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By
REGINALD WRAY.

The

GEM

LIBRARY VOL. 6.

No. 198.



"You are cwumpling my collah, you ho'wid wuffian!" gasped Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, as the captain of the school dangled him out of the window. (An amusing incident contained in the splendid complete school tale in this issue.)

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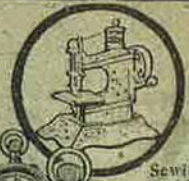
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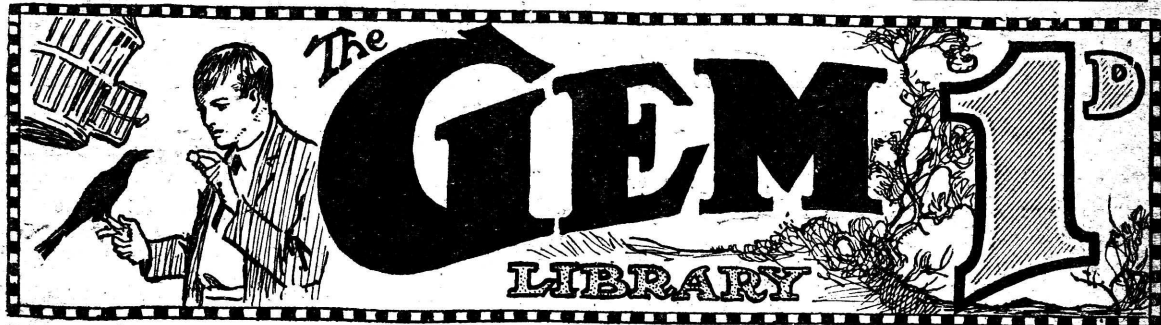
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Tale of Tom Merry & Co. and
KILDARE, the Captain of St. Jim's.

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

CHAPTER 1. A Splendid Idea.

TOM MERRY held up his hand.

"Silence, please!"

"Wats!"

"Now, look here, Gussy——"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy——"

"Silence!" said Tom Merry, thumping on the study table. "I haven't asked you chaps to come into my study to talk. I've asked you to come here and——"

"Hear you talk?" suggested Jack Blake.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, rats!" said Tom Merry crossly. "I tell you it's an important matter; and if we don't get it fixed this evening it will be too late. Now, are you fellows going to listen to me?"

"Undah the circs.——"

"Under the circs., shut up, Gussy!" said Blake. "We'll give Tom Merry a chance to talk——"

"Weally, Blake——"

"Shut up!" roared Lowther.

"Weally, Lowthah——"

"The circumstances are these——" said Manners.

"Weally, Mannahs——"

"Silence!"

"I wefuse——"

Jack Blake pressed a hand upon the chest of Arthur.

Next Thursday:

"HELD TO RANSOM!" AND "DEEP SEA GOLD."

Augustus D'Arcy, and D'Arcy sat down suddenly in a chair—so suddenly that it took his breath away. He gasped; and Tom Merry took advantage of the pause to go on quickly.

"It's about the match to-morrow. You know that the first eleven are meeting Southwood United, and it's going to be the biggest match of the season. Southwood United are a half-professional team, and they've got some ripping men—all older than our first. It will be the hardest nut the first eleven have had to crack. Kildare and his team will have all their work cut out to beat the United."

"They won't beat them," said Blake.

"They're going to try—and I jolly well hope they will, for the honour of St. Jim's," said Tom Merry. "It will be a big feather in our cap if we beat a team like the United. They're supposed to be almost up to League form; and a lot of the Fifth and Sixth have been cavilling at Kildare for accepting their challenge to a match."

Blake grunted.

"I know that," he said. "Lot of unsportsmanlike asses! Kildare was quite right."

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, recovering his breath and his voice at the same time. "I wogard Kildare's conduct as quite wight and pwopah. Blake, if you do not remove your hand from my chest and allow me to wise I shall stwike you violently."

"Well, will you promise to keep quiet?" demanded Blake.

"Weally, Blake——"

"Do give a chap a chance to speak!" urged Tom Merry.

"We could have easily carried this wheeze through without giving you Fourth Form chaps a chance at all, but we thought we'd let you into it."

"Bai Jove!"

"Well, go ahead!" said Blake suspiciously. "Let's hear the wheeze."

"Kildare's team will have all their work cut out to beat the United—"

"You've said that before."

"Well, I can say it again if I like, I suppose," said Tom Merry wrathfully. "Kildare's team will have all their work cut out—"

"Oh, get on with the washing!" said Digby of the Fourth.

"To beat the United!" went on Tom Merry firmly.

"Look here—"

"Weally Tom Mewwy—"

"Kildare's team will have all their work cut out to beat the United," repeated Tom Merry obstinately. The captain of the Shell Form at St. Jim's was not to be lightly put down by mere Fourth-Formers, especially in his own study. "Therefore, I was thinking of suggesting to Kildare a means of strengthening the team."

Blake stared.

"Eh? You're thinking of giving advice to the captain of the school about making up a football eleven?" he ejaculated. Tom Merry nodded calmly.

"Yes."

"My hat!" said Blake.

"My word!" said Digby.

And Arthur Augustus D'Arcy took his eyeglass off and polished it and jammed it into his eye again, and said:

"Gweat Scott!"

Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther—the Terrible Three of the Shell—grinned a little with satisfaction. They were rather pleased with the effect their scheme had produced upon the heroes of the Fourth.

"That's the idea," said Monty Lowther, "and I think it's a jolly good one."

"Simply ripping!" said Manners.

"Well, of all the cheek—!" said Blake slowly.

"Of all the nerve!" said Digby.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"If you chaps don't want to back us up you can slide out," said Tom Merry loftily. "But we're going to put it plainly to Kildare."

"But what are you going to suggest?" asked Blake, puzzled. "Leaving out the New House members of the team?"

"No."

"Then what?"

"Playing juniors."

"Eh?"

"Or, to be more exact, one junior or two," said Tom Merry calmly. "Myself, for instance, and, say, Fatty Wynn of the New House."

"You?"

"Yes."

"Playing a—a—a junior in the first eleven, along with the Fifth and the Sixth!" exclaimed Blake.

"Exactly!"

"Well, you ass!"

"Isn't it a jolly good idea?" demanded Tom Merry. "My idea is that the school eleven ought to be representative of the whole school, instead of only the top Forms. And I really think that a little new blood would do the first eleven good. Darrel's crooked now, you know, and Monteith is off colour. It's just the time for the juniors to claim some of their rights."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look here, Blake—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Blake.

"You ass—"

"Bai Jove, you know," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, after a few moments' thought, "there is somethin' in Tom Mewwy's ideah! There is a vewy weak spot—"

"What's that?" demanded Tom Merry.

"Your idea about the juniors who should be played. My opinion is that one would be enough."

"Well, I'm not set on Wynn being selected—"

"I don't mean that. I think the juniah should be chosen from the Fourth Form," said Arthur Augustus, with a shake of the head.

"Rats!" said the Terrible Three, with one voice.

"Gussy's quite right!" said Blake warmly. "I've never heard him speak so sensibly. He thinks that if there's a junior to be played in the school eleven it ought to be me."

"Weally, Blake, I don't think anythin' of the kind!"

"Eh? You weren't thinking of Figgins, I suppose?"

"Wathah not."

"Herries or Dig?"

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"Certainly not!"

"Who, then?" demanded Blake, crossly.

"Weally, Blake, I should think you might guess. I hope I am not the kind of fellow to put myself forward in any way, but I certainly think that if a juniah is to be played in the first eleven it would be bettah to select the best juniah playah; and, undah those cires, I fail to see how I could be left out."

"Well, you fathead!"

"I wefuse to be called a fathead—"

"Oh, do cheese it!" exclaimed Tom Merry, exasperated. "Are you Fourth Form chaps coming with me to Kildare's study to back me up, or are you not?"

"Not!" said the Fourth-Formers promptly.

"Then you can buzz off!" grunted Tom Merry. "I suppose I was an ass to expect you to talk sense. I—"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Oh, run away and play!"

"I wefuse to wun away and play! I wegard your wemarks as dispwaging in the extweme. If you do not withdraw them, Tom Mewwy, I shall have no alternative but to give you a feahful thwashin'."

"Rats!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy pushed back his cuffs in a very warlike way. All the juniors seemed to be getting into an exasperated frame of mind.

"Now, Tom Mewwy—"

"If you chaps can't talk sense you'd better clear out. Buzz off!"

"I wefuse to buzz off!"

"What-ho!" said Blake.

"I hope you're not going to give us the trouble of putting you into the passage?" said Tom Merry, with forced politeness.

"Wats! I should wefuse to be put into the passage—"

"Better try it!" said Blake, with an expression which indicated very clearly that he really considered that the Terrible Three had better not try it.

"Look here—"

"Rats!"

"I tell you—"

"I considah—"

"You silly asses—"

"Fatheads!"

"Chumps—"

"I'll jolly well—"

"Yah!"

And then, nobody knowing exactly how it started, words were changed for blows, and the Terrible Three and the three Fourth-Formers were whirling in a wild combat.

CHAPTER 2.

A Little Argument.

BUMP!

Jack Blake, whirled through the doorway by Tom Merry, descended in the passage with a resounding bump and lay there, gasping.

Bump!

Another form came whirling through the doorway: but this time it was not a Fourth-Former, it was one of the owners of the study—Manners, to wit—and he had been hurled forth by Digby. He fell upon Blake, and the two clutched one another and rolled over on the linoleum in deadly fray.

"Ow!"

"Yo-wowow!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy and Monty Lowther were whirling round the study in wild combat. Tom Merry closed with Digby, and they staggered through the doorway. Each was determined to "chuck" the other out, and they both succeeded. They came out together, and fell over Blake and Manners, and the four of them rolled over in a yelling heap.

D'Arcy and Lowther remained in the study, struggling wildly. D'Arcy seemed to be getting the advantage, but suddenly his collar-stud snapped.

"Bai Jove! You've bwoken my collah!" gasped the swell of St. Jim's.

"I'll break your silly neck next," growled Lowther.

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Out you go!"

"Wats!"

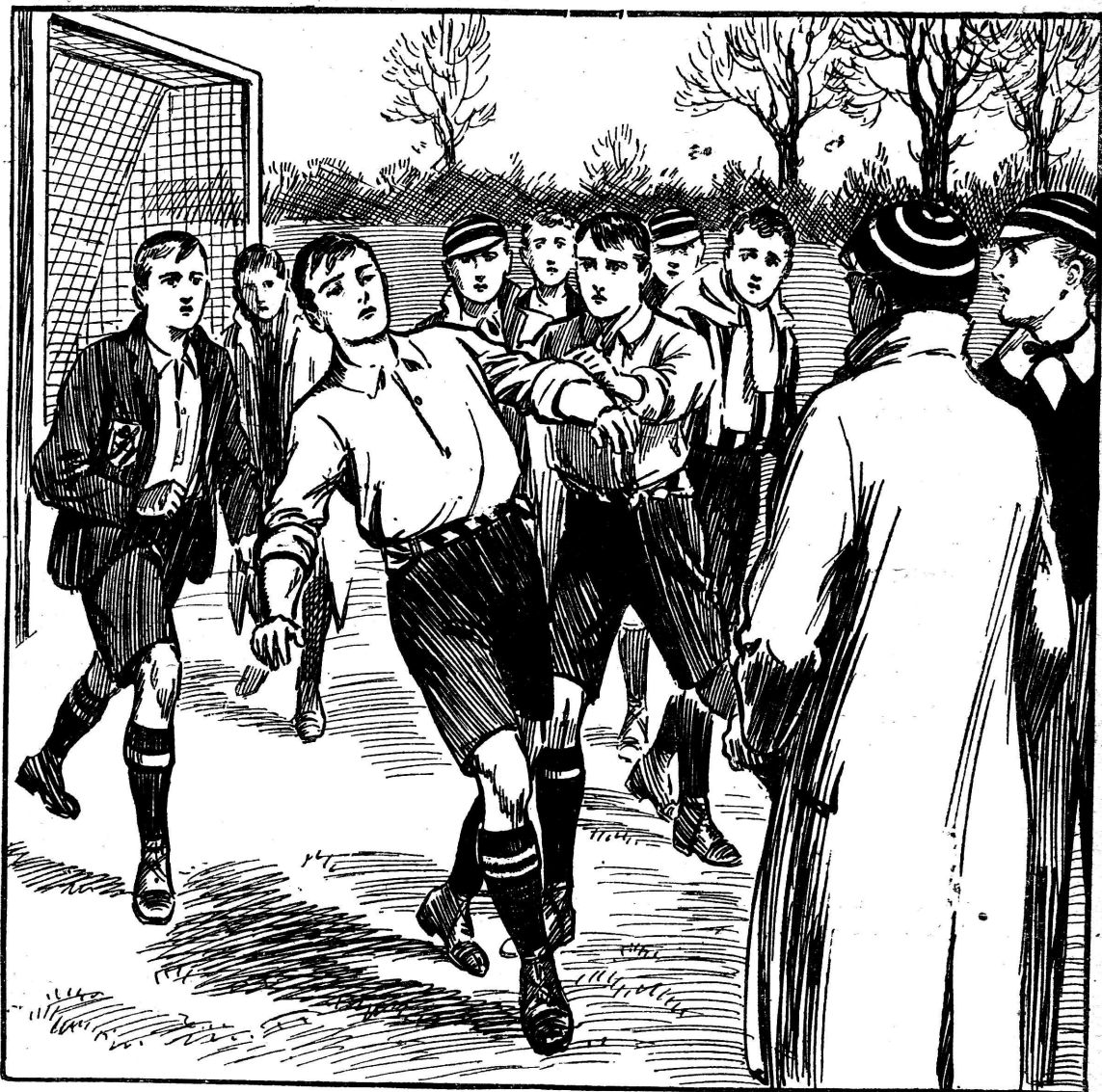
"Outside!" panted Lowther.

"Wefease me, you ass! You are wumplin' my jacket, and wuinin' my collah! I am willin' to make it pax!"

"Rats!"

"You—you uttah wottah! You are wubbin' your beastly feet on my twousahs on purpose. I believe you want to spoil my twousahs!" shrieked D'Arcy.

"Ha, ha, ha!"



Kildare tore the envelope open and read the telegram. The next instant he staggered back, with a hoarse cry. "Mother!" Monteith sprang forward and supported the captain of St. Jim's. (See chapter 12.)

"You—you fwrightful boundah! Welease me at once! If it were not for my twousahs, I would give you a feahful thwashin'!"

Monty Lowther was laughing too much to continue the tussle. He released the swell of St. Jim's, and sank into a chair, gasping with mirth.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You uttah wottah—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy dusted his trousers with a cambric handkerchief, and tried to get his waistcoat straight. Tom Merry came panting into the study. He had succeeded in disposing of Digby. He stared at D'Arcy as he saw how the swell of St. Jim's was engaged.

"Hallo! Have you left off to tend the wounded before the battle's finished?" he demanded.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Lowther.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"If it were not for my twousahs—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus ceased dusting his trousers, and clenched his fists. He rushed at Tom Merry, and Tom Merry caught him round the neck, and they waltzed round the study. In

a moment more Arthur Augustus was floating gracefully through the doorway.

"Yawooh!"

"Oh, you ass!" growled Blake. "What are you falling on me for?"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Groo!"

"Ow! Rescue!" gasped Manners, who was squirming on the linoleum with Blake and Digby sitting on him. "Yow! Rescue!"

Tom Merry and Manners came out of the study at once. At the same moment, Knox the prefect came upstairs with a cane in his hand. Knox did not wait to ask any questions.

He started operations with the cane.

Lash! Lash! Lash!

"Ow! Yow!"

"Yah! Oh!"

"Yawooh!"

"Ow! Help! Yowp!"

The Terrible Three bolted back into their study, and Tom Merry slammed the door, and three pairs of feet were jammed against it inside. Three Fourth-Formers went down the passage at top speed, and Knox was left alone, still brandishing the cane.

"Ow!"
 "Oh!"
 "Bai Jove!" gasped Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, stopping at the end of the passage, and groping wildly for his eyeglass. "Bai Jove! I—"
 "Come on!" howled Blake.
 "Hold on, dear boys—"
 "Buck up, you ass! Knox has got a cane!"
 "Hold on! It has struck me—"
 "It has struck us, too, you ass, and it will strike us again if you don't get a move on!" howled Digby.
 "Weally, Dig—"
 "Run, you ass!"
 "I mean it had struck me that it is not strictly consistent with our personal dig. to-wun in this way. Undah the cires—"

Arthur Augustus got no further. Blake seized him by one arm, and Digby by the other, and the swell of St. Jim's was rushed on at top speed, vainly protesting. It was high time, for Knox was giving chase, and he had almost reached them, and the cane was singing in the air.

"Stop!" yelled Knox.
 "Rats!" gasped Blake.
 "Come back!"

Blake chuckled breathlessly. They were not likely to come back, under the circumstances. It was, as Blake would have said, "not good enough." They dashed on, and disappeared round a corner, and Knox halted. He knew that he might as well have hunted the merry will-o'-the-wisp, as the juniors up and down the old passages of the School House of St. Jim's.

The prefect returned to the Shell passage, and kicked at Tom Merry's door.

"Open this door!" he roared.
 There was a gasping chuckle from inside the study. But the door did not open. Knox gave it a sounding lash with his cane, that rang like a pistol-shot along the passage.

"Open this door!"
 Another chuckle.
 Knox turned the handle, but the door did not move. It was locked on the inside. The Sixth-Former lashed it with his cane again, and then tramped angrily down the passage. The Terrible Three, inside the study, heard his departing footsteps die away, with great relief. Tom Merry rubbed a swollen nose, and Manners sat down and caressed a discoloured eye, and Monty Lowther dabbed a stream of red from the corner of his mouth. The Terrible Three looked very much the worse for wear, and they felt sore.

"Well, this is a nice go!" gasped Tom Merry at last.
 "All your fault!" growled Manners. "I shall have a black eye now."

"How is it my fault?" demanded Tom Merry.
 "You suggested bringing those Fourth-Form bounders into the scheme," growled Manners.

"Well, you approved of it."
 "Oh, don't argue!"
 "Well, you ass—"
 "Blessed if I ever knew such a chap for arguing," said Manners peevishly. "I wonder where I could get a beef-steak for my eye!"

"I believe I've got a loose tooth," growled Monty Lowther, dabbing his mouth. "It was all your fault, you asses. I was against the whole thing—"

"You never said so—"
 "Well, I say so now," growled Lowther.
 "Oh, rats!"
 "Look here, Tom Merry—"
 "Oh, go and eat coke!"
 "I'll jolly well—"

Tom Merry burst into a laugh. It looked for a moment as if the chums of the Shell would begin a new tussle on their own; but Tom Merry's good-temper saved the situation.

"Chuck it!" he exclaimed. "There's been enough hammering! I believe my nose is going to be double size! Ow!"

What about going to Kildare?" asked Monty Lowther, after a pause. "Are you going to drop the wheeze?"

"Not much!" said Tom Merry emphatically. "I'm going to Kildare. It would have looked better to have some of the Fourth backing us up; but I've no doubt we can make Kildare listen to reason."

"Well, we can try. You know it's not much good talking sense to the Sixth, as a rule."

Tom Merry laughed.
 "We'll do our best," he said.

And, after listening carefully at the door to make quite sure that Knox the prefect had departed, Tom Merry & Co. quitted the study, and proceeded to indulge in a "wash and a brush-up," which they very much needed, to make themselves presentable for a visit to the study of the captain of the school.

CHAPTER 3.

Bad News.

KILDARE, the captain of St. Jim's, was at tea in his study.

Kildare, the big, handsome Sixth-Former, looked very well and fit. There were three other seniors with him, all of the Sixth—Darrel and Rushden, of the School House, and Monteith, the head prefect of the New House at St. Jim's. The four seniors were talking over the all-engrossing subject, just then, at St. Jim's—the impending match with Southwood United.

The United match was a "big thing" for St. Jim's First. Kildare, keen and enterprising footballer as he was, was the first to acknowledge that. He would not, of his own accord, have challenged Southwood. The United team was older than the first eleven at St. Jim's—and in its ranks it included several professional players. The United belonged to the county league, and had hopes of being able, at no distant date, to join the Second Division of the English League. Such a team was, in the nature of things, far above any schoolboy eleven, even an eleven picked from the best players in the top Form of a public school.

But they had challenged St. Jim's to a match, and Kildare was not the fellow to refuse a challenge, so long as he had any chance at all. With the first eleven at its very best, there was no reason why the Saints should not have a chance. Most of St. Jim's backed up Kildare in accepting the challenge. The United would be able to throw more size and strength into the scale, but the St. Jim's First were famous for their pace and their splendid combination, and they were accustomed to moving like clockwork under the direction of their captain. As Kildare looked at it, there were even chances of victory and defeat; and if St. Jim's should win, it would be a big feather in their cap. And he could not refuse the challenge without risking an accusation of funkling. He had accepted it; and from the moment of accepting it, he had worked his hardest to get his team into top-notch form.

Then came ill-luck. Darrel, who was the best man in the team after Kildare, twisted his ankle in practice, and was crocked. It was a severe blow to the eleven. Darrel would not be able to play on Wednesday, that was certain. There were plenty of good players in the Sixth and Fifth Forms at St. Jim's from whom Kildare could select a reliable substitute; but there was nobody who was anything like Darrel's form. The St. Jim's First Eleven had to make up their minds to meet the enemy with one of their best left out. But Kildare was not in the least inclined to give up hope.

"It's rotten!" Darrel was saying, as he passed his cup to be refilled. "I'm more sorry than I can say, Kildare."

Kildare nodded.
 "It wasn't your fault!" he said. "Knox cannoned into you, and you had to go down. It was Knox's fault, if anybody's. But how we're to get a winger like you, old man, is a puzzle I shall have to give up."

"It's rotten!" said Darrel again.
 The seniors all agreed that it was rotten. But it could not be helped.

"The team's good as it stands, though," said Kildare thoughtfully. He took a fragment of paper from his pocket, with names pencilled on it, and ran over the list. "Lefevre of the Fifth is going into goal—and he's a steady man. He'll keep the leather out as well as anybody."

