

HANDFORTH'S WINDFALL!



By
EDWY
SEARLES
BROOKS

It was a spiteful jape against Edward Oswald Handforth.... yet it brought him a small fortune: that's why they call him 'Lucky Handforth.'

THE FIRST CHAPTER

BERNARD FORREST STARTS SOMETHING

THERE had been a violent row in Study D, in the Ancient House, at St. Frank's, and most of the furniture had got more or less pulverised. The fact that the furniture belonged to the burly Edward Oswald Handforth, and the added fact that Handforth himself had smashed it, counted for less than nothing. When Handforth had a really juicy row with a fellow he didn't care two hoots about furniture, his own or anybody else's. If it happened to be within the zone of battle it just got broken.

Bernard Forrest, the dandified cad of Study A, was really the cause of it all. Anyhow, that's what Hand-

forth said. Forrest came into Study D one day, insulted Handforth to his face, and the latter promptly locked the door and sailed in. Exactly what the insult was, nobody could ever find out. Even Handforth had forgotten it after the "mill." But when a crowd of Removites gained admittance to the study after the din had died down, they found Handforth standing in the middle of a pile of glorious wreckage with blood-smeared knuckles, and Forrest littered untidily on the floor, totally indifferent to the subsequent proceedings. It took any amount of cold water to bring him round, and he wasn't really himself again for days.

Church and McClure, who shared Study D with Handforth, were needlessly fussy over the whole business.

They took the unreasonable view that Handforth should have marched Forrest to Study A for the fight, where it wouldn't matter a jot what happened to the furniture.

"You've had your fun, and Forrest looks like a mixed-fruit table jelly, but what are we going to use for a table?" asked Church bitterly. "There's only one leg left on this piece of junk, and the chairs are no better than matchwood. The trouble with you, Handy, is that you don't think. You're too ram-headed."

"It was a glorious mill, though," said Handforth, proudly rubbing his bruised knuckles. "As for the furniture, don't make such a fuss. I'll write to my pater and ask him to send some new stuff down. Until it comes we can get some old boxes, and patch this up."

To the astonishment of Church and McClure—and the rest of the Remove Handforth's pater sent a letter a few days later saying that he couldn't quite understand what Handforth meant, but, anyhow, he was dispatching—and had, in fact, dispatched—something which would be just right for Study D. He didn't go into any details—Handforth's pater wasn't that kind of man—and the burly Removite was left in a state of pleasurable anticipation.

"Didn't I tell you it would be all right?" he said triumphantly. "I knew my pater would 'come across.'"

"Beats me!" said McClure, scratching his head.

"What do you mean, fathead?"

"Well, anyway, let's wait until the stuff comes," said Mac hurriedly. "It ought to be here in a day or two."

Forrest, by this time, had licked his wounds and they had duly healed. But the hatred he nursed was like double-distilled snake venom, and

his desire for revenge was little short of an obsession. So far, however, he hadn't thought of anything frightful enough to meet the occasion. Of necessity it had to be at once cast-iron, appropriate, and fool-proof.

His opportunity came two days later, during morning lessons, when Mr. Crowell sent him across to West House with a note for Mr. Stokes. He espied the railway company's delivery lorry, laden with big packing-cases, making for the rear premises. He frowned darkly. His thoughts went at once to Handforth and the new furniture for Study D. Handforth, of course, had been talking grandly about his pater's generosity, and had made many prophecies mostly wild, as to what the new furniture would be like. Further, he was definitely expecting it to turn up to-day.

The sight of those big packing-cases made Bernard Forrest see red. He toyed with the idea of making a bonfire of them, but came to the conclusion, with great reluctance, that such a course would be too risky.

By the time he had found Mr. Stokes, and had handed over the note, the railway lorry was on its way back to the station. Forrest nipped round to the rear, and found the packing-cases in one of the sheds, by the stables. Nobody was about. The double doors of the shed stood wide open, and Forrest was able to carry out an inspection undisturbed. He was relieved to discover that the packing-cases, four of them, were all addressed to Mr. Horace Pycraft.

A light of pure joy—or perhaps it would be more correct to say, impure joy—leapt into Forrest's eyes. In that second the idea was born.

