



Edward Oswald Handforth's out-size in tuck-hampers makes a very meaty bone of contention for the rivals of St. Frank's, and the resultant fun and adventure provide a yarn you'll be sure to enjoy.

THE FIRST CHAPTER The Ambush!

"THERE'S everything in here," said Edward Oswald Handforth contentedly. "A whacking great fruit cake, pastries, jam, sausage rolls, pork pies, beef patties, honey, marmalade, and all sorts of other topping tuck. We're going to have the feed of the term to-day, my sons!"

RIVALS of ST. FRANK'S!

"Good old Handy!" chorused the crowd. A large party of Remove fellows from St. Frank's were assisting the famous leader of Study D with his big tuck-hamper. They were carrying it up the lane from the station, and as it was a half-holiday they had the whole afternoon before them.

Anybody not "in the know" would have



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been excused for supposing that the juniors were bringing home the laundry! It was so large it required two fellows to carry it. They were all taking it in turns, for that laden hamper became heavy after a hundred yards or so.

All these fellows were Old-Timers—Nipper, the cheery Remove skipper, and Tregellis-West and Watson, who shared Study C with him; Handforth and Church and McClure; Vivian Travers and Sir James Potts, of Study H; Fullwood, Russell, Gresham, and a few more. Handforth, with his usual generosity, had invited them all to the feed. There would be enough, and to spare.

"Your people have done the thing properly this time, Handy," remarked Fullwood.

"Well, it's a sort of celebration," explained

Handforth. "My pater has just been made a Privy Councillor, and they've had a grand dinner up in London, and all sorts of fuss. As I couldn't attend, I've got this hamper as my share. That's why it's such a special one."

"Where does your minor come in?" asked Gresham pointedly.

"Willy?" said Handforth with a frown. "The cheeky young ass had the nerve to suggest that we should go halves. I soon squashed him, and said that this hamper was for the Remove. Like his rot!"

The others chuckled. It was quite probable that Willy Handforth, of the Third, was fully entitled to half that feed; but Edward Oswald was an autocrat, and he never recognised his minor's claims.

"We'll take it straight into the gym," said Nipper as they turned a bend and came within view of the grey walls of the famous old school. "We can lock the door, and be private for the rest of the afternoon."

"Why lock the door?" asked Handforth. "Nobody's likely to raid us. The only danger was from the River House chaps, and that danger's over now. They'd never dare to raid us within our own gates."

"I was thinking of somebody else," said Nipper thoughtfully.

It was curious that the very person of whom he was thinking should at that moment emerge briskly from the hedge a dozen paces ahead. He was a big, burly, red-headed schoolboy, with a cheery grin. And, what was more, he was followed out of the hedge by eleven other hefty schoolboys.

"Look-out!" gasped Handforth in alarm. "Red-Hots!"

"I'm not surprised," said Nipper grimly.

Kirby Keeble Parkington, the red-headed leader of the Red-Hots, smiled amiably as he approached. But there was something suggestive in the way he casually pushed up his sleeves and closed his knuckles.

"K.K."—as he was known for short—and his eleven henchmen were not recognised by the other Removites as of themselves. These twelve had come in a bunch from Carlton College, and had stuck together ever since. Terming themselves the Red-Hots, they had proceeded to "run" the Remove. At least, they had tried to run it. But the others, under Nipper's leadership, had formed their own party, proudly calling themselves the Old-Timers. Needless to say, rivalry had been the order of the hour from their advent.

"Nice afternoon," said K.K. casually as he and his crowd formed themselves into a solid barrier across the lane. "You're busy, I see."

"None of your rot, Parkington," growled Handforth. "I thought you'd gone off to Bannington with your beastly mob!"

"I did spread a rumour to that effect," murmured K.K. "We also left the school, ostensibly for Bannington. Merely a blind, my innocent. Actually, we've been waiting in ambush; and now we'll trouble you for that hamper."

"Try and get it!" roared Handforth.

Parkington sighed.

"I thought you'd be unreasonable," he said, with regret. "It'll save an awful lot of bother if you hand that hamper over quietly."

Handforth looked at him with scorn.

"Have you got the nerve to suppose that you and your gorillas can whack us?" he asked, with a snort. "If you try any

funny business, my son, we'll wipe you up! Get out of our way!"

"Come on, K.K.!" said Harvey Deeks gruffly. "We told you it would be better to dash out and attack straight away."

"But I wanted to give them a chance of saving themselves," said K.K. "We don't really enjoy giving black eyes, and fat noses and—— Whoa! Now, look here, Handy—— Hi! What the——"

He backed away, and dodged a straight left with the agility of a boxer. Handforth was a fellow of action, and he was not waiting for any further words. The other Old-Timers followed his example, and the great Kirby Keeble Parkington realised that he had made a tactical blunder—an unusual thing for him.

He should have attacked by surprise, as Deeks had said. However, it wasn't too late. K.K. and his satellites sailed in with real enthusiasm.

