

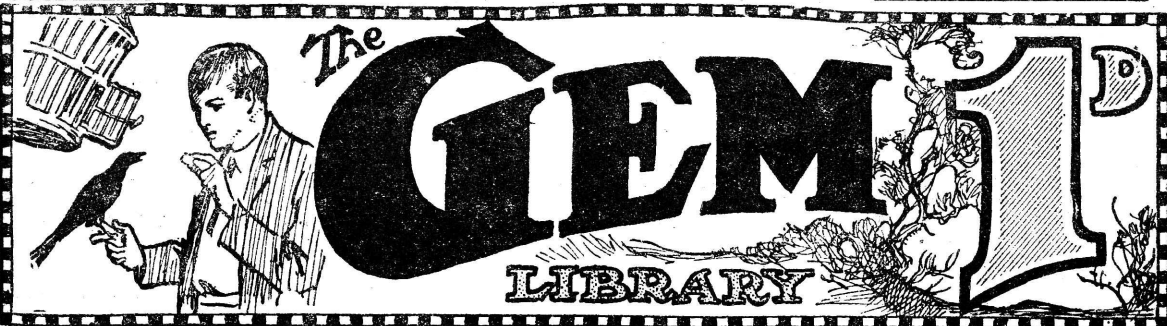
NEXT
WEDNESDAY:

253
"JACK BLAKE ON THE WARPATH!"

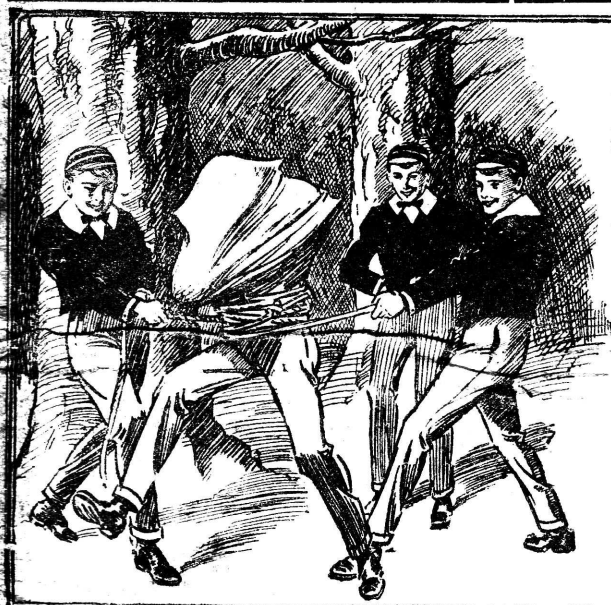
ORDER
EARLY.

Every

Wednesday.



Complete Stories for All, and Every Story a Gem.



THE CAPTAIN'S RIVAL!

A Splendid, New, Long, Complete School Tale of the chums of St. Jim's.

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

CHAPTER 1.

Tom Merry Means Business.

TOM MERRY, of the Shell Form at St. Jim's, thumped on his table in the study.

Thump!

Manners and Lowther looked up. Manners was cutting films—an occupation that seemed to take up a great deal of Manners's spare time—and Monty Lowther was grinding out an imposition that Mr. Railton, the School House master, had kindly given him.

Tom Merry's emphatic thump upon the table interrupted the proceedings. Manners's scissors went jabbing through a most valuable film, which gave a view of the School House, seen from the south, and Monty Lowther's pen jerked and scattered a variety of blots of all shapes and sizes over his paper.

There was a simultaneous yell from Manners and Lowther.

"Fathead!"

"Chump!"

"Sorry," said Tom Merry; "but—"

"Look at my film!"

"Look at my impot!"

Tom Merry glanced at them.

"Look rather rotten, don't they?" he assented affably.

Manners and Lowther rose to their feet. There was vengeance in their looks. The Terrible Three were the closest chums at St. Jim's, but there was a time when friendship did not count, and this was evidently the time. Manners and Lowther advanced upon Tom Merry with warlike looks.

"You'll look rotten, too, when we've finished with you, you burbling ass!" Monty Lowther shouted.

"Collar him!"

Tom Merry waved his hand.

"Hold on!"
"That's what we're going to do!" said the chums of the Shell together, as they laid violent hands upon the leader of the study.

"I—I mean, leggo! Oh—oh!"

Bump!

"Ow!"

"Give him another!"

"Stop it!" roared Tom Merry. "I've got something jolly important to say—something about the Mexborough match!"

"Blow the Mexborough match!"

"And Kildare—"

"Blow Kildare!"

"And Monteith—"

"Blow Monteith!"

"Look here!" roared Tom Merry, struggling. "I'll tell you—"

Bump!

"Yaroo!"

"Give him another!" gasped Lowther, flushed with the exertion. "Give him one for his mother, and one for his Uncle Jim!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove!" The study door opened, and an elegant junior looked in, through an eyeglass that was jammed in his eye. "Pway what's the twouble, deah boys?"

"Ow! Ow!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, of the Fourth, jammed the monocle a little tighter in his eye, and regarded the scene with great interest. Blake, Herries, and Digby, also of the Fourth, looked in with equal interest. Monty Lowther and Manners were bumping their leader as if they meant to bump him through into Knox's study underneath.

"Draggemoff!" gasped Tom Merry. "Hellup!"

Next Wednesday:

"JACK BLAKE ON THE WARPATH!" AND "BIRDS OF PREY!"

No. 253 (New Series), Vol. 7.

Copyright in the United States of America.

"Bai Jove!"
 "Give him one more!" panted Lowther. "One for his Aunt Selina!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 "Rescue!" bawled Tom Merry.
 "Yaas, wathah, deah boy!"
 "Right-ho!" said Jack Blake.

And the chums of the Fourth rushed to the rescue, and Manners and Lowther were dragged off their victim.

Tom Merry sat up on the carpet, gasping.
 His jacket was split up the back, and his collar was hanging by a single stud, and his head looked like a mop.

The juniors grinned as they looked at him.
 "Bai Jove! You do look a wreck, deah boy!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 "If he's a wreck now, it's through being reckless a few minutes ago!" explained Monty Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 "Weally, Lowthah—"
 Tom Merry staggered to his feet. He bestowed a wrathful glare upon his chums as he grappled with his collar.

"You silly asses—"
 "Next time you won't thump the table when I'm doing an impot.," said Lowther, grinning.

"And when I'm cutting films," said Manners.
 "Blow your films and your impot!" grunted Tom Merry.
 "I was going to say something jolly important!"

"Leave it till I've done my impot.," said Monty Lowther.
 "I can't write out Virgil while you're saying something important."

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 "We've come—" began Jack Blake.
 "Yes; we can see that!" said Lowther. "Now, are you going again?"

"Weally, Lowthah—"
 "Sit down, you chaps, if you can find anything to sit on!" said Tom Merry hospitably. "I think Lowther wants sitting on more than anything else in the study!"

"Hear, hear!"
 "I was going to tell you silly chumps," said Tom Merry, glowering at Manners and Lowther, "that these chaps were coming here to consult about an important matter!"

"No need to thump the table—"
 "Fathead!"
 "Ass!"

"Look here—"
 "Look here—"
 "Pway make it pax, deah boys!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy pacifically. "Pway don't wag one another at a time like this!"

"A time like what?" demanded Manners.
 "This, deah boy!"

"Blessed if I can see anything wrong with the time!" said Manners. "It's not bed-time!"
 "Weally, Mannahs—"

"Gentlemen," said Tom Merry, "we've met in this study to discuss an important matter, affecting the honour of St. Jim's. I'm expecting Figgins & Co., too; but before they come, we'd better settle what the meeting is going to decide. Then we can tell it to those New House bounders as a fait accompli."

"A which?"
 "A fait accompli," said Tom Merry sturdily.
 "Is that Dutch?"

"No, it isn't!" roared Tom Merry. "It's French, and it means an accomplished fact!"

"Never come across an accomplished fact," said Monty Lowther thoughtfully. "I've heard of an accomplished young lady, but—"

"If Lowthah is goin' to be funny, I beg to retire from this meetin'," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Hear, hear!"
 "Weally, you fellows—"
 Tom Merry thumped on the table again. Fortunately,

Lowther was not rewriting his impot. yet, and Manners had left off cutting films.

"Order!" he exclaimed. "We've got to settle the bizney before the New House kids come. Order, and listen to your uncle!"

"Hear, hear!"
 "We're listening, deah boy! Go ahead!"
 And Tom Merry went ahead, and the juniors listened with expressions of almost owl-like gravity.

CHAPTER 2.

Figgins & Co. Do Not See It!

TOM MERRY raised his hand dramatically.
 "Gentlemen—"
 "Hear, hear!"

"Adsum!" murmured Monty Lowther.
 "Ha, ha, ha!"
 "Gentlemen, the school is going to the giddy dogs. There was a time when the School House was universally acknowledged to be the cock-house of St. Jim's. We've kept our end up, I think—"

"Hear, hear!"
 "Yaas, wathah!"
 "Figgins & Co., and Redfern & Co., representing the junior element in the New House, have been kept in their places—"

"Bwavo!"
 "So far as the juniors are concerned, the School House has been top dog!"

"Hear, hear!"
 "But," and Tom Merry shook his head seriously—"while we juniors have been standing up for the honour of the House, and keeping the old flag flying, what have the seniors been doing?"

"Echo answers what?" said Blake enthusiastically.
 Arthur Augustus shook his head, with a puzzled look.

"Imposs, deah boy!" he said.
 "Eh?"
 "Echo would natuwally answah 'doin', as that was the last word Tom Merry uttered," the swell of St. Jim's explained.

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 "Order!" said Herries. "This isn't a time to be funny—"
 "But I wasn't bein' funnay, deah boy."

"Order!"
 "I wefuse to ordah—I mean—"
 "Shut up!"
 "Silence!"

"Go ahead, Tom Merry!"
 The captain of the Shell went ahead.

"Gentleman, while we've been keeping the junior flag flying, the seniors have been resting on their laurels. Now, Kildare, our respected captain, is a brick. Although his front name is Eric, he's all right."

"Good old Kildare!"
 "But Kildare has his weak points—"
 "Go hon!"

"He gives way too much to the New House—"
 "Yaas, wathah!"
 "He's putting too many New House seniors into the school team to play the Mexborough eleven."

"Yaas, wathah!"
 "If he's short of men on this side of the school," went on Tom Merry, waxing eloquent, "let him call on the juniors! We're all willing to play in the first eleven—"

"Yaas, wathah! I should be vewy pleased to play centah-forward in the first eleven," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, with a nod.

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 "Weally, you fellows, I see nothin' whatevah to cackle at in that remark—"

"Gentlemen, you are aware that Monteith, the head prefect of the New House, has always been on bad terms with Kildare—"

"Yaas, wathah!"
 "They made it up, and for a long time matters went smoothly; but over this giddy footer bizney, the old bad blood has broken out. Now, you'll all agree with me, that the fault is on the side of the New House."

"Hear, hear!"
 "Kildare, if anything, is too meek and mild—"
 "Yaas, wathah!"