Mr. Pycraft was the master of the Fourth Form. He was more; he

was the most unpleasant gentleman at St. Frank's, bar none. And Forrest remembered, with ghoulish glee, that Mr. Pycraft had recently had his study redecorated. The labels on the packing cases bore the name of a famous London furnishing house. Clearly, Mr. Pycraft was having new furniture to fit the new decorations.

In any case, it didn't matter. What did matter was that here were four great packing-cases, filled with new furniture, and Edward Oswald Handforth was expecting new furniture! Forrest saw a way of getting his revenge which was quite childishly simple. Handforth would be wallowing in trouble, when the bombshell burst, up to his ears. Mr. Pycraft could be trusted to see to that.

Bernard Forrest never hurried himself as a rule; but the way he streaked indoors that morning would have astonished a hare. He performed a certain task, raced back to the shed, and performed another. He prided himself that he had been rapid. But when he leisurely entered the Remove Form-room Mr. Crowell gave him a penetrating, gimlet-like look.

"You've been a very long time



When a crowd of Removltes succeeded in gaining admittance to the study, they found Handforth standing in the middle of a pile of wreckage, with Bernard Forrest littered untidily on the floor, totally indifferent to the proceedings.

gone, Forrest," he said accusingly.

"Couldn't find Mr. Stokes for quite a bit, sir," replied Forrest, with an injured air. "I didn't want to go, anyhow; I'm not an errand-boy."

"That will do, Forrest, go to your place," said the Form-master. "And don't be insolent."

"Well, I no sooner come in than you jump on me——"

"I said that will *do*, Forrest."

The wily cad of Study A muttered something about being behind with his lesson, and settled down. He gave

the impression that he was a conscientious scholar, and resented having his work interrupted.

Five minutes after school had been dismissed, and when the fellows were dividing themselves into knots in the Triangle, Teddy Long came bustling up to a group which included Handforth & Co., Travers, Tregellis-West and Nipper, the popular Remove captain.

"Your furniture's come, Handy!" said Teddy Long brightly.

There was nothing surprising in the fact that Long was apparently the first fellow to know it. He was the busybody of the Remove. He knew everything.

"By George! Is that a fact?" ejaculated Handforth, turning and staring at the Ancient House, as though he expected to see his new furniture piled on the steps. "How do you know, you young ass? Where is it? Why wasn't I told?"

"I'm telling you, aren't I?" retorted Long. "I haven't seen it; I only heard somebody say that there are some big packing-cases round at the back. Came on the railway van, this morning. They're addressed to you——"

Handforth waited for no more. With a whoop he rushed off, and Church and McClure, who didn't believe the news anyway, were in close attendance. Travers and Nipper and Gresham and a few others followed at a more sedate pace.

When they arrived on the scene they found Handforth gazing calmly, and with an air of proud proprietorship, at the packing-cases. Church and McClure were looking at them with dazed eyes. For days Handforth had been bragging, and his chums, who knew him so well, had been fully expecting that when the "new stuff"

arrived Handforth would get a shock. But it was they who got the shock. In fact, they couldn't believe it.

"They can't really be for you," said Church incredulously, and with an intuition which almost amounted to second sight.

"Don't be a howling ass!" retorted Handforth complacently. "Look at the labels! No mistake about them, is there? By George! The pater seems to have excelled himself this time! That letter of mine must have caught him just after he had promoted a big company, or something!"

There was certainly nothing wrong with the labels. They were almost big enough for a blind man to see. They were neatly tacked on, and each bore the following words, in neat type-writing— "FURNITURE WITH CARE—THIS SIDE UP. From Sir Edward Handforth, M.P., London. To: Master E. O. Handforth, Ancient House, St. Frank's College, Bellton, Sussex. Per Southern Railway—Goods train."

Even the sceptics had nothing whatever to say after inspecting those labels. Handforth was expecting furniture from his father, and here it was. A simple sum of two and two making four.

"Lend a hand, you fellows," said Handforth briskly. "We'll have these open in no time. We need hammers and cold chisels and things."

