!" replied one of the Wensfordians. "Darrell, or whatever his name is, met with an accident on the way, and this other chap is playing as a substitute. And, by the look of things, he's hot."

"Hot!"

"Mustard!" said the Wensfordian. "Why the dickens your skipper didn't want to play him at first is a mystery! I wish to goodness he'd never turned up! He's saved I don't know how many boundaries!"

"Oh, my hat!" said Kerruish blankly.

They stood staring at the game, and a moment later they were rewarded by the finest piece of work that Handforth had yet done.

Clack!

It was a mighty hit, and the leather soared up and up, and the batsmen were running.

It was the first chance that had occurred for some time, but it was a very remote one. The ball was soaring across the field towards the boundary, and it seemed impossible that any of the St. Jim's fieldsmen could reach it in time. And, even so, the catch would be difficult.

And it was Handforth who was nearest—Handforth who was running!

It was touch and go. Everybody held their breath. At the last second the junior flung himself upwards and sideways, and his fingers clutched at the leather.

Slap!

The sound of the ball striking his palm was like a pistol-shot, and his fingers closed over it. He stumbled, falling sideways. But, miraculously, he recovered himself, and spun round.

The next second he flung the ball high into the air.

"Oh, well caught!"

"Bravo!"

And another roar went up:

"How's that?"

It was out right enough, and Kildare flushed with pleasure and wonder. The Wensford skipper had been dismissed, and, ridiculously enough, Handforth had done the trick.

"Well caught, Handforth!" shouted Kildare enthusiastically.

Handforth's ears burned, and the palm of his hand felt like fire. But he didn't care. He knew he was doing well,

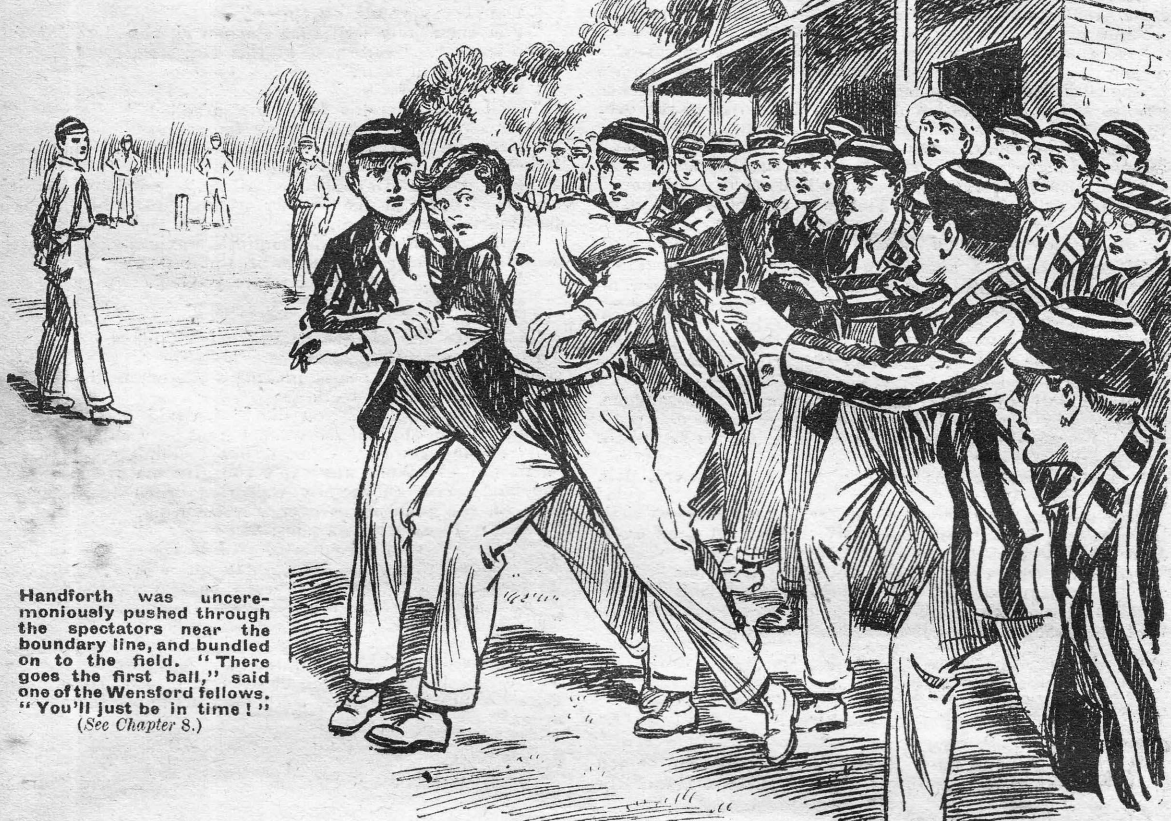
and his heart was beating a song of triumph within him. He was justifying his place.

Dick Julian dragged his two chums away from the Wensford crowds.

"Look here! This is too good to keep!" he said excitedly. "We ought to tell some of the other fellows about it!"

"But there aren't any here!" said Kerruish.

"I know that, but there's a telephone in the place, isn't



Handforth was unceremoniously pushed through the spectators near the boundary line, and bundled on to the field. "There goes the first ball," said one of the Wensford fellows. "You'll just be in time!" (See Chapter 8.)

there?" said Julian quickly. "The game isn't half over yet, and plenty of chaps can get here on their bikes long before the tea interval. They'll be in time to see the fireworks when Handforth bats!"

"Rather!" said Hammond. "I can't believe it even now! Handforth playing for the First Eleven! And even Tom Merry wouldn't accept him!"

"People say that the age of miracles has passed; but they're all wrong!" declared Kerruish. "Come on! Let's go and find a telephone!"

They could hardly contain their excitement. They felt that they couldn't possibly keep this sensation to themselves.

But when they ultimately found a telephone, and succeeded in getting through to St. Jim's, they found that all the juniors were absent. Most of them had gone over to Rylcombe Grammar School, and the others were all out of doors, reading under the trees, or on the river.

"What a frost!" said Kerruish.

"No, it isn't!" said Julian. "We'll ring up Rylcombe Grammar School. That's what we ought to have done at first!"

As it happened, a rather extraordinary state of affairs existed at the Grammar School just then. In a word, the junior match was over.

Gordon Gay and his men had batted first, and they had started out famously, with their usual vigour. But after 25 runs had been knocked up without a wicket falling, an absolute collapse had taken place.

There is never any certainty with cricket. The Grammarian wicket was in fine condition, and there seemed no reason why Gordon Gay & Co. should not stay in the whole afternoon.

But in one over Frank Monk and Gordon Gay had lost their wickets, being dismissed by the redoubtable Fatty Wynn. And then, for no earthly reason at all, the rest of the Grammarians had walked out from the pavilion, and had come back in a procession.

Nobody could understand it, least of all Gordon Gay. But

it had happened. In less than half an hour the home team was out, the "tail" having crumpled up completely.

Tom Merry & Co. found themselves facing a certainty. It was only necessary to obtain 39 runs to win.

And Tom Merry and Blake, between them, knocked up the necessary total with great gusto. Knowing their safe position, they had hit for all they were worth, and had taken all sorts of chances that ordinarily they would never have risked.

"Well, that's whacked you, my lads!" grinned Tom Merry, after the winning run had been scored. "What shall we do now?"

"Is it worth while going on?" asked Gordon Gay dubiously. "There's not much fun in playing when nothing depends on it."

"Oh, we might as well carry on—just for the fun of the thing," said Blake. "Besides, you Grammarian asses need a lot of exercise!"

"Fathead!" said Frank Monk.