"He gives way too much to Monteith, and lets him have a place in the team, as well as Gray and Webb and Baker—all New House chaps."

"Jolly good players!" remarked Jack Blake.
 "Yes; but there ought to be a bigger School House element in the team. But passing that over, there's no doubt that Monteith isn't satisfied with four men in the eleven. He wants to make trouble."

"Lots of the fellows are saying so, anyway," said Digby, with a nod.

G "THE GEM" Library
 FREE CORRESPONDENCE EXCHANGE
COUPON.
 To be enclosed, with coupon taken from page 2, MAGNET No. 253, with all requests for correspondents. This may only be used by readers in Australia, New Zealand, Africa, Canada, India, or other of our Colonies.
 (See column 2, page 27 of this issue.)

253



Four pairs of eyes gazed vacantly on the contents of the box. Blake rose to his feet. "We've been done!" he gasped, "By Figgins & Co!" (See Chapter 18.)

"Quite true!"

"He's bothering Kildare bald-headed," said Tom Merry indignantly. "I shouldn't be surprised to see Kildare's hair grey one morning, like that giddy chap who was a prisoner somewhere, and grew grey in a single day—"

"Grew white in a single night, you ass!" said Blake.

"Grew pink in a single wink!" murmured Monty Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Gentlemen, I've called you together to hear my ideas on the subject—"

"Cut 'em short," said Manners.

"Look here—"

"Order!"

"Pile in, Tommy!"

"It's up to us, as juniors, to back up Kildare, and make him stand up against New House encroachments," said Merry.

"Hear, hear!"

"It's up to Figgins & Co., as juniors of the New House, to help bring pressure to bear on Monteith, to make him behave himself."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Ergo—that's Latin—therefore, we're going to call on Kildare, and tell him that we back him up through thick and thin—"

"Hear, hear!"

"And we're going to persuade Figgins & Co. to put it plainly to their House-captain, and keep him in order!"

"But will they?" said Blake very doubtfully. "As New House chaps, they may not see the matter in a reasonable light."

"Then, we'll point it out to them carefully."

"And if they won't listen—"

"Oh, in that case we'll bump them!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Knock!"

"Order! Here they are!"

The study door opened, and three juniors presented themselves. They were Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn of the New House; generally known as Figgins & Co.

"Please we've come!" said Figgins.

Fatty Wynn looked round the study. He seemed

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 253.

NEXT
WEDNESDAY:

"JACK BLAKE ON THE WARPATH!" By MARTIN CLIFFORD.
Order in advance.

surprised to see a sheet of impot. paper, another of blotting, and a roll of films on the table.

"You asked us over for a special occasion," he exclaimed.
 "Yes, that's right," said Tom Merry, with a nod.
 "You said it was something very special."

"So it is."
 "Then where is it?"
 "Where's what?"
 "The feed."
 "What feed?" demanded Tom Merry.
 "Isn't it a feed?"
 "Ha, ha! No."

"Well, of all the asses!" said Fatty Wynn, in great disgust.
 "You said it was something very special, so of course I thought—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 "Oh, rats!" growled Fatty Wynn. And the subsequent proceedings seemed to interest him no more.

"Well, what's the trouble with you fellows?" asked Figgins genially. "Got into some trouble, and called on the New House to help you out of it? That's only right and proper."

"Rats!"
 "Weally, Figgins—"
 "It's the footer!" Tom Merry explained.
 "What about the footer?"
 "What's that got to do with juniors?" asked Figgins, naturally enough.

Tom Merry coughed.
 "Ahem! You see, we think it's up to us to make matters go better—"

"My hat!"
 "There's disputes between the members of the team—School House and New House. Some of the New House rotters—"

"The what?" demanded Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn, all together.

"Ahem! I should say fellows—"
 "I should think you should!" said Figgins wrathfully.
 "Well, some of the New House fellows have been turned out of the team because they were no class—"

"Oh, rats!"
 "And Monteith and Baker, the only chaps who can play, have resigned—"

"Ancient history, my son!"
 "Kildare's been trying to make it up, but your rotten prefect gives him the cold shoulder every time—"

"Our what?"
 "Ahem! Your respected prefect—"

"Well, we know all this," said Kerr. "We didn't come over here for a lesson in ancient history. You'll be telling us next that all Gaul was divided into three parts—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 "Oh, bosh!" said Tom Merry. "Now, we've got an idea—"

"Whose?" asked Figgins. And Kerr and Wynn chuckled.
 "Oh, don't be funny. We've got an idea. The School House being in the right, and the New House in the wrong—"

"Eh?"
 "It's up to us to back up Kildare, and up to you fellows to put your House captain in his place—"

"What!"
 "And we call upon you to do it," said Tom Merry firmly. And all the School House fellows in the study chimed in enthusiastically:

"Hear, hear!"
 Figgins & Co. simply glared.

"Do you want me to say what I think?" demanded Figgins.
 "Go ahead!"

"Well, I think we've got into a private lunatic asylum by mistake."

And Figgins & Co. marched out of the study, and slammed the door behind them with a slam that rang the whole length of the Shell passage.

The School House fellows looked at one another.
 "My hat!" said Tom Merry. "Figgy seems to be ratty about something."

"Go hon!"
 "Ha, ha, ha!"
 Blake rose.

"Doesn't seem to be much of a giddy success, does it?" he remarked. "You Shell chaps had better leave it to us. We are the leaders of the School House, as a matter of fact. We downed the New House time and again before you bouncers came to St. Jim's at all."

"Yaas, wathah!"
 "Rot!" said the Terrible Three, with one voice.
 "Look here—"

"Gentlemen," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, "I veward
 THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 253.

you as thwce asses! I shall wctire fwom this studay in disgust!"

And he did, and Blake and Herries and Digby followed him. The Terrible Three were left alone. They exchanged glances.

"No go!" remarked Lowther.
 "Spoiled my film for nothing," growled Manners.

"Oh, blow your film!" said Tom Merry crossly. "We've got to take this matter into our own hands, it seems to me. Figgins & Co. are determined to be unreasonable, and Reddy and Owen and Lawrence would be just as bad if we called on them. Blake and those Fourth Form duffers are silly asses! We've got to handle this matter."

"Hear, hear!"
 "Now, when a prefect is an obstinate ass, and won't give way even to a reasonable chap like Kildare, what's the best thing to be done to change him?" Tom Merry demanded.

"Stand him a feed!" suggested Lowther. "That's what Fatty Wynn would suggest."

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 "Not much good to a prefect. Besides, it's rather hard to get a feed, since the new order about closing the tuckshop at certain times," said Tom Merry, with a grunt.

"Now, the thing to be done with a prefect like Monteith is to rag him. He's determined to be up against the School House. Therefore, it's time for the School House to be down upon him, and show him that he's got to toe the line."

"Hear, hear! But how are you going to do it?"
 "Rag him!"

"Phew!" said Monty Lowther.
 "Rag a prefect!" said Manners doubtfully.
 "Only a New House prefect!" said Tom Merry reassuringly.

"Might get flogged or sacked, all the same."
 "Oh, rot!"

"Well, I'm game, if you are," said Lowther recklessly.
 "Give us the wheeze!"

"Same here!" said Manners.
 "Good egg!" said Tom Merry heartily. And the Terrible Three of the Shell put their heads together, and plotted a plot.

CHAPTER 3.

Not a Success!

JAMES MONTEITH, the head prefect of the New House, sat in his study. Outside, in the old quadrangle of St. Jim's, the December evening had set in dark and chilly. There was a cheery fire burning in the prefect's study, but Monteith's face was not looking cheery. Monteith had broken out, as the juniors termed it. He had resigned from the First Eleven, and he had induced other New House seniors to do the same. But he was not in a satisfied humour. Most of the New House seniors, especially Baker of the Sixth, wanted to see peace established between the two divisions, and were willing to meet Kildare half-way if he made any overtures of peace. And there was a rumour that Kildare had called a meeting of the School House members of the eleven, and they had decided to extend the olive-branch to the New House.

That Kildare would concede all Monteith's demands was not at all likely. If he did not, the prefect would gladly have allowed the breach between the two Houses to continue, at any cost of defeats to the First Eleven. Monteith was not the kind of fellow to place patriotism or duty before his personal feelings.

But he was pretty certain that if Kildare made a reasonable offer, he would not be allowed to refuse it. He was head prefect of his House, and he had a great deal of influence. But pressure would be brought to bear upon him by the other seniors, if there was a chance of patching up a peace, especially now that the Mexborough fixture was at hand, one of the toughest matches the St. Jim's eleven ever had to play.

Monteith had constituted himself the captain's rival. And if his House would have backed him up through thick and thin, there was no end to the trouble he might have given to the captain of all St. Jim's.

But there was a limit the other fellows would not pass, and he knew it. He was thinking it over as he sat in his study. There was a tap at the door.

"Come in!" said Monteith, thinking that it was Baker or Gray of the Sixth, coming to speak to him about the Mexborough match.

The door opened. Three juniors entered the study. Monteith stared at them blankly as he recognised the Terrible Three of the Shell.

Tom Merry & Co. came in, and closed the door solemnly behind them.

Monteith's eyes glinted as he fixed them on the School

House juniors. He did not like the Terrible Three, and they did not like him.

"Have you got a message for me?" he asked.

Tom Merry shook his head.

"No, Monteith."

"Then what have you come here for?"

"To speak to you."

"I don't want any jaw from School House fags," said Monteith, frowning.

And Manners and Lowther chuckled. Monteith pointed to the door.

"Get out!" he said briefly.

"But we haven't said what we came to say yet," said Tom Merry, in astonishment.

"I don't want to hear it!" roared the prefect

"My dear Monteith—"

"Get out!"

"We want to say—"

"Outside!"

"It's about the footer match with Mexborough," Tom Merry explained.

Monteith sneered.

"Is Kildare playing School House juniors in the team?" he asked. "It would be just like him, the cad!"

Tom Merry's eyes blazed.

"Whom are you calling a cad?" he shouted.

"Your captain," said Monteith coolly.

"Cad yourself!"

"Yes, rather!" said Manners.

"And rotter, too!" said Lowther.

Monteith jumped up, and reached for a cane. The Terrible Three faced him.

"Ahem!" said Tom Merry. "I say, Monteith, we came here to speak to you in a friendly way."

"Get out of my study!"

"We want to point out to you that your present caddish conduct with regard to the First Eleven isn't cricket—or footer, either."

"Hear, hear!" said Manners and Lowther.

"And we want you to reconsider it—"

"Will you get out?" roared the enraged New House prefect.

"Just a minute! We want you to understand that we're backing up Kildare, and we won't stand any nonsense from the New House! We want to say— Yarooooooh!"

Tom Merry did not really mean that he wanted to say "Yarooooh," but he said it, for the New House prefect's cane caught him across the shoulders as he was speaking, and he yelled.

Swish! Swish! Slash!

"Oh!" roared Lowther. "Ow!"

"Yowp!" gasped Manners.

Lash! Lash! Lash!

"Ow! Ow!"

"Oh! Oh!"