The hamper was hastily slung on to the greensward which bordered the lane, and although it was the bone of contention, so to speak, it ceased to figure in the proceedings. The Red-Hots and the Old-Timers were always spoiling for a fight, and any excuse was better than none.

Later, perhaps, the victors would collect that hamper and triumphantly march off with it. But at present it had ceased to be of any importance. The rival factions of the St. Frank's Remove battled for the sheer joy of battling, though, of course, in the right spirit.

The fight waged hot and fierce. K.K. had deliberately selected the burly Handforth, who was a fair match for him. Deeks was having a personal "dust-up" with Nipper, Goffin was fighting "hammer and tongs" with Travers. Letts, Jepson, Langley, Baines and the rest of the Red-Hots were fighting indiscriminately with the other Old-Timers.

For the most part the action took the form of individual combats. The rivals spread themselves over the road, and at least a dozen separate scraps were in simultaneous progress. The highway was barred completely, and it was fortunate that no traffic came along at the time.

Smack!

Handforth went down with a thud, K.K. having got in a beautiful right-hander. He rubbed his knuckles tenderly as Handforth scrambled to his feet.

"Fearfully sorry, Handy, but I'm afraid I must polish you off quickly," said K.K. "I believe Deeks wants a bit of assistance."

"You funny red-haired ass, I'm not finished off yet!" bellowed Handforth.

He rushed in like a whirlwind, and the next time it was K.K. who went down. Both their faces were somewhat battered by now.



A burly junior emerged from the hedge ahead, followed by several others. "Look out!" cried Handforth in alarm. "Red-Hots!"



Fortunately, Deeks had recovered, and was wiring in with fresh vigour. The battle, in fact, was still inconclusive. It was anybody's victory.

While the issue thus remained in doubt, another party turned the bend in the lane and came unexpectedly upon the battlefield.

But this time they were girls—six of them. They were Irene & Co., of the Moor View School—a big, select academy for young ladies which was situated half a mile beyond St. Frank's.

After one look at the gory scene, Irene ran forward, her pretty face flushed, her blue eyes flashing with indignation. Doris Berkeley and Marjorie Temple were right at her heels; and Phyllis Palmer and Mary Summers and Betty Barlowe were only a yard or two behind.

"Stop!" cried Irene frantically as she ran into the thick of the battle. "How can you fight like this, on the public highway? Oh, my goodness!"

Handforth, lunging at K.K., nearly delivered a left-hand drive at Irene which would have knocked her clean out. She dodged

in the nick of time, and Handforth, aghast, dropped his hands to his sides.

"Where—where did you spring from?" he asked dazedly.

"Stop, all of you!" commanded Irene angrily. "You all look a disgraceful sight."

The other girls were in amongst the com-

batants by now, and the fight had come to a dramatic stop. The St. Frank's fellows stood about, breathing hard, irritated at this unexpected interruption, but far too polite to say so.

"Cheese it, you girls!" said K.K. complainingly. "You might have been sporting, and stood aside until we'd finished the job. In another two minutes we should have had these Old-Timers whacked."

"Why, you poor idiot, we were just putting the final touches to your defeat!" roared Handforth. "But what's the good? We can't fight now!"

"A good thing you can't," said Irene coldly. "Look at your face, Ted!"

"How can I look at it?" growled Handforth. "I'm not a contortionist."

"Your nose is bleeding, your left eye is half closed up, and one of your ears is twice the size of the other," said Irene accusingly.

"Is that all?" asked Handforth. "Look at K.K.!"

K.K. was certainly worse off, for both his eyes were blackened, and the rest of his face was considerably battered.

Scarcely one of the fighters was unmarked. Nipper and Travers and Deeks and Goffin and the rest were all much bruised. Blood had been flowing freely, and it was hardly any wonder that the girls were appalled.

"It's—it's like a slaughter house!" said Doris Berkeley with a shudder. "Oh, why are boys such brutes?"

"You don't understand, old girl," said Travers gently. "We were thoroughly enjoying ourselves until you butted in. It won't take us long to clean up, and—"

"You needn't try to whitewash yourselves," put in Phyllis Palmer icily. "I'm ashamed of you, Vivian. And I always thought you were such a nice boy."

"I'm still nice," said Travers promptly.

"You're just a lot of—of hooligans," said Irene, tossing her head. "We girls believe in boys scrapping when the occasion demands, but this free fighting in the open lane is a different thing. It's—it's degrading. We're ashamed of you!"

"All of us," chorused the other girls.

"But look here——"

"And if you think we're going to forgive you, you're mistaken," went on Irene. "Instead of saying you're sorry, all you do is to try to defend yourselves!"

"We ought never to speak to them again," said Marjorie indignantly.

"They asked us to a party on Saturday, but I think we ought to stay away," proceeded Irene, her coldness as chilly as an Arctic blast. "As a punishment, we won't go to that party, girls."

"Hear, hear!" said the others, looking at the boys with disdain.