But at that moment Carker of the Grammar School Fourth came running up, full of importance.

"I say, you fellows!" he panted. "You're wanted on the phone!"

"Who's wanted?" said Gordon Gay.

"Tom Merry, or one of these other St. Jim's chaps!" said Carker. "It's somebody phoning from Wensford."

"Wensford?" said Blake, in surprise. "What the merry dickens for? The seniors are over at Wensford, aren't they?"

"Yes," said Tom Merry. "All right, I'll go!"

Within five minutes he was back, his face flushed, and his expression rather bewildered.

"What's up?" asked Kangaroo curiously.

"Nothing," replied Tom. "But I'm going to give some of you chaps a fit. Handforth is playing for the First, at Wensford!"

"What?"

"Great Scott!"

"Oh, come off it, Tommy!"

"Tell us something we can believe!"

"It's a fact!" said Tom Merry breathlessly. "I've just heard it from Dick Julian. He's over there, with Kerruish and Hammond. And Handforth is playing for the First—and playing a great game, too!"

"Bai Jove!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "What an extraordinary state of affairs! Weally, Tom Mewwy, I cannot help thinkin' that you are wottin'!"

"I thought Julian was rotting—until he told me, honest Injun, that it was true," said the St. Jim's junior skipper.

"But why did he ring up?" asked Blake.

"He thought some of us fellows might like to go over on our bikes, to see the fun," replied Tom. The captain of the Shell turned to Gordon Gay. "I say, we've whacked you, so what about calling it a day? We'd like to run over to Wensford, to see this marvel."

"You're welcome!" grinned Gordon Gay. "We don't want to do any more leather hunting, thank you!"

"And the next time we play we'll have our revenge!" remarked Jack Wootton. "This win of yours this afternoon was only a fluke!"

"Bow-wow!" chuckled Blake.

"Weally, Blake, I am inclined to agree with Wootton," said Gussy, gracefully. "Evevbody knows that the Gwam-mawians' standard of cricket is below that of St. Jim's—"

"Oh, do they?" said Frank Monk darkly.

"Yaas, wathah!" said D'Arcy. "At the same time, we are willin' to admit that you had fwightfully bad luck this afternoon, deah boys."

"Well, we needn't hold an inquest over the giddy game, Gussy!" said Figgins. "Every team is liable to collapse—and the cause isn't always obvious. The less we say about this game the better."

And the Grammarians were in hearty agreement with these sentiments.

Five minutes later the St. Jim's cricketers were on their bicycles, and speeding off towards Wensford. A good many other juniors went, too.

Ordinarily, no senior match would attract them in this way. But Handforth of the Fourth was playing for St. Jim's, and the circumstance was so remarkable that Wensford drew the St. Jim's juniors like a magnet.

CHAPTER 11.

Playing for the First!

"WELL done, young 'un!" Kildare gave Handforth a hearty clap on the back, and it was all the reward that Handforth needed.

"I did my best," he said, flushing.

The Wensford innings was over. The home side had knocked up the somewhat formidable score of 202. It was of course, nothing unusual in senior cricket, but there was nothing certain about the game. St. Jim's would need to go warily in order to equal, and better, that total.

Handforth was singularly modest about his performance, and the seniors were surprised. They had understood that this junior from St. Frank's was a boaster and a braggart.

In actual experience they were finding that he was nothing of the sort.

For when Handforth did anything really praiseworthy he generally regarded it as a mere nothing, and he actually resented praise. His boasting and bragging was invariably confined to matters of no importance. Which only went to prove that at heart he was true gold.

He knew that he had played well in the field. He would have been a fool if he hadn't known it. He was pleased, but he was not swelled-headed. For, as he argued, he had only played as he had told everybody that he would play. So what was there to brag about? Handforth's philosophy was simple.

All the seniors had congratulated him, and he was fed up. He didn't like the way in which they regarded him as a freak.

"They're dotty!" he told himself. "I wouldn't have asked for a place in the team unless I could have played a decent game. They seem to think I'm a curio, or something! Fatheads!"

Thus dismissing the St. Jim's seniors, Handforth thrust his hands into his pockets and stared at a piece of exercise-paper which was pinned to the wall of the dressing-room.

It was a list of the First Eleven, in numbered order. And he found that Darrell's name was fourth. His eyes gleamed.

"When shall I go in, Kildare?" he asked, turning.

"Last man," said Kildare briefly.

"Eh?"

"You heard me, kid!"

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"I know I did!" said Handforth. "But what's the idea of putting me in last man? How the dickens can I hope to make any score?"

"I'm not relying upon you for any score," said Kildare gently. "You've done good work in the field, kid, and I'm satisfied. You'll take last knock."

"Rot!" said Handforth.

"What did you say?"

"I said 'Rot'—and you heard me!" exclaimed Handforth firmly.

"You cheeky young sweep—"

"You know jolly well that I'm not cheeky!" said Handforth warmly. "But look at this list. Darrell's name is down for fourth man!"

"What about it?"

"Well, I'm Darrell's substitute, aren't I?"

A chuckle went round among the seniors.

"He's got you there, Kildare, old man!" murmured Baker.

"Yes, you're Darrell's substitute," admitted Kildare slowly. "But I'm the skipper, young 'un, and I'm in a position to alter my mind—"

"Oh, come off it!" said Handforth anxiously. "How the dickens can I score a century if I'm last man in?"

"A century?" repeated Kildare politely.

"Yes."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I believe the kid means it," said Kildare, in wonder. "My poor young ass! Do you honestly believe that you stand an earthly chance of making a century in this game?"

Handforth set his teeth.

"You can laugh all you like!" he said grimly. "You were ready to laugh at me when I went on the field, weren't you? I don't want to boast, but I didn't make a mess of it, did I? Well, why can't you give me a chance with the bat? You know jolly well that when the last man goes in, the game is all over, bar shouting."

"But you're merely a substitute—"

"Exactly!" said Handforth. "I'm Darrell's substitute. And Darrell was to be fourth man in. I'm only standing up for my rights when I ask to be sent in fourth."

"Let him have his way, Kildare!" chuckled Monteith. "He deserves it!"

"He deserves a thundering good kicking!" said Kildare good-naturedly. "All the same, I'll agree to let him go in fourth. I don't want to be accused of unfairness. He's Darrell's substitute, so he shall take his knock in the right order."

"Thanks awfully, Kildare!" said Handforth, taking a deep breath.

"And you can count yourself very lucky, my lad!" added Kildare.

Handforth did. As a mere deputy—and a junior at that—he really couldn't expect anything else but a knock at the end. His shrewdness in taking advantage of that list tickled all the St. Jim's seniors, and they were chuckling hugely over it. In fact, they liked Handforth immensely. There was something very attractive about this bluff, blunt, plain-speaking junior.

Kildare and Monteith opened the St. Jim's innings, and there was bad luck right from the start.

Monteith's wicket fell before a run had been scored. He gave the ghost of a chance to third-slip, and third-slip took it. It was really a remarkable catch.

Baker came in next, and things settled down for a bit. Kildare and Baker began to score.

But just as they were nicely set, Baker called to Kildare to run for a risky single.

"No, no!" shouted Kildare.

But Baker was half-way down the pitch, and before he could get back his wicket was shattered.

"How's that?" grinned the keeper.

"Out!"

"Hard lines, old man," said Kildare. "But you shouldn't have chanced it!"

"I know that!" growled Baker. "I was dotty!"

The Wensfordians were feeling happy. They were dismissing these redoubtable St. Jim's fellows with comparative ease. In their enthusiasm they omitted to reflect upon the luck which had favoured them.