"Yah!"

Monteith went back into his study, and closed the door. The Terrible Three dashed out of the New House into the dusky quadrangle.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Figgins, as he saw them go. "Did you have any luck?"

"Yow-ow!"

"Oh, dear! Oh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And the Terrible Three disappeared into the December dusk.

CHAPTER 4.

Monteith Gets the Sack!

"H, dear!"

"Ow!"

"I'm hurt!"

The Terrible Three halted under the elms in the dusky quad., and rubbed their damaged skin, and groaned in chorus.

It could not be said that their visit to Monteith's study in the New House had been a howling success.

They had gone there to remonstrate with the New House prefect on his line of conduct, and to point out the caddishness of it to him in plain language.

They had certainly spoken plainly enough. Their fault was not in being ambiguous by any means. But their plainness of speech did not seem to have appealed to Monteith's sense of sweet reasonableness. His reply had been one that could not be argued with.

"The rotter!" groaned Tom Merry, as he rubbed his shoulders. "Who'd have thought he would break out like that?"

"Ow!" said Manners. "Argument is wasted on a chap like that. Yow!"

Tom Merry's eyes gleamed.

"We've done our best, haven't we?" he demanded.

"We have—ow!"

"And he wouldn't even listen?"

"No—ow!"

"Then there's nothing left but to give him the sack!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"He will look and feel a silly ass when he's tied up in a sack, and it will be a hint of what may happen to him if he doesn't mend his ways," said Tom Merry. "A foretaste of the wrath to come, you know."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We've got the ropes, and we've got the sack, and we'll catch him as he goes to the gym."

"Yes, rather."

James Monteith, when he left his study to go down to the gymnasium that evening, did not guess that an ambush was laid for him in the dusky quadrangle.

He had no suspicion of it until three figures suddenly leaped upon him from the darkness, and he was borne to the ground.

Bump!

"Oh!" roared Monteith.

"Collar him!" gasped Tom Merry.

"Got him!"

"The rope, quick!"

"Here you are!"

"Right!"

"Safe as houses!"

Before Monteith had a chance to struggle, his arms were tied down to his sides. Then a sack was drawn over his head, and the rope was tied round it, round his waist. Then he was dragged up. He presented the peculiar appearance of an inverted sack endowed with a pair of legs.

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

Monteith kicked savagely in the direction of the laughter. The Terrible Three dodged his kicking. It was easy enough, for the prefect could not see through the sack.

"Who are you?" roared the prefect. "I know you. Tom Merry is one!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'll have you expelled for this!" came a muffled voice from the sack.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Lemme gerrout!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You—you young scoundrels!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Monteith lurched away blindly. He had to go slowly, as he was afraid of running into the elms, or into a wall. The Terrible Three staggered away, doubled with merriment.

Monteith blundered to and fro, bumping into obstacles at intervals, and shouting in a muffled voice for help. The air was very close inside the old sack, though the Shell fellows had considerably cut some holes in it to allow him to breathe.

A glimmer of light through the thickness of the sack warned Monteith that he was near one of the Houses, though for the life of him he could not have told which.

He stumbled up the steps, blundering against the stone balustrade, and stumbled into the house, and there was a yell from Lorne, of the Fourth, who caught sight of him first. It was the School House the prefect had blundered into.

"Hallo! What's that?"

"Great Scott!" yelled Lumley-Lumley. "What is it?"

"Faith, and it's the wild man from Borneo!" chuckled Reilly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove, it's alive, deah boys!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, turning his famous monocle upon the moving sack.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Lemme out!" came a muffled voice from the sack. "I'm Monteith! Ow! I've been tied up by a gang of young ruffians—yow! Ow!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The discovery that it was Monteith did not seem to make the School House fellows very eager to help the unfortunate prefect. They roared with laughter.

Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's, came out of his study to see the cause of the uproar. He stared blankly at the walking sack.

"Great Scott! What's that?"

"Monteith!" yelled Blake. "Ha, ha, ha! He's got the sack!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove, I wegard that as funny!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Great Scott!" exclaimed Kildare, running towards the imprisoned prefect. "It's all right. I'll have you loose in a minute."

"Lemme out!"

"All right! All right!" Kildare felt in his pocket for a knife, opened it, and cut through the ropes. It was not a quick or an easy task. The Terrible Three had not spared the rope, and they had simply covered it with knots. Kildare had to hack it away piece by piece, the imprisoned prefect growling and grumbling all the time.

"Lemme out!"

"Won't be a minute now, Monteith!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Shut up, you fellows!" said the St. Jim's captain.

But not even the captain of the school could make the fellows stop laughing. Half the School House had gathered to look on by this time, though the Terrible Three were discreetly keeping out of sight.

The ropes were cut through at last, and Kildare dragged the sack off.

Monty's flushed face and towzled hair were exposed to view, his eyes glittering with rage, and his face smothered with dust from the sack. There was a fresh yell of laughter at the sight of him.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Monteith clenched his hands.

"I believe you had a hand in this!" he shouted furiously.

Kildare started.

"Are you speaking to me?" he exclaimed.

"Yes, I am!"

"Then I'll thank you not to speak to me in that tone," said Kildare coldly; "and you are quite mistaken in what you said. I am not likely to take part in a silly joke played on a prefect!"

"They were juniors of your House that did it!" yelled Monteith.

"Name them, and they will be punished," said the captain of St. Jim's.

"Tom Merry, Manners, Lowther!"

"Did you recognise them?"

"How could I recognise them in the dark?" snarled the prefect.

"Then how do you know that they did it?"

"I knew Tom Merry's voice—besides, they had all three been to my study, and I turned them out for their cheek!"

"Fetch those three chaps here, some of you!" said Kildare shortly.

Kangaroo, of the Shell, hurried away in search of the Terrible Three. The Cornstalk returned in a few minutes with Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther.

Kildare eyed them sternly.

"Did you play this jape on Monteith?" he asked.

"Ahem!" said Tom Merry.

"Answer me!"

"Is that quite a fair question?" asked Tom Merry, in his turn, with great calmness. "It's for Monteith to say who did it—if he minds."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Lumley-Lumley. "I guess he minds."

"Yaas, wathah; he looks like it."

And there was a general chuckle. If Tom Merry expected that the New House prefect would not mind the jape that had been played on him, it showed that the hero of the Shell was very sanguine indeed.

"I say that you three did it!" hissed Monteith. "Do you deny it?"

"Ahem!"

"Do you deny it, Tom Merry?" asked Kildare sharply.

"Ahem! No."

"You did it?"

"Well, if you put it like that—ahem!—yes."

"They've owned up!" said Monteith savagely. "Now they're coming with me to the Head!"

Kildare looked at him.

"No need to take a matter to the Head—a matter like this," he said. "We can deal with it as prefects."

The New House prefect gritted his teeth.

"I'm going to the Head!" he said. "I order those juniors to follow me!"

"Monteith—"

"Nonsense!"

And Monteith strode away to the Head's study. Kildare frowned. As he was head prefect of the School House, and the Terrible Three were School House boys, it would only have been a graceful action on Monteith's part to leave the matter in his hands. But it was not of much use expecting graceful actions from Monteith.

Tom Merry & Co. looked dubiously at Kildare. The captain of St. Jim's made a gesture.

"You'd better go," he said. "The Head will send for you, anyway, as soon as Monteith makes his complaint."

"Oh, my sainted aunt!" groaned Tom Merry.

And the Terrible Three, with lugubrious faces, followed Monteith to the study of Dr. Holmes, the Head of St. Jim's.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 253.

CHAPTER 5.

Rusticated

DR. HOLMES glanced at Monteith in amazement as the flushed and dishevelled prefect entered the study in response to his "Come in!"

"Bless my soul!" he exclaimed. "What has happened?"

"I have been assaulted by these juniors, sir!" said Monteith, almost stuttering with rage.

"What!"

"I have been tied up in a sack, sir, and bound with ropes, and left to find my way in that state into the House."

"Bless my soul!"

"Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther are the guilty parties, sir. They came to my study and insulted me, and I turned them out. Then they laid wait for me in the quadrangle, and treated me in the way I have described."

And Monteith panted.

Dr. Holmes turned a very severe look upon the three Shell fellows.

"Do you deny this?" he asked.

"N-n-no, sir."

"How dare you lay hands on a prefect?"

"You—you see, sir, this isn't an ordinary case," stammered Tom Merry. "If it had been Kildare or Darrel, or even Baker or Webb, we wouldn't have done it. But Monteith is such an outsider, sir—"

"Merry!"

"Yes, sir. He's making trouble over the footer—the Headland match, and the Mexborough match, too—and we thought we ought to talk to him reasonably."

"That's it, sir," ventured Lowther. "So we went over to his study—"

"And he was quite rude!" murmured Manners.

"Exactly!"

The Head tried not to smile.

"Then we thought a little ragging might bring him round, sir," said Tom Merry innocently. "Of course, we didn't know he was coming to bother you with a trifle like that, sir, or—we wouldn't have done it, sir."

"Not at all," said Monty Lowther solemnly.

"I dare say that statement is quite correct," said the Head. "You request that these juniors shall be punished, Monteith?"

"Certainly, sir!" said Monteith promptly. "For an assault upon a prefect, sir, I think they ought to be expelled from the school!"

"Oh!" murmured the Terrible Three altogether.

Dr. Holmes frowned.

"Nonsense, Monteith! It is not so bad as all that."

The prefect set his teeth.

"They have taken it upon themselves to interfere in first eleven matters, sir," he said. "They have taken the Mexborough under their protection, apparently. They have given me their opinion in the most insolent manner, and now they have assaulted me. There will be an end of prefects' authority if they are lightly punished. If you cannot expel them from St. Jim's, sir, let them leave the school for a week or two, so that they may have time to reflect on what they have done."

"Oh!" said Tom Merry.

Dr. Holmes nodded.

"Quite so, Monteith; that is more reasonable. I will send each of them home for a week to consider their conduct."

"Oh, sir!"

"You must learn that the person of a prefect is sacred," said the Head severely. "You must also learn not to interfere in matters that do not concern you."

"Oh, sir!"

"You will leave the school to-morrow morning, and not return for a week!" said the Head. "I shall write to your homes, explaining. I think that this is a very mild punishment, boys."

"We shall miss the Headland match, sir," faltered Tom Merry.

"I cannot help that."

"And the Mexborough match!"

"You should have thought of that earlier."

"Oh, sir!"

"I am sorry," said the Head firmly, "but I cannot rescind my decision. You may go."

And the Terrible Three went, with downcast faces.

Blake & Co. met them in the passage.

"What's the verdict?" asked a dozen voices.

ANSWERS

AN AMUSING XMAS PARTY MASK IS GIVEN IN THE DOUBLE NUMBER OF "THE MAGNET" LIBRARY

"Licked?" asked Percy Mellish, with his unpleasant snigger.

"Or sacked?" asked Levison.

"We're sent away for a week," said Tom Merry dismally.

"We sha'n't come back till the day of the Mexborough match! Rusticated for a week! Ow!"

"Better than a flogging," remarked Bernard Glyn.