"Good man!" said Monteith.
 "Dodd and Price are good backs; I don't see how we could improve on them."

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"Quite right."

"Baker, North, and Jones, they're the half-line, and they will hold together well."

"Yes, rather!"

"Then Russhden, Darrel, Kildare, Monteith, and Fancourt," said Kildare musingly. "That was the front line. And we've got to get a man to put in your place, Darrel."

"I'm beastly sorry."

"Well, we shall have to manage it," said Kildare cheerfully. "Accidents will happen. Luckily, the rest of us are at the top of our form."

"That's true," said Monteith; "and we'll take jolly good care to keep ourselves so. If I may make a suggestion, I should say Anderson of the Fifth for inside-right."

"A good man," said Kildare. "We'll see."

There was a tap at the door, and Knox the prefect came in. He nodded to the other seniors, with a slight flush in his cheeks.

"Come in, Knox," said Kildare. "We were just talking about the eleven—"

"That's what I've come to speak about," said Knox rather abruptly.

Kildare looked a little surprised.

"Yes," he said.

Knox's flush deepened.

"You haven't decided yet upon a winger to replace Darrel?" he said.

"Not yet. We're thinking about Anderson of the Fifth."

"I don't see why the Fifth should be chosen when there are Sixth-Formers available," said Knox.

"Oh! You want to suggest somebody in the Sixth," said Kildare cordially enough. "Go ahead, old man! I shall be glad of any useful suggestion. I assure you."

"Well, I've always looked upon myself as a pretty good winger," said Knox, "and inside-right's my favourite place."

"Oh!"

"I don't see why I shouldn't be given a chance," said Knox rather sharply. "I've played for the First before, and I don't know that I've disgraced the team."

"Well, no," said Kildare slowly; "but—"

"But there is a 'but,'" said Knox, with a sneer. "I know we don't pull very well together, you and I, Kildare, in school matters. We have different ideas about the duties of a prefect. But I don't think personal disagreements ought to be allowed to interfere with football matters."

"I shouldn't let it," said Kildare quietly. "I think all the fellows know me too well to imagine that I should let my private likes and dislikes interfere with selecting a footer team. But that's not the point. I'm going to pass you over—"

"Oh, you've settled that, then?" said Knox unpleasantly.

"Yes. I'm going to pass you over because you're not fit, and because you're not reliable enough for a match of this sort. We shall have to strain every nerve to win, and I can't afford to take chances. If we lose St. Jim's will look a set of duffers for taking up a challenge from such a strong team as the United—at all events, if we lose by a big margin. And we want to win specially, to show that an amateur team can hold its own against professionals. If you were more fit I'd be glad to play you, but—well, to be quite plain, Knox, you smoke too much to be fit, and I know it."

"I might have expected you to harp on that old string," said Knox, with a sneer; "but, really, you might find something new, if you must get at me."

"I don't want to get at you. I'm stating facts. You're a prefect, and I don't interfere with your private habits, though I should cane a junior for acting as you do. But you can't expect me to play you."

"No, I suppose I can't."

"Besides—" Kildare paused.

"Well," said Knox, with the same sneer upon his thin, unpleasant face—"well? Have you some more reasons to give?"

"Yes, if you like to hear them."

"Oh, pile it on!"

"Well, the way you cannoned Darrel yesterday was deuced clumsy, to say the least of it," said Kildare abruptly. "I couldn't suspect a St. Jim's fellow of being cad enough to crook one of ourselves to get a place in the team, but if you had Darrel's place you might be suspected of having cannoned him on purpose, Knox."

Knox flushed deeply.

"You mean that you suspect me?" he exclaimed.

"No, I don't. I've said I don't. Only it would look bad; and I may as well tell you that some of the fellows do suspect you."

Knox gritted his teeth.

"I suppose I ought to know better than expect fair play from you," he said. "We don't get on together, and you're going to leave me out. Well, I can't stop you."

Kildare coloured.

"If you're going to talk in that strain the sooner you get out of my study the better," he said quietly.

Knox gave an angry laugh.

"Oh, I'll get out," he said. "You're going to keep the match in the hands of your own circle of friends—I know that."

Kildare half rose, his blue eyes glinting. Knox made a backward step towards the door. If the captain of St. Jim's had lost his temper it would have gone hard with the prefect. But Kildare was accustomed to keeping a tight hand on his temper; as captain of the first eleven and captain of the school he needed to.

He sat down again quietly.

"You'd better go!" he said.

"Oh, I'll go fast enough!"

Knox quitted the study, and slammed the door. The four seniors looked at one another uncomfortably.

"Knox takes it rottenly enough," Russhden remarked. "Pass the ham, Monty."

"You know what I think," said Monteith. "I never saw a cannon so deliberate in my life. Knox bowled Darrel over on purpose."

"Well, I shall try not to think so," said Kildare. "But he doesn't play in the match—that's settled! Hallo! Come in!"

A knock had come at the door. Toby, the page of the School House, entered with a letter in his hand.

"Letter for you, Master Kildare," he said.

Toby was not bound to bring letters to the captain's study, nor did he expect a tip for doing so. But there was no one at St. Jim's who would not have walked a mile to do any little service for Eric Kildare. The handsome Irish lad, with his unfailing good temper and kind ways, was a favourite with everybody at the old school. There was hardly a fellow in his own Form who did not like him, and he was the idol of the juniors; and even Toby was suspected of putting a little extra polish on his boots and giving an extra rub to the study window when he cleaned it.

"Thank you, Toby!" said Kildare.

He took the letter, and the lad, more pleased with a "thank you!" from Kildare than he would have been with a half-crown from Knox or Sefton, quitted the study. Kildare glanced at the address on the letter.

"It's from my father," he said. "Will you fellows excuse me?"

"All serene!"

Kildare opened the letter, and glanced over it. The ruddy colour in his healthy, handsome face paled a little. The seniors looked at him.

"Not bad news, I hope?" said Darrel anxiously.

Kildare did not reply for a moment.

"Yes," he said, at last.

"I'm sorry, old chap."

"My mother's ill," said Kildare, in a strained voice. "It's—it's not serious, I think, but—but the pater thinks I'd better know, in case it's necessary for me to go home. He's going to let me have a wire to-morrow if I'm to go."

"My hat!"

"Poor old chap!"

Kildare sat staring at the letter. The other fellows looked at him. They were sorry for Kildare. Some of them had seen Kildare's mother, and they knew the deep bond of affection that existed between the kind Irish lady and her son. But they could not be blamed if they were thinking as much of the morrow's match as of Kildare. If the telegram came, what of the match with the United?

"Where is your mater now, Kildare?" asked Darrel, after a long pause.

"Staying at Brighton," said Kildare.

"You could get down there pretty soon, then, in case of any need," said Darrel slowly. "I'm sorry for this, Kildare, old chap."

Kildare nodded. His handsome face was pale and troubled. The seniors exchanged glances, and quietly left the study. They felt that the captain of St. Jim's would prefer to be alone just then.

CHAPTER 4. Rivals.

TOM MERRY gave one more dab to his face, and tossed the sponge down, and began to towel himself. He blinked at his reflection in the glass, and grinned as he saw that his nose had a peculiar sideways effect. The rough-and-tumble in the Shell study had had disarranging results for the features of several of its participants, but Tom Merry had come off the best. Monty Lowther's mouth persisted in emitting a stream of crimson, and as for Manners's eye, it was growing darker and darker, and all attempts to stop its progress towards midnight blackness would evidently be futile. Manners snorted as he looked at

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it in the glass. Manners of the Shell was given to being very neat and clean and select in his appearance, and a black eye was the last thing in the world that he would have desired to possess. Manners was not pleased.

"Well, you fellows ready?" asked Tom Merry.

"Yes," growled Monty Lowther.

"I suppose so," grunted Manners.

"Keep a stiff upper lip!" said Tom Merry encouragingly.

"We've got to see Kildare this evening or not at all. He's bound to fill up Darrel's place in the team to-night, and the list for the match will be posted up to-morrow morning. Then it will be too late. We couldn't expect him to make an alteration to please us."

"Go hon!"

"If you're ready, we'll start."

"I'm ready."

The chums of the Shell quitted the dormitory. They came downstairs with a very determined expression. How Kildare would receive their kind offer of assistance in making up the first eleven they did not know—though perhaps they could guess. But they meant to see the matter through. Juniors had rights as well as seniors, and who was to stand up for them if the juniors themselves did not. Evidently nobody. The Terrible Three were like the grim Scotsman of old who undertook to "bell" the cat, Kildare being in the present instance the cat who was to be belled.

The three juniors came into the Sixth-Form passage with their heads erect. As they entered the passage to make their way to Kildare's study they almost ran into three other juniors, who had just come into the School House. The newcomers were Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn of the New House. They stopped at the sight of the Terrible Three, and looked at them with grinning faces.

"Been in the wars?" asked Figgins.

"Oh, rats!"

"We're just going to see Kildare," Kerr remarked.

"What on earth do you chaps want to see Kildare for?"

"It's about the vacancy in the team."

The Terrible Three stared at them.

"The vacancy in the team?" repeated Tom Merry.

"Yes," Figgins nodded. "We've got a ripping idea. It's occurred to me that on an occasion like this the juniors ought to be given a show. Why shouldn't a junior be played in the school team?"

"My only hat!"

"And now Darrel's crooked there's a chance for Kildare to do the right thing without anybody being hurt," said Fatty Wynn.

"Well, of all the cheek—"

"Oh, rats!" said Figgins warmly. "We've been talking to Blake, and you know jolly well you've got the same idea yourself."

"That's different," said Tom Merry loftily. "We're Shell fellows—almost seniors—"

"Almost idiots, you mean."

"Look here, Kerr—"

"Bosh!"

"You jolly well get out of this House!" said Manners wrathfully. "What are you New House chaps doing on the respectable side of the quad, anyway?"

"Look here—"

"School House! School House!" bawled Monty Lowther. "New House cads! Line up!"

There was a shout. Juniors ran up from all sides. The old warfare between the two Houses at St. Jim's only slept, and it was ready to break into new life at any moment. A crowd of School House fellows were on the spot in a few seconds.

"New House cads!"

"Kick them out!"

"Look here—" roared Figgins.

"Faith, and we're looking!" chuckled Reilly of the Fourth. "Kick them out!"

"Outside!" roared Kangaroo of the Shell.

"I tell you—"

"Outside!"

"Fathead—"

"Kick them out!"

There was a rush of the School House juniors. In a twinkling Figgins & Co., borne away by the rush, were whirling towards the doorway.

They resisted manfully.

But the numbers were too great. In the midst of a flowing tide of School House juniors, Figgins & Co. were swept downwards.

The Terrible Three looked on without taking any part in the combat. They did not want any more signs of strife to carry into Kildare's study. Figgins & Co., fighting desperately, were swept out upon the School House steps.

"Sock it to them!" shrieked Figgins. "We're going in!"

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"Rats!"

"Kick them out!"

"Yah! New House cads!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bump!

Fatty Wynn rolled down the steps, and sat down on the cold ground with a sounding bump. He remained there, gasping for breath, till Kerr rolled down and alighted on him. Figgins, the last of the trio, fought gallantly, but he was hurled down at last, dragging Clifton Dane and Bernard Glyn and Reilly down the steps with him. The School House fellows crowded on the steps, yelling with laughter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Go home!"

"Yah!"

Figgins & Co. gathered themselves up at the bottom of the steps. For a moment the infuriated Figgins was inclined to charge up the steps and attack. But a score or more of School House fellows were collected there, only too eager for the chance of rolling him down the steps again.

"No go," said Kerr.

"But we've got to see Kildare!"

"Some other time, fathead. Come on."

And the three New House juniors limped sorely away, followed by a yell of derision from the School House crowd.

The Terrible Three, in the Sixth Form passage, chuckled. They had got rid of their rivals, and the coast was clear. With serene faces, they walked on to Kildare's study, and Tom Merry tapped at the door.

There was no reply.

"Come out, I suppose," said Manners.

"Kildare was having tea with some other chaps," said Monty Lowther. "I should hardly think he was finished yet."

"We'll soon see."

Tom Merry tapped again, and opened the door of the study. The chums of the Shell looked in, and the next moment they started back, with suppressed exclamations.

Kildare was there.

He was alone. There was a letter beside him, and the captain of St. Jim's was leaning forward upon the table, his face buried in his hands.

CHAPTER 5.

Not a Warm Reception.

KILDARE did not look up.

He had evidently not heard the Shell fellows.

Tom Merry & Co. stood in the doorway, looking at the captain of St. Jim's, and not knowing what to do.

It was clear that they had surprised the captain of the school at an awkward moment. What was the matter with Kildare they could not guess. But he was evidently not himself, and he would certainly not be pleased at being intruded upon just then. But to go without speaking—if he saw them going—

"Better bunk!" whispered Manners.

Tom Merry nodded.

The Shell fellows were just drawing back when Kildare raised his head. He had heard some slight sound. He started to his feet at once, and the juniors could see that his handsome face was very pale.

"Come in," he exclaimed. "Did you knock?"

"Yes, Kildare."

"I didn't hear you. Do you want anything?"

Tom Merry hesitated.

"We—we wanted to speak to you, Kildare," he said, "but—"

"Come in, then."

Kildare was quite himself again now. His face was pale, but he was perfectly cool and calm. Whatever was the matter, he did not mean to allude to the subject, or to allow it to shake his nerves. His manner was perfectly ordinary, and only the unusual pallor in his cheek indicated that he was in any way under the stress of emotion.

"Well, what is it?" asked Kildare, in his old kind tone. Whatever trouble might be on his mind, the captain of St. Jim's was never likely to forget the courtesy of manner that the fellows liked him so much for.

Tom Merry coughed.

"Ahem!"

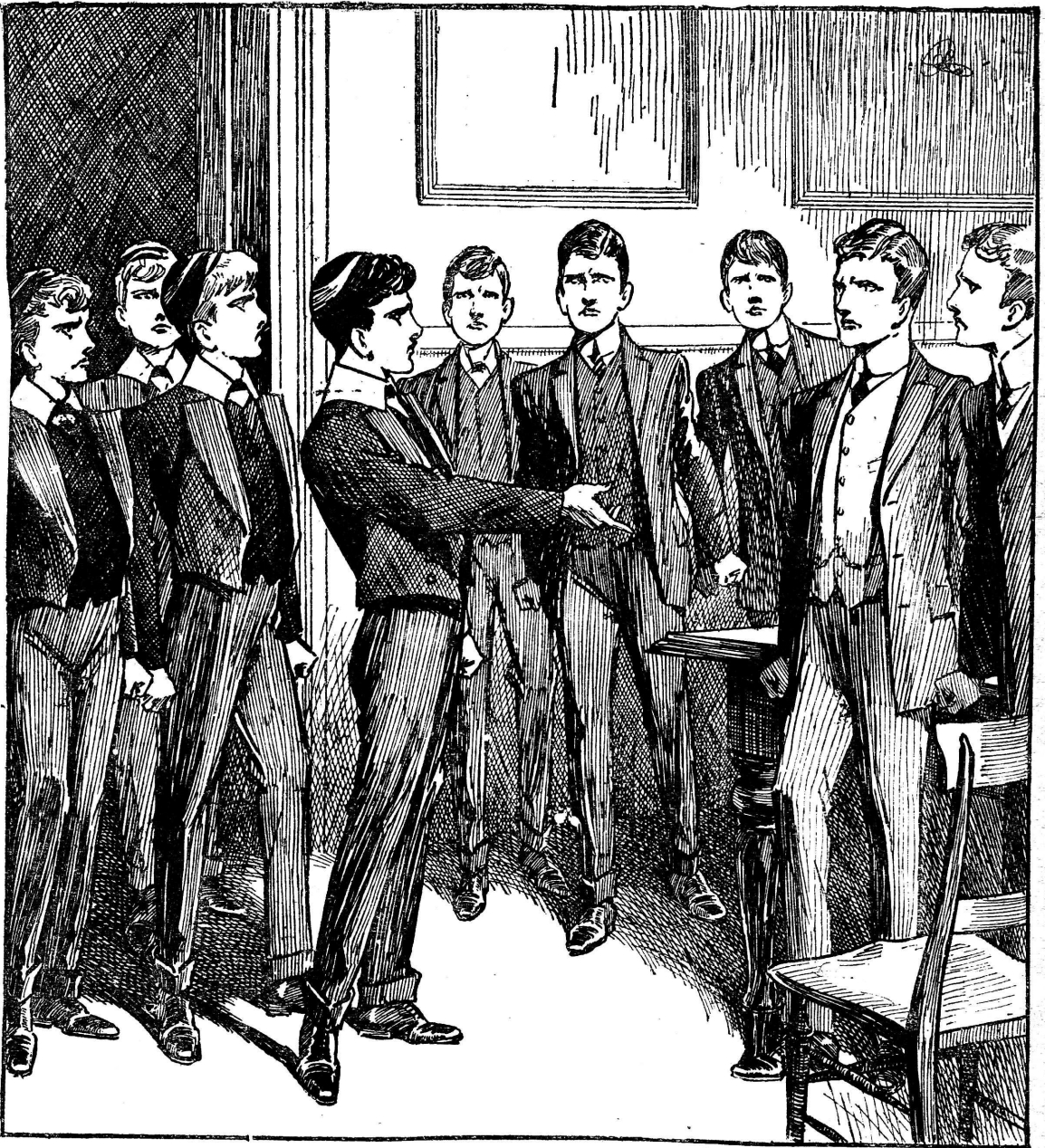
"Exactly," murmured Monty Lowther. "Ahem!"

Kildare looked puzzled.

"Sore throats?" he asked.

"A-ahem!"

"If there's anything wrong with your health, you had better go to the matron," said Kildare, perplexed. "I can give you some cough lozenges, if you like, but if it's really sore throat, you had better see Mrs. Mimms."



The Redclyffe juniors gathered round the little party from Greyfriars threateningly. Harry Wharton and Co. drew more closely together, and clenched their fists. It looked as if they were in for serious trouble. "Hands off!" exclaimed Buistrose sharply. "We didn't come here for a row. We want the Craven Cup back again, that's all."

(An incident taken from "THE STOLEN CUP," the splendid, long, complete tale of Greyfriars School, by Frank Richards, contained in this week's number of our grand companion paper, "THE MAGNET" Library. Don't miss this splendid school tale. Buy a copy of "The Magnet" Library at once! Now on Sale. Price one Penny.)

The Shell fellows turned red.
 "It—it isn't that!" stammered Tom Merry.
 "Well, would you mind being rather quick in telling me what it is?" suggested Kildare.
 "Ahem!"
 "Please come to the point."
 "Certainly, Kildare. Ahem! It's about the football match to-morrow."
 Kildare started.
 "Look here, Merry—"
 "You see, Darrel being crocked, we—we thought we might make a suggestion—"
 "That's it," said Manners. "A suggestion, you see."
 Kildare stared, and then laughed.

"Oh, you want to suggest somebody for the place?" he asked. "You think you are more likely to make a good selection than the captain of the team?"
 Tom Merry's colour deepened to crimson.
 "Not exactly that," he stammered "I don't mean that, Kildare. But—you see—"
 "I'm afraid I don't see," said Kildare, a little testily, "and as I have an important letter to write, I wish you would buck up and explain what you mean, if you mean anything."
 "Ahem! You see—"
 "Well?"
 Darrel being crocked, you'll be selecting a new man—"
 "I know that."

"And we—we thought—"
—It did not seem quite so easy to say it now that he was face to face with the captain of St. Jim's.

"We thought— Ahem!"

"Well," said Kildare patiently, "what did you think, Merry?"

"We thought it would be a ripping opportunity of doing the fair thing all round," said Tom Merry.

Kildare frowned.

"Does that mean that, in the opinion of the Shell, I don't do the fair thing all round now?" he asked.

"N-n-n-no! Not at all!"

"Then what do you mean?"

"I think that perhaps you've overlooked our claims," said Tom Merry cautiously.

Kildare jumped.

"Your claims!"

"Yes." It was out now, and Tom Merry felt all the better for it. "That's it, Kildare."

"You young ass—!"

"Hold on a minute. On an occasion like this, we feel that the juniors ought to be represented, and, Darrel being crooked, there's a jolly good opportunity. You can shove me instead of Darrel—"

"My hat!"

"I'm a jolly good inside right," said Tom Merry modestly.

"If you wanted a good goalie, there's Fatty Wynn, of the New House. He keeps goal like—an angel. But if you want an inside right, well, here's me!"

"Hear, hear!" said Manners and Lowther heartily.

"What do you say, Kildare?"

Kildare pointed to the door.

"Get out!" he replied.

"But I say—"

"You young duffers!" said Kildare, with a laugh of genuine amusement. "Do you think I should be likely to play juniors in the first eleven on the occasion of the most difficult match the school has ever undertaken?"

"Well, you see—"

"We want to strengthen the team—"

"Well, I'm not strengthening the team by leaving out good players and putting in poor ones," said Kildare drily. "You were played in a big match once, Merry, but the present occasion is quite different. Don't be a young ass."

"But you see—"

"I'm afraid I've no more time to spare," Kildare remarked. "Will you oblige me by getting out of the study?"

The Terrible Three looked at one another.

The reception their brilliant idea had met with was certainly discouraging. But they were not in the least inclined to give it up.

"Just think it over a bit, Kildare," urged Tom Merry. "The school eleven ought to be representative of the school, and how can that be if there are no juniors in it? You can see for yourself—"

Kildare pointed to the door again.

"Are you going?" he asked.

"Ye-es, but—"

"Close the door after you."

The Terrible Three exchanged rather sickly looks, and backed towards the door. The captain of St. Jim's was even less amenable to reason than they had expected. They had fully anticipated an argument, perhaps an excited one, but to be summarily dismissed in this manner was exceedingly trying.

"A lot of other fellows agree with me," Tom Merry exclaimed, as a last shot.

Kildare nodded.

"Yes; there's an old saying that one fool makes many," he said.

"Oh! Now, look here—"

"Shut the door."

"Certainly." Tom Merry shut the door. "Now, look here, old man—"

"I meant with yourselves on the other side of it," exclaimed Kildare, laughing in spite of himself. "Are you going out, or shall I have to pitch you out?"