Everybody was willing to help. Tools of all kinds were produced as though by magic. Handforth, always impatient, did not trouble to get the lid off intact. He wrenched it off piecemeal, and with mighty blows of a hammer, which sent his helpers scattering in all directions, he demolished a side of the big packing-case, too.

"There we are!" he said breathlessly. "Now, you chaps, lend a hand."

"Sure you've finished with the hammer, dear old fellow?" asked Travers, from a safe distance.

"By George! It looks like a desk!" said Handforth, ignoring him.

The contents of the case, liberally wrapped in canvas and other protective material, was lifted bodily out. Handforth got busy with his big scout's knife, and ruthlessly ripped the canvas away.

"Careful, you ass," warned Church. "You're scratching the furniture, whatever it is. Don't be in such a giddy hurry. I believe it is a desk."

They expected to see a fairly cheap article of oak—probably second-hand. Even a second-hand oak desk would be a phenomenal luxury in a junior study.

But the reality took their breath away.

As the packing was torn aside they saw a glorious creation of figured walnut; a really beautiful desk, brand-new, and polished like a mirror. True, there were one or two scratches, and they stood out glaringly on the highly-polished surface; but the packers could not be blamed for these. Handforth had undoubtedly been careless with his knife.

"My only sainted aunt!" he ejaculated, in a husky voice. "Fancy the pater sending me a desk like this! He must have had a jolly good day on the Stock Exchange! I'll bet this cost a fiver!"

"My poor fellow, what do you know about furniture?" said Travers. "If this desk didn't set your pater back twenty quid, I'm Clark Gable's mother-in-law! Fancy a desk like this in a junior study! I'm beginning to wonder if your pater is quite right in the head!"

"You—you arrant ass!" retorted Handforth. "I asked my pater to send me something special, didn't I? He's showing me a bit of appreciation at last, that's all. Goodness knows, it's time he did!"

"Well, you're a lucky bounder, Handy," said Nipper, with a laugh. "Half the fellows in the Remove would give their heads for a desk like that. I wonder how long it'll last in Study D?"

"Not long," said Church sadly. "Before it's been in the place ten minutes he'll be putting hot frying-pans on it, and spilling tea over it, and denting it with the ruler."

"Beats me hollow!" said McClure stubbornly. "Handy's pater *must* be mad!"

"You drivelling dummies!" roared Handforth, in exasperation. "I've never had good furniture in my study before—and now that I *have* got it, I'll take care of it. Let's see what's in the next case!"

There was another orgy of hammering and wrenching and lid removing. But this time Handforth was more careful. The second case was a huge affair, and it finally emitted two of the easiest easy-chairs the fellows had ever seen. You sat in them, and sank into a dream of softness and luxury. They were covered in a tasteful russet-brown velvety material.

"Where's Archie Glenthorne?" grinned Harry Gresham. "He ought to see this stuff! He prides himself that Study E is the best-furnished room in the junior passage; but his study will look like a stable in comparison with Handy's!"

Everybody wanted to try sitting in the chairs, but Handforth hoofed them out. He was thoroughly excited now.

Although he would not admit it

for worlds, he was in very much of a daze on his own account. That his father should send him all this glorious furniture was almost too good to be true. Not, however, that Handforth had the slightest suspicion of the awful truth.

The other two cases, duly opened, occasioned no surprise. For the Removites were past being surprised now. There was a splendid little Turkey carpet, just about the right size for Study D, a figured walnut bureau to match the desk, two walnut chairs with russet-brown seats, and an exquisite club fender of rich bronze with solid leather fireside seats.

"By George! Imagine all this ripping stuff in Study D!" gloated Handforth, his eyes burning.

He stood there, imagining it—and that, incidentally, was destined to be as far as he would get!

THE SECOND CHAPTER

MR. PYCRAFT HAS SOMETHING TO SAY!

"WHEN are you going to move it in, Handy?" asked Nipper.

Handforth gave a start, and came out of his dream.

"Eh? Move it in?" he repeated.

"Now, of course! Plenty of time before dinner! Who's going to lend a hand?"

"Can't take it yet," said Church, practically.

"Why not?"