Two of the St. Jim's strong men out! But Monteith had been caught by the merest fluke, and Baker's dismissal was more accidental than anything else.

Being fourth man in Handforth came out to partner Kildare. Barely had the substitute taken his stance at the wicket, when, to cap the run of ill-fortune, and with a total score at only twenty-eight, a bird flew across Kildare's line of vision as he received a ball from the Wensford fast bowler. For a split second, Kildare lost sight of the leather, and his middle stump flew clean out of the ground.

Kildare walked back to the pavilion amid a mild display of sympathetic applause.

"What on earth happened?" asked Baker in wonder, when Kildare reached the pavilion.

"A confounded bird!" growled Kildare. "All sparrows ought to be exterminated by law!"

"I didn't see any bird," said Baker.

But he didn't doubt Kildare's word. The St. Jim's skipper was a very safe batsman, and for him to be out with only ten runs to his credit was unusual.

"I'm afraid there's not much chance for us!" said Kildare gloomily.

"Not an earthly!" agreed Baker, as he watched another Sixth-Former stride out to the wicket and the Wensford team change over. "Handforth's going to bat now. He'll get a duck, I'll bet!"

Handforth, as he took guard, was in exactly the same condition as he had been when he started the game. He was on tip-toe—he was keyed up to a high pitch of efficiency. His coolness, too, was remarkable.

waves. And in that position he simply couldn't do anything wrong!

CHAPTER 12.

Bravo, Handforth!

"**B**AI Jove!" Arthur Augustus D'Arcy made that exclamation as he gazed with consternation at the Wensford score board.

"Must be a mistake!" said Blake incredulously. "Thirty-seven for three wickets! I don't believe it!"

The St. Jim's juniors had just arrived, and they were crowding on to the playing fields, eager and hot.

Long before they got within sight of the pitch, they had learned that Wensford were all out for 202. They had heard rumours, also, that the star St. Jim's batsmen



"Gentlemen," said Handforth, rising to his feet. "It gives me great pleasure—" "Bravo!" "Good old Handy!" "Fatheads!" roared Handforth. "If there are any more of these interruptions, it won't give me pleasure at all to address you!" "Ha, ha, ha!" (See Chapter 14.)

Now that the great moment had come, his brain was as cold as ice; he displayed no sign of stage fright. But this, after all, was characteristic of him. It was in moments of great crisis that Handforth gave of his best. At other times he could be relied upon to make a hopeless mess of anything he undertook.

Kildare sat in the pavilion and watched. His heart almost came into his mouth as Handforth received his first ball.

"Help!" murmured Kildare. For Handforth had swung his bat high, and he leapt forward to meet the leather. It seemed to be an incredible act of folly.

Clack!

"Come on!" yelled Handforth.

He scored two with that first ball, and Kildare sighed.

"He'll last about five minutes—if that!" he said sadly. "The young idiot doesn't even try to get himself set!"

But there was something that Eric Kildare did not know. Handforth was riding on the crest of one of his lucky

had been dismissed for negligible scores. And now the board corroborated those ominous tidings.

"Three wickets down!" said Tom Merry, with a whistle. "My hat! That's bad luck!"

"I say!" burst out Bernard Glyn. "Look who's batting!" They all stared.

"Gweat Scott!" gasped Gussy. "It's Handforth!" "Impossible!" said Blake. "Handforth batting! That means that he was fourth man in!"

"Well I'm blessed!" "Kildare must be off his rocker!"

All the new arrivals were greatly astonished. They had hoped to reach Wensford before the first innings was over, so that they could see Handforth in the field. And they had all been convinced that the new junior would be last man in. To see him actually batting at the opening of the St. Jim's innings was startling.

As it happened, Tom Merry & Co. and the others could not have arrived at a better time.

For Handforth was giving an extraordinary display.

Tom Merry & Co. watched, fascinated. An over had just commenced, and Handforth cheerfully sent the first ball well beyond the boundary. The second ball hit the roof of the pavilion, and the third did its best to brain third-slip.

Handforth's hitting was tremendous. The energy he put into his work was worth running a mile to see. Indeed, not only were the St. Jim's fellows staring, but the Wensfordians were beginning to get worried. This substitute—this junior, who had come in at the last moment—was beginning to give them uneasiness.

"It can't last!" said Kildare in amazement. "It's ridiculous!"

But, strangely enough, it did last—and it was solely owing to Handforth's grim determination. He was slogging amazingly, taking chances that caused Kildare and the other St. Jim's seniors to shudder as they watched.

It was a case of sheer dogged resolution. Handforth knew that this was his chance, and he wasn't sacrificing it. The Wensford bowlers could do nothing with him. He was like a fellow possessed.

And gradually the initial astonishment changed to enthusiasm. Even the Wensford fellows threw aside their anxiety and gave full vent to their excitement. They were enjoying this. Cricket, after all, was cricket—and, from a spectacular point of view, they had never seen anything to equal the performance of this rugged, reckless junior.

There was no science about it—no art. But to watch it was superb. To see Handforth leap out, to see his terrific on-driving, to see him take horrible chances—it was all wonderful.

And his wicket was charmed. Nothing could touch it. Bowler after bowler came on, but Handforth treated every ball in the same way. He knocked those unfortunate Wensford bowlers to every corner of the field. The risks he took were dreadful, but Kildare was becoming inured to them. He no longer shuddered. He just watched with an ever-growing wonderment, and with his heart beating much more rapidly than usual. Kildare, in fact, was beginning to hope.

"Never seen anything like it!" he said, turning to Baker. "This kid's a wizard!"

"It's luck—sheer luck!" said Baker. "Of course, he's working like a navvy, but it isn't decent that he should take such chances and get away with them. I'm sorry for these Wensford bowlers!"

Among the spectators the comments were just as enthusiastic. A perfect storm of applause went up when Handforth reached his fifty. So far, he had practically all the bowling, for he had cunningly contrived to score a single or a three with the last ball of each over. And his partner was glad enough. While this lucky "streak" lasted, it was just as well to give it its head!

But perhaps the seniors were just a little uncharitable in describing Handforth's performance as luck. "Pluck" would have been a better word to use.

For, without his iron will to back him up, without his bulldog courage, Handforth would never have been able to carry this thing through.

"There goes the hundred!" said Tom Merry, with satisfaction. "By Jove! And fifty-eight of 'em have been scored by Handy!"

"Bravo, Handforth!"

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus enthusiastically. "I am inclined to think, deah boys, that we have been blind to Handy's prowess! The chap is a wondah!"

"He'll get his place in the Junior Eleven all right!" said Tom Merry, nodding. "Not that he'll ever bat like this again."

And Tom Merry was probably right. The Junior skipper could well understand that Handforth was playing far above his usual form. A big match of this sort generally has one of two effects upon a fellow in Handforth's position. Either he gets stage fright and comes a hopeless mucker, or he steels himself to his task and plays far above his usual standard. It is seldom that any middle course is taken.

"Seventy-five!" said Blake, after two or three more overs. "Oh, by Jove! I can't believe it even now, although I'm watching!"

Three other wickets had fallen, but Handforth's remained intact. It looked as though he was going to carry his bat right through.

And he was still playing the same game—still slogging recklessly at any and every kind of ball. It didn't matter to him whether they were slow or fast, and googlies and yorkers and every kind of delivery met with the same cavalier treatment.

It seemed to the spectators that some of those balls were unplayable, and yet Handforth slogged them away for twos or threes with impunity.

"I believe we're going to win!" said Blake breathlessly at

last. "Hundred and seventy-six! We need under thirty to give us the game, and Handforth is good for the whole innings."