"Oh, it's rotten!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"And how will first eleven football get on while you're gone, too?" asked Levison of the Fourth, sarcastically.

"Matches will have to be scratched," said Crooke of the Shell.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, go and eat coke!" said Tom Merry.

"Bai Jove! I'm weally vewy sowwy, you fellows," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy sympathetically. "If they hadn't closed the wotten tuckshop undah the new wules, I would stand you a partin' feed!"

"Feeds are no good now," groaned Monty Lowther, "we want Mexborough matches!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And the chums of the Shell went dismally on their way.

Tom Merry & Co. hoped against hope that the Head would change his mind before morning. But it was really not very likely to happen—and it did not happen.

When morning came the three japers, who had japed not wisely but too well, departed from the school upon their enforced holiday. As Monty Lowther said pathetically, he didn't mind having a holiday, but he wanted it when he wanted it, and not when he didn't want it. And when he didn't want it was when the St. Jim's first eleven was about to meet Headland in a footer match. It was almost as bad as missing one of the most important of junior matches.

"Never mind," said Tom Merry, with dismal consolation, "we've played our match with the Grammar School, and beaten Gordon Gay & Co. last week. Lucky that's done."

"And now we're done!" grunted Lowther.

Quite a crowd of fellows walked down to the gates to see the Terrible Three off.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy waved his silk hat after them in sympathy as they walked away to the station.

"It's wotten!" said the swell of St. Jim's as Tom Merry & Co. disappeared.

And the other fellows agreed that it was rotten, very rotten indeed.

But Blake looked more serious than ever when the chums of the Fourth met in No. 6 Study after morning lessons.

"I've got something to say to you chaps," he said.

"Go ahead, deah boy," said D'Arcy encouragingly.

"Now Tom Merry & Co. are gone on a giddy vacation, we're the heads of the School House juniors, without a giddy rival, same as used to be before Tom Merry came to St. Jim's," said Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"It's up to us to stand up for the honour of the House, and keep our end up against the New House and all its giddy works."

"Hear, hear!"

"So you fellows have got to back me up like anything!"

"Upon the whole, Blake, deah boy, don't you think it would be bettah for you fellows to back me up?" Arthur Augustus D'Arcy suggested thoughtfully.

"You ass!"

"Weally, Blake——"

"You duffer!"

"I wefuse to be chawactewised as a duffah!"

"You'll back me up, and we'll give the New House bouders the giddy kybosh!" said Blake impressively. "And if you don't back me up you'll get it in the neck!"

"Weally, Blake——"

"Hear, hear!" said Herries and Digby. "Study No. 6 against Figgins & Co., just as it used to be in the old days, and hurrah for us!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

And there was no doubt—from the point of view of Study No. 6, at all events—that the honour of the School House would be quite safe in the hands of the chums of the Fourth!

CHAPTER 6.

The Captain's Offer.

ERIC KILDARE, captain of St. Jim's, came down the steps of the School House with a shade upon his usually sunny face. He seemed to hesitate for a moment, and then, with his quick, springy stride, crossed the quadrangle towards the New House.

"Hallo, there goes Kildare!" exclaimed Jack Blake, who was looking out of the window of Study No. 6, that famous apartment shared by the chums of the School House. "I wonder what's up? He wears a worried look."

"Oh, he's going over to the New House!" said Herries, looking out. "Going over to see cad Monteith about the footer, I suppose. Enough to make him look worried, going to interview that pig in his den."

"That's it," chimed in Digby. "There's been a meeting in Kildare's study, and I hear they've decided to give the New House a chance to come into line again."

"Oh, what rot!" said Blake emphatically. "What do we want with the New House bouders in the first eleven for? They chose to stick out of their own accord. We can do without 'em. Haven't we won a big match with a wholly School House side, without a solitary New House chap in it at all?"

"Yes; but——"

"Oh, I know!" exclaimed Blake, in deep disgust. "It's Kildare's old idea—fair play all round, and peace at any price. He can't, or won't, understand that what Monteith wants isn't fair play at all. He wants to score off the School House, and make himself generally obnoxious. His last move, sticking out of the eleven, has got him into a hole. It's just like Kildare to go and pull him out of it. Small thanks he'll get."

"Still——"

"If I were captain of St. Jim's," said Blake, thumping the table to lend additional emphasis to his statement, "I'd never let the boulder play for the school again."

"But as you're not captain of St. Jim's," remarked Digby, "and ain't likely to be yet awhile, come and help me do this beastly exercise, and leave off thumping the table."

And the indignant chief of the School House juniors subsided.

Meanwhile, Kildare, quite unconscious of the comments of the juniors, had crossed the quad, and entered the porch of the New House. He made his way directly to Monteith's study.

There was an unpalatable task before him, but the captain of St. Jim's was not the fellow to shrink from it. Matters at the good old school were getting into a most unsatisfactory state, so far as the sports were concerned, and Kildare, as captain, was finding his responsibility heavy.

It was not his fault that Monteith, the head prefect of the New House, and the second best footballer at St. Jim's, had chosen to act in an obstinate and unreasonable manner. But he had to deal somehow with the result of it.

"Come in!" called out the prefect, as Kildare knocked. And the captain of St. Jim's entered James Monteith's study.

Monteith was not alone. There were three or four seniors of the new House with him, and they all turned and looked at Kildare, as if wondering what was implied by this visit to the enemy's camp.

"Hallo, Kildare!" said Monteith, not very genially.

"I've come over for a chat about the footer, Monteith," said the captain quietly, "if you have a few minutes to spare. If you're busy——"

"Oh, that's all right!" said Monteith carelessly. "Sit down!"

Kildare sat down.

"I want to speak about it in a friendly spirit," he said. "There's been friction enough already, goodness knows!"

"Well, whose fault was that?" said Monteith tartly.

"We needn't go into that——"

"I'm afraid we can't help going into it. You turned all the New House members of the team out, with two exceptions, and the others resigned as a protest. You couldn't expect them to do anything else."

Monteith's manner was the reverse of conciliatory. But here Baker, one of the New House seniors, and formerly outside-right in the first eleven, chimed in quickly.

"Let's hear what Kildare has to say, Monty. I'm sure we all want to come to an understanding, and end the present state of affairs."

Monteith bit his lip. He never could depend upon Baker to back him up in all his measures. Baker was loyal to his House, but he did not forget, like Monteith, that the New House was only part of St. Jim's, and that to the school as a whole his loyalty was also due.

And as Baker was a prefect, and had a great deal of influence in the New House, Monteith was compelled to pay some regard to his opinions.

"We're at an impasse now," continued Baker. "The New House is out of it so far as sports are concerned, and I, for one, don't believe in standing on our dignity, and letting the reputation of the college go to the dogs."

"Hear, hear!" said Webb, the treasurer of the school clubs. "I'm sure you agree with that, Monty."

"Oh, yes, of course," said Monteith savagely. "I agree with that. If Kildare's got any reasonable offer to make, I'll jump at it. But I fancy it's only the same old tale, the New House has got to knuckle under to the School House."

"Nothing of the kind!" exclaimed Kildare. "I never

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 253.

NEXT WEDNESDAY: "JACK BLAKE ON THE WARPATH!" By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

Order in advance.

asked that or wanted it. In turning out of the team players I considered not up to the mark, I only exercised my unquestioned right as captain of the eleven. It is unfortunate that they happened to be all New House chaps—"

"Very unfortunate!" sneered Monteith.

"But I found no fault with you or Baker. You resigned of your own accord."

"Yes, as a protest."

"We have played matches with a wholly School House side; but that isn't satisfactory. We have managed to keep our end up so far. But a wholly School House team doesn't represent all St. Jim's, and two of our best players belong to this House. I'd gladly take five or six players from the New House, if I could, but you haven't the men."

"That's a matter of opinion."

"Well, I don't know," broke in Baker again. Baker had a most uncomfortable way of stating plain facts at the most awkward moments. "It isn't a pleasant confession to make, but, as a matter of fact, we have very few men up to first eleven form."

Kildare brightened a good deal. He could see from the start that he had only hostility to look for from Monteith, but others of the New House seniors were quite ready to accept the olive branch.

As a matter of fact, the New House felt their exclusion from first team matches very keenly, and Monteith, though as obstinate as ever, was threatened with something like a mutiny in his own House if the present state of affairs continued.

"Well," he said snappishly, "have you come to make an offer, Kildare? We took up the position that, if we were allowed to play only two men in the eleven, we wouldn't play at all. We haven't altered our minds about that."

"I have discussed the matter with my own side," said the captain of St. Jim's, "and we've made up our mind to make as big a concession as can be made without endangering the matches."

"You can leave all that out, and come down to facts."

Kildare's eye flashed, but he went on quietly.

"We want to meet you in every way. As captain, I cannot forgo the duty of selecting the team. It would be better for me to resign than that. But I am willing to take four New House men into the first eleven on trial."

"You're going to reinstate the men turned out?" began Monteith, with a gleam of triumph in his eyes. This would indeed be a triumph for the New House, and for the policy pursued by the prefect.

But Kildare shook his head.

"No. Rake, Sefton, and Jones are barred. They are no good!"

"Then—" began Monteith hotly.

"Let me finish. I am willing to take in four New House men, but I must select them myself, with a view solely to their quality as players."

"Oh, let's hear the names, by all means!"

"Yourself, Baker, Webb, and Gray."

Monteith was about to reply with a refusal, but he paused. He saw by the faces of his companions that they were willing to accept the compromise offered by the captain of all St. Jim's, and he was himself surprised by the extent of Kildare's concession.

The seniors named were all present, and they looked very expressively at Monteith. If he refused Kildare's offer, the danger of a split in the side, a dispute of his authority in his own house, was imminent. And so the prefect paused.

"Would you mind giving us a bit of time to think it over?" he suggested, at last.

Kildare rose.

"Certainly; I'm making up the eleven for the Headland match to-morrow. If you send me over a note presently, it will do, so that I can put the names on the notice-board for to-morrow morning."

"Very well."

And Kildare with a pleasant nod, quitted the study.

The New House seniors looked at one another.

"I can see you're inclined to accept the offer," said Monteith coldly.

"I'm not," said Sefton promptly. "I'd stick out for half the team if I were you."

"Rats!" said Baker. "The offer is a jolly good one, and we ought to take it. The position was getting simply intolerable, and this is a way out of it without any loss of dignity, as the proposal comes from the School House."

"My sentiments exactly," agreed Webb.

"And mine," added Gray.

Monteith nodded shortly.

"Very well, as you seem to be agreed, we'll take the offer," he said. "But, you know, I don't trust Kildare, and I don't suppose this will set matters right."

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 253.

"Well, you know, I always said you did Kildare injustice," remarked Baker. "His position isn't an easy one, and—"

"Well, we accept the offer," interrupted Monteith. "That's settled. I'll send him a note over by Figgins this evening."

The seniors, greatly pleased with the turn affairs had taken, quitted the room, discussing the Headland match, which was coming off next day. Only Sefton remained with Monteith. He looked inquiringly at the prefect.