"Well, the study's full of that wreckage, for one thing," said Church. "We can't put the new stuff in until we take the old stuff out. The room ought to be swept and cleaned, too——"

"Hadn't thought of that," interrupted Handforth brightly. "You're right, Churchy! Let's go along and clear the study. We don't need that old muck in there now. If you other

chaps like to come along and lend a hand, I'll make some presents."

There were plenty of helpers. The old furniture in Study D, battered about though it was, would be useful. Plenty of fellows could do with an odd chair, or a fender, or the bookcase.

Within five minutes hectic operations were in progress in Study D. Everything was cleared out. There were so many willing hands that the work was quickly accomplished.

Handforth did not trouble to give the stuff away to any particular fellows. He just waved his hand, and told them to help themselves. Which they did, scrambling over the loot like a lot of Mexican bandits. There were several side quarrels over this, and one or two fights; but, in the end, the new owners, dusty and dishevelled, triumphantly bore their prizes away to their own studies.

And Study D was left as bare as the proverbial Mother Hubbard's cupboard. Not a stick of furniture was left in it. All was clear for the moving in of the glorious new equipment.

And while all this had been going on, Bernard Forrest, watching like a fox from afar, had become intensely active. No sooner had the crowd of juniors deserted the shed than Forrest unobtrusively slipped on the scene. As he had anticipated, everybody had accompanied Handforth to Study D. The new furniture was left in solitude. It was the work of but two minutes for Forrest to remove the superimposed, tacked-on labels. They were of cardboard, and, of course, they completely obliterated the original labels. They looked strongly attached, too; but with a few quick wrenches, Forrest detached them, tacks included. There was now no trace that they had ever been there.

Hastening away, he got rid of the

labels, and then strolled to the East House. He was lucky enough to run into Mr. Horace Pycraft in the lobby.

"Seems to be a bit of excitement round the back, sir," he observed casually. "Some big cases of furniture arrived this morning——"

"I am well aware of it," interrupted Mr. Pycraft coldly. "I received the notification from the railway company yesterday. The furniture is mine."

"Yours, sir?" said Forrest, in surprise. "Handforth seems to think it's his."

Mr. Pycraft jumped.

"Handforth thinks—— What on

earth are you talking about, Forrest?" he snapped. "Don't be ridiculous!"

"Well, it's nothing to do with me," said Forrest, shrugging his shoulders. "I thought there was a mistake, all the time. Anyhow, Handforth has wrenched all the cases open, and he's lugged the furniture out——"

"Whaaaaat!" shrieked Mr. Pycraft, his weedy figure shaking from bow to stern.

"Only a coincidence, I suppose, sir," said Forrest comfortingly. "Handforth's been expecting some furniture for days, and it seems as though yours happened to arrive at the same time. A bit queer, though,



"Either you are deliberately wicked or the biggest fool in the school!" shouted Mr. Pycraft. And he grabbed Handforth by the scruff of the neck and bent him double. "Look, sir! Look at that label!"

that his pater should send him four whacking great cases——"

Mr. Pycraft waited to hear no more. Sedate seniors in the Triangle were astonished to see the Form-master tearing along like a track sprinter. He whisked out of sight, and Bernard Forrest gave a happy sigh.

"And that," he murmured complacently, "is that!"

He had timed it with rare cunning. At that very moment Handforth, with his attendant crowd of helpers, was on his way to fetch the new furniture.

"The desk's the heaviest piece, so we'll take that in first," he said briskly. "Half a dozen of us ought to be enough to hike it along."

"What an original chap you are, Handy," said Vivian Travers, in a tone of admiration. "Now, personally, I should never have thought of taking the desk in first. In my own futile way I should have started off by laying down the carpet."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"By George! I'd forgotten the carpet!" said Handforth, with a start. "Are you trying to kid me, you fathead? Naturally, the carpet goes down first."

"It's a pity about that carpet," said Nipper regretfully.

"What's a pity? It's a ripping carpet."

"That's just the point," said Nipper. "What will it look like in a week's time? All those glorious colours will be splashed with ink, and there'll be cinder burns, and soot stains——"

"A week!" broke in Church. "Bit of an optimist, aren't you? That carpet will be ruined before this time to-morrow! How the dickens Handy's pater ever came to send him all that stuff beats me hollow!"