"Yaas, wathah!"

They had ceased to watch for the shattering of Handforth's wicket. The latter, of course, was charmed. There could be no other explanation.

Eighty-eight—ninety-two—ninety-four!

Handforth's score was creeping up. The excitement grew intense as he neared his century. Would he do it? Would he succeed?

"Of course, we can see what he's after!" said Tom Merry. "Dry up, you ass!" said Manners. "We can't talk now! Here comes— Oh, bravo! Well hit, Handy!"

Another four!

"Ninety-eight!" said Tom Merry, with a little gulp in his throat. "Oh, my hat! I'm all trembling!"

"Same heah, deah boy!" murmured Gussy.

"It's that promise of his!" said Tom. "The fellow's an absolute marvel! He told us that he would score a century in a First Eleven match, and I'm blessed if he's not doing it!"

But nobody was listening to him, and a dead silence fell over the field as Handforth prepared to accept the next ball. Everybody knew that this would be the crucial one. Would he be robbed of his century at the last second?

Down came the leather, and out sprang Handforth.

Clack!

It was the biggest hit that he had made yet—a terrific driving stroke which sent the ball soaring skywards like a shell from a cannon. Away it went, over the ground, far beyond the boundary.

"Hurrah!"

"Bravo, Handforth! Oh, well played!"

Handforth, at the wicket, took a deep breath. He glanced at the score board, and his face was flushed as he saw "104" go up against his name. He had done it! He had scored his century! And all round cheer upon cheer went up.

With the very next ball Handforth's stumps were spread-eagled. He didn't know why—he couldn't explain how it had happened. But, with the accomplishment of his purpose, his nerve seemed to go. Every atom of his assurance deserted him, and he made an awful mess of that stroke.

But it didn't matter. He had done wonders—he had scored a century for the First Eleven, and it was a record that he could well be proud of.

CHAPTER 13.

The Conquering Hero!

"GOOD old Handy!"

"Hurrah!"

"Well played, old man!"

The juniors came crowding round Handforth as he approached the pavilion. They were excited and enthusiastic, and their expressions of admiration were genuine. "Jolly good, Handy!" said Tom Merry, as he clapped the new fellow on the back. "You were marvellous!"

"Oh, cheese it!" said Handforth uncomfortably. "I made an awful hash of that last stroke!"

"What does it matter?" laughed Tom Merry. "You've made your century."

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus, beaming upon Handforth. "Weally, deah boy, your performance was remarkable. Pway allow me to congwatulate you. I wegard you as a wippah!"

"He's made history for the Fourth!" said Blake genially. "And if the First Eleven doesn't win this match now the seniors ought to be boiled!"

"Oh, they'll win!" said Tom Merry confidently. "Handy has set them an example that they can't possibly ignore. The game's all over bar shouting."

"Well, we'll do the shouting!" grinned Lowther.

The seniors were almost as boisterous as the juniors as Handforth went amongst them. Kildare caught him by the shoulder, shook his hand, and regarded him with frank wonder.

"How on earth did you manage it?" he inquired. "You know, you're a bit of a surprise packet!"

"Am I?" asked Handforth. "Where does the surprise come in? I told you that I was going to score a century, didn't I?"

"You'll do!" chuckled Kildare.

"I don't know how the dickens I came to miss that last ball!" said Handforth, frowning. "I meant to carry my bat right through—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The seniors laughed uproariously.

"Anyhow, young 'un, I believe you've saved the game!"

said Kildare. "We shall carry on and win now."

It was true enough. Encouraged by the example of this

extraordinary junior, the seniors won the match fairly easy. And the Wensfordians considered that it was very much of a swindle. This mere junior had been brought in as a substitute, and it was owing to him that they had been robbed of their victory. Nevertheless, they were sportsmen, and they congratulated Handforth as heartily as any of the St. Jim's seniors.

Handforth went home in triumph, in his Austin Seven, escorted by a whole crowd of cyclists. There was nothing half-hearted in the way in which the juniors showed him their appreciation. And Handforth, of course, enjoyed it all.

This was the sort of thing he liked! Yet one could have too much of a good thing, and before St. Jim's was reached Handforth was becoming somewhat embarrassed.

Personally, he did not regard his feat as anything remarkable. Hadn't he said, all along, that he would score a century for the First Eleven? Then what was all the fuss about?

"Anybody might think that I'd taken all you fellows by surprise!" said Handforth, turning to Blake, who was sitting beside the driver's seat.

"Well, you have taken us by surprise," replied Blake.

"Rats! Didn't I say—"

"Yes, I suppose you did," put in Blake hastily.

"Yaas, wathah!" observed Gussy, from one of the rear seats. "You promised us that you would score a century for the First, Handay, but we thought you were only boastin'. I wathah think we owe you an apology."

"Oh, don't bother about it!" said Handforth lightly.

Blake chuckled. He was feeling very pleased with this new recruit in the Fourth. Handforth was certainly doing famously. Gussy and Herries and Digby had managed to squash themselves into the limited space at the rear of the car. They could not have been comfortable, and yet they seemed to be enjoying themselves.

When Handforth steered through the old gateway, into the quad, a storm of cheering rang out. The news had got to St. Jim's in advance. Somebody had telephoned, and crowds of enthusiastic juniors were waiting.

Wally D'Arcy and a gang of fags were much in evidence; and a large number of New House fellows joined in the cheering.

But the climax came when Dr. Holmes himself came across to the Austin Seven, which had pulled up against the School House steps. The Head was beaming with good nature.

"Well done, Handforth!" he said, extending his hand.

The flustered Handforth gripped it, turning as red as a beetroot.

"It was nothing, sir!" he muttered uncomfortably.

"I admire your modesty, since I have been led to believe that you were not exactly a modest boy," said Dr. Holmes kindly. "You have done splendidly, Handforth. I congratulate you!"

"Thank you, sir!" murmured Handforth.

"Darrell, I am sure, will be more pleased than anybody else—since you have deputised for him so valiantly," continued Dr. Holmes. "I am only sorry that I was not at Wensford to watch the match. It must have been very thrilling."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Handforth's hitting was a sight for sore eyes, sir!"

"It was glorious, sir!"

"I wish you fellows wouldn't make such a fuss!" said Handforth, frowning. "There wasn't anything in it. Those Wensford chaps didn't know how to bowl."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Handforth's modesty was quite sincere, and most of the juniors were surprised. They had always regarded him as a boaster.

But Handforth was rather difficult to understand. If he had scored a century in a fags' match he would probably have bragged for hours. But whenever he accomplished anything of genuine merit, he generally astonished everybody by disclaiming all credit.

"I am sure that your Form is proud of you!" smiled the Head, as he prepared to take his departure. "You are quite a newcomer, Handforth, and you have started extremely well. I hope that you will score many another century for St. Jim's—although for some time to come you must necessarily confine your energies to the Junior Eleven."

"Thank you, sir," repeated Handforth.

He was very relieved when the Head went, and Tom Merry clapped him heartily on the back.

"Steady, deah boy!" protested Gussy. "I imagine that Handay's back must be quite sore by now!"

"Sorry!" grinned Tom. "The fact is, Handy, the Head was right. In future, you'll play for the Junior Eleven—and you can take it from me that you've won your place. You'll be one of the star turns in the next big match."

"Good man!" said Handforth eagerly.

"What about making him the star turn at a special feed this evening?" suggested Blake.

"Good egg!"

"The very wheeze!"

But Handforth, as usual, objected.

"Oh, rot!" he protested. "You can have a feed, if you like, and I'll be glad enough to come; but I'm jiggered if I'll let you hold it in my honour. What's the idea of making all this silly fuss?"