"Oh, I say, have a heart!" protested Nipper. "That's going to be a very special party on Saturday, and it'll be ruined unless you girls turn up. I've got some ripping new records for my gramophone, and we're going to have dancing and a big feed, and——"

"It can't be helped," interrupted Irene. "You've got to be punished somehow, and we wouldn't dream of coming to that party. What's more, we'll 'cut' you for at least a week. So don't dare to speak to us if you happen to meet us by chance."

"This fighting in the road is altogether too thick," said Doris, gazing accusingly from one to the other. "I agree with everything that Irene has said, and so do the other girls."

"Yes, rather," said Phyllis. "Come on—let's go. We don't want to be seen with these—these roughs!"

"Oh, I say—roughs!" protested Handforth feebly.

But the girls, unrelenting, uttered no further word, but walked on with their noses high in the air. The Old-Timers and Red-Hots gazed at one another with mournful faces. There was no further fight left in them.

"Well, I suppose we'd better call the fight off," remarked K.K. with regret. "A pity we can't have that hamper—it would have been ours in another two minutes."

"Rot!" snorted Handforth. "You couldn't have whacked us—By George! Where is the hamper?" he added in alarm. "Who's taken my hamper?"

They all looked round, dismayed. The hamper, over which the battle had been waged, had completely vanished.

THE SECOND CHAPTER

Another Raid.

IRENE MANNERS held her sides, and fairly gasped for breath.

"Oh, girls, do stop!" she breathed.

"I haven't laughed so much for terms! The way those boys swallowed everything we said was a scream!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

If the Removites could have seen those six young ladies just then they would have had something of a shock. Gone were their cold looks; instead, they were doubled up with laughter.

"I never thought it was so easy to spoof those boys," chuckled Doris gleefully. "It was a topping stunt of yours, Renie. The way they swallowed our stern censure was simply too ridiculous. I wonder how long it will be before they jump to it?"

"Not until we turn up at that party, and tell them," laughed Marjorie. "Boys aren't so smart as they think they are."

Irene & Co. were healthy girls, and they did not regard scrapping with anything like the horror they had pretended. But they were rivals of the St. Frank's fellows, too, in a way, and any opportunity for a spoof was gladly seized. Never for a moment had Irene believed, when she ran forward so indignantly, that the Re-

movites would take her seriously. But when they had done so she had mischievously carried on the good work.

"And they think we're not going to their party!" chuckled Phyllis. "I say, we ought to tell them before that, you know, or they might be unprepared when we turn up. It would be tragic if there was a shortage of grub."

"Oh, they'll know before Saturday," said Irene. "They're not such duffers as all that. They're bound to put two and two together as soon as they start thinking. While we were there they were flustered and confused."

They walked on, chuckling delightedly. It was a feather in their caps to "put it across" the boys.

The sound of triumphant laughter drew their attention after they had walked a little farther; it was coming from a belt of trees some distance from the road, at the angle of a neigh-



Through the trees Irene & Co. saw the Third-Formers commence operations on Handforth's big hamper. "My hat!" one fag said. "What a find!"

bouring meadow. The girls halted, their curiosity aroused.

"There's something else going on, it seems," murmured Doris.

"Listen!" urged Irene, holding up a finger.

They could even hear a few words, and they recognised the cheery voice of Willy Handforth.

"And there was my major and those other fatheads scrapping with the Red-Hots, and never giving a thought to their giddy hamper!" came Willy's voice. "They didn't even see us dodge in and lift it!"

"Well, it's ours now," came Chubby Heath's gleeful comment.

"Oh-ho!" breathed Irene. "So that's how it stands, is it? Those chaps were fighting over a hamper, were they? We didn't know that before, girls. I say, why didn't they explain?"

"Too flustered, I suppose," said Doris. "But it was too bad of us to spoof them like that. If they were fighting for a hamper, they were justified."

Beyond the trees a merry band of Third-Formers was making vigorous attacks upon the coveted prize. Chubby Heath and Juicy Lemon had just unfasted the hamper's lid, and it had now been thrown back.

"My only sainted aunt! What a find!" shouted Dicky Jones. "Look at this whacking great cake! Look at—"

"Not so loud, you ass!" warned Willy Handforth. "In fact, it wouldn't be a bad idea if we got farther away. I'm not sure if we're safe here."

"Those Remove fatheads will never suspect us," said Lemon disdainfully.

"Well, it'll be better if we don't give them the chance," retorted Willy. "As for this hamper, it's just as much ours as theirs. It's like my major's nerve to bag it for himself and to tell me to go and eat coke."

"You like eating plum cake better, eh?" grinned Owen minor.

The fags were proud of themselves. It was seldom, indeed, that a chance offered for them to raid the Remove. But the sight of that hamper, lying unprotected at the side of the road, had been too much for them. Besides,

as Willy had said, it was just as much his as Edward Oswald's.

And the fags believed in quick action. To smuggle that hamper far away would be to waste time. Far better to open it, and demolish the contents on the spot. Once eaten, they were safe.