"Dry up about it, can't you?" roared Handforth. "I can't understand it myself. I—I mean, why shouldn't he send it? After all these years he's beginning to appreciate my worth! It's a good sign."

"What sort of a sign is this?" murmured Travers.

They had just turned a corner, and were in full view of the shed, with its wide open doors. Mr. Horace Pycraft, usually so much on his dignity, was dancing up and down like a wild dervish in front of the unpacked furniture and the opened cases.

"Funny!" said Handforth, frowning. "What's old Pieface raving about? Just like him to shove his long nose into my business!"

A hush fell over the juniors as they advanced. Perhaps they had some suspicion that the bubble was on the point of bursting. They had felt, all along, that there was something "phony" about Handforth's new furniture. But Handforth himself was quite serene. He hurried forward, in advance of the others; and Mr. Pycraft, conscious that he was no longer alone, managed, by a supreme effort, to control himself. A Berserk glare blazed in his eyes as he recognised Handforth.

"You!" he croaked, leaping forward like a half-starved panther. "You, sir!"

"What about me, sir?" asked Handforth, in astonishment.

"You—you—you——" Mr. Pycraft gulped, spluttered, and gripped himself. "How dare you?" he positively yelled. "You unmitigated young scoundrel!"

"Here, steady, sir!" protested Handforth. "What have I done?"

"What have you done!" thundered Mr. Pycraft, trembling in every limb. "What haven't you done!"

I'll have you turned out of the school for this piece of outrageous effrontery! How dare you open these cases?"

Handforth was more astonished than ever.

"Why shouldn't I open them, sir?" he demanded truculently. "I don't see that I had to get your permission first. You're not my Form-master, anyway; you're not even my House-master."

"Look at this desk!" shrieked Mr. Pycraft. "Look at the scratches on it! Ruined!"

"Pouf! That's nothing! I happened to scratch it with my knife when I was cutting through the canvas," explained Handforth. "In any case, I don't see why you should be so upset about it. It's not your desk. It's mine."

"Are you mad, Handforth?" panted Mr. Pycraft. "This furniture is mine! Do you understand, boy? Mine—mine!"

"You've made a mistake, sir," said Handforth pityingly. "My pater sent me all this new furniture. If you don't believe me, look at the labels on the cases. You don't think I'd open them if they weren't addressed to me, do you?"

Mr. Pycraft nearly choked.

"If you think this is a joke, Handforth, I shall see to it that your sense of humour is adjusted by a flogging," he said, fighting for breath. "How you can stand there and tell me that this furniture is yours passes my comprehension. All these packing cases are addressed to me. Do you understand, sir? To me!"

"I beg your pardon, sir," replied Handforth politely. "If you'll take the trouble to look at the labels you'll see that *my* name is on them."

His confidence was supreme. He was as cool as ice. The fact—as he

felt—that he was in the right made him regard Mr. Pycraft as a visitor might regard the inmates of the local asylum.

"Either you are deliberately wicked or the biggest fool in the school!" shouted Mr. Pycraft, grabbing at Handforth, and seizing him by the scruff of the neck and bending him double. "Look, sir! Look at that label!"

Handforth looked—and the absurd and uncomfortable feeling assailed him that he had suddenly been filleted.

THE THIRD CHAPTER

HE WHO LAUGHS LAST!

ALL the strength seemed to ooze out of Edward Oswald's body through his pores. His eyes goggled. Gazing at that label, he read, at the top, the name of a famous West End furnishing firm; lower, he saw in clear, unmistakable printed characters the name—"Horace Pycraft, Esq." He gulped, tore himself away from the Form-master's grasp, and passed both his hands over the label, as though to assure himself that it was really there.

"But—but it's impossible!" he gasped, in a thin, feeble voice. "All these packing-cases were addressed to me!"

"How dare you tell such deliberate lies?" demanded Mr. Pycraft hoarsely. "You have had the unparalleled audacity——"

"Hold on, sir," interrupted Nipper. "Handforth isn't lying. When he opened these cases he thought they were his."