"Under the circumstances—"

Kildare rose to his feet. Tom Merry hastily opened the door. Manners and Lowther executed a strategic movement into the passage. Tom Merry lingered in the doorway to make a last attempt to bring the captain of St. Jim's to reason.

"Kildare, old man— Ow!"

The Sixth Former's strong hand descended upon Tom Merry's collar, and he was lifted from the floor, swinging clear in the air.

"Ow!" he gurgled. "Groo! Oh!"

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Biff!
The hero of the Shell went spinning out into the passage. He crashed into Manners and Lowther, and sent them both spinning. The Terrible Three rolled on the floor, yelling.

Kildare's door shut with a bang.

"Ow!"

"Ow!"

"Yah!"

Tom Merry & Co. picked themselves up ruefully. They were not much hurt, but they were very dusty indeed, and extremely exasperated.

"It's no go!" growled Manners.

Monty Lowther sniffed.

"I said it was a rotten idea from the start!" he growled.

"Oh, rats!"

"Look here, Tom Merry—"

"More rats!"

And thus amiably discoursing, the chagrined and dust-stained heroes of the Shell tramped disconsolately down the passage.

Kildare, in his study, laughed. It was like his old laugh. But as his eyes fell again upon the letter on the table, his face became grave, and a worn look came into his eyes. He picked up the letter, and held it tightly in his hand.

"The mater," he whispered aloud. "If—if I could only go to her! But—but I can't—I can't desert the fellows on the eve of the biggest match of the season!"

The captain of St. Jim's paced the study restlessly. He was not thinking now of the morrow's match—of the stern struggle that lay before St. Jim's First. He was thinking of a kind and loving face, now pale with sickness—a face he had always loved and honoured. His own handsome, healthy face was strangely haggard now. If he had worse news—if there was danger—he shuddered at the thought. How would he be able to stand by his comrades then—nay, if he did so, how was he likely to help them in their fight against heavy odds—with his thoughts elsewhere, and anxiety and black care eating at his heart? Kildare groaned aloud.

He paused in his hurried pacing of the study, and looked in the glass. It showed him a strange change in his face—the reflection that looked out at him from the mirror was pale, worn, harassed, almost haggard. Kildare clenched his hand hard.

"I must stand by the fellows—they depend on me! But—but— Oh, mother!"

CHAPTER 6. Tar and Feathers.

"TAH!"
"What?"
"And feathers!"

"Eh?"

"Tah and feathers!"

Jack Blake, Digby, and Herries suspended their various occupations to fix their eyes upon the swell of St. Jim's. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had been seated for some little time in silence, in Study No. 6 in the Fourth Form passage.

He was evidently thinking something over deeply, but Blake and Herries and Digby had been busy with their preparation, and they did not notice his deep abstraction till he broke the silence at last with those incomprehensible ejaculations.

"What are you babbling about?" asked Blake politely.

"Weally, Blake—"

"He's wandering!" said Digby soothingly. "It's the shock of having his trousers made dusty. You can't expect Gussy to recover from that in a hurry. He'll begin to babble of green brooks presently!"

"Weally, Dig—"

"He'd better not babble here," said Herries. "I've got to get my prep. done, or I shall be late feeding Towser—"

"Weally, Hewwies—"

"Shut up, and let a chap get his work done!" said Blake crossly. "We shall have little Lathou ragging us in the morning."

"Tah—"

"What?"

"And feathers!"

"You utter ass—"

"I wefuse to be called an uffah ass, Blake!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, with a great deal of dignity. "Undah the circs, I see only one wresource. This studay has been insulted in the most outwageous mannah by Knox. He has chased us about with a cane uttably wegardless of our personal dig."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I fail to see any cause for wibald laughter. I wegard it as impwative to bwing Knox to his senses, and for that weason, I have thought the mattah out. Of course, it's only wight and pwopah to wespsect constituted authorities, and I

would be the last fellow in the world to recommend waggin' a prefect. But ciro, atah cases, you know. Knox has tweated us with gwoos diswespect, and I wegard it as our dutay to punish him."

"Hear, hear!"

"I am glad to see that you agwee with me," said D'Arcy encouraged. "I twust you will back me up in punishin' the uttah cad."

"Certainly!" said Blake. "Shall we boil him in oil, or strew the hungry churchyard with his bones? Personally, I'm not particular which."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Pway don't talk out of your hat, Blake! I have wesolved that there is only one adequate way of punishin' Knox, and that is by givin' him a dose of tah and feathahs."

"Tar and feathers?"

"Yaas, wathah, deah boys! It is dwastic, but strictly mewited, in my opinion," said D'Arcy.

"The brute deserves it, anyway, if it's only for venting his rotten spite on us because Kildare won't have him in the first eleven," growled Blake.

"My hat—yes!" agreed Digby.

"But you can't tar-and-feather a prefect," said Blake disconsolately.

"Pway, why not, deah boy?"

"Because he's too big and strong, for one thing, ass!" snapped Blake.

"Bai Jove! I nevah thought of that, deah boys!"

Arthur Augustus put up his monocle. In the first flush of hope, the idea of tar-and-feathering a prefect had been very alluring.

But a few moments' reflection convinced the chums of the Fourth that D'Arcy's idea was too ambitious. Such a flagrant breach of the rules would surely be heavily punished by the Head. Knox was a prefect, and therefore the Head would be bound to uphold him.

"Wotten!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "I'm afraid Blake is wight, deah boys. The thing's impess. Hard lines—wotten hard lines!"

Blake snorted.

"I know where there's a tar-pot handy, anyway," said Digby, in a brighter tone.

"Let's wisk it, deah boys!" suggested Arthur Augustus enthusiastically.

"Ass!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"What would we carry the tar in, to begin with, anyway?" said Herries.

"My hat—"

"No; Gussie's hat!"

"You wudiculous beast, Blake!"

"One of his nice shiny toppers would be just the thing," went on Blake relentlessly.

"If you dare to cawwy tah in one of my toppahs, Blake—"

"Oh, ring off, Gussy!" growled Blake. "Besides, there's no danger."

"I don't know about that," said Digby. "What price tar-and-feathering Knox's study?"

Blake leaped to his feet. Arthur Augustus favoured Digby with an approving glance through his monocle. Herries was interested at once.

"The very thing!" cried all the chums together.

"Let's—"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Gussy can go for the tar."

"Weally, Blake—"

"We should enjoy the jape all the better if we saw him carrying the tar-pot across the quad," went on Blake, with a grin. "Buck up, ass! We're in a hurry!"

"You wottah, Blake!"

"But you're a fellow of tact and judgment, aren't you?" said Herries. "Tell him where to find that tar-pot, Dig."

"Taggles has been using one on the woodshed. I saw he had left it there when I passed," said Digby. "Buck up, Gus!"

"I wefuse!"

"I thought he'd make a muck of the idea!" groaned Blake.

Arthur Augustus turned to his chum to administer stern reproof, but words utterly failed him. The idea of carrying a tar-pot across the quad, as Blake had suggested was very distressing to the swell of the School House.

"I suppose I shall have to do it myself," went on Blake.

"Come on, you kids! Let's get one of his toppers to put the tar in!"

"If you dare to put tah in one of my toppahs, Blake, I'll—I'll give you a most feahful thwashin!"

"Rats!" exclaimed Blake, making for the door.

But Arthur Augustus got there before him.

"Out of the way, ass!" cried Blake.

"Wats! You're not goin' to use my toppahs, deah boy!" said Arthur Augustus defiantly.

"Blithering donkey!" went on Blake. "I don't intend to, while a watering-can will do!"

The swell of the School House glared at Blake, but he did not impede his progress any longer.

"Don't mind Gussy kids," continued Blake. "You get the feathers, while I look after the tar. Buck up! Scat!"

"Where the dickens shall we get them?" asked Herries and Digby as Blake turned to go.

"My only hat! I hadn't thought of that," said Blake.

Arthur Augustus maintained a dignified calm while the other three tried to think it out.

"Oh, hang it!" said Digby. "I can't think of anything!"

Arthur Augustus coughed.

"I shall be pleased to assist you, if Blake will apologise for his wude wemarks."

"Sorry, Gussy!" said Blake promptly.

D'Arcy was too good-natured a fellow to be dissatisfied with such an offhand apology. In view of the urgent business in hand, he waived all claims to more respect from Blake.

"I propose to wip open the boundah's bed, deah boys," he said. "While Blake goes for the tah," he added quickly.

"There will be plenty of feathahs in Knox's bed."

"Let me kiss him for his mother!" cried Blake.

"Pway don't be a silly ass, Blake!"

"It's a ripping idea!" said Herries.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What are you cackling at?" demanded Herries, looking round in astonishment.

"Ha, ha, ha! Ripping!"

"Bai Jove! I wegard that as wathah funnay!"

"What's funny?" roared Herries. "What are you getting at? I—"

"The pun, deah boy. Ha, ha, ha!"

"Pun! Who's making puns?" demanded Herries.

"Why, you did," said Blake. "Gussy suggested ripping open Knox's bed to get the feathers, and you said it was a ripping idea. Ha, ha, ha!"

Herries grunted.

"What rot! Do you think I'm taking to making rotten puns, like Monty Lowther?" he demanded. "Shut up cackling, and let's get on with the washing!"

Blake chuckled.

"Right-ho!" he said. "I'll get the tar. If Gussy won't lend me his topper—"

"Weally, Blake—"

"I'll get it in a water-can. You fellows buzz off to Knox's study—the brute's gone out with Sefton now. I know—and get the bed open, and I'll bring in the tar."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Herries, Digby, and D'Arcy, dropping all thought of preparation—in spite of the danger of wrath from Mr. Lathom on the morrow—made their way to Knox's study. They reached it, and entered without ceremony, and closed the door.

Then they commenced operations. There was no time to waste. The mattresses were dragged off the bed in the alcove, and Herries' pocket-knife ripped them open. The contents were dragged out in a heap on the study floor.

D'Arcy surveyed the heap through his monocle with considerable satisfaction.

"Wippin', deah boys!" he remarked.

The juniors swung round as the door was quickly opened. But it was only Jack Blake! He hurried into the study, and threw the door shut, and set down a water-can brimming with tar, and unrolled a tar-brush from the newspaper it was wrapped in.

"Bai Jove! That's all wight!"

Blake chuckled as he dipped the brush into the tar.

Splash! Splash! Splash!

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Blake was very active with the tar-brush. If he had been given a shed to tar he might not have wired in with such keenness; but he was farring the inside of a study, not the outside of a shed, and that made all the difference. Tar was smothered on the bed, on the walls, on the looking-glass, on the shelves and the bookcase, the table, and the floor. Taggles's tar was quickly exhausted.

"There," said Blake, swinging the tar-brush, "that's about all I—"

"Ow! Yawwoh!"

"What's the matter, Gussy?"

"Ow! You uttah ass!" shrieked D'Arcy. "You have dabbed that wotten bwush on my twousahs—ow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's not a laughin' mattah, you uttah asses! My twousahs are wuined. I—"

"Buzz out the feathers," said Blake.

"Weally, Blake—"

"No time to waste! We don't want Knox to come back and catch us here!"

"Phew! No!"

That thought was quite enough to make the juniors hurry. With busy hands they scattered the feathers over the wet tar. It was the work of but a few minutes. They were sorry it was not Knox himself who was undergoing the operation at their hands; but the study, at all events, was thoroughly tarred and feathered. The young rascals surveyed their handiwork with joyous chuckles when it was completed. "Buzz off!" said Blake. And with cautious steps the juniors "buzzed," leaving the study door wide open to greet Knox upon his return.

CHAPTER 7.

KNOX is a Little too Hasty.

HA, ha, ha!"

"My hat! Ha, ha, ha!"

Knox, of the Sixth, heard the roars of laughter as he came along the passage. He stared as he saw Lefevre and Hodgson, of the Fifth, outside his study door. The study door was wide open, and the two Fifth-Formers were staring in, and roaring with laughter. What there might be to laugh at in his study, Knox could not imagine, unless the two Fifth fellows had been playing some trick there. Knox's eyes glittered at the thought.

He had a special dislike for Lefevre, of the Fifth, not because Lefevre had ever offended him in any way, but because the captain of the Fifth was in the School Eleven, which was to meet Southwood United on the morrow. Knox flattered himself that, even if he was not up to Darrel's form in the front line, he was equal to anybody in the school at keeping goal.

He had kept goal on several occasions for the first eleven, but Kildare had chosen to leave him out on this one, and to put Lefevre between the posts. Knox would have been very glad of an excuse for hammering Lefevre in consequence.

Lefevre and Hodgson turned their heads at the sound of the prefect's rapid footsteps. Knox glared at them as he came breathlessly up.

"What's the joke here?" he demanded roughly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look here, you silly asses—"

"Ha, ha! Look in your study!" roared Lefevre. "Ha, ha, ha!"

Knox hurried on to the open doorway, and looked into his study. For a moment he stood rooted to the floor, petrified by what he saw. The study had changed very much since he had last seen it. Tar and feathers were everywhere. Tar was dabbed on the walls, and the glass, and the table and chairs, and on the bed, and feathers adhered to the tar.

The aspect of the study would have infuriated the owner, if he had been the mildest-tempered fellow in the school. And Knox was not the mildest-tempered fellow in the school—he was very far from that. Knox's temper was the worst temper that St. Jim's could boast, and the prefect was not much accustomed to keeping it in control.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Lefevre. He did not like the prefect, any more than the prefect liked him, and Knox's face amused him at that moment. "My hat, it's funny—that's what I say—very funny! Ha, ha, ha!"

It needed only Lefevre's remark to rouse Knox. The Sixth-Former, black with fury, turned upon him.

"You hound!" he roared. "I—I—"

"Hold on!" gasped Lefevre. "I—oh! Yaroooh!"

Knox had grasped him round the neck, and with a swing of his powerful arms, he whirled the Fifth-Former into the tarry and feathery study. Lefevre crashed upon the floor, but he had hold of the prefect, and he dragged Knox down with him.

"Hold on!" gasped Hodgson. "What the—"

"You hound!" yelled Knox. "I'll teach you—"

"Oh! Ow! Oh!"

Knox hammered the Fifth-Former furiously. Lefevre strove in vain to defend himself against the infuriated attack, but he was no match for the prefect. Knox dragged him round the study, dabbing his face, and rolling his clothes in the tar and feathers till he was as tarry and feathery as the furniture in the study.

"Ow! ow! ow!" roared Lefevre. "That's what I say! Rescue! Yow!"

Hodgson rushed into the study. He did not much like the task of tackling the furious prefect at that moment, but he could not abandon his chum to Knox's tender mercies. He tried to drag the prefect off Lefevre.

Knox hit out savagely, and his fist caught Hodgson in the wind, and the Fifth-Former gave a gasp of agony, and rolled over helplessly on the floor.

"Grooooooooooch!"

"Ow!" roared Lefevre. "Help!"

Hammer, hammer, hammer! It had flashed into Knox's mind that if Lefevre had a record hammering, he would not

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be fit to play on the morrow, and the prefect might have a chance of keeping goal against United after all. It needed only that thought to bring out all the brutality of the bully of the Sixth.

Lefevre's wild yells rang along the passage, as he struggled in the grasp of the prefect. Knox rolled in the tar with him, and he was now almost as tarry and feathery as Lefevre. But he did not care, so long as he punished the Fifth-Former thoroughly.

There were excited voices and hurried footsteps in the Sixth-Form passage. Fellows came running along, and Kildare was the first to reach the study doorway. He gazed in astonishment. Hodgson was lying gasping painfully on the floor in a pool of tar, and Knox and Lefevre were rolling over, tarry and feathery, and the Sixth-Former was punching his victim in a way a prize-ring pugilist would have disdained.

Kildare's brows knitted.

"Stop that!" he shouted.

Hammer, and hammer, and hammer! Knox's blows descended as fast as ever; and the St. Jim's captain dashed into the study, grasped the prefect in his powerful hands, and tore him away from his victim.

"You cowardly cad!" he exclaimed hotly. "How dare you hit a fellow like that!"

Knox staggered to his feet, his face blazing with rage through its patches of tar and feathers.

"Look what he's done to my study!" he yelled.

"Whatever he's done, you've no right to hit him like that."

"I'll—"

"If you touch him again, Knox, I'll send you spinning!" said Kildare, in a low, quiet voice. "Help Lefevre up, Rushden."

Rushden helped the Fifth-Former to his feet. Lefevre was staggering with weakness. His face was bruised, and he could hardly get his breath.

"The rotten bully!" he muttered. "This—this is because he was left out of the team, and I was put in, the rotter!"

"Look how he's treated my study!" howled Knox.

"I didn't!" gasped Lefevre.

"Liar!"

"I tell you—"

"He didn't," panted Hodgson, "and you're a cowardly cad to hit me below the belt, Knox!"

"I came up, then, just as they were chuckling over it!" said Knox, between his teeth.

"Did you do it, Lefevre?"

"No!"

"Who did?"

"I haven't the faintest idea!" gasped Lefevre. "That's what I say, and it's the truth. Hodgy and I were coming along to your study to speak to you about the footer practice, and as Knox's door was wide open, we couldn't help seeing in. Of course, we laughed. Somebody's been tarring and feathering Knox's study—some junior, I suppose, that he's been bullying. Serve him jolly well right."

Knox's face was a study.

He could see now that he had been too hasty. He had jumped to conclusions when he had seen the two Fifth-Formers laughing outside the study doorway, but a moment's reflection ought to have convinced him that Fifth-Form fellows would not play so wild a trick on the Sixth.

Not that Knox was sorry for the mistake!

Lefevre had been so thoroughly knocked out that on the morrow he was pretty certain to be one mass of aching bones from head to foot, and no more fit to take his part in a football match than in an aviating competition.

Kildare looked at the prefect sternly.

"I suppose you can see that you were mistaken?" he exclaimed.

"I—I suppose so," muttered Knox. "But what was I to think. They were standing here, yelling with laughter like a pair of lunatics, and as soon as I saw into the study I saw it was smothered with tar and feathers. Of course, I concluded they had done it."

"You had no right to conclude anything of the sort," said Kildare sharply, "and if the Head were to see Lefevre now, you wouldn't remain a prefect another five minutes."

"I'm sorry," muttered Knox.

"That won't help Lefevre."

"I'll find the fellow that did this," said Knox, with a savage look round the study. "I'll make every bone in his body ache! I'll—"

"No, you won't!" said Lefevre. "You've done enough in that line, you cad! You deserve all you've had, and if you touch any of the kids for it, I'll go straight to the Head and show him what you've done to me. I mean that!"

"Look here—"

"Nuff said," said Lefevre. "If I were your size I'd have you in the gym, and thrash you within an inch of your life, you cad!"

"I—"

"Mind, you don't lay a finger on the chap who tarred your study," said Lefevre. "I'll show you up to the Head if you do. And if I find out who it was, I'll have him to tea in my study."

And Lefevre staggered out of the room. The other fellows followed him, and Kildare was left with Knox. The St. Jim's captain's face was as hard as iron. Knox looked at him with a savage sneer.

"Well, have you got anything to say?" he demanded.

"Yes," said Kildare quietly. "You're a cowardly brute, Knox, and you've no right to be a prefect. I can't help suspecting that you've hammered Lefevre like that to have a chance of taking his place to-morrow."

Knox sneered.

"Come to think of it, he won't be much good in goal," he remarked.

"No," said Kildare. "Perhaps not. But you won't go into goal, Knox. I wouldn't let you take his place if there wasn't another man to be found. I'd rather play ten men than put you in the team. You're a rotten cad!"

"Look here, Kildare, there's a limit to what I will stand, even from you!" Knox began fiercely.

Kildare gave him a scornful look.

"If you don't like my words, I'm willing to have the gloves on with you any time you like!" he said contemptuously.

Knox made no reply.

Kildare quitted the study, and Knox was left in the room to survey the wreck. Matters had been bad enough when Jack Blake & Co. had left it, but the rough-and-tumble fight there had made them decidedly worse. Tar and feathers—feathers and tar—everything in the study was smothered with them.

Knox ground his teeth with bitter rage as he looked round him. Himself and his own clothes looked as feathery and tarry as the room he was standing in. And there was no redress, for he knew that Lefevre would keep his word, and he dared not have his hasty brutality brought to the notice of the Head. He had to grin and bear it, or to bear it, at all events, if he did not grin.

"Hang them!" he muttered savagely. "Hang them! But—but Lefevre won't be able to keep goal to-morrow. I'm jolly sure of that. And Kildare hasn't a decent goal to put in, unless he takes Baker out of the half-line, and then he would want a new half. He may have to play me, whether he likes it or not—hang him!"

And somewhat comforted by that reflection, Knox proceeded to clean the tar off himself as well as he could. But it was a long and a painful task, and the state of Knox's temper during the process was simply indescribable. For a long time afterwards it was not safe for a junior to come near Knox, and there were at least four juniors who were very careful indeed not to do so, and those four, needless to say, were the chums of Study No. 6.

CHAPTER 8. Gussy's Latest.

THE bad news that had come to Kildare was soon known to all St. Jim's, and when he appeared the next morning a good many fellows looked at him curiously. It was easy to see the marks of grief and anxiety in the anxious face of the captain of St. Jim's. Kildare was waiting on the steps of the School House for the postman long before there was any chance of Blagg arriving. When the fellows spoke to him, their sympathy was apparent in their looks and in their words. There was hardly a fellow in the school who did not feel sorry; but it was true, too, that there was keen anxiety as to the match. If Kildare was called away from St. Jim's just before the United match, there was not the ghost of a chance for St. Jim's; upon that point there could be no doubt whatever. Kildare was the life and soul of the team: without him, they could have met a schoolboy team, but they would be simply walked over by a team like Southwood United. Unless the worst came to the worst, Kildare would not go; but if he went, the last chance of a victory would go with him.

Kildare knew it.

But even if he did not go—if his mother became worse, if he was alarmed and anxious—what would his play be like? The fellows realised, with deep dismay, that matters might be just as bad if Kildare stayed if he was off colour.