"You don't think this will end the rows, do you, Monty?" he asked.

Monteith smiled in his sour way.

"No; I don't. I'd have flung Kildare's offer back in his face, but I don't want a split in the New House; and those fellows believe in Kildare, and in his talk about standing together for the school, and that rot. Kildare will think he has scored when he gets my note. But let him wait a little. This won't be the end of it!"

By which the reader will see that Kildare had very little cause for the satisfaction he felt as he went back to the School House.

CHAPTER 7.

Figgins Makes Discoveries.

WHILE the question of football occupied the elders, a matter of equal, if not of even greater importance was exercising the minds of most of the juniors of St. Jim's.

They had a grievance. It was not often that the rival Houses of St. Jim's agreed upon anything; seldom, indeed, that they saw eye to eye in any matter whatsoever. But upon this point the juniors of the School House were quite in accordance with the New House youngsters, and the New House youngsters admitted that, for once in their lives, the School House chaps had taken a proper stand.

The question was, indeed, one of vast importance to the juniors. The situation was strained, exceedingly strained, and the cause of it was the following notification which had appeared upon the notice-boards in both Houses one morning:

"The School shop will, in future, only be open between the hours of 11 and 12 a.m. and 4.30 and 6 p.m.—By order."

Now, a disinterested outsider might have imagined that any average schoolboy could have managed to "blow" a sufficient quantity of pocket-money in the school tuckshop, if he devoted an hour in the morning and an hour and a half in the afternoon, to that object. And that between eleven and twelve in the morning and half-past four and six in the afternoon, he could have done enough damage to his digestion by cramming unnecessary tarts, and consuming unnecessary ginger-pop, to satisfy any ordinary mortal.

But these views were scouted by the youngsters concerned. It was all very well to say that the new regulations were made by the Head for their good, and that they would be all the better for getting out of the habit of indiscriminate stuffing at all odd moments. It was a question of liberty, of immemorial privilege, and the juniors felt the restriction very keenly.

"Just as if we couldn't be trusted not to make beasts of ourselves!" exclaimed Figgins, of the New House, to a crowd in the quadrangle after the notice appeared.

"Well, that shows the doctor knows you New House chaps," Blake remarked. "If the order applied only to the New House, I could understand it; but—"

"Oh, dry up!" said Figgins crossly. "This is a serious matter. Something ought to be done."

And, indeed, the juniors of both houses agreed that it was a howling shame, and that something certainly ought to be done.

It was proposed to send a round-robin to the doctor, signed by all the names in the Lower Forms of both houses. A meeting of School House and New House was called to discuss the project. The meeting unfortunately ended in a fight, and nothing came of it but a varied crop of swollen noses, black eyes, and thick ears.

Then a genius proposed that the juniors should show their indignation by boycotting the tuckshop altogether, and confining themselves strictly to the fare provided by the school—a proposition that was greeted with howls of derision. Still, it was agreed that something ought to be done, though nobody was quite clear as to what form that "something" should take.

Figgins & Co. were discussing the matter in their study in the New House, about the time that Kildare came over to make his offer to the New House seniors.

"You see," said the great Figgins to the dutiful Co., "we've got to do something. We are cocks of the walk in

the New House, and the chaps naturally look to us to lead them. It's a question of the honour and dignity of the Lower Forms, you know."

"Of course it is," said Kerr. "The Head acts just as if we didn't have any opinions at all, or it didn't matter if we had. Check!"

"Shocking!" agreed Fatty Wynn. Fatty felt the new order more keenly than anybody else—he had always been the best customer at the tuckshop. "Suppose we ask our prefect to put the matter before the Head?"

"A fat lot of good that would do!" said Figgins scornfully. "Monteith thinks that the tuckshop ought to be closed altogether. I've heard him say so."

"Well, he is a pig!" exclaimed Kerr.

"Right!" assented Figgy. "There are pigs, and pigs; but of all the pigs I ever knew, Monteith is about the—Hallo, Monteith!"

The prefect put his head into the study. The sour look on his face was a pretty plain indication that he had heard Figgins's complimentary reference to himself.

"What were you saying, Figgins?"

"Saying?" repeated Figgins reflectively. "Oh, I was saying, Monteith, what an honourable chap you were; the kind of fellow who wouldn't think of coming quietly into a chap's study and hearing what—"

Kerr and Wynn giggled, and Monteith scowled.

"I want you, Figgins," said Monteith. "Take this note over to Kildare, in the School House. 'There is no reply.'"

"Right you are!" said Figgins cheerfully.

"And you had better take care how you speak of your seniors in future," added the prefect, "or you may get a hiding."

And he walked away.

"My hat!" said Kerr. "I thought he was going for you, Figgy. Now, buzz off with that note, and get it over."

"That won't take long."

And Figgins put on his cap and left the New House. It did not take him long to reach Kildare's study in the School House and deliver Monteith's note.

"Thank you!" said the captain of St. Jim's, taking it. "No answer, Figgins."

Figgins went out of the study and closed the door. Then he did not immediately quit the School House. There seemed to be no one about, as he glanced up and down the corridor and up the stairs. He remembered a certain visit which Jack Blake had paid to his study once upon a time, and the thought came into his head that now was a rare opportunity of returning the compliment.

The thought was immediately followed by action. Figgins went up the stairs, his long legs talking three at a time, and reached the famous apartment known as Study No. 6. But he had evidently come at the wrong time, for the door was half-open, and from within could be heard the voices of the four, all eagerly discussing some topic which seemed of unusual interest to them.

"Mind Figgins doesn't get on the scent, Blake, that's all," said the voice of Herries.

Figgins grinned. Under ordinary circumstances, Figgins would no more have listened to a private conversation than he would have picked a pocket; but now he regarded himself as a scout in the enemy's camp, and fully entitled to learn all he could of their plans. So he halted outside the door of Study No. 6, and stood there quietly.

"Oh, I don't see how Figgy could get on to the wheeze!" replied Jack Blake. "A good many chaps in our House will have to know, but it won't be given away to the New House. I admit Figgy is up to snuff, but he can't get on to this."

Again the unseen Figgy grinned.

"What I mean is," said Herries, "that if the New House found anything out they might get up to some game to collar the grub."

"I know they might, so we're going to be very careful."

"Well, let's hear the plan," said Digby.

"In the first place," said Blake, "we're all agreed that we've got to buck up, and show that we aren't going to knuckle under to any giddy tyranny. Down with the tyrants, and long live the tuckshop and free grub!"

"Bravo!" said Herries.

"To limit the hours of feeding at the tuckshop is an insult to the intelligence and the—in short, it's one in the eye to all the Lower Forms. I know some sort of restraint is needed in the case of those greedy wasters in the New House. There's that fat porker, Fatty Wynn, always gorging like

some blessed boa-constrictor. I've told him myself that it's dangerous, but he wouldn't take any notice. As for Figgins, it would do him good to eat some more, I should think, and then he mightn't be such a long, skinny, herring-bony specimen as he is."

Figgins breathed hard.

"We're going to stand up for our rights," continued Blake, "like true patriots, and fight for freedom and independence, and grub, and so on. And the best way seems to me to be the plan I've hit upon. By getting a hamper from Rylcombe we shall be supplied with all we want, and can bar the tuckshop altogether, and have a supply all the time in our own quarters."

"Yaas; it's weally a nobby ideah," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Weally nobby."

"My dear kid, did your uncle ever have an idea that wasn't really nobby?" demanded Blake. "Now, as to details. D'Arcy will advance three pounds, which we'll make up to him from our pocket-money in time—"

"I should feel honoured to stand twat," interposed D'Arcy.

"That's very good of you, Adolphus, but we can't sponge on you," said Blake. "We'll stand in equally all round, that's fair. Now, one of us must get to Rylcombe and buy the grub and select what we're going to get for the tin. I think I should do that best, as I've had a good deal of experience in that line."

"Agreed."

"But the difficult question is, to get the hamper to the school. Since the new regulations, we shouldn't be allowed to have it. It would have to be delivered in the usual way, and the authorities would confiscate it at once. That's no good. We don't want to blow three quid and not get a single tartlet for the money."

"Crumbs, no!"

"That's where the wisdom of your uncle comes out strong," said Blake, with a superior smile. "Your Uncle Blake is a big chief. I've thought of a plan for getting the hamper to the School House, and delivered in this very study, without any soul within the walls of St. Jim's being the wiser."

"Bravo!"

"The first step," said Blake, "was to take a deep interest in the school workshop, and in Mr. Merton's carpentry class."

The chums stared at him.

"Off your rocker?" asked Dig politely.

"Just you listen, my son, and don't pass any rude remarks. In the short space of a quarter of an hour, I succeeded in impressing Mr. Merton with the belief that I was the most enthusiastic

amateur carpenter that ever chipped a plank in the school workshop."

"What's the good of that?"

"Only this, that I've got a permit to leave the school and go to Jones's, in Rylcombe, the shop that supplies the carpentry things, and look over his tool-chests, and buy one if I decide that I'd like to."

"You might have got to the village without a permit."

"Yes, ass, but that wasn't all! I couldn't have brought the hamper home in my waistcoat-pocket, or in my watch-case. And, as I've told you, it can't be delivered by carrier. But when it's sent to St. Jim's inside a box with Jones's name on the outside, it will be brought up to this study without a question being asked by anybody."

For a moment there was a breathless silence. Then the chums of Study No. 6 fell upon Blake and hugged him.

"Ripping!" cried Herries.

"Spiffing!" gasped Dig.

"Bravo!" chortled Arthur Augustus.

"Oh, moderate your giddy transports!" exclaimed Blake. "Of course the idea's a good one, or I shouldn't have thought of it. Beats any of Tom Merry's, I think."

"You think you can get a box at Jones's?" asked Dig.

"Certain! He's often got odd empty boxes to sell, with his name and address on the outside as large as life. All I've got to do is to buy one for a bob, and carry it to the confectioner's, and there the things will be packed into it instead of into a common or garden hamper."

"Ripping!"

"Then the confectioner will send it on by the carrier, old Crabb, and he'll deliver it at the porter's lodge, and even Taggles, suspicious old boulder as he is, will never have any suspicion that it doesn't contain hardware and things."

"Of course he won't. The idea's simply great."

"So he'll trot it up here," continued Blake, "and there

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 253.

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

Order in advance.

we are! We'll have enough tommy for ourselves for weeks, and we can sell it at cost price to the other chaps, too, if they like, so that they can bar the tuckshop."

"Blake, old chap, you're a great man. The only thing is, not to let those New House cads get the faintest glimmer of a suspicion of the scheme, or Figgins will get up to some trick to loot the grub, as sure as heggs."

"Right-ho! Not a whisper outside the house," agreed Blake. "Figgins mustn't get the least idea. I'll go down to Rylcombe this evening, and we'll have the box up here to-morrow."

Figgins, outside the study door, grinned hugely, and went with a silent step down the stairs. His visit had panned out better than he had hoped. Five minutes later he burst into his own room in the New House upon the startled Co.

"Hallo! What's the trouble?" demanded Kerr and Wynn together, as they stared at the excited countenance of their leader.