But Willy & Co. were up against an unexpected factor this afternoon. Even if they had known that Irene & Co. were near at hand, they would not have worried. But Irene & Co. were in a particularly mischievous mood.

"Why not?" murmured Irene, her eyes twinkling.

"Do you think we could?" asked Doris eagerly.

"There are six of us—and I don't suppose there are more than eight or ten of those fags," replied Irene. "Come on, girls! Let's chance it!"

They firmly believed in the policy of raiding tuck-hampers. They did it among themselves, but, hitherto, they had never raided a St. Frank's hamper.

They gave themselves no opportunity for hesitating. They burst through the trees just as Willy & Co. were unpacking the top layer. The fags started up in alarm as they heard the crashing of the branches.

"Look out!" gasped Chubby. "They're on us!"

Willy glanced round, frantic, and then he grinned.

"Cheese it," he said. "Only girls!"

"What!"

"It's Irene and her crowd," said Willy. "They won't—Here, I say! What the dickens—Oh, my only hat!"

Willy sat down in the grass with a violent thud. He had been bowled over in the first rush. And his eyes nearly started out of his head when he saw that the girls were putting the things back into the hamper, and closing the lid.

"Hi! What's the idea?" howled Chubby Heath in dismay.

"This is ours," said Irene calmly. "We're raiding it."

"You're doing *what*?" yelled Willy.

"This hamper isn't yours—you bagged it

from those Remove fellows," explained Irene. "So we're bagging it from you. This hamper is going to have a good home at last."

"But—but— Here, you chaps!" exclaimed Willy desperately. "We're not going to let these girls ride roughshod over us and bone our spoils!"

"Not likely!" chorused the other fags excitedly.

When it came to the point, however, they hardly knew how to circumvent these feminine raiders. They were up against something new. And it was an undeniable fact that Irene and Doris and Phyllis and the others looked extremely capable. Not only were they in a fighting mood, but they were on the offensive.

To Willy's horror, Doris advanced upon him, her expression warlike; and when he feebly put up his hands to resist she swept them aside, advanced still farther, and pushed him violently backwards into the middle of a bush.

"Well, what are you going to do?" she asked defiantly.

"Oh, crumbs!" groaned Willy.

Never had he felt so helpless. A born fighter himself, and a remarkably capable leader, he would have laughed with scorn if anybody had told him that a party of six girls would have put him to rout. The other fags were equally dumbfounded.

For once in his life, Willy Handforth was at a loss. His keen, resourceful wits deserted him. Had he been dealing with Removites or Fourth-Formers he would have put up a stern fight, and by some dodge he would probably have won. For Willy was full of bright dodges.

But all he could do now was to scramble out of the bush and watch Irene & Co. triumphantly marching away with that hamper. His fellow fags were looking at him for guidance, dismay and consternation on their faces.

"It's no good looking at me," said Willy sadly. "We can't fight girls. We're done!"

"Why can't we fight 'em?" demanded Chubby Heath, with fierce resentment. "They're taking advantage of us—they're fooling us! They counted on us letting 'em

walk off with the hamper! But if they play boys' tricks they must expect to be treated as boys."

"Yes, rather!" shouted the other fags.

"Come on!" yelled Chubby excitedly. "On 'em!"

"Wait a minute—" began Willy.

But the others were already at it. Willy looked on in horror. It wasn't that he feared for the girls—but for his fellow fags. It seemed to him that Irene & Co. were not so incapable as girls are supposed to be.

The fags found it out, too.

Rushing up, they attempted to push the fair raiders off that hamper, and to seize it for themselves. The result was disastrous. The girls dropped the hamper, and sailed into action.

Thud! Smack! Crash!

Chubby Heath received a slap on one cheek which dazed him; something hard and forceful biffed him in the ribs, and knocked him over backwards. It was hardly possible to believe that that something had been a girl's closed fist.

Juicy Lemon was dealt with by Doris. She simply wiped him up, and left him flat on his back with his head singing painfully. He had had his ears boxed a few times, but this example beat all the others.

"Oh, my only hat!" babbled Chubby. "Let's bunk, you chaps!"

They fled in utter disorder, and Willy at least had the satisfaction of remembering that he had not ordered that attack, and that he had taken no part in it. But he had seen, from the first, that it had been doomed to failure.

He would face any amount of odds of the ordinary kind, and face them gamely. But girls—never! Willy knew his limitations.

THE THIRD CHAPTER

Held Up.

EDWARD OSWALD HANDFORTH looked round with something like desperation.

"But can't something be done about it?" he asked fiercely. "Are we going to stand idle and—and—"

"It's no good getting excited, Handy," interrupted Nipper. "We don't know where the hamper went, but we can take it as a

certainly that it's gone for good. By this time the contents will have been wolfed."

"Oh, help!" groaned Handforth.

The Old-Timers and the Red-Hots, in their common grievance, had sunk their own differences. They had cleaned themselves up by now, and were looking fairly respectable as they stood in a big group in the Triangle of St. Frank's.