It was not as if it was an ordinary match. St. Jim's First needed to be at their full strength to have a chance against United at all; and Darrel, the second best man in the eleven, was already crooked. Lefevre, who was a good goalkeeper, was crooked too, now, as a matter of fact. The heavy punishment he had received the day before at Knox's hands did not leave him in a state to play a good game.

Misfortunes never come singly. The loss of Darrel and

Lefevre the team might have stood; but if their captain failed them, all was over.

And the St. Jim's realised, with reddening cheeks, the unpleasant position they would stand in if they were walked over by United. A defeat would be bad enough, if they put up a good fight, and were defeated by a narrow margin; but if they were overwhelmed, and beaten by some ridiculous total of five or six goals to one or nil, they would never dare to hold up their heads after it. They would be considered to have "bitten off more than they could chew," and to have been properly put in their place for their cheek. It would be cruelly unjust, under the peculiar circumstances, but that was undoubtedly the view that everyone would take of the matter.

Kildare was thinking of this, as well as of his own private troubles, as he stood on the steps waiting for the arrival of the postman that keen, clear winter's morning. Three juniors came out of the School House and paused on the top step, and stood regarding him dubiously. They were Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther. They wanted to speak to him—that was very evident—but they hesitated.

Kildare glanced at them, and smiled his usual kind smile. Kildare would always have had a kind heart and a kind smile, especially for fellows younger than himself, though troubles had piled never so thickly upon him.

The chums of the Shell, encouraged by his smile and his cheery nod, came up.

"We—we want to speak to you, Kildare," said Tom Merry, colouring.

"No more of that nonsense of yesterday, I hope," said the captain of St. Jim's, frowning a little.

Tom Merry shook his head hastily.

"No, no! I—I want to tell you I—I'm sorry we bothered you about it yesterday, Kildare. I—I didn't know then about your having had a letter from home—about your mater being seedy. I wonder you didn't kick us out of the study!"

Kildare smiled.

"It's all right, kids."

"We're sorry," said Tom Merry.

"All serene."

The Terrible Three moved away, relieved at having got that matter off their consciences. It had troubled them considerably, ever since they had heard of Kildare's bad news from home.

"Not that I've changed my opinion," Tom Merry confided to Manners and Lowther, "but it's no good bothering old Kildare now. He doesn't see the thing the way we do, and we're not going to give him any more trouble than he has at present."

"Hear, hear!" said Monty Lowther.

And Manners nodded assent.

The local postman came plodding across the quadrangle with his bag. Kildare came down off the School House steps and walked hastily to meet him.

"Anything for me?" he asked quickly.

Blagg nodded. Blagg was red and ruddy, and his breath was like steam on the frosty air.

"Yes, Master Kildare, there's a letter for you."

And Blagg sorted it out, and handed it to the captain of St. Jim's. Kildare took it quickly, and walked away under the eaves to open it. His face was very pale. Was it bad news or better that he was to find in the letter? For a moment he hardly dared to open it; then, with an effort, he tore the envelope wide.

He looked eagerly over the letter within, and a sigh rose to his lips. He crushed the letter in his hand.

"The poor mater!"

It was much the same as the last letter. His mother was no better, and no worse; and if there was bad news in the day, a wire would be sent to call him home.

Kildare put the letter into his pocket, and walked back to the School House. Several of the seniors met him on the steps.

"No change," said Kildare, in reply to Darrel's inquiring look. "Yes; the letter's from home. The mater's just the same."

"You haven't got to go home, then?" asked Rushden.

Kildare shook his head.

"No; if the mater is much worse, the dad's going to wire me to-day, and then I can go. So he says here."

"That will be pretty rough on the team," North remarked.

Kildare flushed.

"I suppose it will," he said. "I sha'n't go if I can possibly help it, you may be sure of that. In any case, I shall buzz off home the moment the match is over; but if it can possibly be helped, I sha'n't cut the match."

"But do you feel fit, old man?" asked Darrel.

Kildare smiled rather wanly.

"I shall play up, at all events," he said.

He went into the School House. Knox, the prefect, who had been standing on the steps with his hands in his pockets,

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listening to all that passed, looked after the captain of St. Jim's with a peculiar sneering smile upon his face. Some strange idea seemed to have crossed Knox's mind, which brought that peculiar look to his face and a strange glitter to his eyes.

"It's rough on Kildare!"

That was the general opinion. Many fellows said it was rough on the school too, but it was certain that Kildare would not abandon his side if he could possibly help it.

The powerful brain of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was working on that subject. The swell of St. Jim's was looking very thoughtful as he sat at the breakfast-table with the Fourth. When the juniors came out after breakfast, Arthur Augustus broke silence, and acquainted his chums with the valuable thoughts that were stirring in his mental department.

"I've thought of somethin', deah boys!" he remarked. "I wathah think I can see the way out of this difficult posish for Kildare."

"Go hon!" said Blake.

"You see, Kildare ought not weally to have to play, even for his school's sake, while his matah is lyin' ill," said D'Arcy. "I feel for him, you know."

"So do we all," grunted Herries.

"Yaas, wathah! But I have thought of a way of helpin' him out of his doocid awkward posish, deah boys."

"Well, what's the way?" demanded Blake.

"Suppose a new skippah were selected for the eleven——"

"Oh, bosh!"

"Weally, Blake——"

"Darrel's the only chap who could captain anything like Kildare, and Darrel's crooked," said Digby.

"I was not thinkin' of a seniah!" said Arthur Augustus loftily.

The juniors stared at him.

"My hat!" ejaculated Blake, as his elegant chum's meaning dawned upon him. "My only summer chapeau!"

"Weally, deah boy——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I fail to see any cause whatever for wibald laughtab," said the swell of St. Jim's, in his most stately way. "I twust I'm not the sort of chap to put myself forward in any way; but, undah the circe, I wegard it as only decent to offah to welieve Kildare of his duties as skippah of the first eleven. I weally do not see why I could not captain a team against Southwood United."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, you fellows——"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the juniors.

"You uttah asses!"

Blake laughed till he wept. Three juniors who had come out of the New House sauntered up and demanded to know the joke. Blake was only too pleased to tell them.

"Oh, Figgy, it's Gussy's latest!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Figgins, in anticipation.

"Weally, Blake——"

"The very latest!" sobbed Blake. "He's going to offer Kildare to captain the team for him this afternoon against United!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Figgins & Co. yelled. Blake and Herries and Digby yelled. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy jammed his monocle into his eye, and surveyed them with immeasurable scorn, and stalked away with great dignity. He left them yelling.

CHAPTER 9.

Goals and Gauls.

DURING morning lessons at St. Jim's that Wednesday it is to be feared that more thought was given to the United match than to class-room work, especially in the junior Forms.

Fourth Form and Shell were intensely interested in the match, although, apparently, they were not to be represented in it, and it loomed larger in their minds than the Gallic War or the Conspiracy of Catiline.

Indeed, Tom Merry had not yet given up hope of seeing a junior in the team, and he discussed the matter in low tones with Manners and Lowther, what time Mr. Linton, the master of the Shell, was discoursing upon the subject of early Roman history.

"What are they going to do for a goalkeeper?" Tom Merry asked.

And Manners and Lowther shook their heads. They had seen Lefevre that morning, and it was pretty certain that if he played it would result in an abnormal score for the United. Lefevre himself realised that he would have to be dropped, and he was considerably glum about it. The question that interested the juniors was who would be played in the place of Lefevre in goal.

"Kildare won't give the place to Knox," Tom Merry sagely observed. "It would be like rewarding him for

knocking poor old Lefevre out. Between ourselves, it's pretty plain that the brute knocked Lefevre about like that so as to get a chance of replacing him."

"Clear as daylight," said Monty Lowther.

"Kildare won't let him do it," Tom Merry said confidently. "Now, if they had sense enough, they could put Fatty Wynn in goal. It's quite certain that he's the best goalie at St. Jim's, junior or senior."

"New House bouncer, though!" said Manners dubiously. "It would make Figgins & Co. crow no end."

"That doesn't matter, so long as we get a junior into the team," said Tom Merry. "Fatty Wynn ought to be shoved in, and we'll go and cheer."

"That's all very well——"

"If course it is!" agreed Tom Merry. "I don't want to bother Kildare any more now, but I should really like to point that out to him."

"Order of the boot again, I expect!" grinned Manners.

Tom Merry smiled.

"I shouldn't wonder," he assented. "But if they don't play Fatty Wynn, my sons, who are they going to play in goal?"

"Merry!"

Mr. Linton's sharp voice interrupted Tom Merry's surmises upon the subject of the goalkeeper for the United match. Tom Merry turned red. In his keen interest in the subject, he had forgotten for the moment that he was in the Form-room, and that Mr. Linton's voice was droning on about the invasion of Brennus.

"Ye-e-es, sir," stammered Tom Merry.

"What did you just say to Lowther?"

"I, sir?"

"Yes, you."

"Ahem, sir——"

"Will you kindly repeat what you said, Merry?"

"Certainly, sir."

"Well, I am waiting."

"I—I said, sir——"

"Well?"

"Who are they going to play in goal, sir?"

Mr. Linton stared.

"What can you possibly mean, Merry? The lesson is on the subject of the war with Gaul, not about any play in Gaul. What do you mean by play in Gaul? Are you referring to some of the ancient sports and pastimes of the Gallic tribes?"

There was a faint chuckle in the Shell.

Tom Merry turned crimson. Mr. Linton, it is true, knew much more about Gauls and Romans than about goals and footballs; but this was a peculiar misunderstanding, even for him.

"Ahem, sir! I—I wasn't speaking of Gaul, sir——"

"What were you speaking of, then?"

"Goal, sir!"

"Goal! What do you mean by goal, Merry? What has goal to do with the invasion of Italy by Brennus and the Gauls?"

"N-n-nothing, sir."

"Oh! You were speaking of some matter quite apart from the subject of the present lesson!" exclaimed Mr. Linton, apparently in the greatest astonishment.

Tom Merry's face was a study in scarlet.

"Ye-e-es, sir," he stammered.

"And what was the subject?"

"Football, sir."

Mr. Linton seemed to tower majestically over his class in his indignation.

"Is it possible, Merry, that you have been thinking of a trifling game, instead of absorbing knowledge on the subject of Brennus's invasion of Rome?"

Tom Merry almost grinned. He wondered how many boys would have preferred Brennus's invasion of early Rome to football.

"If you please, sir——"

"I am shocked, Merry—shocked and surprised!"

"I—I—I'm sorry, sir."

"Very well. Perhaps you had better stay in this afternoon, Merry, and study the subject of the Gallic invasion."

Tom Merry turned quite pale.

"Oh, sir!" He stared at the Form-master in utter dismay. "Stay in, and miss the United match? Oh, sir! I—I—I'm sorry, sir!"

The anguish in his face almost made Mr. Linton smile, annoyed as he was.

"Well, well, Merry, I will not detain you this afternoon, if you have any special occupation," he said. "You may do a hundred lines instead."

"Oh, thank you, sir!" said Tom Merry, with a sigh of relief.

Never had he been so thankful to receive lines.

There was no danger of any more talking in the Shell

Form-room that morning. The mere thought of being detained for the half-holiday and missing the great match made the juniors as docile as lambs. Mr Linton was very pleased with his class after that—so pleased that when he dismissed them after morning lessons he graciously remitted Tom Merry's hundred lines.

"You need not write out that imposition, Merry," he said. "But, remember, there is a time for all things, and the Form-room during lessons is not the place to discuss football."

"Thank you, sir! I will remember," said Tom Merry gratefully.

And he went out with his chums in the greatest of spirits, feeling that Mr. Linton was not such a bad sort of chap, though it would probably have given the master of the Shell an electric shock if he had known that he was thought of as a "chap" at all.

CHAPTER 10.

A Really Kind Offer.

II TWIST you chaps approve of my ideah?"

"Never knew you had one!" yawned Blake.

"Weally, Blake—"

"Where did you get it?"

"Beggod, borrowed, or stolen it?" asked Digby.

"Weally, Dig—"

"Let's go out and get a bit of footer practice before dinner," Herries suggested. "We shan't get a chance this afternoon. We shall be watching the United match."

"Good! Come on!"

"Weally, deah boys—"

"Come on, Gussy. Never mind your idea now. It will keep, if it's not a bad one," said Blake blandly. "Come and punt about the lively leather."

"I wefuse to do anythin' of the sort! I was asking you chaps if you approve of my ideah. You know perfectly well that I mean my ideah of makin' Kildare an offah."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"If you are goin' to weceive my wemarks with wibald laughah, I shall say no more," said Arthur Augustus, with dignity. "Do you chaps know where Kildare is?"

"He went into the prefects' room," said Blake. "I should advise you to leave him alone. For one thing, the poor chap's in trouble."

"But I'm goin' to believe him of his twouble, deah boy."

"Oh, don't be funny!"

"I wefuse to be chawactowised as funny!" exclaimed the swell of St. Jim's indignantly. "And I decline to continue this discuss, with you wotahs!"

"Look here, Gussy—"

The swell of St. Jim's waved his hand disdainfully.

"You have said quite enough, Blake. I wegard you as a wotah! Pway go and eat coke!"

And D'Arcy walked away, with his nose very high in the air. The chums of the Fourth chuckled softly.

"Let's get down to the footer," said Blake. "We shall have to mend Gussy when Kildare's done with him. Come on!"

There was already a crowd of juniors on the ground. They all wanted to get some practice done, with the idea of "chucking" play for the afternoon, so that they could watch the match between St. Jim's First and Southwood United.

Fatty Wynn was in goal, and a crowd of fellows were pelting him with shots, half a dozen footballs being in play, several of them at the same time, but the Falstaff of the New House was never found wanting. Plump as he was, Fatty Wynn was as active as a cricket, and he was "there" all the time, and the leather seldom or never found the net.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, with his mind too loftily occupied just then to think of footer practice, walked away to the prefects' room in search of the captain of St. Jim's. The prefects' room was only used by fellows who had attained the rank of prefects, and juniors were barred; but D'Arcy was going on business—most important business from his point of view—and he entered without hesitation.

Kildare was there alone. He was standing before the open window, looking out into the quad., with his hands in his pockets, and a troubled expression upon his handsome face. He turned round as the swell of St. Jim's came in.

Arthur Augustus coughed.

"Kildare, deah boy—"

"Hallo!" said Kildare.

"I have come to speak to you about a wathah important mattah, deah boy. I twist you will excuse me for invadin' these sacred pwocincts—"

"What on earth are you saying, D'Arcy?" said Kildare, not unkindly.

"This is a pwefects' woom, you know, Kildare, and I have no right here, weally," said Arthur Augustus apologetically.

"Well, D'Arcy?"

"You look quite seedy, deah boy. But I have a pwoposition to make to you, which I have weason to hope will buck you up like anythin', Kildare."

"Oh, I'm all right, thank you, D'Arcy—"

"Excuse me, deah boy, but you don't look it, weally. May I go on? It's about the Southwood United match, you know—"

Kildare turned sharply.

"I thought I had made myself quite clear about that with you chaps," he said.

"Yaas, wathah, Kildare. But the othahs—"

"With all, D'Arcy!"

Arthur Augustus was rather staggered. Not knowing for the moment how to proceed, he took refuge in arranging his monocle. Kildare continued to look steadily through the window.

D'Arcy coughed.

"It's weally vewy decent of you, Kildare, to allow me to talk to you here. Pewwaps I had bettah make a clean breast of it—"

"Clean breast of what?" demanded Kildare suddenly.

Arthur Augustus, to use his own picturesque phrase, was in quite a flutter. But he had a duty to perform in his own estimation, and he did it.

"My wepresentsin' you in the First Eleven, deah boy," he said, with a sufficient calmness. "You are weally too seedy to play, Kildare, and I shall play up like anythin', I assure you."

Kildare looked curiously at the swell of the School House for a moment, then he laughed.

"Thank you very much, D'Arcy—"

"Not at all, deah boy!"

"But it can't be done!" concluded Kildare.

D'Arcy's face fell. He thought Kildare had been going to agree.

"You look feahfully worried, Kildare. Won't you think it ovah, deah boy?" persisted Arthur Augustus. "St. Jim's must win, you know."

"No; I couldn't do it, D'Arcy," said Kildare, with a smile. "Leave me now, there's a good fellow. I don't feel like talking."

"I usually play on the wing, but I'm sure I could play much better at centah, your posish-, deah boy," urged Arthur Augustus. "I'm not afraid of—"

Arthur Augustus stopped speaking as Kildare began to walk round the room. Apparently he had forgotten that D'Arcy was there. The swell of the School House put up his monocle, and surveyed Kildare severely. It was incomprehensible to him that anyone should not heed his remarks. Kildare glanced at him once, but he did not seem to see.

"I was speakin' to you, Kildare, deah boy—"

"Yes; but I've answered you, D'Arcy," returned the captain of St. Jim's.

"But weally, Kildare—"

"Really!"

Arthur Augustus moved towards the door quickly. Kildare's tone was threatening.

"It would be extremewy wotten for St. Jim's to be licked, Kildare," said D'Arcy. "May I make one more appeal to you, deah boy?"

"If you don't go, D'Arcy—"

"Weally, deah boy—"

"Get out!" said Kildare, losing his patience, and pointing to the door.

"You will be sowwy aftahwards that you didn't accept my offah, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus, walking leisurely to the door.

"We'll soon see who's sorry!" said Kildare, making a spring towards him.

The swell of the School House did not stop to argue the point, and the door closed behind him with a bang. Kildare walked back to the window. In half a minute he had forgotten all about D'Arcy. But Arthur Augustus was a determined youth. A thing taken up with him was a thing to be carried through at all costs. He knew that if any other prefects came along and caught him outside the prefects' room, they would probably take the law into their own hands, regardless of Kildare.

These considerations Arthur Augustus decided to disdain. He was out to help Kildare, and he meant to do it, whether Kildare would have it or not. Carefully he approached the prefects' door again.

Kildare, still staring through the window, did not see the handle of the door turn. The door opened. A monocle gleamed round the edge of the door. A soft football, and Arthur Augustus was in the "lions' den" again. Kildare turned.

"You young beggar!" he exclaimed.

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"Weally, you know, Kildare—"

"Out you go!"

"I wefuse! I mean—weally, Kildare, don't you think you had bettah agree—"

"Get out, I tell you!" said Kildare, making a stride towards Arthur Augustus.

The swell of the School House dodged him nimbly, but only for a moment. There was a scramble for two or three moments, and when it was over Arthur Augustus was considerably disarranged.

"You howwid bwute, Kildare! Welease me at once!"

"I will!" grinned Kildare.

Before D'Arcy could quite realise it, he found himself dangling over the quad. outside the window of the prefects' room. Kildare's grip was on the back of his collar, taking in both the collar and the jacket, and Arthur Augustus swung over space with dizzy eyes.

"Now then, you young ass!"

"B-b-bai Jove!" gasped D'Arcy. "You—you are chook-chook-choking me, you know! You are—gwoo—wumplin' my collah feahfully, you know! Ow! Welease me at once, you howwid wuffian! I shall uttably wefuse to offah to do you a service again! Ow!"

"You cheeky young duffer!" said Kildare.

"Ow! Welease me, you howwid boundah! Oh!"

"Certainly!" said Kildare.

He released the swell of St. Jim's suddenly. Arthur Augustus dropped with a bump to the ground. The ground was only a couple of yards below, but Arthur Augustus dropped upon it quite suddenly, and he sat down with considerable violence.

"Ow!" he gasped.

"Now buzz off!" said Kildare curtly.

D'Arcy staggered to his feet.

"Kildare, I wegard you as an uttah boundah! I now withdaw my extremely genewous offah, and I wefuse to ceapain the school team undah any conditions whatevah!"

And Arthur Augustus D'Arcy stalked away in high dudgeon, setting his collar straight as he went with one hand, and groping wildly for his eyeglass with the other.

CHAPTER 11.
The New Goalkeeper.

"I WANT to speak to you, Kildare."

It was an abrupt and unpleasant voice, and Kildare turned round from the window in the prefects' room, to find Knox at his elbow. Kildare's face clouded over. He had never liked Knox, and he liked him less than ever now. The St. Jim's captain was the most unsuspecting of fellows, and he had not been able to suspect Knox of deliberately fouling Darrel to keep the winger out of the match. But what had happened since had convinced even the unsuspecting Kildare. Lefevre could not keep goal for the First, owing to Knox's brutality, and the prefect's motive was quite clear. There was an uncompromising frown on Kildare's face as he met the eyes of the prefect. Kildare was very patient, and very unsuspecting; but when he was certain that a fellow had been guilty of meanness and foul play, he never took the trouble to conceal his scorn.

"What do you want?" he asked abruptly. "The less I have to say to you, Knox, the better I shall like it."

Knox sneered.

"It's about the footer match this afternoon."

"That doesn't concern you."

"I hope it does," said Knox.

"I hear that Lefevre's name has been scratched."

"That is correct. And you know the reason?"

"Yes; he is crooked."

"And you did it," said Kildare, "and I cannot help thinking that you did it on purpose, to spoil him for the match!"

"You've no right to say so."

"I say so because I think so."

"What I was going to say is, who's going to keep goal for the First?"

"I haven't decided yet."

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"You know I'm good in goal."

"If you were better than the best goalkeeper in a League team, you shouldn't keep goal for the team this afternoon!" said Kildare, with a glint in his eyes. "I'm fed up with you, Knox. You'll never play in a team that I captain. I've tried to stand you, because you're a prefect, and because our people are neighbours in Brighton; but now I've seen what an utter cad you are, I don't want to say a word to you. Is that plain enough?"

Knox gritted his teeth.

"Yes; that's plain enough!" he said savagely. "You are going to leave me out of the eleven, then?"

"Most decidedly!"

"Although you know you haven't a goalie so good?"

"There are several just as good, and more honest."

"Look here, Kildare!"

Kildare pointed to the door.

"You'd better leave me alone," he said. "I can't stand you, Knox. I feel sure that you fouled Darrel on purpose, and I know you hammered Lefevre to make him unfit for the match. When I think of it, I can hardly keep my hands off you. You'd better leave me alone."

Knox apparently thought so, too. He turned and quitted the room without another word. But his eyes were glittering with a savage light.