"Trouble?" said Figgins. "Trouble for the School House, my sons. Listen, and I will a tale unfold. This is where we go on the giddy warpath."

The Co. listened eagerly as he related what he had discovered. Then three heads were put earnestly together, and the New House juniors plotted a plot, which was destined to have more success than the plot plotted by Tom Merry & Co.

CHAPTER 8. The Headland Match.

"MY Aunt Georgina!" exclaimed Blake, stopping before the notice-board in the hall the next morning. "Here's news!"

"What's up?" asked Herries, stopping also.

"Read for yourself, my son."

There was very soon a crowd round the notice-board. Every eye was glued upon a sheet of paper pinned there, in the well-known handwriting of the captain of St. Jim's. It contained the list of names in the school eleven for the football match of the afternoon, when Headland College were to visit St. Jim's.

The last time the list had appeared the names had all belonged to boys of the School House, and this, in the eyes of most of the School House fellows, was exactly as it should have been.

But an alteration had now been made. The eleven to meet Headland contained four names from the New House.

The list ran as follows:

Rushden; Gray, Knox; Webb, Darrel, Berry; Drake, Morgan, Kildare, Monteith, Baker.

Four of these belonged to the New House—Monteith, Baker, Gray, and Webb.

It was evident to all that a compromise had been arrived at, and that Kildare had made a great concession in order to bring the New House into line with the rest of the school.

"Well, I call that rot!" said Blake. "As if we couldn't have licked Headland without any of those New House bouncers in the team!"

"Peace at any price," sniffed Dig. "You see how it'll turn out. They'll give the game away to Headland."

"If Kildare had taken my advice—" went on Blake.

"What a pity he didn't!" sniggered Mellish. "Why don't you go to his study and offer it to him, Blake? He'd be grateful."

"I'll offer you something if you snigger at me," said Blake, "and you'll get it on the nose!"

Whereupon Mellish said no more, and the chums of No. 6 continued to discuss the situation with indignant emphasis until a senior appeared on the scene, when they all scuttled away.

But it was not only by the juniors that Kildare's action was criticised.

Kildare's position was a difficult one, and few of the fellows made full allowance for its difficulty. The dream of the captain was to get the two houses to pull heartily together for the good of the school; but it was a dream difficult of realisation. He kept steadily at it, but he found it a very uphill task.

He saw very clearly that it was not satisfactory for only one house to be represented in the college eleven, even if they could win matches; and that was by no means certain. They had certainly pulled off some very creditable successes; but fortune had favoured them so far. Kildare had thought a great deal about the matter, and the olive-branch to the New House had been the result. In this the more thoughtful of the School House seniors were with him.

But the majority were not thoughtful, and, though they did not dispute the will of their captain, who was indeed the idol of the School House, they shook their heads solemnly over this new decision, and predicted that Kildare would be sorry for it.

Still, it could not be denied that of the New House recruits, Monteith and Baker, at least, were first-class players, and Gray and Webb were fellows certain to do their best.

The Headland match was eagerly looked forward to. When the new eleven took the field, it would be seen how the experiment was to turn out.

If the team pulled well together, and the visitors were beaten, it would be a triumph for Kildare's policy of conciliation, and it would settle a knotty point—the formation of the college team to meet Mexborough, a neighbouring town, with whom a fixture had long been arranged, and who were known to be extremely dangerous opponents.

So, when the afternoon came, there was a crowd round the football ground, both houses being strongly represented.

Study No. 6 marched down arm-in-arm, prepared to do battle with Figgins & Co. for the best place at the ropes; but the lanky form of Figgins was conspicuous by its absence. Nor was the sturdy form of Kerr, nor the Falstaffian figure of Fatty Wynn to be seen.

"Can't understand this," said Blake. "Where are Figgins & Co.? Thought they'd be on the ground pretty early."

"Detained, perhaps," hazarded Herries.

"H'm! More likely up to some game!"

Herries looked alarmed.

"I say, they can't be on the track of the grub, can they?"

Blake shook his head.

"Of course not! There hasn't been a whisper outside the house. As we decided, after all, not to tell even School House fellows until the grub was actually here, the secret is only between us four. None of us have blabbed."

"No; that's a cert!" said Dig. "Figgys is sharp, but he can't be on the scent this time. I dare say he's up to some game, but it isn't that."

"Well, the thought crossed my mind," said Herries. "Figgys is such an artful dodger, and the box is due this afternoon, you know. But I suppose it's all right."

"Of course it is!" said Blake. "Hallo, there's Monteith walking with Kildare! Don't hiss him; see how he plays up first."

And the chums began to discuss the coming match, and forgot about Figgins & Co.

Blake's grand idea had been carried out without a hitch so far. He had visited Jones's in the village, and effected the purchase of a great box, with the name, trade, and address of Jones's fully inscribed in big, black stencilled letters on the outside. He had taken that box to the confectioner's, and laid in a supply of all kinds of edibles, sufficient to fill the box to the brim, and to account for the whole of the three sovereigns devoted to the purpose.

That box the confectioner had agreed to send by the local carrier, addressed to Master Blake, at the School House, the following day.

No one at St. Jim's who was not in the secret could guess that the box came from any establishment other than Jones's, and it would pass under the eyes of the most suspicious prefect without question.

Blake's lately-developed interest in the carpentry class was a sufficient explanation of the box coming to him. It was not too large to hold only what was supposed to be inside it—a tool-chest, and various materials for making all sorts of articles. Who was to guess the nature of its contents?

So Blake and his chums waited, easy in their minds, in the full assurance that the box would arrive quite safely in charge of old Cabb, the carrier, in the afternoon.

Meanwhile, they gave their attention to the football field.

Headland arrived in their brake, and were accorded a warm welcome by the Saints. Headland were not by any means the most formidable opponents St. Jim's met, and Kildare had been wise to try the new team with them, before committing the fate of the Mexborough Town match to it.

There was a hearty cheer as the visitors streamed into the

SANDOW'S BOOK FREE!

Just published, a new book showing how Sandow won Health and Fame, beautifully illustrated, and explaining how every man and woman can obtain robust health and perfect development by exercise.

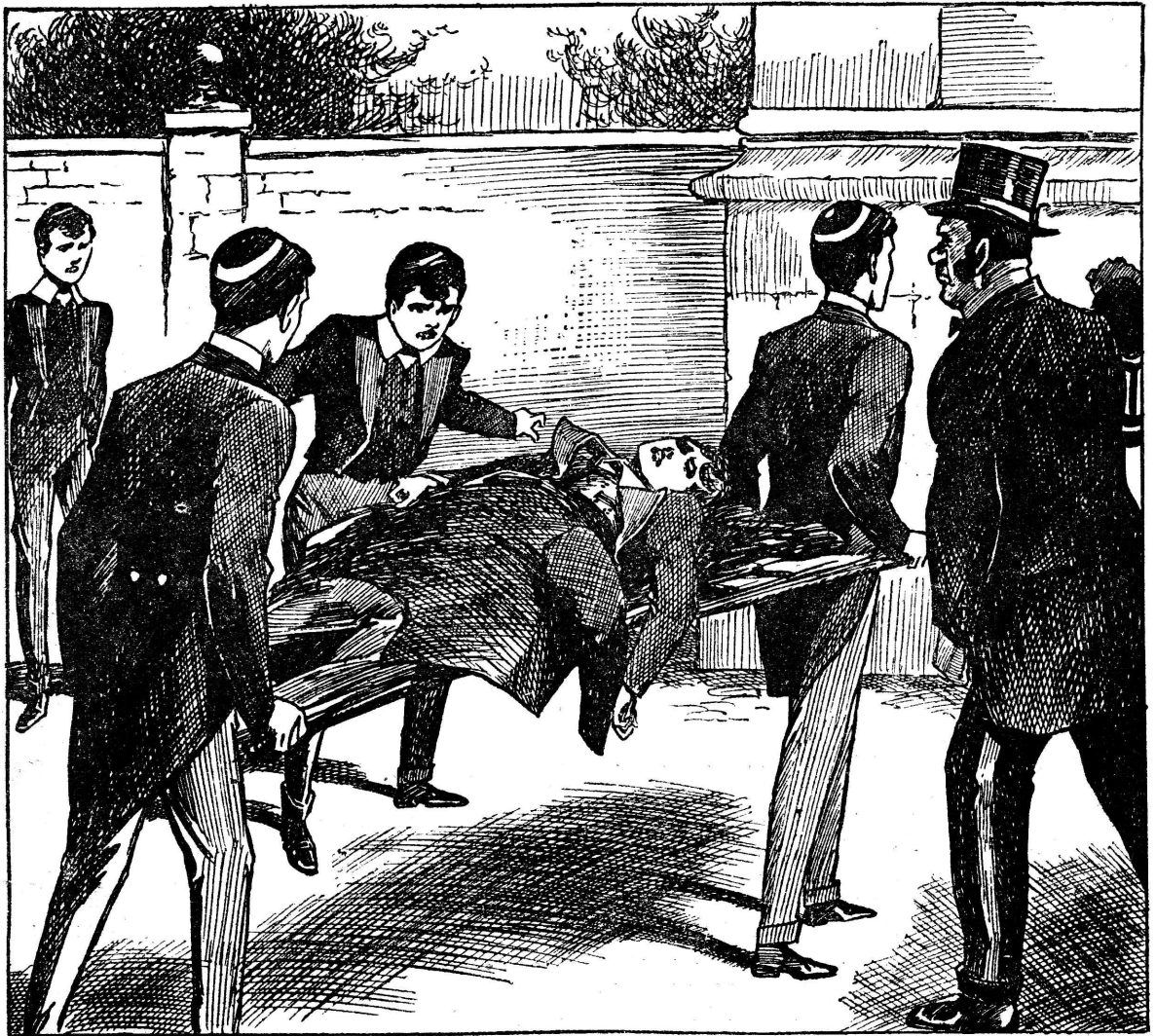
SPECIAL OFFER.

To every reader who writes at once a copy of this book will be sent free.

Address: No. 17, SANDOW HALL, BURY STREET,
LONDON, W.C.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 253.

AN AMUSING XMAS PARTY MASK IS GIVEN IN THE DOUBLE NUMBER OF "THE MAGNET" LIBRARY



Forms loomed up in the mist lighted by the porter's lantern. The Greyfriar's fellows gathered round with bated breath. "Wingate—what is it—?" "It's Vernon-Smith," said Wingate. "Quiet, all of you!" (An incident from "DRUMMED OUT OF GREYFRIARS," the magnificent, extra-long complete tale of Harry Wharton & Co.'s Schooldays, by Frank Richards, which is contained in this week's Grand Christmas Double Number of THE "MAGNET" Library. Don't miss this rare feast of good reading-matter! Now on Sale.)

field. They looked very fit, but the Saints had little doubt that the home team would come out victorious, if they pulled together. That was the question. Could the New House fellows be relied upon to back up the captain?

Kildare did not permit himself to doubt it for a moment. And, indeed, three, at least, of the New House members meant to do their best. If a lingering doubt lurked in Kildare's mind, it was of Monteith.