There was no earthly sense in being at loggerheads now. The hamper had gone, and Irene & Co. had given them much food for thought, too. They were in the girls' bad books, and it worried them.

"Never mind the hamper," said Kirby Keeble Parkington. "What are we going to do about Saturday? That party will be ruined unless the girls turn up. I think we ought to get out some wheeze to have our own back."

"How do you mean?" asked Handforth, staring.

"Well, it's a bit thick of Irene and Doris and the others to threaten to 'cut' us," said K. K. warmly. "I thought better of 'em! Can't they understand that scrapping is all in the day's work?"

"Girls can't understand anything," said Travers caustically.

"Well, anyhow, they need a lesson," declared K.K. "We ought to get something up and show them——"

"I say, you chaps!" interrupted an excited voice.

Teddy Long came bustling up, and the Removites regarded him with disfavour. Teddy was the champion sneak of the Remove—the busybody of the Lower School.

"If you want a thick ear, interrupt again!" said Handforth threateningly.

"Oh, I say!" protested Teddy. "I thought you wanted to know what happened to your hamper, that's all. If you'll lend me a bob I can give you some information on the subject."

"Our hamper!" yelled Handforth.

"I know where it is," grinned Teddy. "For a couple of bob——"

"You said a bob just now," broke in Handforth grimly. "But you won't even get that, you—you fat rotter! Where's that hamper?"

he added, seizing Teddy and holding him firmly.

"If you don't give me half a crown, I won't tell you anything!" gasped Teddy. "Stop him, you chaps! Don't stand by and see him bully me!"

"Where's that hamper?" roared the others, closing in on him.

"Oh, corks!" panted Teddy Long. "You're all against me! Hi! Mind what you're doing to my arm, Handforth! Your minor's got that hamper! He and a crowd of other fags bagged it and carried it off while you were scrapping."

"What rot!" said Handforth. "You're only fibbing, you rotter!"

"Willy's just come in, so we can verify it, anyhow," put in K.K. "He doesn't look particularly happy, I must say."

Willy & Co., disconsolate and dishevelled, were attempting to get past unnoticed. But they were collared and questioned.

"Yes, we took that hamper," said Willy defiantly. "It was sent as much for me as for you, Ted—so the Third had a right to it."

"And—and you've eaten everything?" asked Handforth, horrified.

"We didn't even get a taste," replied Willy sadly. "Irene and those other girls came along and bagged it! Did you ever hear of such a thing?" he went on complainingly. "We couldn't biff girls, could we? We had to stand by and see 'em walk off with the hamper."

The fags thought it unnecessary to add that they had been soundly trounced by the Moor View girls. Not that the Removites thought of asking. They had heard enough. And Willy and Co. were allowed to go their way. Even Handforth was too staggered to slaughter his minor.

"It's—it's awful!" he said hoarsely. "First those girls rag us for fighting, and threaten to cut us; then they pinch our tuck! What the dickens can we do?"

"We can do plenty!" said Kirby Keeble Parkington grimly. "Children, let us put our heads together."

Nothing further happened that day, and Irene & Co. came to the conclusion that the

boys had "given them best." And there was no doubt about it that that hamper had been well worth the raiding.

It wasn't until the next day that anything fresh developed—and this was quite different from anything the girls had anticipated. In fact, it hardly seemed to be connected with St. Frank's at all.

About eight of the girls set off for the village, immediately after lessons, on their usual weekly trip. They were well laden with parcels—shopping baskets, cardboard boxes, and so forth.

In a word, they were bent upon distributing the results of their morning labours. There was a cookery class every Thursday at the Moor View School, and the girls produced large quantities of questionable cakes, and even more questionable pastry. Their own inclination was to consume their handiwork; but Miss Bond, the headmistress, had consistently put her foot down on any such suggestion.

The products of the cookery class were always taken down to the village, to be distributed among the poor and needy. Miss Bond evidently believed in being on the safe side. Perhaps she had visions of the sanatorium being filled to overflowing every Friday if she granted her enthusiastic pupils' request.



The Third-Formers attempted to recover the tuck-hamper from the fair raiders, but the result was disastrous. Slap! Smack! Thud! The girls made short work of the fags.

The poor and needy, apparently, did not matter. The St. Frank's fellows had always commented unfavourably upon the practice. What had the poor and needy done to deserve such a weekly visitation? But this, perhaps, was only their fun. And such sentiments were only uttered because the delicacies were beyond their own reach. The boys would really have welcomed the opportunity of demolishing the products of their girl friends.

Irene & Co. were half afraid of meeting some Removites on their way to Belton, and they hardly knew what to do if such a contingency arose. They all looked very charming as they walked briskly down the lane, carrying their serviette-covered receptacles.

"We shall have to keep our word, of course," declared Irene. "Might as well keep up the spoof for a bit. So if we meet any of the chaps, we've got to raise our noses in the air, and cut them dead."

"If they'll let us," commented Doris. "But I'll bet they'll have twigged by now."