Kildare remained staring out of the window gloomily. He was thinking of the match, and of the goalkeeper that was wanted; but he was thinking, too, of the pale face upon the pillows at home, and of the mother that would have been glad to see her son. As soon as the match was over, he was going—but—

He resolutely put the matter out of his mind; it was unnering him. He had the match to think of, and the time was growing very short.

The loud shouts from the direction of the playing-fields came to his ears.

"Bravo, Wynn!"

"Well saved!"

"Hurrah!"

Kildare started a little. He left the prefects' room, and the House, and strolled down in the direction of the football-ground. The crowd was dense around the junior ground, and seniors as well as juniors were there, looking on at the fine display given by Fatty Wynn.

The fat Fourth Former was warming to his work. Five or six of the best shots in the Lower Forms were pelting him with balls, and Fatty was saving them all. Tom Merry, Blake, Figgins, Kangaroo, and Reilly, were sending in shots in turn, and sometimes together, and Fatty Wynn, active and quick as a cat, saved them all. His fat face was very red, and he was grinning good-humouredly as he tossed out the balls.

Kildare looked on, with a thoughtful expression upon his face.

Three balls came whizzing in together, and there was an exclamation from the crowd. It was certain that Fatty would be "done" this time! But

There was a yell.

"Bravo, Fatty!"

"Hurrah!"

Kildare came forward. The juniors made way for the captain of the school, and the shooting practice stopped. Kildare signed to Fatty Wynn to come out of the goal.

"You seem to be in good form, kid," he remarked.

"Pretty fair," said Fatty Wynn modestly.

"I wonder if you could stop a ball from me?"

"I don't know. I'll try if you like."

"Give me the ball, Tom Merry."

"Here you are!"

Fatty Wynn stepped back between the posts. The crowd looked on breathlessly. Kildare was the best kick at goal that St. Jim's possessed. But Fatty Wynn was a wonderful

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"You cowardly cad!" exclaimed Kildare hotly. "How dare you hit a fellow like that!" Knox staggered to his feet, his face blazing with rage through its patches of tar and feathers. "Look what they've done to my study!" he yelled. (See chapter 12.)

goalie. If he stopped a ball sent in with all Kildare's skill, he would have established his reputation for ever.

"Go it, Fatty!" said Figgins encouragingly. "You can do it."

Fatty Wynn nodded, but he did not speak. He was watching Kildare like a cat.

Kildare brought the ball down goalward, dribbling it neatly, and made a feint of kicking into the far corner of the net.

"Stop it, Fatty!" yelled Figgins, deceived by the captain's tactics, and he half-groaned as Fatty Wynn made no motion.

But Fatty Wynn was right! For even as Figgins shouted, Kildare changed his feet with lightning speed, and sent the ball in with a quick, low shot.

But Fatty Wynn was there. He threw himself down to the ball, and drove it out with his fat fist, and it whizzed past Kildare's foot like a shot.

There was a terrific yell.

"Well saved, Fatty!"

"Bravo!"

Fatty Wynn rose, and grinned serenely. He had saved a most difficult shot, and Figgins rushed into the goal, and slapped him wildly on the back.

Kildare smiled.

"That was well done!" he exclaimed. "Would you like to keep goal for the first eleven this afternoon, Wynn?"

Fatty Wynn almost staggered.

"Keep goal—first eleven!" he murmured.

"Yes."

"You—you—I—you don't mean it!" gasped Fatty Wynn.

"Keep goal for the St. Jim's First! Oh, my only Aunt Sempronia!"

"I do mean it," said Kildare, with a smile. "If you only keep your nerve, you will do splendidly. Would you like to try?"

"Like!" said Fatty Wynn. "Why I'd jump at a chance like that with both feet! Oh, I say, Figgy! Isn't it gorgeous?"

"Hurrah!" roared Figgins.

"Then you'll be ready at two-thirty!" said Kildare. And the captain of St. Jim's walked away, very well satisfied indeed with his selection of a goalkeeper for the United match.

The juniors looked at one another gleefully. Tom Merry and Blake were as pleased as anybody.

"It's ripping!" said Tom Merry. "It was really my

idea, playing a junior in the first eleven; in fact, I suggested it to Kildare. Only what I thought of was, playing me as a forward, instead of Fatty Wynn as a goalie."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But so long as the Lower School has a man in the team, it's all serene," said Tom Merry, slapping Fatty Wynn on the shoulder. "Bravo, Fatty!"

"Hurrah, Fatty!"

"Good old porpoise!"

And a crowd of juniors surrounded the Falstaff of the New House, and lifted him on their shoulders, and bore him away in triumph.

CHAPTER 12.

At the Last Moment.

LONG before the time fixed for the match with the United, the ground was crowded. Nearly all St. Jim's meant to see the match, and all other play at the old school was dropped for the afternoon. Seniors and juniors thronged round the field, and there was a good deal of bustling for favourable places among the School House and New House juniors. Jack Blake & Co. and the Terrible Three stood in a compact group, and resisted all the efforts of New House fellows to dislodge them. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's voice was heard in complaint several times as he received shoves and pushes. More than once the handsome silk hat of the swell of St. Jim's was pushed over his eyes, whether by friends or foes he could not tell.

"I weally wish you fellows would not shove, you know," said Arthur Augustus, with a glance round through his monocle. "On an occasion like this—oh!"

"Hallo! What's the matter now, Gussy?"

"Ow! Some uttah wottah has jerked the stwing of my eyeglass."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It is no laughin' mattah, Tom Mewwy. It has thwown me into quite a futtah!" said the swell of the Fourth indignantly. "I wufuse to be shoved in this mannah!"

"Better get out of the crowd," suggested Figgins.

"Weally, Figgins—"

"You could watch the match with a telescope from the roof of the School House!" Monty Lowther suggested thoughtfully.

"Lowthah, you ass! Oh!"

"What's the trouble now?"

"Some uttah wottah has dug his elbow into my wibs."

"Too bad!" said Monty Lowther. "What do you mean by it, Figg?"

"Eh! I didn't do it," said Figgins.

"Well, don't do it again, then," said Lowther severely. "Gussy's ribs are not to be elbowed in this way. You should remember that Gussy's ribs are descended from a set that came over with the Conqueror."

"Weally, Lowthah, you ass—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yow!"

"Great Scott! There he goes again!" said Manners.

"Some twightful boundah has twodden on my foot."

"Hurt, old son?" asked Blake.

"No, I am not hurt, deah boy—"

"Then what on earth are you making a row about?" demanded Blake indignantly.

"I was not makin' a wow. I was utterin' an exclamation. I feah that the polish on my boot has been injahed—"

"Oh, rats!"

"If you say wats to me, Blake—"

"Rats!"

"Weally—"

"Now, then, make room, you brats!" said an unpleasant voice, and Knox came pushing his way roughly forward, followed by Sefton of the Sixth, of the New House.

There was a yell of defiance from the juniors. On the crowded footer-field, the prefect was not likely to be much regarded. It was not easy to bully a crowd of juniors, excited in temper, and wedged together in great numbers.

"Go and eat coke!"

"Yah!"

"Keep off the grass!"

Knox flushed with rage. He shoved his way violently among the juniors, and tripped over a boot, which probably belonged to Monty Lowther. He came down heavily on his knees, and then somebody sat on his shoulders, and he was squashed flat.

"Oh!" he roared. "You young fiends! Let me get up!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Five or six juniors fell over Knox. The prefect's nose ground deeply into the turf, and he yelled and struggled frantically. Kildare came over from the direction of the pavilion, a frown on his face. The St. Jim's First were already on the ground, and most of them had come out into the field in their colours.

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"Don't make a disturbance there, you youngsters," said the St. Jim's captain.

"We're not, thank you," said Monty Lowther meekly. "There's a chap here on the ground, and he won't lie still."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Lemme gerrup!" came a stifled voice from underneath the juniors.

Kildare laughed in spite of himself.

"Is that Knox?" he exclaimed. "Let him get up immediately."

Knox was allowed to crawl out into view. He was looking very dusty and untidy, and his face was crimson with rage. He seemed inclined to rush savagely at the juniors, but an array of clenched fists and gleaming eyes daunted him. He muttered savagely between his teeth, and scowled at Kildare, and stalked away.

The juniors chuckled softly.

The bully of the Sixth had been defeated; they had got the better of their old enemy. Two or three voices yelled after him to inquire whether he was still fond of tar and feathers, and there was a roar of laughter.

Knox ground his teeth as he strode away with Sefton, and the two cads of the Sixth took up their position in a different part of the field. Sefton looked at Knox in some surprise; Knox's eagerness to witness the match was a surprise to the New House senior.

"What the dooce does the match matter to you?" asked Sefton.

"Hang the match!" said Knox.

"Then why waste time here?"

"I want to see the start."

"Why?"

"Oh, I've my reasons!" growled Knox ungraciously.

There was a shout from the crowd. Fatty Wynn had just come out of the pavilion, arrayed in footer garb. Very plump and fit the Falstaff of the New House looked. He was overtopped by the senior members of the team, head and shoulders; but he looked very strong and sturdy, and very resolute. There was no doubt that Fatty Wynn of the Fourth would do credit to the school that day. The juniors yelled enthusiastically to greet him. For the moment, rivalry between the Houses was forgotten, and School House as well as New House cheered Fatty Wynn. He was a junior playing in the first eleven, and that was enough for Tom Merry & Co. They yelled and waved their caps, and even Arthur Augustus D'Arcy forgot the repose which stamps the caste of Vere de Vere, and waved his silk topper in the air.

"Huwway, huwway, deah boy!"

"Bravo, Fatty!"

"Good old porpoise!"

"Bravo!"

Fatty Wynn grinned at his many friends round the ropes. To the junior section of St. Jim's, there was one player on the field that day, and that one was Fatty Wynn. Even the mighty Kildare did not loom so largely in their eyes.

Fatty Wynn rolled over to the edge of the field to chat with the juniors till he was wanted. Figgins slapped him on the shoulder, and Kerr dug him affectionately in the ribs.

"Good old Fatty!" said Figgins. "Feeling all right?"

"Right as rain!" said Fatty cheerfully.

"Mind you don't let them score!" said Kerr.

"Not if I can help it."

"Yaas, wathah! Pway play up, for the honah of the juniahs, you know," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "We shall all have an eye on you, Fatty, deah boy."

"And we'll stand a big feed afterwards, if you don't let them score," said Lowther.

"What-ho!" said Fatty Wynn.

There was a fresh shout.

"The United!"

The visiting team had arrived.

They came in a brake. The crowd watched them, and gave them a cheer as they met Kildare and his men. Tom Merry looked the United over, and he could not help seeing what a big order the first eleven had taken on, in meeting them.

Southwood United were an older and heavier team in every way. Their average age was about twenty, and at least three of the team were professional players. The three "pro.'s" were as keen as mustard, and evidently regarded the match with a schoolboy team as somewhat in the light of a joke. Probably the United had taken the match on more in the way of practice than of anything else. On Saturdays they were generally playing matches for which gate-money was charged, but Wednesday was an idle day, and their skipper had filled it up with the fixture with St. Jim's. Wimpole, the United skipper, was not what would be called swanking, but it was easy to see that he regarded the match as practically won already, and the coming play simply as a walk-over.

That was so evident that it put up the backs of the St.

Jim's team at once. They were filled with the most intense desire to beat the United, and take them down a peg or two. Hardly a fellow there, in the team or out of it, would not have given half a term's pocket-money to see the visitors licked.

Kildare greeted his visitors politely enough. Wimpole, of Southwood, glanced over the sturdy set of seniors with an approving eye—he saw that the Saints were in good form. He grinned as he saw Fatty Wynn.

"Excuse me," he remarked. "Is that kid in the team?"

Kildare nodded shortly.

"That's our goalkeeper," he said.

"Great Scott!"

Fatty Wynn heard the surprised and not very respectful ejaculation, and he flushed red. He made no remark; but he grimly resolved that the "kid" who amused the United skipper so much, should show that he knew how to keep goal, at all events.

"Fatty will surprise those swanking bounders!" said Figgins confidently.

And all St. Jim's devoutly hoped that he would.

The rival captains tossed for choice of ends. A muttered exclamation from Knox made Sefton look at him sharply. Knox's face was dark with passion.

"What's the matter?" asked Sefton, in wonder.

Knox gritted his teeth.

"Nothing! Hang it! Oh, nothing! Ah!"

Knox's glance had swept round in the direction of the school gates in the distance.

Sefton followed his glance. A boy in uniform was making his way towards the football-ground, and he had a buff-coloured envelope in his hand.

Sefton whistled softly.

"A telegram!" he muttered.

Knox's eyes gleamed.

"Yes; for Kildare!"

"You mean you hope it is," said Sefton, with a grin.

"Yes," said Knox, smiling in a very peculiar way; "he's half expecting one, you know. I hope it is; I've very little doubt of it."

"Kildare! Kildare! Wire for you!"

Kildare swung round suddenly, his face going pale. He had just won the toss against Southwood when the telegraph-boy came on the field.

"For Master Kildare!"

Kildare's hand trembled as he took the telegram.

There was a deadly pause. The Southwood players looked surprised; they did not understand, but all the St. Jim's crowd understood very well. The telegram was for Kildare—from Brighton! It meant bad news. Every eye was fixed upon the captain of St. Jim's.

Kildare tore the envelope open, and looked at the message. The telegram fluttered from his hand to the ground, and with a hoarse cry the captain of St. Jim's staggered back.

CHAPTER 13.

For the Sake of the School.

MONTEITH sprang forward and caught the captain of St. Jim's.

Kildare, deadly pale, with the perspiration clotting his forehead, staggered unsteadily, and leaned upon the New House prefect.

"Bad news?" asked Monteith anxiously.

He hardly needed to ask the question. It was pretty clear that the telegram contained bad news.

"It's from the pater," muttered Kildare.

"And your mother—"

"Read it!"

Kildare pulled himself together. Monteith picked up the telegram and read it, a dozen fellows reading it over his shoulder. It was brief.

"Kildare, School House, St. James's. Worse. Come at once.—FATHER."

Monteith clicked his teeth.

There was a dead silence. The Southwood players were waiting to begin. Mr. Railton, the House-master of the School House, who was refereeing the match, had already put his whistle to his lips, but he lowered it again, and came over to Kildare. Monteith showed the House-master the telegram.

Mr. Railton's face became very grave.

"Your mother, Kildare?" he asked.

Kildare nodded without speaking.

"I am sorry! You are going?"

"I—I must!" muttered the St. Jim's captain.

He cast an almost appealing glance round upon the team. They did not meet his eyes.

There was utter, blank dismay in every face. If Kildare left them now, on the very verge of the match, what would happen? The walk-over the Southwooders so confidently expected would certainly become an accomplished fact. St. Jim's would be beaten, beaten hollow, with a disgraceful margin of goals, and become a laughing-stock. It would not be their fault; it would not be Kildare's fault; it would only be the roughest and cruellest luck. It was rotten—rotten!

"You chaps—what do you say?" muttered Kildare.

There was no reply. The fellows did not like to say what they thought. They wanted Kildare to stay; they wanted him to lead them.

Kildare read it in their faces.

He looked at Mr. Railton. The House-master's face was very grave and anxious. He did not know what to advise the St. Jim's captain to do.

"What shall I do, sir?" muttered Kildare.

"I can hardly say, Kildare." Mr. Railton looked at his watch. "For one thing, there is no train from Rylcombe for thirty-five minutes from now. You could at least begin the match, if you liked—if you feel fit."

"I should have to leave in a quarter of an hour. That would really mean playing the match a man short."

"Yes."

Kildare gritted his teeth. What was he to do? To hesitate to fly to his mother, when she asked for him in the hour of sickness—it seemed impossible! But to abandon his comrades, who relied upon him, at the very last moment, when it was far too late to think of any fresh arrangement—to leave them to sickening defeat and humiliation—how was that possible either?

Monteith fixed an almost beseeching look upon Kildare. Time had been when these two were rivals, when the New House prefect would have been glad of any chance, any accident, that would have given him the captaincy in the place of Kildare. And certainly if Kildare went it was Monteith who would take his place. But that time was past; the only thought in Monteith's mind was to save the match for the school. And without Kildare it could not be saved.

"You—you can't go, Kildare," Monteith muttered at last. "After all, it doesn't say there is danger—it's not so bad as that."

"But—"

"There's a train at half-past four, that catches the express at Wayland," said Monteith. "You could catch that immediately after the match. Taggles could have the trap ready. It's a difference of only an hour and a half."

Kildare groaned.

An hour and a half, when his mother was asking for him on her sick-bed! But he had his duty to do!

The more he felt inclined to fly at once to his home the more it was borne in upon his mind that his duty lay with his comrades at St. Jim's.

He must play—for his school's sake!

"You could send a wire, to say, 'Coming by the four-thirty,'" Monteith suggested. "Don't—don't let me persuade you. But—but we're done for if you go."

"That's certain," said Rushden.

Kildare set his teeth.

"I shall stay," he said.

There was a murmur of relief from the footballers.

Kildare took a telegraph-form from the post-office lad, and Mr. Railton handed him a pencil. He spread out the form on his knee, and wrote quickly:

"Your wire received. Coming by four-thirty.—Eric."

He handed the form to the lad.

"Send that as quickly as you can, kid."

"Yes, sir!"

Kildare straightened up.

"I'm ready," he said.

"Good for you!" muttered Monteith, in great relief.

"Something wrong at home, I suppose?" asked Wimpole, the Southwood captain.

Kildare nodded.

"Yes. I'm sorry to have kept you fellows waiting like this—"

"Oh, that's nothing! Take your time."

"We're ready now."

And the footballers lined up, ten minutes after the time fixed for starting. There was a cheer for Kildare as he took his place in the field. Everybody had seen the telegraph-boy arrive, and enough had been heard and passed from one to another for all the crowd to know what had happened.

"Poor old Kildare!" said Tom Merry. "It's rotten rough on him; but he's going to play, all the same."

"Real grit!" said Figgins.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Good old Kildare!"

But there was one fellow in the crowd who stared at Kildare with glittering eyes, in which rage struggled with incredulity. It was Knox of the Sixth.

"He's going to play, after all!" he muttered thickly.

"Looks like it," assented Sefton.

"It's—it's impossible!" Knox muttered. "The brute—the fool—he must go! He can't play after that telegram!"

"He seems to think that he can!"

Knox clenched his hands.

Phip!

The whistle sounded from Mr. Railton's lips, and the ball rolled from the foot of a Southwood player. It was evident that Kildare was going to play now—the match had started! Still Knox seemed to be almost unable to believe his eyes. He stared blankly at the surging mass of players as the match began.

"Hang him! Hang him!" he muttered.

But Knox's rage and disappointment passed unnoticed. All eyes were upon the field, upon the players who were fighting to uphold the honour of St. Jim's—upon the brave, true-hearted captain, who had crushed down his grief and anxiety at the call of duty, and was facing the enemy with cool and steady determination—for his school's sake!

CHAPTER 14.

The Great Match.

SOUTHWOOD UNITED followed up the kick-off with hard pressing, making matters "hum," as Monty Lowther expressed it, from the very start. That they under-rated their opponents, and fancied that the task they had in hand was far easier than it really was, was quite evident, and all the St. Jim's crowd fervently hoped that they would soon be undeceived as to the quality of the St. Jim's players.

But the rushing, attacking tactics of the United seemed at first to beat all before them. They beat the front line of St. Jim's with ease, and the halves seemed nowhere. The Saints, with bitter chagrin, realised that Kildare was not quite himself. The brave lad had made up his mind to play, and to play hard. But, in spite of himself, the telegram seemed to dance before his eyes, and he saw a pale womanly face instead of the blue shirts of the Southwood footballers. Kildare seemed to be nowhere, and his unaccustomed slackness made his comrades slack down in turn. The Southwood attack bore right through the defence, and the backs were beaten hollow as Wimpole and Hooper of Southwood brought the ball down. Hooper had centred finely to Wimpole, and the Southwood captain shot for goal, and a groan trembled on the lips of the St. Jim's crowd. Wimpole was a keen professional, and well-known for his shooting powers, and it seemed too much to hope that a junior would succeed in stopping the shot, especially when he was discouraged by seeing his side go to pieces before his eyes.

But there was one face in the crowd that never relaxed in its confidence—the face of Figgins of the Fourth. Figgins watched Fatty Wynn—and waited for him to save!

And his faith in his chum was not misplaced!

For Fatty Wynn was "all there." A lump fist met the ball as it came whizzing in, and out it went again. But Hooper was on it in a flash, before the backs could get a chance, and he headed it into goal again. But another head met it there—the round head of Fatty Wynn—and it came out again like a pip from an orange. And then Price, the right back had it, and he swept it up to mid-field with a powerful kick.

There was a roar!

"Well saved, sir!"

"Bravo, Fatty!"

"Good old porpoise!"

Fatty Wynn grinned in the goalmouth. He knew that he had done well, and he intended to keep the ball rolling. The Southwood team were destined to find a surprise packet of the most surprising kind in Fatty Wynn.

The play went back again into the middle of the field, and there the tussle lasted some time. The Southwood forwards tried to get away with the ball, but they tried in vain. For Kildare was rapidly becoming himself again.

He realised that all depended upon him. His unintentional slackness had almost been fatal to St. Jim's. Fatty Wynn had saved the situation, but he might not be able to save it again. Kildare woke up to the needs of the position, and, resolutely casting all other thoughts out of his mind, he threw himself into the game with all his old keenness.

Then there was a change.

The St. Jim's forwards got away, and the fighting for some time was all in the territory of the United.

"Bravo!" yelled Tom Merry. "Kildare's all right now!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

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"Play up, St. Jim's!"

"On the ball!"

"Go it Kildare!"

"Play up, Eric, my son!" shrieked Blake.

"Bai Jove, Kildare is weally wippin' now!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, surveying the match keenly through his monocle. "Wippin', bai Jove! Upon the whole, I'm not weally sowwy that he insisted upon captainin' the team himself; I could not have done bettah than that!"

"Go hon!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"On the ball!" yelled Blake. "Shoot! Shoot!"

The St. Jim's forwards had the ball right up to the goal-mouth now. The Southwood goalie had been strolling about in the goal area and blowing on his hands to keep them warm, indicating very plainly by his manner that he did not think that he would have much work to do. But now he woke up to the realisation that there was fine quality in the schoolboy team, and that if the goal was to remain intact he would have to save it. And now he was as watchful as a cat.