But the New House prefect looked very fit as he lined up with his side, and he certainly looked as if he meant business.

The visitors won the toss, and it fell to the Saints to kick off, which they did against a keen wind. The afternoon was fine, though cold. Kildare kicked off, and the game commenced.

"Now," said Blake oracularly, "we shall see what we shall see."

What they saw first was the visitors coming down with the wind, in a fine rush for the home goal. Then Blake and Study No. 6 shouted:

"Buck up, Saints!"

"Play up!" shouted Kangaroo of the Shield.

Whether encouraged by the attention of Study No. 6 or not, the Saints certainly did play up, and the Headland rush was stopped, and the ball went to midfield from Gray's foot. It came down right to Monteith, who was on it like lightning. The New House prefect went through the Headlanders like a shot.

The spectators watched eagerly. Loud rang the cheers of the New House as Monteith covered the ground like a deer.

"Bravo, Monteith!"

Blake sniffed.

"If Monteith takes that goal," he said, "I'll say, 'Good old New House—but he won't, my sons—he won't! Why doesn't he pass?'"

Even as Blake spoke Monteith was checked by a Headland back; but he passed the ball to Kildare in time, and the captain of St. Jim's slammed it home.

"Goal!"

Things were looking well for St. Jim's. With the wind in their faces they had scored a goal in the first ten minutes. But that success acted as a spur to the Headland team, and when they kicked off again they followed it up with a desperate attack. The tussle was hard and sharp.

Again Gray at back sent the ball to midfield when the visitors looked dangerous, and the New House cheered their man to the echo.

Two home forwards were on the ball in a moment, while Darrel was running up. It was a moment of tussle and wild excitement, and what followed happened like a flash. Darrel, shouldered by a Headland forward, reeled and fell against Monteith, who went staggering. But for that unfortunate chance Monteith would have got the ball away. As it was, Kildare, who was a second behind him, captured it and took it up the field. Monteith, before he could regain his balance, went over in the rush that followed, and it swept past him, and left him gasping on the grass.

No one was looking at him as he slowly rose, his face white with fury. Every glance was following the game,

sweeping on resistlessly towards the Headland goal. Kildare had the ball, and the other forwards were backing him up well. With a beautiful exhibition of passing they bore it through the Headland defence, and then Drake, centring to Kildare at the psychological moment, the Saints' skipper sent the ball in with a shot that gave the goalie not the ghost of a chance.

St. Jim's roared over the second goal. "But look at Monteith!" muttered Blake. The New House prefect was white with rage, and his eyes were burning. Darrel, glancing at him, remembered the tumble in the struggle for the ball, which had slipped his memory in the excitement of what followed.

"Sorry, Monteith," he said, as the players came back to the centre of the field—"sorry I was shoved against you!" "It's a lie," said Monteith thickly—"it's a lie, and you know it! You did it on purpose!"

Darrel stared at him. "Don't be a fool!" he said shortly. "Do you know what you're talking about?" "Yes, I do; and I know that it wasn't an accident made you shove me off the ball and give it to Kildare!"

Kildare caught those words, and his eyes flashed. "Monteith!" The prefect glared at him. "Well, what have you got to say?" "I've got this to say, that you'd better hold your tongue!" "I shall say what I think, and—"

"Line up! Silence there!" The prefect lined up with the rest, but his face was very black. His heart was burning with passionate anger as the game restarted, and he was in a mood for anything—anything but good play and backing up Kildare.

Kildare noticed that he was playing slackly now, and his eye flashed, but he said nothing. But presently a Headland rush came right through the Saints, and Monteith, who had a chance to get the ball, let it pass him.

"Play up, Monteith!" cried Kildare. The prefect gave him a savage look. Kildare gritted his teeth; it came into his mind that the prefect was slacking on purpose—that this was Monteith's revenge for his supposed injury.

The backs succeeded in clearing, and a fine opening came to the home forwards. Monteith was on the ball quickly this time.

The enemy were rushing upon him; Kildare stood ready to receive the pass, and for a moment it seemed that the prefect would send him the ball as he expected.

But as he caught the captain's look, there seemed to Monteith's distorted imagination something threatening in it, and he set his lips spitefully.

Kildare uttered a sharp exclamation as Monteith mis-kicked, and the ball dropped just before a Headland forward, who sent it right up the field in a twinkling.

For a moment Kildare quivered with anger. But it was no time for recrimination then.

The game had to be saved; Monteith's bad play, or, rather, treachery, had to be retrieved.

But that was impossible, as it proved; the advantage given to the Headlanders was well improved by them, and a couple of minutes later the ball was in the home net.

Then the whistle went for half-time, and both teams trooped off for a much-needed rest. In the home dressing-room in the pavilion Kildare strode up to Monteith.

His eyes were blazing, and even the prefect, though he had provoked the conflict, shrank for a moment from his look.

"Monteith, I want to know your intentions!" exclaimed the captain. "Are you going to play up like a decent fellow, or aren't you?"

Monteith scowled. "What fault do you find with my play?" "You deliberately gave the ball to the Headlanders, and threw away that goal."

"It's a lie!" The veins stood out on Kildare's forehead, but with a mighty effort he controlled himself. "I appeal to the team!" he cried, looking round.

"We all saw it!" exclaimed Darrel. "It was plain enough!" The New House fellows were silent.

They were not inclined to think badly of their chief, nor to bear witness against him. But the School House players backed up Darrel's words.

"We all saw it!" cried Rushden. "Did you all see Darrel trip me up, too, so as to let Kildare get the ball?" sneered the New House prefect.

"That's a lie!" said Darrel unceremoniously. "You know I did nothing of the kind, Monteith! I was shoved over myself, and couldn't help it."

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 253.

"Well, I say you could help it, and that you did it on purpose. You saw it, Gray. What did you think?"

Grey hesitated. "Well, it looked like it," he said. "But I don't think Darrel would do that, Monteith."

"Only a rotten cad would bring such an accusation!" exclaimed Kildare. "There's not a word of truth in it! Darrel had no intention of doing anything of the kind!"

Monteith snapped his teeth. "I say he did do it, and that it was done on purpose!" he cried. "I don't expect fair play from you, Kildare!"

"You mean," said Kildare quietly, "that you are looking for trouble. In that case, you had better get out of the team."

"I'm quite willing to go, but I shall not go alone. There are three here who will stand by me."

Grey, Webb, and Baker looked at each other dubiously. To desert their chief at such a moment was difficult, but to desert the school eleven in the middle of a hard-fought match appeared harder.

"I say, don't let us go any further!" exclaimed Baker anxiously. "Let us all play up for the school. The whistle goes in a minute. For goodness' sake let's stop rowing in the middle of a match! We can quarrel after we've licked Headland!"

"I don't want to quarrel," said Monteith. "But Kildare has accused me of deliberately playing into the enemy's hands."

"He didn't mean that, I'm sure," said the pacific Baker. "We all know you wouldn't do such a thing. There goes the whistle! Come on; let's play up!"

There was no time for further discussion. The matter dropped just where it was, and the whole team turned out for the second half. But if ever a football team was in a state of mind unfit for winning a victory, it was the St. Jim's First Eleven at that moment.

CHAPTER 9.

A Capture from the Enemy.

WHILE the first half of the Headland match was being fought on the football-ground at St. Jim's, Figgins & Co. were not idle. Blake had remarked the absence of the trio, but he little dreamed how they were engaged while he and his chums were watching the footer. And as Figgins & Co. were busy at this time, we will now, with the reader's permission, leave the football-field for a while, and follow their adventures.

Figgins & Co. were on the warpath. "I'm beastly sorry to have to cut the match," said Figgins, as they went down the lane towards Rylcombe, "but it can't be helped. Perhaps we shall be back in time for the second half. I hope so."

"Well, it's worth it, if we can get this wheeze off on the School House cads," remarked Kerr; "and I really think it will work."

"Worth it!" exclaimed Fatty Wynn. "I should say so! Think of the feast we'll have when we've got the loot safe in the New House!"

"Yes, that's just like you, Fatty—always thinking of the grub!"

"Well, I dare say you'll do your whack when it comes to putting it away," said Fatty. "But, I say, why not invite Study No. 6 to the feed, chaps? It would be no end of a lark to have 'em to a feed on their own tommy."

Figgins grinned. "Yes, that's a good idea. We'll do it."

"Only we haven't got the grub yet," said the matter-of-fact Kerr.

"The wheeze can't fail," said Figgins seriously. "Old Crabb the carrier always comes along at the same time in the afternoon. He always stops at the Green Man for his ale as regularly as clockwork, and stays in there at least half an hour. He leaves his cart in the lane, and his hoss wouldn't move for anything short of an earthquake. What's to prevent us from scoffing the loot?"

"Nothing," said Fatty Wynn, smacking his lips—"nothing, Figg! My hat! What a glorious feed we'll have when we've got it!"

"The feed won't be so glorious as the scoring off the School House," grinned Figg. "Blake will want to kick himself hard this time."

And, grinning hugely at the anticipation, the New House juniors hurried along the lane.

The Green Man was an alchouse between the school and the village. The boys soon came in sight of it.

"Whoa, there! Whoa, I say!" It was a well-known voice. Figgins shoved his companions into the cover of a hedge, and they watched.

A covered cart was coming up from the direction of

Rylcombe, with an ancient horse between the shafts and an ancient man holding the reins.

Old Crabb the carrier was a well-known character in those parts. His private opinion, which he expressed frequently in the parlour of the Green Man, was that all boys ought to be painlessly extinguished at an early age. And, indeed, Crabb had had more than one skirmish with the boys of St. Jim's, and had come off second best.

"There he is," said Figgins, "as large as life, and twice as natural. Don't let him see you, chaps, or he'll smell a mouse. He's always ratty when a St. Jim's chap is around."

The trio lay close, watching the carrier through the hedge. Crabb drew his ancient horse to a halt, and stepped down, throwing the reins carelessly aside. The old horse could be trusted. Crabb had stopped in the same place, at the same time in the afternoon, for many a year now; and if he had not stopped then, his horse would have been astonished.

Without a suspicion that foes were in ambush, Crabb left his cart and disappeared through the gate in the fence. He had barely passed into the alehouse when Figgins & Co. came out of their cover.

"Quiet does it!" whispered Figgins.

In a few seconds he was in the cart.

The biggest object it contained was a wooden box bearing the name, style, and title of Jones & Co., of Rylcombe, in black, stencilled letters, and addressed on the label to Master Blake, the School House, St. James's College.

Figgy's eyes glistened as he saw it.

The loot was at his feet.

"Got it?" muttered Kerr.

"Yes. Stand ready to take it. It's beastly heavy!"

"All the better," murmured Fatty Wynn. "All the more grub in it."

Figgins let down the tail-board, and shoved the box over.

Kerr and Wynn received it, and, carrying it between them, rushed it away from the spot.

Figgins refastened the tail-board, and jumped out of the carrier's cart.

Quickly he followed his comrades.