As they turned the bend by the stile, they half-hesitated. A number of boys were coming out of Bellton Wood, and the meeting had all the appearance of an accidental one. But it obviously wasn't.

"My goodness!" murmured Phyllis. "For a tick I thought they were St. Frank's chaps. But it's only those River House fellows."

Hal Brewster & Co., of the River House School—traditional and deadly rivals of the St. Frank's boys—paused politely as they spotted the schoolgirls. They raised their caps gallantly. But Irene & Co. eyed them with suspicion.

"Ah, Thursday afternoon," said Hal Brewster genially. "Just off to the village, I see, with the awful results of the cookery class. No wonder the village chemist is always so busy on Friday!"

"You wretch!" said Irene indignantly. "These cakes and pastries are as good as you can buy in a shop."

Brewster, it seemed, had been expecting that rejoinder, for he was prompt to take his cue.

"By Jove, really?" he said. "Did you hear that, you chaps? These cakes and pastries are as good as you can buy in any of the shops. We must have had a wrong impression."

"There's only one way to test it thoroughly," declared Ascott.

"Sample the goods for ourselves," added Glynn promptly.

Irene frowned.

"Well, you won't sample any of these," she said coldly. "Next week, perhaps, if you're really in earnest, we might make a few extra things, and smuggle them out of the cookery class for you without Miss Bond knowing."

"We can't wait until next week!" interrupted Brewster. "There's no time like the present. How about it, you chaps?"

Irene says this tuck is A.1. How about taking her at her word?"

"It wouldn't be polite to do anything else," said Kingswood firmly. "It's always the correct thing to take a girl's word."

"So we'll trouble you for these packages," said Brewster, with a bland smile. "If the tuck's as good as you say, we'll—"

"Don't be silly!" broke in Irene. "You know perfectly well that these things are for the Bellton poor. You wouldn't rob the poor, would you?"

"Heaven forbid!" replied Brewster gravely. "But it all depends upon the point of view. Perhaps we shall be doing the poor a good turn."

"You—you cheeky rotter!" cried Doris hotly.

"Anyhow, we'll give you one minute to hand those parcels over," said Brewster. "If you don't obey, we'll take 'em by force."

Irene & Co. looked at one another helplessly. Week after week they had openly carried their tit-bits down to the village. Nobody had ever dreamed of raiding them. So this hold-up had taken them completely by surprise.

"Aren't you bold and brave?" asked Irene scornfully. "Over a dozen boys to seven or eight girls! Things have come to a pretty pass if we can't walk along the public highway without being raided."

"Just a minute, old girl," said Hal, rather stung. "Who started this raiding business? We seem to have heard a rumour that you bagged a St. Frank's hamper yesterday, and wolfed the contents."

"What—what of it?" asked Phyllis feebly.

"You admit it, then?" demanded Brewster. "If you girls have started on this raiding stunt, you've laid yourselves open to attack. As long as you kept out of it, we couldn't touch you. But you're in the swim now, and that lets us in. Hand over!"

"Oh, dear!" said Irene helplessly.

Her sense of fair play told her that the River House boys were right. It had seemed great fun to raid that hamper yesterday—but not until now had they realised the possible consequences.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER

Honours Even.

THE girls were not weaklings, however. When Irene glanced round at her companions, she found that they were all looking very determined.

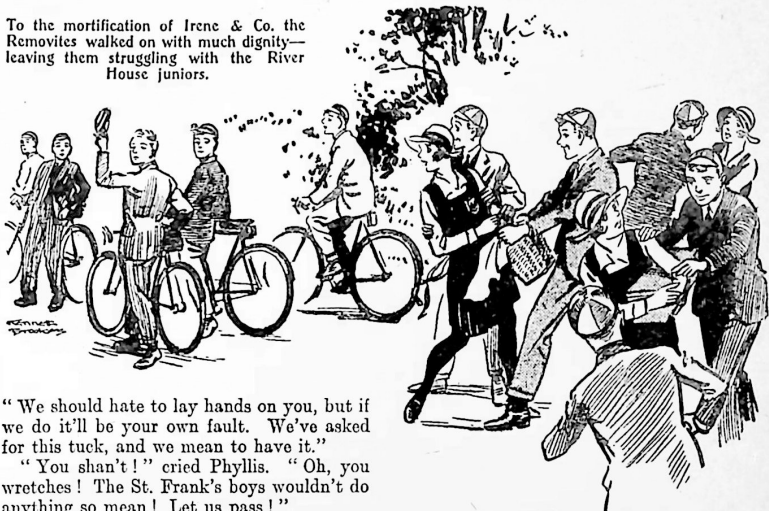
"Come on, let's be going," said Irene simply. "These silly boys are only bluffing. They wouldn't dare to rob the poor."

"They can't spoof us," said Doris tartly.

They attempted to walk on, but Hal Brewster & Co. spread themselves over the road, and barred the way.

"Better take it quietly, girls," said Hal.

To the mortification of Irene & Co. the Removites walked on with much dignity—leaving them struggling with the River House juniors.