Whiz! came the leather from Monteith's foot. But the goalie fisted it out, and the backs cleared.

"Oh, wats!" said D'Arcy, dropping his eyeglass. "I weally hoped that that was goin' to be a goal, you know!"

"They'll come in time," said Tom Merry.

"I twust so!"

But the goals seemed a long time coming. There was a long tussle in mid-field, and the ball went constantly into touch.

At last Southwood got away again, and came crowding round the home goal. Necks were craned forward to see.

Fatty Wynn was on the watch.

Shots rained in upon him, but never a shot found him wanting.

Head or foot or fist met the leather every time, and wild yells of enthusiasm rose from the crowd as they watched Fatty's splendid play. The Welsh junior did not hear them. All his attention was on the ball.

Thrice, four times, the ball came in, only to be sent whizzing out; then it came a fifth time, bouncing in from the bar. But Fatty Wynn's head was ready for it. He leaped into the air, heading the ball out, and it dropped to Baker, at half. Baker was pelted upon immediately by three Southwooders, but he cleared, and was charged over the next minute. And now Kildare was on the ball, and the St. Jim's front line broke away in good earnest.

Southwood was scattered, and Kildare, Monteith, and Rusden were taking the ball down, passing like clockwork; and for once Southwood seemed nowhere.

Excitement rose to fever-height in the crowd.

The fellows yelled and gasped and strained their eyes to see. Was the bold attempt to materialise? The Southwood backs were ready. Kildare had the ball. He passed it out to Rusden, and eluded the right back, and dashed on, and Rusden let him have it back just in time with a magnificent centre.

Kick!

Right for the net the ball whizzed, true as a die, and it gave the Southwood goalkeeper no earthly chance.

He threw himself at full length in the net in a futile effort to save—but it was quite futile—the ball escaped his fingertips.

It was in the net!

Then a yell broke forth that might have been heard a mile from St. Jim's:

"Goal!"

"Goal! Hurray!"

"Good old Kildare!"

"Goal!"

Pheep!

It was the referee's whistle! The first half was over, and it had ended with a goal up for St. Jim's. And the Saints simply shrieked in their delight!

CHAPTER 15.

A Fight to a Finish.

KILDARE looked all himself as the players came on the field for the second half. A yell of cheering greeted him. The face of the St. Jim's captain was steady and composed. His followers looked elated and determined. In spite of the strength against them they had scored. So far, the match was safe—more than safe.

The Southwood players wore a somewhat peculiar expression. The play had been a surprise to them. It dawned upon them that they would have to fight hard if they were not to be beaten, after all, by the schoolboy team.

Wimpole and his men looked grim and annoyed. There was no doubt that they would put up a harder fight in the

second half than in the first, and St. Jim's would be hard put to it to keep their lead. And the wind was against St. Jim's now, with the change of ends.

The whistle sounded, and St. Jim's kicked off.

"Now look out for fun!" said Jack Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!"

The juniors were right.

The play was fast and furious. Especially was it furious on the Southwood side. Being pegged down every moment by what they had at first considered an inferior team was a new experience for them. Wimpole began to issue snappy orders to his men, orders which were very questionably obeyed. Nothing which his men did seemed to please the visiting skipper, and the men were not slow to return the compliment. They played well, but it was with a sullen determination rather than that splendid spirit that wins matches.

The Southwood side were being forced on their defence. Kildare marshalled his front line like a master. He knew that attack is the best form of defence, and the St. Jim's front rank took good care to uphold him.

"Now, Kildare, let's have another!" yelled the crowd.

Wimpole scowled. He knew there was more than a chance of their hopes being realised. But it is an old and true saying that you cannot weigh up form at footer. Just when the chances seemed eminently in favour of another St. Jim's score, the ball seemed to flash out of the ruck and become the sole property of Hooper, of the United. With an ease that made Tom Merry & Co. gasp, the Southwood professional made his way through the St. Jim's men.

"Bai Jove!"

"That looks bad for us!" said Tom Merry.

"Great Scott!"

As Monty Lowther spoke, Hooper and Wimpole, having completely beaten the halves, were bearing down on the St. Jim's goal at lightning speed. The backs alone remained to be beaten, and the whole Southwood team were well up behind their two cracks.

Price managed to rob Hooper of the ball, and roars of applause went up as he did it. Dodd, taking the pass which Price was compelled to send him, was knocked flying as he got possession. With a savage exclamation, which Tom Merry & Co. could hear from where they stood, Wimpole leaped over the fallen back, and raced after the ball, which was bounding towards the St. Jim's goal.

"Now, Southwood!" yelled the visitors' supporters. "Oh!"

The Southwood professional had not reckoned on Fatty Wynn—the demon goalie, as the Southwood crowd had already begun to call him. While the Southwood professionals had been tussling with Price and Dodd, no one seemed to notice Fatty Wynn advance from his goal. It is a fearfully risky thing to do at all times. But Fatty judged his time well. As Wimpole tore forward for the ball, Fatty knew that he had done right. He got in first, and the impact was so terrific as he gathered the ball Rugby fashion that Wimpole went flying over the fat junior's back, and measured his length on the turf.

Then the St. Jim's spectators yelled as Fatty got his kick in, despite the odds still against him.

It was a grand save. Price and Dodd waved their caps as they took up position again.

"Bravo, sir!" yelled the Southwood side themselves, as they tore back after the ball, which was being well looked after by Kildare and his line.

"Our Fatty!" yelled Tom Merry & Co.

"Cheek!" grinned Figgins.

"We share him to-day, at any rate!" said Jack Blake.

"Yaas, wathah! Bai Jove! Look, deah boys!"

It was evidently a goalie's day. The Southwood custodian was now called upon for a display of gymnastics. Kildare and his men made things warmer for him than he had experienced for some time, if his agility went for anything. But the Southwood man paid all his accounts.

Do what they would, the St. Jim's fellows could not get the ball past him.

Both crowds cheered him to the echo.

"But he bain't as good as t'other chap," said one of the Southwood crowd. "Yon's a marvel!"

And Tom Merry smiled at him as the fellow pointed to Fatty Wynn. The play began to be one hard turmoil in mid-field. Neither side could make any running. A change had come over Southwood from its captain downwards. They were beginning to feel that stern joy which warriors feel in fœmen worthy of their steel. They were playing every ounce against St. Jim's. Every resource which Wimpole's professional experience had taught him was brought into play.

St. Jim's felt the strain. Jerseys were more muddied than usual, telling their own tale of the stubborn contest. Pace answered pace. Wing men seemed to hold one another as if they had been tied together by a short line. Spotting was as sure as if the two teams had been competing for

International honours. Cheering had ceased. The crowd were also feeling the tension. They watched in silence. Fellows were seen drawing in their breath fitfully as their favourite player did well or ill. Only a murmur broke the calm when anything above the ordinary was done. Then all at once the murmur which applauded a minor success of Southwood gradually swelled into a roar.

"Now, Southwood, rub it in, and get even!" was the cry.

"Keep 'em out, St. Jim's!"

Kildare and his men rose valiantly to the task. But the combination of the visitors was working with the precision of an admirably constructed machine. If they made a mistake someone righted it instantly, and gradually they bore down on the St. Jim's goal once more.

Kildare battled like a giant. But Southwood were not to be denied.

The St. Jim's crowd themselves could scarce forbear to cheer their brilliant manoeuvring. Making for the St. Jim's twenty-five, Wimpole and his side treated the spectators to as pretty a display of footer as most of them could remember to have seen. Kildare's men were giving way, but they were being beaten on their merits.

"Now, Kildare!" shouted St. Jim's.

Kildare replied manfully. For a moment it seemed that he would turn the tide. But though the wonderful passing that the Southwood men displayed was broken up time and again, in the end they came for the St. Jim's goal in no uncertain fashion, and the fact had to be admitted that St. Jim's were on the defensive pure and simple. Kildare died hard, so to put it. He and his men were well up. But Southwood were not to be denied.

A hundred or more fellows, men and boys, who had followed the team from Southwood, were yelling wildly.

"Go it!"

"Put her through!"

"Shove it in, Southwood!"

Whiz!

Fatty Wynn gasped. For once, and only once, he had been found wanting. Right from the toe of the Southwood skipper the ball came, and it found the corner of the net. Fatty Wynn made a desperate attempt to save, but he failed, and the ball was in the net. Then the Southwood supporters shrieked themselves hoarse.

"Goal! Goal!"

"Hurray! Goal! Hurray!"

Southwood United had scored. The score was level. But the effort had been desperate, and the Southwood team showed the effects of it as they lined up again. Even the professionals in the team looked pumped. And Southwood had only equalised, and there remained exactly ten minutes to go.

Fatty Wynn looked a little sore as he stood breathing hard in his goal. He had not done so well as he had hoped to do; but, after all, nobody had expected him to prevent the visitors from scoring at all. His saves had been wonderful, and he had deserved well of his school, and the school showed that they knew it by the rousing cheers they gave him.

"Fatty couldn't help that!" said Figgins.

Tom Merry smacked him on the shoulder.

"Of course, he couldn't!" he exclaimed. "He's done wonders, Figgy! My hat! It's been a splendid game! But we must score again!"

"Yaas, wathah! We want the odd goal!"

"Go it, Kildare!"

"On the ball!"

"Play up, United!" roared the Southwood crowd.

Again the play was fast and furious. Both sides were pumped. But Kildare, at all events, seemed to be as fresh as paint. The captain of St. Jim's had succeeded in driving the troublesome, harassing thoughts from his mind, and he was all himself—more than himself. He was playing with a deadly determination that seemed assured of victory.

Would he win?

Five minutes ticked off, and now many eyes were seeking watches, or the clock in the old tower of St. Jim's.

Five minutes to go!

And now came a last determined attack of the Southwooders. Right up to the home goal, in spite of the desperate defence, they brought the leather, right up to the goalmouth, and shots rained in on Fatty Wynn.

But the Welsh junior was not found wanting a second time.

Whatever United sent in he sent back, with his plump face grim and hard, his eyes gleaming.

ANSWERS

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Next Thursday's Special Long "HELD TO RANSOM!" By MARTIN CLIFFORD, also "DEEP SEA GOLD," by REGINALD WRAY.

He seemed all eyes and hands and feet. Five times he saved, while St. Jim's caught their breath, and then the backs cleared to midfield, and Kildare had a chance.

Then St. Jim's roared.
"Go it, Saints!"

"Put her through!"
The St. Jim's forwards were away, passing like machinery. The Southwood defence was pumped, and the home forwards went through like a knife through cheese. Away, away, while the roar round the field grew louder.

"Put her through!"
"Shoot! Shoot!"
The backs did their best. But the St. Jim's forwards, passing wonderfully, beat them hollow, and Rushden brought the ball well up, and centred to Kildare.

Three of the United were rushing on the captain of St. Jim's, and he had just time to kick. But he was as cool as an iceberg. The goalie was watching him hungrily, ready for anything, excepting what he got! Kildare feinted, and the goalie sprawled along the goal to stop the threatened low shot—and then the ball hummed into the top of the net.

Like thunder came the roar:

"Goal!"
"Kildare! Kildare!"
"Well kicked!"
"Goal! Goal!"

"St. Jim's wins! Hurray!"
And St. Jim's had won, for there were but thirty seconds to go. St. Jim's had won—Eric Kildare had saved his side!

The field was blackened with a roaring crowd as soon as the whistle went. Fellows, yelling wildly, surrounded the players, and a crowd seized Kildare to carry him back to the pavilion. Shoulder-high he was borne off the field, amid frenzied hurrahs!

CHAPTER 16. A Startling Discovery.

"**B**AI Jove! We've beaten them!"

"St. Jim's wins!"
"Hurrah! Hurrah!"
Even the Southwood supporters, bitterly disappointed as they were, could scarce forbear a cheer at that last splendid goal. Southwood was beaten—the schoolboy team had won! Southwood United, the semi-professional team with League aspirations, had been beaten by St. Jim's First! No wonder the fellows roared.

Kildare struggled to be set down, and the fellows let him go at last, and the captain of St. Jim's walked off the field with the rest.

Kildare looked little like the victor in a hard-fought and well-won battle. His face was deadly pale, and his eyes dim.

The excitement was over—the reaction had come. He had saved his side—for the sake of his school he had played, and driven every other thought from his mind. But now—now black care was eating his heart—grim anxiety furrowed his boyish brow! What of his mother?

While cheers rang and echoed round him, while his name was on every lip, there was a groan in the brave heart of the St. Jim's captain.

What of his mother?
"Kildare," muttered Monteith, anxiously, as he caught sight of the captain's face—"Kildare, old man! You're not well!"

Kildare looked at him dully.
"Look after him!" exclaimed Rushden. "He's ill!"
"I—I'm all right!"

But even as he spoke, Kildare swayed and fell. The strain had been too much.
"Hold him!"

Monteith's strong arm was round the captain of St. Jim's.
"It's all right! Give him room!"

Gently the fellows carried the fainting lad into the dressing-room. Mr. Railton hurried to him at once. Kildare opened his eyes, wildly, to find himself lying in the dressing-room, with his head resting on the Housemaster's knee.

"What—what," he muttered—"what has happened?"
"Better, my lad?" said Mr. Railton, very softly.

"Yes—yes!" Kildare struggled into a sitting posture.
"I—I didn't faint?"

"Yes. It's all right now."
The lad's pale face flushed.
"I—I don't know what made me do it, sir. I'm all right. I—I suppose—"

"I understand," said Mr. Railton softly. "Rest a minute or two, Kildare."
"I must be off!" the St. Jim's captain exclaimed, and he sprang to his feet. He swayed a little, and Mr. Railton

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held him. But Kildare pulled himself together. "I—I couldn't help thinking of the mater all the time, sir. I suppose it was that. But I must go now. I must not lose the train."

"The trap is ready."
"Thank you, sir."
Darrel came into the dressing-room.
"Kildare? Is he—"

The senior had a telegram in his hand. Kildare saw it at once, and he held out his hand, his face going white.

"For me?" he muttered.
"Yes."
"When did it come?"

"This minute. The lad's just arrived."
Kildare trembled.
"Open it for me," he muttered. "Open it, Darrel, and read it out to me. I—I think I couldn't read it myself."

Darrel nodded.
He tore open the telegram, and glanced over it quickly. Then his face brightened up wonderfully. Kildare, who was watching him with haggard eyes, brightened too.

"Darrel—"
"Hurray!" shouted Darrel. "Good news, old man!"
"Thank Heaven!"

"Listen!" said Darrel, and he read out the message:

"Don't understand your wire. Have not wired you to-day. Mother much better. No cause anxiety now. "FATHER."

Kildare staggered.
"What does it mean?" he exclaimed. "He says he has not wired, and I had his wire just before the match, as you all know!"

"There is some mistake," said Mr. Railton quietly. "But the mistake must have been in the first wire. This is in answer to yours, Kildare, and so must evidently be genuine."

"Yes—yes, that is from my father! But the other—"
"The other was evidently not from your father."
"But—but—"

"Good heavens!" burst out Darrel. "Is it possible anybody would be scoundrel enough to play a trick like that, to prevent Kildare from playing?"

Mr. Railton's face was very hard and stern.
"It certainly looks like it," he said.

Kildare sank into a chair and covered his face with his hands. After the terrible strain he had gone through, the relief was almost too much for him. Darrel's eyes met Mr. Railton's.

The same thought was in both minds, now—some unscrupulous trickster had sent the first wire, and it could only have had one object—to prevent Kildare from playing for St. Jim's that day.

"The United, do you think, sir?" muttered Darrel.
"They were very keen about winning; but—but it seems too rotten!"

Mr. Railton shook his head.
"Impossible! The United men fully expected to win, and even if they had been capable of this treachery, they would not have imagined it necessary. Besides, how could they, perfect strangers, know anything about Kildare's mother being ill?"

"It was a St. Jim's fellow!"
"It must have been."
"Good heavens!"

"That can be investigated later," said Mr. Railton. "At present, I should advise you to go home all the same, Kildare, and see your people. Perhaps they may be able to let in some light on the affair."
"You are right, sir."

Kildare rose to his feet. In three minutes he was in the trap, driving fast to the railway-station; and he was gone before the United players had left St. Jim's.

Southwood United drove away in their brake, with far less cocky looks than when they had arrived, and they departed from St. Jim's a sadder and wiser team. St. Jim's was left in a ferment. For the story of the bogus telegram was repeated far and wide. All St. Jim's knew of it, and all St. Jim's was asking itself one question—"Who had sent it? Who was the rascal?"

CHAPTER 17.
Rough Justice.

WHO had sent the telegram?
St. Jim's, high and low, puzzled over the question, from Head to the youngest fag—and, indeed, to Toby the page and Taggles the porter. In the studies and the common-rooms that night, in the masters' rooms in both Houses, the matter was discussed in all its bearings. That a false telegram had been sent, to prevent Kildare from playing in the great match, and that it must

have been sent by a St. Jim's fellow, the whole school knew. But who was the rascal, and why had he done it?

"The fellow must have been an uthah wottah!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "But there is another point—the telegram was sent from Brighton! How could a St. Jim's fellow have gone to Brighton to send a telegram without bein' missed?"

"My hat!" said Blake. "I was thinking of Knox. He's cad enough, and he was very wild at being left out of the team. But he was on the ground the whole time—I saw him there."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Great Scott!" exclaimed Kerr.

All eyes were turned on Kerr. The juniors were crowding in Tom Merry's study, to a royal feed in celebration of Fatty Wynn's inclusion in the team, and of the splendid assistance he had given St. Jim's First in beating the enemy. The juniors were all discussing the mystery of the telegram—all excepting Fatty Wynn. Fatty was discussing a steak-and-kidney pie, and he had no attention to bestow just then upon anything else.

"What have you thought of, Kerr?" exclaimed Figgins.

Figgins had great confidence in the judgment of his Scottish chum.

"Something about Knox?"

"What is it?"

"His people live at Brighton," said Kerr quietly.

"Bai Jove!"

"Phew!"

"That settles it!" said Tom Merry.

"Yes, rather!" said Blake, with emphasis. "That settles it! Knox has a relation or a friend at Brighton, and they've done this!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

The juniors had no further doubt upon the matter. The fellow who had played the trick was an unspeakable cad, and Knox was certainly that. The fellow must have had some connections at Brighton, to be able to get the telegram sent, and Knox had connections at Brighton. The juniors did not want any more evidence.

"But it wouldn't be easy to prove it," Monty Lowther remarked, with a shake of the head.

"It's a mowal certainty, deah boys, and I considah that we should be justified in waggin' Knox!"

"Hear, hear!"

Fatty Wynn did full justice to the celebration. After it was over, the juniors waited for Kildare to come in. Kildare was late. It was almost bedtime when he returned to St. Jim's, and when he came his handsome face was pale with anger.

"Good news, Kildare?" exclaimed the juniors, with one voice, as they met him in the passage.

"Yes; the mater's all right now, thanks, kids. She had a turn for the better this afternoon—at the same time that I was getting that lying telegram."

"It wasn't a mistake, then, deah boy?" asked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"No; it was a trick. The people at home know nothing of it."

Kildare nodded to the juniors, and walked away. They glanced after him; he did not go to his own study, but to Knox's. Tom Merry & Co. exchanged glances.

"He knows!" muttered Figgins.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"He guesses, at all events," said Tom Merry. "I shouldn't care to be Knox just now."

"Bai Jove, wathah not!"

Kildare knocked at the prefect's door, and entered. Knox was in the study with Sefton, and both the seniors rose to their feet as Kildare came in. Knox, as it were by accident, moved so that the table was between him and Kildare.

Kildare noted the movement, and his lip curled with scorn.

"I want to speak to you, Knox," he said. "You can let Sefton hear what I have to say, or not, as you choose."

Sefton glanced at his friend.

"Don't go!" said Knox. Knox had no desire to be left alone with Kildare just then. He did not like the look upon the face of the captain of St. Jim's.

"Very well," said Kildare. "I've been home—"

"Indeed?" said Knox, with a yawn.

"Yes. You know I had a telegram this afternoon, a minute or two before the match, telling me that my mother was worse?"

"I heard the fellows speaking about it."

"Is that all you know of it?"

Knox shrugged his shoulders.

"How should I know any more?" he asked.

"You did not send the telegram?"

"I! How could I? I understand that it was sent from Brighton."

"Exactly! Your people live at Brighton. Your young brother is there; I've seen him several times, and I am aware that he is just as mean and cowardly a cad as you are."

Knox flushed.

"This language—"

"You'll get something worse than that soon," said Kildare, between his teeth. "I will tell you what I suspect—what I am sure of, rather. You sent that telegram, through somebody you know at Brighton. You wanted to muck up the United match; you wanted to prevent me from playing. I imagine that you wrote to your brother yesterday, and asked him to do it; that seems to me most likely."

Knox laughed, a husky laugh.

"I should be likely to do that, when I was trying only to-day to get into the team myself," he said. "I shouldn't want my own team to lose, you fool."

"Of course not," said Sefton.

Kildare took no notice of Sefton. His keen, clear eyes were fastened unwaveringly upon the pale face of the prefect.

"If you wrote to your brother, I suppose you would have wired to him if you had succeeded in getting into the team," he said. "Exactly how you made your arrangements I don't know, and I don't care; but I am quite assured upon one point—that I owe to you that false telegram and the misery it caused me."

Knox licked his dry lips.

"You'll find it hard to prove that," he muttered thickly.

"I shall not try to prove it," said Kildare. "My object isn't to show you up to St. Jim's. You deserve it, but you've been too cunning for me; I can't prove it. But you are not going unpunished, Knox."

The prefect sneered.

"What are you going to do, then?" he exclaimed.

"I am going to thrash you!" said Kildare, between his teeth.

Knox started.

"Kildare, are you mad?"

"No; I am going to thrash you! Put up your hands!" said the captain of St. Jim's, advancing upon the prefect.

Knox turned deadly pale.

"You are mad!" he said hoarsely. "A fight between the captain of the school and a prefect! It's—it's unheard of! I—I won't!"