But Handforth's objections fell on deaf ears, and swift preparations were set afoot for the holding of a big celebration feed. Naturally, any excuse for a feed was welcome; and this could hardly be called an excuse, anyhow. A feed was absolutely necessary.

There was a quick whip round, all the wealthy juniors contributing handsomely, and there was a good deal of bustle round the tuckshop. Handforth wanted to stand his whack, but he wasn't allowed to. The juniors were very firm on this point. As the guest of honour, they couldn't think of him contributing towards the exes.

And so, an hour later, while the Senior School was still discussing Handforth's feat with mild astonishment, the juniors gave themselves up to revelry. The gathering was a large one—in fact, practically the whole of the Shell and Fourth were present, including Figgins and all his New House valiants.

It was a time for celebration, and everybody celebrated.

CHAPTER 14.

Still Determined!

"GENTLEMEN—"

"Hurrah!"

"I stand here to address you—"

"Bravo!"

"It gives me great pleasure—"

"Good old Handy!"

"Fatheads!" roared Handforth indignantly. "If there are any more of these interruptions, it won't give me any pleasure at all to address you."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Personally, I consider that you're all dotty!" continued the new fellow candidly: "A feed's all right, but the way you keep harping on that century of mine makes me wild!"

"You'll have to forgive us, old man," chuckled Tom Merry. "The spoils to the victor, you know—and that's why you're the guest of honour at this feast. You've proved that you're a good cricketer."

"Hear, hear!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Not scientific, perhaps, but a good slogger," continued Tom. "And nobody can say that you aren't a hard worker. In fact, taking you all round, Handy, you're a good acquisition to the Junior Eleven."

Handforth didn't look very pleased.

"Half a tick!" he said tartly. "Who's making this speech?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Sorry, old scout!" grinned Tom. "Carry on!"

"Thanks! I will," said Handforth. "And, understand, I don't want to hear any more of this rot! Let's forget the silly match! Who are the seniors, anyhow?"

"Ah, who?" murmured Blake.

"They're always overated," said Handforth disparagingly. "It was just the same at St. Frank's. The fatheads were dreadfully shocked at the idea of a junior playing in the First; but, as everybody at this feast knows, lots of juniors can show the seniors a clean pair of heels any day."

"Hear, hear!"

"Hurrah!"

"The seniors think too much of themselves!" roared Handforth. "It was only by a sheer accident that I got into that game to-day, backed up by my own determination. And what was the result?"

"We know it, old man," said Tom Merry genially.

"The result was a foregone conclusion," declared Handforth. "A junior cricketer can generally knock spots off the seniors. It's a good thing that these incidents happen now and again. They help to open the seniors' eyes to their true standing. They're not better than we are."

"Heah, heah!"

"In fact, they're not so good as we are!"

"Bravo!"

"We can wipe them up any day!" roared Handforth, waxing enthusiastic, and amid much laughter. "So don't talk any more piffle about my doing something miraculous! I'd ten times rather play for the Junior Eleven!"

(Continued on page 28.)

A fellow in favour usually finds an enemy ready to do him a dirty trick. But that, as Dick Dare philosophically observes, even when an enemy has done him a dirty trick, is just the luck of the game!



The LUCK of the GAME!

RICHARD RANDOLPH

A GRAND NEW CRICKET STORY, DEALING WITH THE ADVENTURES OF A BOY WHO LOVES THE GREAT SUMMER GAME, AND IS A MASTER AT IT, TOO.

WHAT HAS GONE BEFORE

Driven to rebellion by the tyranny of an overbearing manager, young Dick Dare, 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. 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. The match is a triumph for Dick, but he makes an enemy in Herbert Blair, the captain of the Wickhamdene eleven. On the following Monday morning Dick is reported by the manager and is sacked from his job. He decides to apply at the Markshire ground for a place on the staff, little dreaming that at that very moment his future is being discussed by his late employer and John Ainsley, two old friends. The latter decides to offer Dick a job as assistant-secretary to the club.

(Now read on.)

Stirring Up Strife.

DICK asked to see Mr. Frost, and the man on duty at the gate of the county ground made no difficulty about admitting him.

On the veranda of the pavilion two men lounged in the sunshine. Both were known to Dick, though to one of them he had never spoken.

The handsome, rather florid-faced man of twenty-eight or so was Leonard Urwine, captain of the Markshire team. An old Oxford Blue, he was counted one of the best amateur batsmen in England, and he had made heaps of runs for the county. He was a relative of John Ainsley. It was said his nearest relative and his probable heir, for Ainsley was a childless widower.

His companion was Herbert Blair.

Blair was in Marchester on business. He was articleed clerk to Messrs. Deedes & Deedes, of Wickhamdene, Mr. Ainsley's solicitors, and had come over to see Mr. Ainsley for the firm. Knowing that he was likely to find Ainsley at the county ground, he had gone straight there to wait for him.

Urwine glanced at Dick in a supercilious way. Blair turned his head aside; but if he had nodded to Dick, he would not even have had a nod in return. Dick had quite made up his mind about Herbert Blair.

Practice was going on at the nets; but Urwine was not in flannels yet. Dick saw his bag, with the initials "L. U." upon it, just inside the pavilion.

Dick looked round. He did not know where the secretary's office was, and there seemed no one but those two of whom he could ask.

But at that moment Edmead, who had gone in first with him on Saturday, came out of the pros' dressing-room, and his lean, tanned face lighted up with a smile as he saw Dick.

"None the worse, I hope?" he said. "That's good! Want Mr. Frost? Through that door and upstairs, and you'll find him."

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Pads under arm, bat in hand, Edmead passed on, and Dick ran up the stairs and tapped at the door on which was painted "Secretary's Office."

"Come in!" called a high voice.

Dick entered, to see a short, thin man with a lined face that looked rather severe.

"What is it?" asked the secretary, with just a suspicion of snap.

"My name's Dare, sir. I've left the Marchester Insurance Society, and I've come to see whether there's any chance of a place on the staff."

"You look like a cricketer. I take it that you think you are one, though thinking that isn't all that matters. But we're really overstaffed already. Mr. Ainsley doesn't like turning down a man in whom he sees real promise; but the eleven isn't elastic, and we aren't running a second team in the minor counties competition yet, though that may come about in time."

"Do you mean there isn't any chance, sir?"

"I don't say that. It's not for me to decide. Sit down! I'm hoping to see Mr. Ainsley walk in any minute now, and it's for him to decide. If I turn you away and you go elsewhere and make good, I shall be in hot water."

Mr. Frost's face did not relax in the least as he said this, and yet it seemed to Dick as though he had said it smilingly. From the first he sensed the utter loyalty to the maker of Markshire cricket, and to the great game itself that dwelt in the little man whom Urwine—no friend of his—always spoke of to everyone but Ainsley as "Old Frostyface."

Dick wondered whether Mr. Ainsley would turn up, or whether Mr. Frost knew that it might be impossible for him to do so. But he said nothing, for he could hardly speak of the accident without telling of what he had done. There had been no mention of it in the morning paper. The news scouts had failed for once to get an interesting item.

Mr. Frost went on with his work. Dick sat still. Through the window behind the secretary he could see the men at work in the nets, and that was entertainment enough for him.

Twenty minutes passed; then the secretary laid down his fountain-pen, and looked at Dick.

"Your nerves are all right, anyway," he said. "You don't fidget."

"I was watching the men in the nets," answered Dick.

There was an exclamation from the secretary as he turned to the window.

"Ah, there's Mr. Ainsley! He'll be up here in a minute!"