"We should hate to lay hands on you, but if we do it'll be your own fault. We've asked for this tuck, and we mean to have it."

"You shan't!" cried Phyllis. "Oh, you wretches! The St. Frank's boys wouldn't do anything so mean! Let us pass!"

"Come on!" said Irene. "They won't dare to touch us."

But the bluff didn't work. Hal Brewster & Co. not only dared, but they touched the girls to some purpose. They held them firmly, in spite of their struggles, and the raid was soon over. The boys quickly began to seize the various packages.

It was at this interesting moment that some newcomers arrived on the scene.

Nipper, Handforth, Parkington, and at least

a dozen other Old-Timers and Red-Hots came sailing round the bend on their bicycles. They braked up on seeing the obstruction, and dismounted.

"Hallo! What's going on here?" asked Nipper wonderingly.

"Oh, thank goodness you boys have come!" called Irene. "Quick! Stop these awful River House fellows! They're stealing all the food we were taking down to the poor!"

"The stuff you made in cookery class this morning?" asked Travers incredulously.

"What do they want that for? Are they going to build something?"

"Oh, don't be funny," cried Irene. "Can't you see they're taking our baskets and things? Why don't you fight them?"

Handforth looked horrified.

"Fight them?" he repeated, aghast. "Are you suggesting that we should act like hooligans and fight on the public highway?"

"Perish the thought," said K.K., shuddering.

The girls looked dumbfounded. Here was another "come-back" at them! Vividly,

they remembered their spoof censure of the previous day—only these juniors didn't know that it had been spoof.

"Awfully sorry to hear that Brewster and his gang have so far forgotten their manners as to molest you," said Nipper solemnly. "One day, perhaps, we'll punish them for it. But not here, girls. You taught us a lesson yesterday. You'll never find us fighting like roughs on the public road again."

"So I'm afraid we can't do anything," added Handforth regretfully.

To the mortification of Irene & Co. the Renovites tilted their chins very high in the air and walked on with much dignity. Brewster & Co. watched them with triumphant faces.

"And quite right, too," said Hal. "What are these girls coming to nowadays, you fellows? Did you hear that? They actually asked those St. Frank's chaps to fight us!"

"Horrible!" said Glynn sternly.

They looked at the girls with frank disapproval and marched back into the wood, whence they had originally come. Irene & Co. were helpless. It was impossible to attack these boys themselves, and their own friends of St. Frank's had given them the cold shoulder.

"Oh!" panted Irene, nearly boiling over. "Oh, I'm furious!"

"What's the good of being furious?" asked Doris sadly. "When you get down to rock bottom, you've got to admit that we brought this on ourselves."

"I don't see it," cried Irene angrily. "Raiding an ordinary hamper is one thing, but taking all this food from the poor people of Belton is another. Those River House boys ought to be ashamed of themselves. And Ted Handforth and Nipper and the others are just as bad for refusing to help us."

Having no reason to go to the village now, the girls turned back home. They were hot and indignant, and they fervently hoped that Miss Bond wouldn't ask any awkward questions. Greatly as they scorned the boys' action, they did not want to sneak on them. And they knew, of course, that it had all been a carefully arranged conspiracy—a

"come-back" at them for what had happened yesterday.

"In future, I think we'll leave raids alone," said Irene dismally as she sat in her study with Doris and Marjorie. "It doesn't pay for us to butt in!"

"And we thought we were so jolly clever yesterday, too," said Doris. "I wish we'd never touched that giddy hamper!"

They were in momentary fear that Miss Bond would send for them, and ask awkward questions. Of course, it would serve the boys right if the whole truth came out—and it was quite certain that Miss Bond would complain bitterly to Dr. Hogge, their headmaster. That would mean lickings all round—and more bad feeling.

"We asked for it," said Marjorie, "and we got it."

"Which all proves that the boys are one too many for us—much as we hate to admit it," said Doris dolefully.

The door opened abruptly, and Vera Wilkes entered. She wasn't really supposed to be there, for Vera was a day girl—in fact, the daughter of Mr. Alington Wilkes, of the Ancient House at St. Frank's. She was looking hot and excited.

"I say! I've heard about that River House raid on our cookery stuff," she said breathlessly. "Do you know what happened afterwards?"

"I hope we really *did* make some stodgy stuff this time, and that the boys are all ill!" said Irene promptly. "It would serve them right."

"I've just come from the village, and those River House boys have been taking the stuff round to the cottagers just the same as you would have done."

"What!" cried the others.

"It's a fact," said Vera. "Brewster and his lot haven't even a single cake or a single piece of pastry. They've distributed everything."

"Well, I'm blessed!" said Irene in an unladylike whisper. "I say, what duffers we are! We were spoofed up to the eyes, and we didn't even know it! I believe the whole thing was a jape from beginning to end."

"Looks like it," said Doris, her eyes

twinkling. "I wonder if the St. Frank's chaps were mixed up in it? Let's buzz along and ask them."

"Good idea!" cried the others.