"You can defend yourself, or not, as you please," said Kildare, "but you are going to be thrashed! If you interfere, Sefton, I shall call in Darrel to deal with you."

"It's not my business," said Sefton.

He left the study. Knox strove to follow him, but the captain of the school stepped into his way.

"Let me pass!" roared Knox furiously.

Smack!

Kildare's open palm came with a crack like a pistol-shot across Knox's face. The prefect reeled blindly back.

"Now will you fight?" said Kildare, gritting his teeth.

Knox made no reply. He clenched his fists hard, and sprang like a tiger at the captain of St. Jim's.

In a moment a desperate fight was in progress. Knox was a powerful fellow, and he either had to fight or to be thrashed, and he chose to fight. Desperation lent him a kind of courage. He fought hard, and he needed to.

But he was no match for the captain of St. Jim's. Indignation seemed to have made a giant of Eric Kildare. He was tired from the hard match and the long journey after it, but Knox had no chance. Crashing blows drove him to right and left. Again and again he was knocked down; and at last, when a terrific upper-cut sent him crashing upon the carpet, the rascally prefect lay still, gasping, unable to rise.

"Hang you!" he gasped. "I'm done! Hang you!"

Kildare looked down upon him scornfully. The prefect lay helpless at his feet, more soundly thrashed than he had ever been in his life before. Kildare's hands unclenched.

"You've had your punishment," he said. "Take care, Knox—take care in the future!"

He opened the study door, and strode out into the passage. Knox lay upon the carpet, groaning. It was several minutes after the captain of St. Jim's was gone before the rascally prefect was able to rise to his feet. Kildare strode down the passage, his face bruised—but he did not feel the bruises—his knuckles barked and red, but he did not know it. But a group of juniors in the passage noticed it, and they grinned with satisfaction.

"Knox has had it!" murmured Tom Merry.

"Yaas, wathah! And I wathah think that he has had it hot, deah boy."

And Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was right.

THE END.

(Another grand, long, complete tale of Tom Merry & Co. of St. Jim's next week, entitled "HELD TO RANSOM," by Martin Clifford. Also a long instalment of "DEEP SEA GOLD." Order your Next Thursday's "GEM" in advance. Price One Penny.)

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Next Thursday's Special Long "HELD TO RANSOM!" By MARTIN CLIFFORD, also "DEEP SEA GOLD," by REGINALD WRAY.



"DEEP SEA GOLD!"

A Thrilling New Story of
Amazing Adventure on a
Submarine Motor-Car.

By

REGINALD WRAY.

From out a towering mass of shrubs immediately before the Octopus arose an enormous body, tapering to a ludicrously small head, and covered with long, shining hair. (See page 26.)

The Opening Chapters of "DEEP SEA GOLD," specially re-written for this number of "THE GEM" LIBRARY.

Dick Dauntless and Jack Orde, chums of Weltsea College, are bathing in the sea early one morning, when they are suddenly seized by enormous octopus-like tentacles and dragged swiftly down beneath the surface of the water.

They are pulled aboard a submarine motor-car, and are soon introduced to Captain Flame, the captain of the Octopus, as the strange craft is named.

The crew consists entirely of boys, with whom Dick Dauntless and Jack Orde are soon on good terms.

The chums learn that Captain Flame is bound for the Pacific with the express intention of searching for Dick Dauntless's millionaire father, who was a friend of his, and whose yacht the Morning Star, has long been reported missing.

They make for that dreaded mass of floating weeds known as the Sargasso Sea, and there, stuck fast in the midst of the weeds, they find both the Morning Star and the tug that had been sent out to aid her. While investigating, the Octopus is attacked by a body of Tankas—huge men who dwell in the crater of an extinct volcano. They defeat these, but have to make for an island where the repairs to the submarine can be properly attended to. Dick Dauntless and Jack Orde are sent to the Island of Rest for chemicals, but on arriving at their destination, they find that the prisoners who are kept

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on an adjoining island, the Island of Lost Hopes, have rebelled. The boys escape with the chemicals, but when they arrive at the island on which the Octopus was grounded, they find it buried beneath a mass of lava. The two boys discover an underground world, and while exploring, they sight, in a pit, a huge serpent. A blare of trumpets attracts their attention, and they behold a procession of Tanka priests moving towards the pit, escorting a red-cloaked prisoner. To his horror, Dick Dauntless finds that the doomed man is his father!

(Now go on with the story.)

Dick Dauntless Finds His Father.

The procession halted on the edge of the pit, and Dick Dauntless saw a grey-bearded priest take a broad-bladed scimitar from an attendant's hand and step to the prisoner's side.

A thrill of pride quickened the beating of Dick Dauntless's heart as he saw his father draw himself proudly up, and gaze, without flinching, at the swaying head of the Serpent God immediately beneath him.

His face contorted by an expression of frenzied hatred, the white-bearded priest swung the huge scimitar above his head.

DON'T MISS

"THE STOLEN CUP!"

The Splendid, Long, Complete School Story appearing in this week's number of the

"MAGNET" LIBRARY.

Price One Penny

Dick thrust the barrel of his rifle through the leaves. For a moment his whole frame became rigid. Then he pulled the trigger.

A wild, despairing yell burst from the would-be executioner's lips, and his sword clattered upon the stone-flagged platform as, with Dick's well-aimed bullet planted in the centre of his forehead, he plunged headlong into the open mouth of the serpent.

As the rifle shot rang out, Mr. Dauntless started, and even before the sea serpent's jaws closed over the priest's still writhing form he snatched up the huge scimitar and turned to face the priests, who, with cries of rage, hurled themselves upon him.

It was grand to see the gallant Britisher as, poised on the extreme edge of the precipice, he whirled the mighty scimitar above his head, and kept two score of huge Tankas priests at bay.

"Fire, Jack—fire! But, for Heaven's sake, be careful you do not hit my father!" yelled Dick, as, careless of who might see him, he sprang to his feet, and sent shot after shot hurtling into the closely-packed ranks of the priests.

Two had already paid the penalty of their daring beneath the sweeping blows from the huge scimitar Mr. Dauntless wielded so well.

Three more fell before the boy's hastily-fired bullets, and, with a thrill of delight, Dick had begun to hope that, aided by their rifle bullets, his father might yet clear the platform, when the king hurled his broad-bladed spear at the bravely-fighting Britisher.

Mr. Dauntless saw the deadly missile hurtling towards him, sprang back to avoid its deadly impact, stepped into space, and fell headlong on the writhing folds of the serpent.

Fortunately, the brute had just dropped its first victim to seize one of the priests the Britisher had slain. Ere it could fix its huge teeth into Mr. Dauntless, he gained a rock which rose some half a dozen feet above the waves.

As though aware that a living victim awaited him, the serpent reared its huge head until it towered a dozen feet above the apparently doomed man, and prepared to strike.

But ere it could do so, two rifles rang out in quick succession, and, pierced by a couple of bullets from Dick Dauntless's and Jack Orde's rifles, it sank, writhing in its death agony into the sea.

A roar of rage, despair, and grief arose from the Tankas as they watched the slaying of their Serpent God.

No longer restrained through fear of hitting Mr. Dauntless, Dick and Jack opened so fierce a fire upon them that they were driven to seek the shelter of the temple.

Taking advantage of the respite, Dick Dauntless flung himself face downwards on the verge of the cliff, and, thrusting his head forward, he cried:

"Father, father, it is I, Dick!"

Surprise for a moment held the prisoner speechless; then, with the unselfishness of a truly noble nature, he cried despairingly:

"Dick—Dick, my boy, what ill-fortune brought you here?"

"Not ill-fortune, dad, but the very, very best!" cried Dick. "But they will not leave us long in peace. Is there no path by which you can climb up?"

Mr. Dauntless surveyed the walls of rock by which he was surrounded, then shook his head.

"It is hopeless, Dick. The pit narrows towards the top. But are you alone?" he added.

"Jack Orde, a school chum, is with me," replied the boy.

His heart sank as he saw the look of hopeless despair sweep over his father's face.

"Then we are lost!" cried Mr. Dauntless despairingly. "At any rate, save yourselves, my lads," he added. "I cannot escape out of this fearful pit. Keep in the open country. The jungle is infested by the fearful Wild Men of the Woods. If overtaken, die fighting; anything rather than fall alive into the Tankas' hands."

Dick's sole reply was to take a snap shot at a helmeted head which peered from behind a pillar ornamenting the temple's stone platform.

It was a good shot, and the man dropped, with the top part of his body overhanging the precipitous wall.

Dick looked anxiously around. His eyes fell upon the trailing vines laced from tree to tree above his head. With a loud whoop, he sprang to his feet.

"Quick, Jack! Help me cut down some of these vines. Spliced together, they will reach to the foot of the chasm," he cried.

Without a word, Jack Orde drew his axe, and the next moment the two boys were slashing away at the pliable vines.

Soon they had secured sufficient to reach, when spliced together, the bottom of the chasm.

Putting the ends of the vines side by side, they tied them

with the long stems of a trailing plant growing close to where they were standing.

But ere the rope was half finished, Dick sprang to an upright position, listening intently, then clambered up the smooth trunk of a tree, and looked anxiously around.

A minute later he dropped to the earth.

"It's no good, Jack. We are entirely cut off by our foes. A thousand Tankas are closing in upon us!" he declared.

Creeping to where an opening amongst the trees showed them the distant city, Jack Orde rose cautiously from the shelter of the undergrowth.

The next moment he dropped down as a huge arrow, such as could only be fired by men of the Tankas' enormous stature, buried its barbed head in the trunk of a tree immediately behind him.

Warned by his narrow escape of the proximity of their foes, he moved the leaves that screened him cautiously aside.

A low hiss brought Dick Dauntless to his side.

"It's all over but the shooting, old chap," he whispered.

Dick glanced in the direction his chum indicated, and was conscious of a sudden tightening of his heartstrings.

From the limb of the tree to which he had climbed, he had seen a semicircle of the spearmen closing in upon them, but, shielded by the undergrowth, an advance line of archers, spread out in skirmishing order before the spearmen, had escaped his observation.

In silence he held out his hand to his chum.

In silence Jack Orde held it in his own for nearly a minute.

It was a characteristic Briton's last farewell.

Just one stout handgrip before the end came.

Jack Orde glanced once more towards the encircling foes, then looked inquiringly at his chum.

"Yes, we will let them have it," agreed Dick. "If the worst comes to the worst, we will jump into the chasm. At any rate, that will be better than being taken alive."

Saved!

Throwing themselves down in the undergrowth, the boys waited patiently until five huge Tankas, each armed with a long-bow as tall as himself, appeared some fifty yards from where they were crouched.

"Now!" whispered Dick.

"Immediately two shots rang out, and one of the five, springing in the air, crashed back into the undergrowth, slain by the boys' unerring bullets.

The others hesitated, a hesitation which proved fatal to four of their number, as, rapidly reloading, the boys fired once more.

The fifth man turned to fly, and they rapidly retreated to the gnarled roots of a tree growing at the very point of the promontory from which they had fired the shots which had rescued Mr. Dauntless from the clutches of the executioner.

This would serve as a temporary fortress in which they could give a good account of themselves, so long as their ammunition lasted.

It was well they moved, for the next minute, with a fearful, nerve-racking, whistling sound, a hundred huge arrows clattered on the spot where they had crouched a few seconds before.

The place selected for their last stand reached, the boys crept beneath the roots and awaited the end.

Each lad's finger was on the trigger of his rifle, ready to fire at the first foe who showed himself.

But the Tankas had evidently no intention of risking more lives than was necessary.

A perfect hail of arrows hurtled through the trees, and advancing, slowly but surely, nearer and nearer the boys' hiding-place.

Yet, not a savage offered them the chance of a shot. The waiting strained their patience to breaking-point, but the boys were unwilling to waste a single bullet in a chance shot.

As modern artillery sweeps the ground in front of an artillery attack, so the shower of arrows advanced, showing to what a high pitch of discipline (and tactics) the Tankas army had reached.

Presently the arrows began to fall around the boys.

They glanced off the tree-trunks, stuck quivering into the ground before them, or plunged their barbed heads into the huge roots which covered them.

But so skillfully had the boys taken cover that not one of the deadly missiles reached them.

With a grim smile parting his lips, Dick Dauntless whispered his instructions into Jack Orde's ear; then, as his comrade nodded, uttered a most appalling, pain-laden shriek, followed a second afterwards by a similar cry of pretended pain from Orde.

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Immediately a trumpet blew close at hand, answered, as the flights of arrows ceased to fall, by a second call from a little further away.

The next moment there was the regular beat of slow-moving footsteps, accompanied by a crackling of dried twigs and the rustle of shrubs trodden under foot by marching men.

Moving in perfect order, their spears held at the charge, a semicircle of Tankas appeared, closing slowly and remorselessly upon the waiting boys.

Laying as though indeed dead, the boys remained until that steady line was within some twenty yards of where they crouched; then, with a stirring, death-defying British cheer they sprang to their feet, and, retreating to the utmost edge of the chasm, poured shot after shot into the ranks of their astonished foes as quickly as they could load and fire.

So unexpected was the reappearance of enemies whom they had believed dead that, brave and well disciplined though the Tankas were, the whole half-circle came to a sudden halt.

Above the din of their exploding rifles, the boys could hear the officers urging their men forward.

But the halt was only momentary.

Closing up their ranks as each shot from the boys' rifles claimed a victim, the Tankas resumed their advance.

Nearer and nearer came that fearful semicircle of glistening spear-points.

The end was very near now.

Suddenly Dick heard an ejaculation of alarm from where Jack Orde had been standing, a foot or so on his left flank.

He dare not look round.

He had still six cartridges left, and he would not for worlds cease firing until the last had been expended.

He was doomed. Nothing could save him. But he was determined to inflict as much loss as possible upon his foes ere he took the fatal plunge into the chasm.

He had seen, or fancied he had seen, a look of astonished horror on the faces of the men nearest him when what he believed to be Jack Orde's expiring cry reached his ears.

Just as the foremost Tanka had shortened his spear to strike, and Dick was in the act of hurling his empty gun into the man's face, he saw him and the comrades on either side start back with a look of unaccountable horror in their eyes.

The next moment Dick's heart almost ceased to beat as he felt an iron grip around his waist.

He was lifted from his feet and snatched from the ground.

As he was borne through the air he glanced downwards. The sight which met his gaze almost unmanned him.

Her hull rising above the swirling waters at the bottom of the chasm lay the Octopus.

It was one of the car's steel-wire tentacles which had snatched him from the certain death which threatened.

He caught a brief glimpse of Jack Orde disappearing through the open door of the water-dock into the Octopus's hull. The next moment he had followed him, and was holding his breath as the closing of the outer door plunged him into darkness.

Swiftly the water was ejected from the dock, the inner door was thrown open, and, gasping for breath, scarce realising that, after all, he was safe, he sprang forward and grasped Captain Flame's extended hand.

On Board the Octopus Once More.

There was no mistaking the genuineness of Captain Flame's delight at having Dick Dauntless safely back in the Octopus.

His usually stern features were relaxed, and Dick almost fancied that his friend's eyes were dimmed with unshed tears.

But the great inventor was not the only one to welcome the returned adventurers.

Behind him appeared the delighted faces of Harry Monston, Will Avery, Tom Allstraw, and little Charlie Steel.

Mopsa was there also; that is, if he could be said to be anywhere at all.

As a matter of fact, he did not remain in the same place a single moment, but welcomed Dick Dauntless in a series of wondrous somersaults and fearful contortions, which seemed as though they must hopelessly dislocate every joint of his body.

And all the time the little Chinaman's smile grew broader, until his mouth appeared as a broad gash in his head.

As pleased to be back as their friends were to see them, Jack and Dick shook hands all round again and again.

But Dick's eyes were wandering in search of his father all the time.

Captain Flame guessed his thoughts.

Laying his hand on Dick's shoulder, he half led, half

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pushed him into the chart-room, where Mr. Dauntless was seated, looking around him with an expression of hopeless bewilderment.

"I promised that your boy should be saved, old friend, and here he is," were Captain Flame's words, as he thrust Dick into the room, and, closing the door behind him, left father and son together.

But even though comrades might return who had been wept for as dead, the march of events may not be checked.

A thunderous crash which shook the Octopus from stem to stern resounded from outside her rounding hull.

Rushing to the conning-tower, Captain Flame looked out.

A crowd of Tankas lined the edge of the chasm.

Armed with levers they were rolling huge stones on the submarine car.

She was strongly built, but there were boulders weighing several tons hovering over the crumbling earth immediately above them.

With a touch on a lever Captain Flame sent the Octopus rushing backwards into deep water.

Swiftly wheeling the car round, he sent her sweeping down a steep declivity, until at length her glowing searchlight showed no longer the side or top of the enormous tunnel by which he had gained the chasm.

Reducing her speed to a mere crawl, Captain Flame turned her head in a westerly direction, and, bidding Harry Monston, whom he had summoned to the conning-tower, to take his place, made his way back to the chart-room.

He found Dick Dauntless and his father, their first transports of delight at their reunion over, chatting as quietly as though they had only been parted a few days, as is the manner of Britishers whether on earth, sea, or air.

"And now, old friend, we are safe from interruption for the present," he cried genially. "I have already said how more than delighted I am to see you. Do you feel inclined to tell us how you came to be carried to the interior of the earth, or would you rather I left you with your son for a little longer?"

"Oh, Dick and I will have plenty of time to talk!" laughed Mr. Dauntless. "Besides, I want to hear how it is you turned up so opportunely. Of course, I know all about the Octopus, and the wonderful things she can do, but I am consumed with curiosity to discover how you found me."

Captain Flame laughed.

"No, no. We'll take the whole thing in sequence; you first, Dick next, I last," he declared.

"All right," agreed Mr. Dauntless; and at once plunged into a wondrous tale, which held his listeners spellbound until he ceased speaking.

He told how the Morning Star had become entangled in the Sargasso Sea, how the fishermen had seized him and his crew in the same mysterious manner they had carried off Will Avery, Mopsa, and Flame himself.

How he had been taken into Crater Island, had been confined in the castle, from which Dick Dauntless had rescued his comrades, for many weary weeks, and had then, with other unfortunate prisoners, been escorted through a wonderful subterranean road to the land of the Tankas.

He spoke of the loathsome creatures the Tankas had appropriately named the Wild Men of the Woods, who kept the more highly-civilised Tankas constantly on the alert, for they were cannibals, and though they often killed and ate the enormous monsters with which the jungles of the underworld were infested, they would go to almost any length to secure human flesh for their fearful feasts.

He told also of enormous creatures that his escort had encountered on their way to the City of Palaces, where the king whom Captain Flame had abducted lived in great state.

There he had been confined with several others in a large prison. They had been well fed and treated, but forbidden, under pain of death, to leave their prison.

At regular intervals the priests had entered the prison, covered one of their number with a red cloth, and led them out.

Whether they took them he could not say, but they never returned, and there was little doubt that the unfortunate white men had been sacrificed to the Serpent God whom Jack Orde and Dick Dauntless had slain.

One day his turn came, and he had been led through the streets of the City of Palaces to the temple, as he thought to his death, but as it had turned out to life, liberty, and reunion with his son.

The above is but a brief outline of what Mr. Dauntless told, but he spoke many times afterwards of breathless adventures and hairbreadth escapes that had accompanied almost every yard of his progress from Crater Island to the City of Palaces.

There is no need to repeat Dick's adventures, but from the time he mentioned the outbreak of the prisoners on the

Island of Lost Hopes, a fearful change came over Captain Flame's face.

His eyes flashed ominously, his brow became furrowed with a dark frown, the smiles faded from his lips, which were pressed close together in a look of stern, ruthless determination, and, whilst Dick was continuing his narrative, he walked, with quick, fierce, angry strides, backwards and forwards over the floor of the chart-room.

As Dick ceased speaking both looked inquiringly at Captain Flame, and Mr. Dauntless, noting the change in his friend's face, rose abruptly to his feet.

He was about to speak, when the inventor checked him with upraised hand.

"This is no time for idle talk-telling," he said sternly. "Summon the crew to quarters, Dick; I must return at once to the island. Then—"

He raised his clenched fists above his head, bringing them slowly down as though he was bearing some conquered foe to the earth.

Signing his father to follow, Dick Dauntless led the way from the chart-room.

"Leave Captain Flame to himself; he is better alone when his dark hour is upon him," he whispered; then hastened to the general-room, where he communicated Captain Flame's order to the excited boys.

Barely had he done so ere he was summoned to the conning-tower, where he found Captain Flame seated at the wheel, and the Octopus moving swiftly over the rocky bed of a shallow sea, the waters of which were alive with strange, eyeless fish, that bit, snapped, and flung themselves ferociously upon the car's glistening hull.

"You say you disabled the Red Terror—why didn't you destroy her?" demanded the inventor sternly.

Dick Dauntless explained his reasons.

Captain Flame nodded.

"Perhaps you are right," he admitted. "Yet there are as clever engineers on the Island of Lost Hopes as the world can produce, and black-hearted scoundrels who will stand at nothing if plunder leads them on. During your journey from the volcano to the City of Palaces did you see anything of Karl Munchen?" he added.

"Karl Munchen!" repeated Dick. "Is he not on board?"

"No. I forgot, you do not know that it was he who released the Tanka king, and almost led to the destruction of the Octopus and all within her," explained the great inventor.

Then Captain Flame condensed their adventures on the island into a few short, crisp words, explaining how, after the defeat of the Tankas we have already described, the white-bearded priest whom Dick had shot had caused an eruption of the volcano, from which the Octopus had only escaped by seeking safety in the sea.

Expecting the boys to return, they had gone back to the island, to find the launch crushed beneath the fallen rock, and had mourned them dead.

For days they had wandered about seeking an opening, but in vain.

From the desert island they had returned to the Sargasso Sea. Forcing their way through the outer fence, they had climbed the rocky barrier leading to the centre of Crater Island, and plunged into the inland sea.

Chance had directed them to the home of the Serpent God just in time to rescue Dick Dauntless, his father, and Jack Orde from certain death.

"And now, though every moment is of consequence, I must stop to bring the traitor, Karl Munchen, to his account," he added bitterly.