But several minutes passed, and Mr. Ainsley did not come.

He had been met by Urwine and Blair.

"I've a complaint to make to you, sir," said the county captain.

"Better come into my room, then," replied Ainsley

Blair followed Urwine in.

"Well?" said the great man sharply.

He was in pain, and he had little patience to listen to Urwine's complaints. They had been all too frequent last season.

"You've hurt yourself, sir?" said Urwine, with seeming anxiety.

"No. I didn't do it myself. It's of no great consequence. What's the trouble?"

"It's about the club and ground match on Saturday."

"Which of the men are you at odds with now, Leonard?"

"Oh, I don't mean the game at Yarnley. I mean the match here."

"But that's surely no concern of yours."

"I think so. If I had been in charge of the team I should not have done what Tryon did."

"And what was it Tryon did? Anything very dreadful?"

"Blair here can tell you better than I can, perhaps."

"Well, Blair?"

"Tryon roped in a man who is not a member of the county club," said Blair.

"Oh, what does it matter? I suppose he was short. He took on the raising of a team at two days' notice, because your people wanted a match. It's nothing to make a fuss about."

Blair looked at Urwine. He had not wanted to do any of the talking, but it had been forced upon him.

"Well, sir, it's only natural Wickhamdene should not like being beaten through an outsider," said Urwine unpleasantly.

"I don't see it that way. They got their game. The result was a matter of very little importance. Who was the outsider? And what did he do?"

"A fellow named Dare," answered Urwine, rather sulkily. "He made top score, and took most of the wickets."

"Dare—eh? Well, you've made your complaint. I don't think there's much in it, and, after all, it's hardly your concern. But I'll speak to Tryon when I see him again."

He looked as if he expected both to go after he had said that. Urwine turned for the door, shrugging his shoulders. But Blair remained.

"I've come over from the firm to see you, sir," he said.

"It's the matter of the Browne lease."

"Oh, tell them it goes through!"

"But Mr. Edward thought, sir—"

"I've made up my mind! It goes through!"

Blair retreated sulkily. He had a notion that Mr. Ainsley did not like him. He was sure it was not his fault; there was little Blair would not have done to curry favour with a wealthy man.

John Ainsley went up to the secretary's office. He ascended the stairs slowly; he felt weak and ill. But Mr. Frost knew his step.

"Here he comes!" he said.

At once Dick sprang up and opened the door.

"Why, young Dare!" exclaimed Mr. Ainsley. "I've been to your lodgings, after learning that you had been written off the roll in Bank Street, and now I find you here!"

"Dare thinks you haven't enough men on the ground staff, Mr. Ainsley," said the secretary.

"Does he? I've heard you're a cricketer, Dare. I know that you have pluck and presence of mind. Frost, you see me with a crippled arm. If it hadn't been for this boy I might have had my skull smashed instead of merely getting a knock on the shoulder!"

Mr. Frost only nodded; but somehow his nod seemed to mean more than many words from another man might have done.

"Can you do with help here?" asked Mr. Ainsley.

"If it's really help," replied the secretary.

"Would it be, Dare? If you care to take on a job as assistant to Mr. Frost you'd get plenty of cricket, and perhaps when you'd got a qualification for us—"

"I was born in Markshire, sir. I beg your pardon for interrupting!"

"Oh, then you have your qualification! That makes no difference to my offer. Let's see! Two hundred a year would be a fair figure, I think."

Mr. Frost looked at Dick keenly. He saw that the boy hesitated, and wondered why, for he was sure that Dick had drawn nothing like that sum from the insurance society.

"If I'm good enough, sir, I'd rather have a job on the staff," said Dick. "You see, I just hate being indoors! All the same, if Mr. Frost wanted help, I'd be glad to do what I could at nights; and I'm all right with a typewriter and not too bad at figures."

"You wouldn't be as well off, unless you're county form, Dare; and even if you are, there's strong competition against you," interposed the secretary. "And you'd be a pro, whereas being assistant-secretary you could play as an amateur."

"I'd rather be a pro, I think," Dick said. "I don't care so much about the money. I've five pounds a month of my own—couldn't have got along on my screw at the office without it."

"Come along again at this time to-morrow, then," said Mr. Ainsley. "I want to talk to Frost now, and Giddings isn't here. I must have his opinion."

Giddings was the head of the ground staff, an old county player. He said quite frankly that he did not reckon his opinion worth a sou if it did not agree with Mr. Ainsley's. But that gentleman always took the opinion of Giddings.

"Very well, sir!" answered Dick.

He left the office, with a flushed face and shining eyes. "Were you here on Saturday afternoon, Frost?" Mr. Ainsley asked, when the door had closed behind the youngster.

"No. I do sometimes take an hour or two off, you know," replied the secretary, with a smile. "Why?"

"You missed something, that's all. No; don't ask me what. Let's go into the matters to come before the committee to-morrow."

While Dick had been with Mr. Ainsley and the secretary something had happened which was to affect materially his future.

Balkwill, the crack all-rounder of the Markshire team, arriving late for net practice—as was very much Balkwill's way—brought news. He had run against Tom Deeks, and from him had heard the story of what had taken place in High Street on the Saturday.

Of all the Markshire pros, Balkwill was the only one with whom the captain got along really well. Their tastes were much the same. Whether Balkwill really liked Urwine no one was sure—perhaps not even Balkwill himself. But they hung together.

Now, as he told his captain how Dick Dare had gone to the rescue of Mr. Ainsley, Balkwill had a curious gleam in his hazel eyes. He understood how jealous Urwine was of anyone who was regarded with favour by John Ainsley.

Dark and lean and tall, Balkwill lounged into the dressing-room.

Urwine turned to Blair.

"Bertie," he said, "I wouldn't have that youngster say things such as he said here on Saturday and get away with it! I'd give him a dashed good hiding!"

"That means trouble with Ainsley!" objected Blair.

Urwine cared little if there was trouble with Ainsley for Herbert Blair as long as there was also trouble for Dick. He knew well that John Ainsley was down on anything in the way of brawling, and thought it might queer Dick's pitch pretty effectively if he got into a fight before he left the ground. Anyway, Blair, who had a big reputation as an amateur boxer, ought to be able to give the young upstart a hiding.

"I shouldn't worry about that. You can have my testimony that Dare was the aggressor, and you ought to be able to work it so that he seems so!"

"Yes, I might do that," agreed Blair, who knew something about the contents of John Ainsley's will.

They waited for Dick outside the pavilion. When he emerged Blair walked up to him.

"I want an apology for what you said about me on Saturday!" he said arrogantly.

"I guess you'll go on wanting!" replied Dick.

It was Tryon, not he, who had spoken those words. But Dick was quite prepared to answer for them.

"Have I to force an apology from you?" rapped out Blair.

"You might try! I don't think it will come off!" retorted Dick.

"Spoiling for a hiding—eh?"

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"Not exactly. But if you think you can give me one—"
 "Think! I know I can! Put up your fists!"
 "Not here, thanks!" said Dick coolly. "There's a nice little paddock a hundred yards or so down the road where we could settle it."

Blair looked at Urwine. This was hardly according to programme.

Urwine shrugged his shoulders.

"It's up to you, Bertie!" he said.

At that moment Balkwill came out of the pavilion.

Urwine called to him

"Scrap on, Balk!" he said. "You'd better come along. It's a bit informal, but if each man has a second we can dispense with referee and timekeeper."

"I'm to second the kid there, then?" said Balkwill.

"That's the notion!"

"I'm on!"

Though Blair did not know it, Gregory Balkwill was far from being friendly disposed towards him, and the notion of seeing him licked appealed to the crack pro.