"Utter nonsense!" shouted Mr. Pycraft. "How could he think such a thing? Can't he read?"

"That's just it, sir," replied Nipper. "I've had a look at the other cases, and I see they're all addressed to you."

But when we came here with Handforth, half an hour ago, they were addressed to *him*."

"For the love of Samson!" murmured Travers, light dawning on him. "So it was a jape!"

"A—a j-j-jape?" stammered Handforth.

"I think we know who did it—although we needn't mention names," continued Nipper grimly. "We know, anyhow, that one of our chaps was out of the form-room during lessons—just when these cases must have arrived. Anyhow, somebody typed some labels, and tacked them over the tops of the originals. They looked all right, Mr. Pycraft. I saw them myself, and I didn't twig anything wrong."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Poor old Handy!"

"Spoofed, by jingo!"

"Dished, diddled and done!"

In spite of Mr. Pycraft's presence, the Removites yelled with laughter. They couldn't help themselves. As for Mr. Pycraft, although he realised that his original accusations were unjust, he stormed off swearing that he would go straight to the Headmaster.

"Forrest, of course," said Church gloomily. "Forrest has been saying for days that he would get his own back on Handy. Well, he's got it!"

"Where is he?" asked Handforth, in a voice like burning sulphur. "I'll pulverise him! I'll slaughter him!"

"Better not," advised Nipper. "The Head will want to see you pretty soon—and you don't want to go to him carrying the marks of recent battle."

"Perhaps you'll think, too, what we're going to do for furniture in Study D?" asked McClure pointedly.

"Eh?"

"You haven't forgotten, by any chance, that you gave everything away?" said Mac, with excessive politeness. "Of course, we can sit on the floor——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But — but I thought—— I mean——" began Handforth.

"You can't expect the fellows to give the stuff back again," said Church impatiently. "You gave it away without any trimmings. If you ask for it back you'll only make yourself more ridiculous than ever."

"Crumbs!" groaned Handforth wretchedly.

"Hey, you chaps, come and look here!"

It was a sudden shout from Tommy Watson. He had been casually examining an ancient-looking crate which stood in the yard. It was a disreputable thing, with straw packing bulging out between the interstices.

"What have you got there?" asked Nipper.

"Come and look!" grinned Watson. "This is Handy's new study furniture—the real thing this time!"

"What!"

The juniors rushed round. Even Handforth, with a dazed look in his eyes, followed. The dilapidated crate bore a label, and the label said, "Master E. O. Handforth," and the handwriting was the handwriting of Handforth's pater. So there could be no shadow of doubt about *this* one.

"Poor old Handy!" said Nipper sympathetically. "Just one crate! And what a crate! Are you going to open it?"

"Might as well," said Handforth impatiently. "By George! So this is all my pater sent? I might have known it! Blow the thing! I want to find Forrest——"

"Not much good finding him,"



Suddenly, as the chair fell to pieces under Handforth's blows, there was a metallic tinkle, and Church leapt forward and grabbed something. "Look at this," he shouted excitedly. "A golden sovereign!"

interrupted Church. "You can't prove anything. Let's get this crate open, and see what's inside."

There were plenty of willing hands. The crate was torn asunder. Handforth himself, bitterly disillusioned, stood by. He wasn't even interested.

At last the "something" his father had sent him was revealed to full view. At the sight of it Handforth started like a dyspeptic stag. It was a rickety old easy chair which the burly junior recognised at once. For years his mother had been threatening to throw it out of his father's study. And here it was—thrown out at last! It was all the "new" furniture he was likely to see for Study D. It was

faded and threadbare, and the springs were sticking up like a volcanic mountain range in the seat.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The joke's on you, Handy!"

"What offers for this piece of junk?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"So at last your pater is beginning to appreciate you, old man!"

Roaring with laughter, the Removites went away. The show was over. Handforth was left alone with his new property—except, of course, for Church and McClure, who always stood by him. Their feelings were too bitter for words now; they knew that within five minutes the whole of

St. Frank's would be ringing with laughter at Handforth's expense.