"Why not leave him to the punishment he has brought upon himself?" demanded Dick. "Depend upon it, sir, sooner or later he will wish himself back in the Octopus, even if he has not already done so."

But Captain Flame shook his head.

"It is not my custom to leave either the punishing of my enemies or the rewarding of my friends to others," he declared coldly, and Dick knew that there was nothing more to be said.

Presently they came to the inner curve of a large bay, and, drawing in shore, found the waves dashing wildly upon a precipitous cliff, the wave-topped summit of which was some twenty feet below a boulder-strewn beach.

Captain Flame guided the Octopus close to the base of the cliff, then his long, white, tapering fingers played amongst the wheels which manipulated the car's tentacles.

Swiftly the tentacles glided over the face of the cliff until the foremost found some projecting rock round which to cling.

Then another obtained a similar hold.

The remaining tentacles, pressing hard upon the rock-strewn ocean-bed, forced the bows of the Octopus upwards, thus assisting the two first to draw her towards the surface.

Dick Dauntless watched the manoeuvres with surprise.

His experience of the wonderful submarine car told him that there was little she could not do, but he had never imagined that she could clamber up the face of a precipitous cliff.

Slowly, but with a steady persistency, she raised herself foot by foot from the ground, her revolving wheels, pressed tightly to the face of the cliff, assisting the feelers in their heavy task.

It was an exciting time.

At any moment a straining wire tentacle might break or might give way, sending the Octopus rolling over and over to the bottom.

But Captain Flame, standing with one foot on the side, one on the floor of the conning-tower, gazed calmly, almost indifferently, towards the white foam which marked the breaking waves overhead.

He, at least, had every confidence in his machine.

Nor was it misplaced.

In a very short time, considering the difficulty of their path, the Octopus had reached the shelving summit of the cliff.

For a moment she halted, like some enormous marine monster pausing to breathe.

Captain Flame was looking about for some safe anchorage. He found it in an enormous fissure which ran inland from the edge of the sea.

Soon the Octopus was resting high and dry above the water at the foot of a cleft in the earth, beyond which could be seen the waving branches of a subterranean forest.

Throwing open all doors and windows, Captain Flame ordered the crew to subject the Octopus to a thorough overhaul; then, armed only with a sword and a brace of revolvers, sternly ordered Dick Dauntless, who had volunteered to accompany him, to remain where he was, and attacked the steep side of the Octopus's hiding-place.

News of Munchen.

Working with a will, as did all who served Captain Flame, the crew of the submarine car speedily went through every chamber, every storehouse, tapping the steel-work in search of undeveloped cracks, sweeping out accumulated dust which had forced its way in during the fearful experience on the desert island, and examining and tightening every bolt and rivet, whilst Mr. MacIntyre prepared his engines for their long run back to the island.

The result was that when, some six hours later, Captain Flame reappeared, he found the Octopus as spick and span as the day she had left the workshop on the Island of Lost Hopes.

His face was very grave, and Dick Dauntless saw at a glance that something serious had happened.

Nor was he long kept in suspense.

Calling the crew together in the general-room, Captain Flame unfolded a strange tale.

He told how, advancing with the noiseless steps he had learned years before from a tribe of Indians on the Amazon, he had crept almost up to the walls of the City of Palaces.

His intention had been to penetrate that wondrous town, and discover, if possible, where Karl Munchen lived, or was confined.

But there had been no need.

A party of soldiers were encamped outside the gates.

Two men, evidently officers, wandered into the jungle and seated themselves close to where Captain Flame lay.

From their conversation he had gathered the information he sought.

It was very different from what he had believed.

Karl Munchen had never reached the City of Palaces. He had been seized on the way by the hideous men of the woods, and was then a prisoner in their hands.

The officers had spoken callously of the stranger's peril. Yet even they had seemed to pity the unfortunate captive, though why or wherefore Captain Flame could not gather.

From a few chance words the speakers let fall the unseen listener discovered that Munchen's prison was in a valley between three hills standing in a triangle, some two hours' journey to the north of the city.

Satisfied with what he had heard, Captain Flame was about to withdraw when he was arrested by hearing one of the men say:

"'Methinks it would have been wiser if our king had let these outer barbarians escape. But the priests clamour for their blood, and the king covets the magic carriage, with which he hopes to free our country of the accursed men of the woods.'"

His companion had shrugged his shoulders.

"Our king is a mighty man of war, the greatest monarch that has ever ruled over the under-world," he declared, "but I doubt if even he will succeed against men who live in a

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moving fort, and can strike down their foes by hundreds at a greater distance than our best bowmen can shoot an arrow. Besides, now they have rescued their comrades, they have doubtless since taken their departure, and have reached the outer world, whither we cannot follow."

"Ah, that is one reason why our king is so determined upon their destruction," replied the other. "He fears that if they return to their own country they will come back with more of these magic vessels, against which we will be unable to make a stand. He has therefore given orders that the tunnel into the mountain of fire shall be blocked up, and already a thousand fishermen are busy preparing a trap in the sea in Crater Island, from which they will find it impossible to escape."

"Well, the king is the king, and his word is law, yet I for one would be better pleased if I knew that the outer barbarians had returned to their own world."

At that moment a bugle sounded in the camp, and the two officers had hurried off to rejoin their men.

"And now, lads, I have told you all. The Tankas believe they can secure the Octopus; we think different—eh, lads? At any rate, our first task must be to secure the German, then we will test the quality of this trap of which the officer spoke."

"Forewarned is forearmed, and we will not blunder into it blindfold."

"To quarters, lads! There are stirring times before us!"

A cheer, led by Dick Dauntless, echoed through the general-room ere the boys separated to their various posts.

Dick Dauntless's duty was to see that every man was at his post, and that all arms, helmets, and accoutrements were ready for immediate use.

It was no easy task moving about the Octopus when she first started, for her decks were tilted at an angle of forty-five degrees, and she swayed from side to side like a ship in a heavy sea as she climbed up the steep side of the gully.

But by the time Dick had made his way to the conning-tower to report that all were ready, she had once more resumed her proper position, and, urged forward by her mighty wheels, was crashing through the jungle, avoiding the larger trees, but snapping the smaller saplings as though they had been reeds.

Presently they crossed the long, straight, well-made road which Dick and Jack Orde had traversed on their way to the City of Palaces, and Dick caught a fleeting glance of a huge army of Tankas hastening from the city to attack them.

He pointed the army out to Captain Flame.

The inventor smiled.

He knew that, even were the Tankas mounted, his submarine car could easily leave the swiftest horse behind. Nor did he feel any anxiety regarding return.

The Octopus could force her way through the whole armed force of the Tankas king if need arose.

Suddenly Captain Flame shut off power and applied the powerful iron bands which, circling the hubs of the hind wheels, acted as brakes, for from out a towering mass of shrubs immediately before them arose a huge, dark-brown body, covered with long, shining fur.

It was as though a mountain of living flesh and blood had suddenly arisen to bar their path.

Too late Captain Flame had put the brakes on.

Ere the Octopus could come to a standstill her blunt bows were buried in the curtain of fur which had so unexpectedly barred their path.

There was a sudden shock, a deafening bellow of pain ringing in their ears, and the Octopus recoiled as a billiard ball springs back from a cushion.

For a few seconds she swayed from side to side, until those on board feared she would capsize, but she at length settled down on her wheels, whilst the huge animal against which they had run writhed in agony on the ground.

Presently a huge leg protruded from the mass of fur, and a huge foot, a yard across, was planted firmly on the earth.

The next moment the creature straightened itself up, and Dick saw, to his amazement, an enormous body, tapering to a ludicrously small head, but dimly seen amidst the tops of the tall trees, moving off at a clumsy, earth-shaking trot.

His thoughts flew to a model he had seen in the South Kensington Museum a year or so before, and he recognised the ungainly creature as a giant sloth.

"If I'd had time I would have secured his skin, and thus have saved myself a future journey to the wilds of Patagonia, where some of these enormous antediluvian beasts are supposed to exist," declared Captain Flame regretfully.

As he spoke he started the engines once more, and gathering speed with every revolution of her wheels, the Octopus was soon plunging through the thick undergrowth of the wonderful under-world forest.

Presently they emerged upon a wide, open plain, beyond

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which could be seen yet another forest, rising above the tree-tops of which appeared the hills of which they were in search.

No longer delayed by the undergrowth or compelled to proceed cautiously lest they should dash against the trunk of an enormous tree, the Octopus sped across the plain at a good fifty miles an hour.

Trapped But Not Caught.

As they neared the three hills a constant jabbering, as of an innumerable crowd of startled apes, reached their ears. Soon the air was darkened by a cloud of huge stones, which rattled harmlessly on the car's stout plates, as the men of the wood assailed the invaders of their sanctuary.

From every shrub, from every clump of tangled undergrowth, from the interlaced branches above their heads, a countless horde of the wild men of the woods flung themselves upon the swiftly-moving car.

They advanced in thousands. Their fearful, beast-like faces were contorted with rage as they dropped from the trees upon the hull, careless of the fact that scores were crushed beneath the enormous wheels, or were borne onward, shrieking with frenzied hate, as they clung to the wire tentacles or broke their huge, claw-like nails on the car's slippery plates.

So numerous were their foes, so wondrous their disregard of the certain death which menaced all who approached the car, that, for a minute or so, Dick Dauntless feared lest they should stop her by sheer weight of numbers.

Reluctantly Captain Flame brought the steel wire tentacles into play. Beating the air like flails, they soon cleared a path through the living flood.

In the centre of the three hills appeared a city of dome-shaped huts. They looked more like the nests of savage beasts, as indeed they were, than human habitations.

In a cleared space in the midst of the woodmen's town arose a tall, gallows-like structure, from which, trussed like a fowl prepared for the table, twirled the limp, white form of Karl Munchen, half-hidden in the smoke of a recently-lighted fire immediately beneath him.

At first they feared that they had come too late, and that the boy, who, though now a traitor, had yet once been a comrade, was already dead.

But, even as they looked, the slowly circling face came towards them, and Dick uttered a cry of dismay, as he saw Munchen's wide-staring eyes were gazing, with terror-laden appeal, at the Octopus.

Crashing through the huts, scattering the occupants in all directions, Captain Flame steered the car straight towards where Munchen hung.

A moment later a tentacle had wound itself gently round the tortured boy's body, whilst another tore the rope by which he was suspended from its fastening.

A cry of baffled hate and rage arose from the woodmen when they saw their intended victim disappear into the white, glistening hull.

Filling the air with blood-curdling yells, they hurled themselves upon the car, their huge, knotted clubs resounding like thunder from her staunch plates.

Dick Dauntless hastened at once to Karl Munchen's assistance.

He felt the car trembling beneath the woodmen's fearful blows.

Suddenly she swayed from side to side, the blows ceased as though by magic, and he knew that the strange, squalid town, with its wild inhabitants, was being left far behind.

Karl Munchen was in a parlous state. His body was literally covered with bruises, his back scarred as though by a cat-o'-nine-tails, his eyes shone with the strange, shrinking, terrified glare of one whom terror has driven insane.

Leaving him under Mopsa's charge—for amongst his other qualifications the little Chinaman was a splendid doctor—Dick returned to the conning-tower, where he found his father standing by the driving-seat, on which Captain Flame stood.

The inventor's eyes were fixed intently upon the track, down which they were swiftly retreating.

His object attained, he was anxious to leave the under-world as quickly as possible, or perhaps discretion would have warned him to have taken a more circuitous route.

Not a foe was in sight, and, remembering the conversation he had overheard, Captain Flame was on his guard, with the result that, just as the road leading to the city showed ahead, he slowed down, and, cautiously extending one of the car's wire ropes, jerked a rope which ran up and down the road.

A moment later a huge arrow, formed of the stout trunk of a fir tree, hurtled by.

Moving slowly from out the forest, Captain Flame glanced

in the direction from whence the missile had come, to see a crowd of Tankas clustered round an enormous catapult, the wide ends of which were lost to sight on either side of the road.

Yells of baffled rage greeted the reappearance of the Octopus, to which she replied with mocking blasts on her siren as she resumed her way.

A mile from the sea Captain Flame turned the car from the track by which she had advanced.

His keen eyes had seen a hastily-dug pit, which the Tankas had finished but had not had time to cover over.

Moving more cautiously, for it was now evident that their foes were determined upon their capture, or destruction, Captain Flame guided his car through undergrowth alive with foes, for bugle blasts, loud shouted orders, and the steady tramp of marching men resounded on all sides.

Again he was compelled to turn aside, or the Octopus would have impaled herself upon a fence of huge, iron-tipped poles, planted at such an angle that they must inevitably have pierced her lower plates if she ran against them.

Soon a clatter of iron on iron told that the Tankas were launching their enormous arrows at the car, possibly hoping to injure her through some loose joint in her armour.

But their hopes were doomed to disappointment. There was no weak place in the submarine car, or she would never have travelled in safety a score miles from her dock.

After the mighty pummelling of the ocean, the puny efforts of the Tankas were futile. But Captain Flame was soon to find that in the Tanka king he had an enemy worthy of his steel.

Again and again he tried to reach the cleft in the rock through which he had emerged from the sea.

No matter in which direction he turned he found his way

"It's a fine sight, Dauntless," he said, turning to his friend.

A short laugh escaped Mr. Dauntless's lips.

"A sight I'd rather see in more open country," he replied, adding anxiously, "What do you intend to do?"

"Continue our journey," was the brief response.

Captain Flame touched a switch by his side.

Immediately the shutters fell over the glass walls and port-holes of the submarine car.

Dick held his breath. He felt the Octopus tremble beneath his feet as she moved with ever-increasing speed towards the verge of the tall cliffs before them.

"Good heavens, Flame, what are you about?" demanded Mr. Dauntless.

Captain Flame's sole reply was to shout an order on the telephone to Mr. MacIntyre to put on every ounce of power he could get out of the engines.

Barely had the words left his lips ere the edge of the cliff was reached.

The next moment father and son were clinging in terror to each other as they saw the land disappear from view, and felt the car, carried forward by its own momentum, being hurled through the air.

So swiftly had the Octopus been travelling when she left the top of the cliff that she hurtled like an enormous shell for nearly three hundred yards, ere her bows dipped.

A few seconds later she plunged, with a tremendous splash which sent a column of water flying high above the waves, into the sea.

Down she sped, down and down until, at length, she was speeding over the bottom of the sea.

As calmly as though the dangerous expedient which had

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barred by iron-tipped stakes, whilst an attempt to break back proved that his foes were hemming them in on every side but one, and that, with a grim smile on his lips, Captain Flame took.

The reason why this side had been left unguarded was not far to seek.

Their path ended on an enormous cliff, five hundred feet above the sea.

A mighty shout of triumph arose from the concealed Tankas as Captain Flame brought the Octopus to a halt.

They believed her capture was assured.

Suddenly a strange trumpeting arose immediately behind the car.

A few minutes later Captain Flame, Mr. Dauntless, and Dick drew in their breath in a gasp of admiring amazement. From beyond the long lines of spikes, which hemmed them in, appeared a semi-circle of enormous mammoths.

Upon the back of each huge mammoth was a howdah, in the shape of a castle, crowded with armed men.

From a magnificently-trapped animal in the centre the king directed the assault.

Trumpeting shrilly, the ever-closing circle of the enormous monsters advanced upon the car.

Dick and his father looked into each other's pale faces with alarm.

Surely, even the Octopus must surrender, or be crushed to pieces beneath these moving mountains of flesh, bone, and muscle.

Dick Dauntless glanced into Captain Flame's face, and was comforted.

The inventor was watching the mighty beast with the expression of an amused, but otherwise uninterested, spectator.

saved them from the Tankas might not easily have ended in their deaths, Captain Flame turned to Dick Dauntless, and, giving him the course, bade him summon him when Crater Island was reached. Then, thrusting his arm through that of Mr. Dauntless, he led him to his own room.

Caught!

Many were the strange sights which met Dick Dauntless's gaze as he guided the submarine car through the dark waters of that underground sea.

Strange fish, attracted by the glare of the Octopus's search-light, surrounded them on every side.

Once a huge, shapeless form, in which he fancied he could detect an enormous cavernous mouth, barred his path, but shrank away, blinded by the searchlight's glare.

At another time he heard a roar of waves, and saw immediately above him the billows dashing against the roof of this wondrous underworld, which, at this point, came to within a few feet of the surface of the sea.

He knew now that he was approaching the outer world, and in obedience to Captain Flame's orders, had just touched the bell which would summon the inventor to his side, when a sudden turn in the wide, tunnel-like passage brought the welcome beams of the reflected sunlight shining into the tower.

(Another grand, long instalment of this thrilling serial story in next Thursday's number of THE GEM LIBRARY.)

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From Another Colonial Reader.

The letter published below, from a chum in Western Australia, is very interesting, by reason of the inking it gives of the difficulties which some readers of the good old GEM Library have to surmount before they can obtain their favourite paper:

"Norseman, Western Australia.

"Dear Editor,—I have been a constant subscriber for a couple of years, and cannot wish for better yarns than have been supplied. The serial, 'The Brotherhood of Iron,' was the best story I have ever read.

"Railway communication has lately been opened between this town and Coolgardie, and has made a marked improvement in the price of food, papers, etc. Before the opening of the railway we had to pay exactly six times the English price for THE GEM, 'Magnet,' and other papers. I first saw THE GEM when I was in Perth, three years ago, and on reading the first story was so delighted with it that I introduced it to my chums, who in turn showed it to others, and the sale here has now grown from one to several hundreds. They all agree it is the best story book for boys they know. They all appreciate the good qualities and stirring worth of the heroes—namely, Tom Merry, Jack Blake, the one and only Gussy, Wally, Kangaroo, Herries, Digby, and the rest.

"I think that Frank Kingston, Dolores, and Professor Polgrave are magnificent characters.

"I am very glad to see you have opened a 'Chat Page,' as it enables readers to correspond with other 'Gemites' in Merry England. My sisters read your paper with great interest; and, although it means a two-mile ride, I procure it as soon as it arrives at the newsagent's.—Yours truly,

"R. W. P."

Many thanks, R. W. P. I should like to hear from you again when you can find time to write.

Out of Print 3d. Books Wanted.

A. Barrett, 95, Knightley Street, Queen's Road, Manchester. "Wolves of the Deep," and "Lion against Bear," the two popular serials which ran in "The Magnet" Library, have been published in separate volumes of "The Boys' Friend" 3d. Complete Library, but are now out of print. The best I can do is to call attention of your fellow-Gemites to the fact that you desire to get these books. Perhaps some reader may be able to oblige you with a second-hand copy of each.

A Want Supplied.

In answer to the request of Master E. Phillips, published on this page in THE GEM, No. 192, Master W. Ward, of 5, Annan Street, Denton, near Manchester, very kindly writes offering to supply his want.

Health Hints.**Things to Remember About Eating.**

Never take anything into the system merely for the purpose of tickling the palate. See that your food has a value.

Food supplies the wants of our bodies in four ways:

1. The materials of which our bodies are made.
2. The materials to repair the wastes of the body.
3. To produce heat to keep the body warm.
4. To produce muscular and intellectual strength.

Eat slowly. Do not bolt your food, but masticate it thoroughly. Do not drink liquids of any kind while there is food in the mouth.

Drinking.

Water is the only liquid that will absolutely quench thirst. Coffee, without milk, cream, or sugar, is the only general stimulant and tonic which has no reaction. In its proper form it is a nerve-restorer instead of a nerve-destroyer.

Avoid all false stimulants. Take a glass of moderately cold water half an hour or more before breakfast. While the stomach is tubular, as it is when you arise, the water passes through quickly and removes all the mucus that has gathered during the period of rest. The water also performs other very useful functions.

Eat and drink strictly in moderation. Cultivate a cheerful disposition, and always take it with you to the table. Eat and drink only that which nourishes. Discard all foods that have no value. Eat and drink nothing at any time which you fear will result in discomfort to your stomach or to your nervous system.

By the Way.

H. Adamson, of Sewage Works, Halton, Leeds, wishes to correspond with some girl reader.

Master J. J. Allen, of 214, Hendon Broadway, London, N.W., wished to correspond with a Windsor reader by means of the aerial post. As this service has now been discontinued, perhaps my Hendon reader will be content to receive communications through the medium of the ordinary post.

For information with a view to joining the American Police Force, "Constable," of Dalston, should apply to the American Consul, Mr. J. L. Griffiths, at 42, New Broad Street, E.C.

The Editor's Acknowledgments.

I have to acknowledge with thanks interesting letters from the following readers: A. J. Hitchins, S.E.; W. K., N.; H. L. P., London, N.; J. W. B., Edinburgh; A. W. Parsons, Southampton; J. Borrer, Bognor; "Sheffielder," Sheffield; C. H. C., Cookley; M. M., Waterford, Ireland; F. T. C., Peckham, S.E.; W. Woods, Vauxhall, S.W.; H. S. O., Liverpool; J. W. B., London, W.; Percy A., Highgate, N.; Alick Davidson, South Africa; H. Hollics, Hammersmith; Miss M. Kemp, Ierne Hill, S.E.; Miss Kathleen E., Littlehampton; "Constant Reader," Leeds; E. L. T., Doncaster; G. E. B., Manchester; M. H., "Whitely"; A. H., "Whitely"; F. M., Birmingham; H. F. S., Blackpool; L. Bull, Hawthorn, South Australia; L. M. and D. C., Tooting; H. T. P., Lambeth, S.E.; J. G. and A. Blake, London; W. W. and G. D. W., Peckham Rye, S.E.; A. Roberts, Putney; Miss Mary L., Putney; Miss W. M. Scott, London, E.C.; E. N. Litherland; W. M., Kirrimuir; Miss S. J., London; N. E. S., Coventry; H. S. R., Cardiff; C. E. W., Wolverhampton; "A Gemite," South Shields; J. and S. W., Putney; A. B. C., Berkshire; E. G., Lancashire; L. W., Peckham, S.E.; L. W., Halifax; J. R. S., Watford; A. R. P., Lee, S. E.; H. M. J. G., Belfast; A. S. S., Hastings; Miss A. J., Whitchurch; Miss E. L., Burton-on-Trent; Miss M. W. W., London, N.W.; L. D. M., Hastings; E. G. Anters, London, W.

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