And this youngster looked hefty enough to have a chance. Balkwill knew that Blair was counted an expert with the gloves. But he suspected a yellow streak in Blair; and this fight would be with bare fists.

"Come along!" he said.

He and Dick led the way out of the ground and down the road. Blair and Urwine followed. Balkwill said nothing to Dick, and Dick said nothing to him. The two behind them were not more talkative. Blair was wondering whether he had not been forced into a false position, and Urwine was thinking that it would be rather a sell if the youngster proved too good for the man he had egged on to fight, though it would not be on Blair's account that that would trouble him.

The paddock of which Dick had spoken seemed quite a suitable place for the fight. A high fence screened it from the road, and no house overlooked it. But there were two or three windows in the upper storey of the pavilion from which a view of it could be had.

One of these was that of a little room next the secretary's office. In this room were stored the club's old score-books, with bound volumes of the annual reports; and there were some shelves full of sets of the cricket annuals.

Here, to look up the precise details of some match of the past, came John Ainsley at the moment when the four reached the paddock.

Dick pushed open the gate.

"There won't be any trouble about trespassing," he said. "I know the fellow this place belongs to."

"And you're sure he won't mind your coming here to be licked?" sneered Blair.

"He won't mind my coming here, or my bringing you here," answered Dick.

He stopped short there. But if he had gone on to add "to be licked," his meaning would not have been clearer to Urwine or Balkwill, though Blair, in his self-conceit, did not perceive it.

The boy plainly thought he had a chance. Balkwill was glad of that, while Urwine did not mind. To see Blair thrashed would not ruffle his feelings.

In a few seconds the two opponents had taken off their coats, waistcoats, collars, and ties.

"I'll keep time," said Urwine. "You must do what's needed in the ref way, Balk."

"I'm on!" replied Balkwill.

"Three minutes each round, half-minute intervals," Urwine said, watch in hand. "Go at it!"

They went at it.

Blair rushed in. He was heavier than Dick, and had the longer reach; that he had the greater science he did not doubt—in the first five seconds.

Then, when a lightning cross-counter came home on his jaw, he began to feel a little less certain.

Neville Tryon could have told him a thing or two. Tryon had left Yarnley Grammar School at the end of Dick's first term there; but he often looked in at the old place, and he had seen Dick box.

Blair thought better of his rushing tactics. He was much more careful after that blow had got home. But he was not content to act wholly on the defensive, and he really had considerable cleverness.

But the absence of gloves, which did not trouble Dick in the least, bothered Blair greatly. For it meant that hitting the other fellow hard hurt one's knuckles, and Blair did not like that.

Before the end of the round came Balkwill was yelling at him to break away, for he had fallen into a clinch that did not suit the pro's notion of fighting.

But Urwine called "Time!" while the clinch still held, and the combatants fell apart. Dick smiled. Blair scowled. "You don't want to hug him, Blair," said Balkwill. "Stand up and hit him, man!"

John Ainsley chanced to look out of the window of the little room in the pavilion at the moment when the second round began.

Mr. Ainsley disliked quarrelling; but in his youth he had been a devotee of boxing. Then it had chanced to him to see a man killed in the ring. It was a great shock to his sensitive nature. He gave up boxing once for all; and his feeling against it, combined with his hatred of squabbling, made him less broad-minded in any matter of this sort than in most ways.

He recognised at once the four figures in the paddock. He went into Mr. Frost's room, took up a pair of field-glasses, and returned to the window without a word.

He saw Dick stagger and recover. He saw the boy press in and force Blair back. Dick got home very near the point of Blair's jaw, and the man who had sought the fight went to grass, and lay still.

With anger burning in him, Mr. Ainsley put down the glasses, hurried down the stairs, and made for the gates. He had sent Robins away with the car. He regretted that now, for he was in desperate haste to stop that fight—if, indeed, it were not already at an end, and that a tragic end!

"I Can't Take It!"

BLAIR was on his feet again by the time Urwine had counted seven. For the rest of the round he sparred for safety, for the fall had taken something out of him. He was not used to measuring his length thus.

But he felt fitter after the thirty seconds' rest, and the smile on Dick's face enraged him. He imagined it due to swank. It was not. Dick was naturally a smiling fighter—and that sort is not the least to be feared.

Blair meant to wipe out that smile. He did not succeed. In his fury he was at a disadvantage with his cooler antagonist. Seeking to break down Dick's guard, he left his own open, and took a punch to the mark that settled the issue.

Again he went down, and lay like a log this time. Urwine, with no great regret on his account, but grudging Dick the victory for all that, counted him out.

It was at that moment that Mr. Ainsley appeared, pushing open the gate impatiently, his face pale and angry.

That face grew paler and angrier yet when he saw Blair still on the ground. He naturally imagined that Blair had been incapable of rising after the blow he had seen from the pavilion window.

The memory of that incident of twenty-odd years earlier flooded his mind.

Was it his fate, after all the care he had taken to avoid it, to see a repetition of it?

When a man takes a really hard punch to the mark he is apt to lie very like a dead man. He is dead to the world for a brief space, in fact.

"I say, Mr. Urwine, here's the boss!" said Balkwill. He spoke warningly, but it struck Dick that he did not seem in the least concerned for himself. And there was a queer gleam in his hazel eyes as they watched Urwine swing round in surprise and some alarm.

Gone— But Not Forgotten!

Edward Oswald Handforth may have left St. Frank's, but Church and McClure and Nipper and the other Removites have not forgotten their old Form-fellow. For there can be no denying that the celebrated Handy provided them with plenty of fun, and his bluntness and generosity had endeared him to them all.

But in spite of Handy's absence things go on as usual at St. Frank's, and the Removites have some stirring adventures. If you like tales of thrilling school-life and adventure you can't do better than read

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Things had fallen out much as Urwine had hoped. But not quite. He had not wanted to be on the spot when his relative came to know of the fight. It would have suited him better to have been able to pose as an unwilling spectator. But the watch was still in his hand, and, though he hastened to conceal it, he knew that it had been seen by those keen eyes.

Dick flushed hotly. He did not like this. But there was nothing in it of which he had need to be ashamed.

"What does this mean?" demanded Mr. Ainsley. "Have you killed Blair?"

Dick could not help smiling. He knew nothing of that tragic incident of old, and fancied that the question came from a man ignorant of everything to do with the art and science of boxing.

"No, sir. Just knocked him out, that's all," he replied lightly.

"But he's been lying there for several minutes! I saw him from the pavilion, and came here at once."

And John Ainsley knelt by Blair's side, and lifted his head with his left hand, unable to make any use of his right.

Mr. Ainsley had come round, and he heard Mr. Ainsley's words. But no fellow would have said at once that there was wrong with him. Blair kept silence.

"I had better hurry to the pavilion and telephone for Kerr, Balkwill," Mr. Ainsley said. "There's really no need, sir. He'll be all right in a few seconds," the pro answered coolly.

Blair was certainly not dead. Of that Mr. Ainsley could easily assure himself. But the shock of seeing him lying on the ground, and the angling the nerves of the newcomer.

He had seen him when he was first knocked out. "He's been up since, and is now talking," he explained.

"The cause of the quarrel?" asked Mr. Ainsley, looking angrily at Dick.

Dick did not answer. He would not make excuses. If Mr. Ainsley was minded to take him for the aggressor simply because he saw him the victor—well, let him!

"What?" asked Mr. Ainsley, rather annoyed that Dick did not answer. "What was it all about?"

Dick did not answer, but he gave Blair a glance that told him all.

Blair turned to his relative. "I can make it clear," said Urwine. "It was all about the time to speak."