"Cheer up, Handy," murmured Church. "We'll manage somehow—"

"And my pater had the nerve to send me *this!*" exploded Handforth violently. "After all I've been saying, too! Why, the crabby old skinflint!"

"Rats! If you weren't such a hopeless optimist, you wouldn't have expected anything better," said McClure, with some impatience. "The chair's not so bad. Here, what the dickens are you doing, you ass?"

"I'll show you what I'm doing," roared Handforth.

He had grasped a handy axe, and utterly exasperated by everything that had happened, he set to with a will.

Crash!

The heavy axe-head descended and bit deeply into one of the arms of the chair.

"Stop it, Handy!" yelled Church. "You're mad!"

"You bet I'm mad," panted Handforth. "I'm as mad as a teased tiger! Stand clear, both of you, or you might get hit!"

Crash—crash—crash!

He had strong muscles, and in a surprisingly short space of time that old chair was reduced to ruins. It literally fell to pieces under Handforth's mighty blows. Suddenly there was a metallic tinkle, and Handforth thought it was caused by the springs, which were shooting out everywhere. But Church, risking death from the whirling axe, leapt forward and grabbed something.

"Look at this!" he shouted excitedly. "A golden sovereign!"

"What?"

Handforth took the coin. He hadn't seen many sovereigns, but he knew one when he saw it. And this was one.

"Look! There's another—and another!" ejaculated McClure, making a dive.

The way in which they tore the remnants of the chair to pieces was a sight worth watching. In the end they found no less than fifteen golden sovereigns. Corn in Egypt. The old chair had turned out to be a surprise packet after all.

"I'll bet these quids have been in here for years—perhaps twenty or thirty," panted Handforth, as he regarded the little golden pile in his palm. "Some pilfering servant, I suppose. Took 'em one by one, and stuffed 'em into the chair-padding. Then got the sack before he could recover the loot. Or it might have been a 'she.' What does it matter, anyway? The pater himself might have accidentally lost them in the chair."

An idea came to him. His eyes were glowing with triumph now. The tables were completely turned. Without explaining to his chums, he rushed away. Diving into the Ancient House, he heard yells of laughter coming from various quarters. But he took no notice.

He went to the telephone, and although it was against all regulations, he put through a long-distance call to London. He was, in fact, telephoning his father's City office.

And, as luck would have it, Sir Edward Handforth was presiding at an important company meeting when the interruption came.

"That you, Pater?" asked Handforth tensely, when he heard his father's voice.

"Good gracious, Edward, is that you? Is anything the matter?"

"That old chair you sent me, Pater," said Handforth eagerly. "It arrived this morning, and—"

"Upon my word, Edward, have

you rung me up to tell me that?" barked Sir Edward, over the wires. "I can't be bothered now. I'm busy."

"But the chair, Pater. It's mine, isn't it? All of it?"

"Are you out of your mind, Edward?" retorted his father. "Of course it's all yours! Stuffing, springs, and everything else that's in it."

"By George! Can I depend on that, Pater?" asked Handforth. "Is it a go?"

"Yes!" snapped Sir Edward.

"Good enough, Pater. I just wanted to tell you that I chopped—that the chair got broken up," said Edward Oswald serenely. "And what do you think? I found fifteen golden sovereigns in the stuffing."

"Good gracious! I didn't know—"


"But you know now, Pater," grinned Handforth. "Thanks awfully! I can buy some nice stuff for my study with the money. Sorry to butt in when you're busy. Cheerio!"

And Handforth's Pater, who was made of the right stuff, was too much of a sport to go back on his word. Indeed, after he had hung up he chuckled amusedly and told the joke to the meeting.

As for Handforth he got his new furniture after all—not so exquisite as Mr. Pycraft's, but far more serviceable for use in a junior study. And the laugh against him somehow fizzled out.

The Head, when he heard all the facts, decided that Handforth had made a natural mistake, and that he was not deserving of punishment. And as it was difficult to find the unknown japer, the matter was allowed to drop.

Even Forrest himself escaped the licking which Handforth had promised; for, as Handforth said, if Forrest hadn't played the jape, the old chair would never have been smashed up—and that little gold-mine would never have come to light.



THE END