And off they went, helter-skelter.

When they arrived at St. Frank's they found their schoolboy friends laughing uproariously in the Triangle. Hal Brewster and his merry men were there, too, laden with empty baskets and other receptacles.

"Hallo, girls!" said Hal, grinning. "It's a lucky thing you've turned up. We were on our way to bring these baskets and things back, and you've saved us the trouble."

"You awful spoofers!" said Irene breathlessly. "We thought you had taken all those good things for yourselves."

"Ahem! We're not quite so rash," murmured Hal.

"Cheese it! You know jolly well that the stuff is good," said Doris. "But we couldn't understand you robbing the poor. So it was all a jape, was it?"

"Don't blame us," said Ascott. "These St. Frank's chaps put us up to it."

"Exactly," said Nipper, smiling. "You see, we thought you girls needed a lesson—after yesterday. And we staged that little affair so that we could walk past and refuse to fight. Just our fun."

The girls laughed merrily.

"Well, you could have saved yourselves the trouble," said Irene blandly. "You silly donkeys, don't you understand that we were spoofing you, too?"

"Spoofing us?" asked Kirby Keeble Parkinson. "You mean that you were spoofing us yesterday?"

"Of course we were, silly!"

"When you ragged us for fighting?" asked Handforth.

"We never meant to stay away from your party on Saturday, or to cut you, or anything," explained Irene. "In fact, we didn't think you'd 'fall' for it. But when you did we kept it up. If you ask me, it's honours even."

"In a way," admitted Nipper. "But there's one other little point. Forgive me for mentioning it, but are we to understand that it was only a spoof when you raided that hamper from young Willy and his fags?"

"No, that was the real thing," admitted Irene, with a chuckle. "And I must say, Ted, that your people know how to send hampers!"

Handforth sniffed.

"I thought there was a catch in it somewhere!" he said tartly. "All the rest was spoof—but raiding our hamper wasn't! My hamper, in fact! Dash it, it's a bit thick for you girls to start those sort of games."

"We thought it was topping," laughed Doris. "Give us the tip next time you have a hamper coming along, won't you, Ted? We'll see if we can't repeat the dose!"

Laughing heartily, Irene & Co. took their departure. The boys watched them go with mingled feelings. Hal Brewster chuckled.

"Well, thank goodness our school's two or three miles away from theirs!" he said, with feeling. "It's rough on you St. Frank's chaps, being so near."

"Rats!" said Nipper lightly. "The more they jape us, the better we shall like it—and don't forget that they have hampers occasionally. One of these days we'll have our revenge."

The other St. Frank's juniors echoed his sentiments. The keener the rivalry, the better they liked it.

THE END



FOOTBALL FLASHLIGHTS

Some "Illuminating" Notes
on Rookwood Football
By George Bulkeley.

OUR Junior Eleven, under the able leadership of Jimmy Silver, ran into form quite early in the season, and started winning matches in a manner that became monotonous — monotonous to their opponents, at all events. But Greyfriars stepped in and spoilt their winning

sequence, even as they spoilt ours. I happened to referee the match in question, and it was anybody's game right up to the finish, when Wharton of Greyfriars dashed through and scored the winning goal for his side.

THE last football season was one of the best we have ever experienced at Rookwood. Both senior and junior elevens did remarkably well, and in the circumstances we may be excused for patting ourselves on the back, and blowing our own trumpet to the extent of a gentle blast!

THE First Eleven played 40 games (including mid-week matches) and won 30. There were five drawn games and five defeats. The goal average makes healthy reading, 122 goals being scored by us, against 57 by our opponents. Our biggest win was to the tune of 11—0 against Coombe Athletic; and our worst defeat was 0—7 at Greyfriars; but we lacked the services of Neville, one of our "stars," for the major portion of the game.

THE Junior Eleven played 38 matches; won 27, drew 6, and lost 5. Goals for, 105; goals against, 44. Jimmy Silver accomplished the "hat-trick" on three occasions—a "hat-trick of hat-tricks," so to speak; and Lovell and Tommy Dodd were also prolific scorers. Tom Rawson rendered yeoman service in goal.

THE annual junior match between Classicals and Moderns was fought out at a terrific pace, and Rookwood was all agog with excitement for ninety minutes on end! In the first half Tommy Dodd, Tommy Doyle, and Tommy Cook each scored a goal for the Moderns, and Jimmy Silver replied for the Classicals just before the interval. In the second half, with the wind behind them, the Classicals rallied in fine style, and Mornington netted twice. The score was 3—3 until a few minutes from the end, when Jimmy Silver won the match for the Classicals with a powerful drive from twenty yards out. It was a most memorable match. Bravo, the Classicals!

OUR victory of 11—0 over the village team by no means represents a record. When my uncle was captain of Rookwood, way back in the 'nineties, he helped to beat a school called Stonehouse by 19 goals to 1! It is true that Stonehouse did not field their strongest eleven on that occasion; but one trembles to think what the score might have been had they fielded their weakest! It would have been a cricket score!