He gave a great sigh, though just coming to himself. He spoke in a feeble voice, and seemingly with some difficulty.

"I had the misfortune to pick up Dare over with a full pitch on Saturday, sir," he said.

"That was true. Dick could not contradict it."

"And he has picked a quarrel with you on that account!" snapped Mr. Ainsley. "Dare, I am disappointed in you! When I heard of what had taken place at the insurance office, I took the view that you were, or believed yourself to be, unfairly treated by the man concerned. But this is a different matter. As a cricketer, you ought to be able to take an accident as in the course of the game."

Something seemed to tick Dick's tongue. There was all the difference in the world between his picking a quarrel with Blair because Blair had knocked him out with a full pitch,

WHO'S GOING TO WIN?



Urwine called "Time!" and the combatants fell apart. "You don't want to hug him, Blair," said Balkwill. "Stand up and hit him, man!" Blair scowled and did not reply, and Dick smiled, knowing in his heart of hearts that he had his man beaten. (See Page 26.)

even though he might not have believed it an accident, and the truth—which was that Blair had threatened him with a thrashing unless he would apologise for words he had not uttered.

Balkwill nudged him. The pro had some sympathy with Dick, chiefly due to his dislike for Blair.

But that nudge, though Dick knew what it meant, had no effect—unless it had that of making him less than ever inclined to explain. He remembered, too, that an explanation must involve Tryon; and he did not want his old schoolfellow dragged into this.

He wondered why Urwine, who knew that the quarrel had not been sought by him, did not say so. But Urwine saw his profit in taking the other side.

"Well, there can be no more fighting now," said Mr. Ainsley. "I would see to it that there was no more, even had Blair been in any case to resume. I consider that this affair reflects discredit on everyone concerned in it!"

Balkwill shrugged his shoulders. Urwine frowned. To be brought to book before others was a wound to his arrogance. Blair tried his best to look meek. Dick lifted his hat to Mr. Ainsley, and walked out of the paddock.

This settled it, he supposed. After this there was no chance of his getting a place on the ground staff. Or, if there was, it would only be because Mr. Ainsley wanted to reward him for what he had done in the High Street, and his pride made him resent the notion of accepting any such reward.

Already angry, Mr. Ainsley was made angrier yet by his exit.

"Stiff-necked young rascal!" he muttered under his breath. "That's finished it!"

(But has it? Don't forget, boys, the old saying that truth will out. Young Dick hasn't seen the last of the Markshire C.C. by any means, for he possesses a friend in Balkwill. You'll enjoy every word of next week's long instalment, so order your GEM to-day!)

PLAYING FOR THE FIRST!

(Continued from page 23.)

This, after all, was true modesty on Handforth's part, and his audience appreciated it. Many a fellow in his position would have made great capital out of his feat. But Handforth blunty told the truth when he gave it as his opinion that senior cricket was overrated.

"It's jolly decent of you to give me this feed," continued Handy, "and I don't want you to think I'm ungrateful. But you'll do me a favour if you'll forget cricket for the rest of the evening, and talk about something else."

"That's easy!" chuckled Bernard Glyn. "Let's talk about your next ordeal, Handy."

"Ha, ha, ha!"
"My next which?" asked Handforth.
"You've already wiped off two of those special tests, old scout," grinned Tom Merry, taking his cue from Glyn. "You haven't forgotten the other two, have you?"

"Of course I haven't, ass!"
"When I invented those tests I was only rotting," went on Tom Merry. "Nobody ever thought that you would take them seriously, Handy."

"Unless he's a fathead, he won't take them seriously now," said Blake. "He wiped up Knox of the Sixth by a fluke—"

"What!" thundered Handforth.
"By a fluke!" repeated Blake calmly.
"You— you silly ass!"

"A fluke!" insisted Blake, quite unmoved. "I'm not saying that you thrashed him by a fluke, but the opportunity came along unexpectedly, without any preparation on your part."

"That's different!" admitted Handforth, simmering.

"And practically the same thing can be said of to-day's match," argued Blake. "You were born lucky, Handy. Just think of it! By sheer chance you accidentally came upon Darrell, and Darrell, by the merest of flukes, had sprained his ankle. And so you got your chance to play, and succeeded in that second test."

"H'm! Perhaps you're right," said Handforth gruffly.
"My dear chap, of course I'm right!" said Blake. "I'm not trying to belittle your performance, so don't misunderstand me. It doesn't matter much how you got into the game—"

"Are you going to start jawing cricket again?"
"Sorry," said Blake hastily. "Well, and now we come to the next two tests."

"Why drag in two?" murmured Cardew. "I'm inclined to think that one of them will be a pretty stiff hardle."

"Not too stiff for me," said Handforth promptly.
"Ha, ha, ha!"
"Optimist!"

Tom Merry rose to his feet, and there was silence.
"Look here, Handy. I withdraw all I said about those

tests," he said earnestly. "There's no need for you to go ahead with them. We're satisfied."

Edward Oswald Handforth shook his head.
"You may be satisfied, but I'm not," he said firmly. "I know jolly well that those tests were a spoof; but I've done two, and I'll do the other two."

"Ha, ha, ha!"
"But you know it's impossible—"
"I know nothing of the sort, Tom Merry!" frowned Handforth. "Not long ago you were saying it was impossible for me to score a century for the First. But I did it, didn't I?"

"But you were lucky, old man—"
"Well, perhaps I shall be lucky again," retorted Handforth calmly. "Lemme see. What is this fatheaded third test, anyhow? I've got to raid the Grammar School single-handed, haven't I?"

"No; that's the fourth test."
"What's the third, then?"

"I'm afraid the third is just as difficult as the fourth," said Tom Merry, rather uncomfortably. "I keep telling you that I was only rotting. It was just a joke, Handy."

"Never mind that. What am I supposed to do?"
"Sleep a night in your Housemaster's bed!"
"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'm afraid that's torn it!" grinned Blake. "Handy, old man, why not chuck it up while you're still safe? You've been victorious twice, and we're ready to wash out the others. Why spoil everything by coming a cropper?"

"But I shan't come a cropper!"
"My dear, poor innocent!" said Blake. "How the merry dickens do you think you can sleep for a whole night in old Railton's bed? The thing's out of the question. Even if Railton provides you with the opportunity, you'd be risking the sack to attempt it."

"I don't care!" said Handforth stubbornly. "You dared me, and I'm going to carry on."

"Railton hardly ever leaves the school in mid-term," growled Blake. "And if he doesn't leave the school, how can you get into his bed-room, let alone sleep in his bed?"
"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus. "Pway weccasidah the mattah, Handay. We should hate to see you come a cwoppah aftah your wipin' success of to-day."

But Handforth remained obdurate.
"There's something you've forgotten," he said coldly.

"Blake distinctly told me that if I won these four tests I should automatically become leader of the Fourth!"

"My only sainted aunt!" murmured Blake.
"You admit it, don't you?" demanded Handforth.
"Well, yes."

"Good enough, then," said Handy, tripping lightly. "I'm not going to rest content until I'm leader of the Fourth! And as I can't become leader of the Fourth until I succeeded in all four tests, I'm going ahead!"

And Tom Merry gave it up.
This astonishing new fellow was filled with extraordinary determination, and the juniors were beginning to wonder if those other two tests were, after all, impossible. For nothing seemed impossible to the lucky Handforth!

THE END.

(Make sure you read the next story in this splendid series, *chums*, entitled: "HANDFORTH'S THIRD TEST!" It is, without doubt, one of Martin Clifford's finest yarns. An order for next week's GEM now will save disappointment.)

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