Kerr and Wynn had the box on the other side of the hedge in a twinkling.

There Figgins joined them.

There was no sign of the carrier.

He was safe for half an hour inside the hospitable doors of the Green Man.

The three chums sat down on the box and howled with mirth.

"We've done the trick!" gasped Figgins. "Hear me smile!"

And he smiled in a way that made the rocks rise from the trees overhead.

"I say, the sooner we're off the scene the better," said Kerr. "This is where we do the vanishing trick. We don't want to be spotted with the plunder."

"No," agreed Figgins; "let's be off. This is the first time I've ever turned highwayman, but it seems to me an easy job. Only, of course, we mustn't stick to Blake's box. That would be naughty."

Kerr and Wynn stared.

"What are you driving at, Figgy?"

"Why, we must let Blake have his box. We're only going to stick to the grub."

"Oh, I see!"

"This seizure of supplies," said Figgy, "is exactly in accordance with International law. There's a state of war at St. Jim's, isn't there?"

"There is."

"Therefore the School House may be considered to be in a state of siege."

"Of course it may."

"Therefore supplies going in to the garrison are contraband of war, and liable to seizure by the beleaguering forces."

"They is—I mean they are."

"Ergo—that's Latin—we, the enemy, seize them, and so that they shan't be wasted, we're going to eat them. I was brought up to be economical. Which is all in accordance with the laws of war, though if old Crabb had seen us collaring the contraband, he might not have seen reason. He might even have called a policeman."

"Figgy, you're quite right, and you speak like a giddy oracle; but it was time we were shifting."

"Come on, then."

They carried the box, on the inner side of the hedge, to some distance, and then set it down again. The weight was considerable and the size awkward.

"We can't carry it to the school," said Kerr.

"If we could, we wouldn't pass the gates with it," replied Figgins. "Did you put that hammer and chisel in your pocket as I told you, Kerr?"

"Yes; here they are."

"Hand them over."

Figgins soon had the box open. The eyes of the Co. glistened at the sight of the array of paper bags crammed with edibles within.

"Out with 'em!" said Figgins. "They've got to be packed into the hollow tree, to wait till called for. Buck up!"

"But—"

"No time for buts, Fatty. Do as I tell you."

"But—"

"Do you want me to lam you? Buck up!"

They set to work without further questions. Figgy was chief, and Figgy knew best. At all events, he had his way. He had set down the box close to a huge hollow tree, a well-known spot to the boys of St. Jim's. The contents of the box were transferred to the space inside the big trunk, which was large enough to hold twice as much. The box was soon empty.

"Now, shove stones and stuff into it!" commanded Figgins.

The Co. dutifully obeyed. The box was filled to the brim with stones, turf, and rubbish of all kinds. Then Figgy closed the lid and, as the lock was hopelessly broken, he fastened it with a couple of nails. Then it was corded again.

"Now, give me a hand."

They carried the box into the lane, and set it down in the middle. Then Figgy's plan dawned upon his companions. In a few minutes the carrier's cart would be along, and Crabb would have to stop, for the box lay directly in his path.

Even if he had not missed the box, he could not fail to recognise it when he stopped. The trio took cover behind a hedge close at hand, and watched and waited. The crack of the carrier's whip came along the road.

"Whoa! Whoa theer, I tell 'e!"

The carrier's cart came into view. The old horse was plodding steadily on, and Crabb was cracking his whip to induce it to "buck up" a little. The chums watched the carrier breathlessly.

"He's coming!" whispered Figgins.

Willingly enough the old horse came to a halt. Crabb had caught sight of the box in the road. He stared at it over his horse's ears in blank amazement. It was certainly a peculiar place for such a box to be in, and at the second glance Crabb recognised it as the one he had supposed to be in the cart behind him.

He turned his head, and looked into the covered cart. On coming out of the Green Man he had mounted to his seat, and driven off without thinking of looking among the contents of the cart. Now, for the first time, he saw that the box was missing. His gaze returned to the box in the road. The idiotic bewilderment depicted upon his face made the hidden boys choke with suppressed laughter.

For some minutes the old carrier sat there, his head turning slowly from the interior of the cart to the box in the road, and back again from the box to the cart. Figgins nearly shrieked; Kerr had buried his face in the grass, and Fatty Wynn stuffed a handkerchief into his mouth. The three were convulsed.

"It's ghostses, that's what it ez!" murmured Crabb. "Ghostses in broad daylight!"

Figgins could contain himself no longer. He let out a yell that rang over the fields, and Crabb gave a jump. Figgins, having thus given himself away, the chums no longer restrained their mirth, and a shout went up which soon enlightened Crabb as to the real nature of the "ghostses" which had shifted the box.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Crabb scowled at the three figures that emerged from the hedge, almost doubled up with laughter.

"You dratted himps!" he said. "Wot gamè 'ave you been playing?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"So you took that theer box outer my cart while I was at the Green Man!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And carried it 'ere, did you, you dratted himps!"

"Hear us smile! Ha, ha, ha!"

Crabb jumped down into the road, his long whip whisking



in a very businesslike way, and Figgins & Co. promptly bolted.

The carrier knew that it was useless to pursue the elusive three, and he stood in the road brandishing his whip and hurling forth threats of what he would do when the mischievous youngsters came within his reach. Figgins kissed his hand to the almost frantic carrier.

"Good-bye, Bluebell!" he trilled. "How did you like the ale at the Green Man?"

Crabb did not answer that question. He lifted the box back into the cart and drove on.

Figgins had closed it tightly, and restored the lock to its former appearance, and, as the nails held the lid firmly in place, the carrier could not see that it had been tampered with. His only idea was that the juniors had been having a "lark" with him, but he was greatly relieved at regaining possession of the box. He reflected that they might have left him to go on to the school without it, and then he would have been in trouble. This reflection calmed him somewhat, and his face relaxed as he drove on.

Figgins & Co. cut across the fields to St. Jim's.

"That's all right!" exclaimed Figgins. "Blake will get the box, but he won't get the grub. They're expecting a big feed in Study 6, but if they eat what's inside that box—well, I hope they'll enjoy it."

And at the thought of the surprise that was in store for the chums of the School House, the trio had to stop and yell again.

"But how are we going to get the stuff to the New House, Figgy?" asked Kerr. "You haven't told us yet."

"Easy enough. We'll let a dozen chaps we can trust into the secret, and they can go out with cricket-bags, and come back one at a time with the bags full of the loot. That won't be noticed. We shall get it all into the New House that way. The hollow tree is near enough to the school, you know. That's why I selected it."

"Hallo, listen!"

It was a clear whistle from the direction of St. Jim's. Figgins looked at his watch.

"That's for the second half!" he exclaimed. "Come on, we sha'n't lose the match, after all."

They raced on, and a few minutes later were mingling with the crowd on the football ground. The second half of the eventful match between St. Jim's and Headland College had just commenced, and Figgins & Co. were glad to be in time for it.

CHAPTER 10.

The Second Half—Ordered off the Field.

THE spectators crowded round the football field knew nothing of what had passed in the home dressing-room; but the more observant of them saw that something was amiss as the "Saints" turned into the field for the second half.

Kildare, though he tried to recover his usual calmness, could not quite banish the cloud from his brow, while Monteith made no effort to hide his temper. The others were looking more or less disturbed and anxious, too. Blake at once spotted the looks of the team, and commented upon it.

"Something wrong there," he said. "I suppose Kildare is down on Monteith for chucking that goal away; and he did chuck it away, my sons."

"Oh, rats!" broke in a voice at his elbow. "What do you know about it?"

Blake turned his head, and saw Figgins. The Co., as usual, were at his heels.

"More than you do, as you weren't on the ground!" replied Blake. "Where have you been? Detained in your class-room like naughty boys?"

Figgins grinned. "We've been out on business," he said. "Sorter speculation, and it's turned out well."

Blake looked at him suspiciously.

"What tricks have you been up to?"

"Fact is," said Figgy, with an appearance of great candour, "we've been laying in a stock of provisions for a feed in the New House, and we want you to come."

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 253.

"Honest Injun?"

"Of course; we're going to bar the tackshop, since their new giddy regulations, and we have laid in a supply of Tommy. See? We're going to have a big feed in the common-room in the New House—all our juniors and you four, if you'll come. I only wish Tom Merry could come."

"Well, that's decent of you, Figgy," said Blake. "When does the feast come off?"

"This evening, as soon as the match is over, in fact."

"Good enough! We'll be there, won't we, chaps?"

"You bet!" said Herries and Digby together.

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus. "Weally honahed, deah boys!"

"Glad to have you," said Figgins. "I think you'll like the spread. The grub is first-class, though I say it."

"Where did you get it?"

"It comes from Rylcombe."

"But suppose they spot it coming in—"

"There's a dozen of our chaps going to fetch it in, one at a time," explained Figgins. "It will be slow work and a long job, and I dare say a few bags will be confiscated by some beastly interfering prefects. But that won't hurt; there's plenty, and we got it cheap."

The Co. nearly exploded at this. Figgins gave them a warning glance.

"So make it pax till after the feast, Blake," went on Figgins. "Don't let any of your cads—your chaps, I mean—raid our kids while they're getting the grub in."

"Certainly not," said Blake. "I'll scalp them if they do. It's peace till we've feasted together. It's a go."

"Right you are! I really think you'll like the feed. Just the things you like, you know; you might have selected them yourself," said Figgins.

There was a shout just then, which interrupted the talk.

All eyes immediately turned to the field again. The St. Jim's forwards were getting away finely, and the visitors' goal was besieged.

The wind was now in favour of the Saints, and as they had taken two goals to one with it against them, they were naturally expected to walk over the Headlanders now. But the crowd soon perceived that the second half was to be far from a walk-over.

The St. Jim's attack was a fine one, but there was a weak spot in the line, and that was at inside-right. Monteith was in too savage a temper to play up well. One weak spot was enough for the Headlanders, and soon the backs succeeded in clearing, and the tussle went to mid-field again.

Kildare's eyes blazed. Whether Monteith was doing his best or not, there was no doubt that the prefect had become rather a hindrance than a help to his side.

"If I was Kildare," said Blake impressively, "I'd take that rotter by the scruff of the neck and chuck him over the ropes."

"Oh, you shut up!" said Figgins. "Monteith is all right."

"Do you call that football he's playing, Figgy?"

"What you don't know about footer, Blake, would fill an encyclopædia," replied Figgins. "Monteith's all right if they give him a chance."

"I'd give him a chance!" muttered Blake. "A chance to get off the field, with a football boot behind him to help him off!"

"You go and eat coke!"

Figgins & Co. naturally stood up for their House prefect against School House criticism, but as the game wore on they themselves began to look serious. Either Monteith was deliberately slacking, or his bad temper spoiled his form. At all events, he was of very little use to his side.

The Headland attack swept up to the home goal, against the wind, and the St. Jim's players had to fall back to defend their citadel. But the backs put their "beef" into it, and the Headlanders did not succeed in scoring, and the ball went out again from a press of players, and dropped fairly at Monteith's feet. The prefect fumbled with it, and

NEXT WEEK!

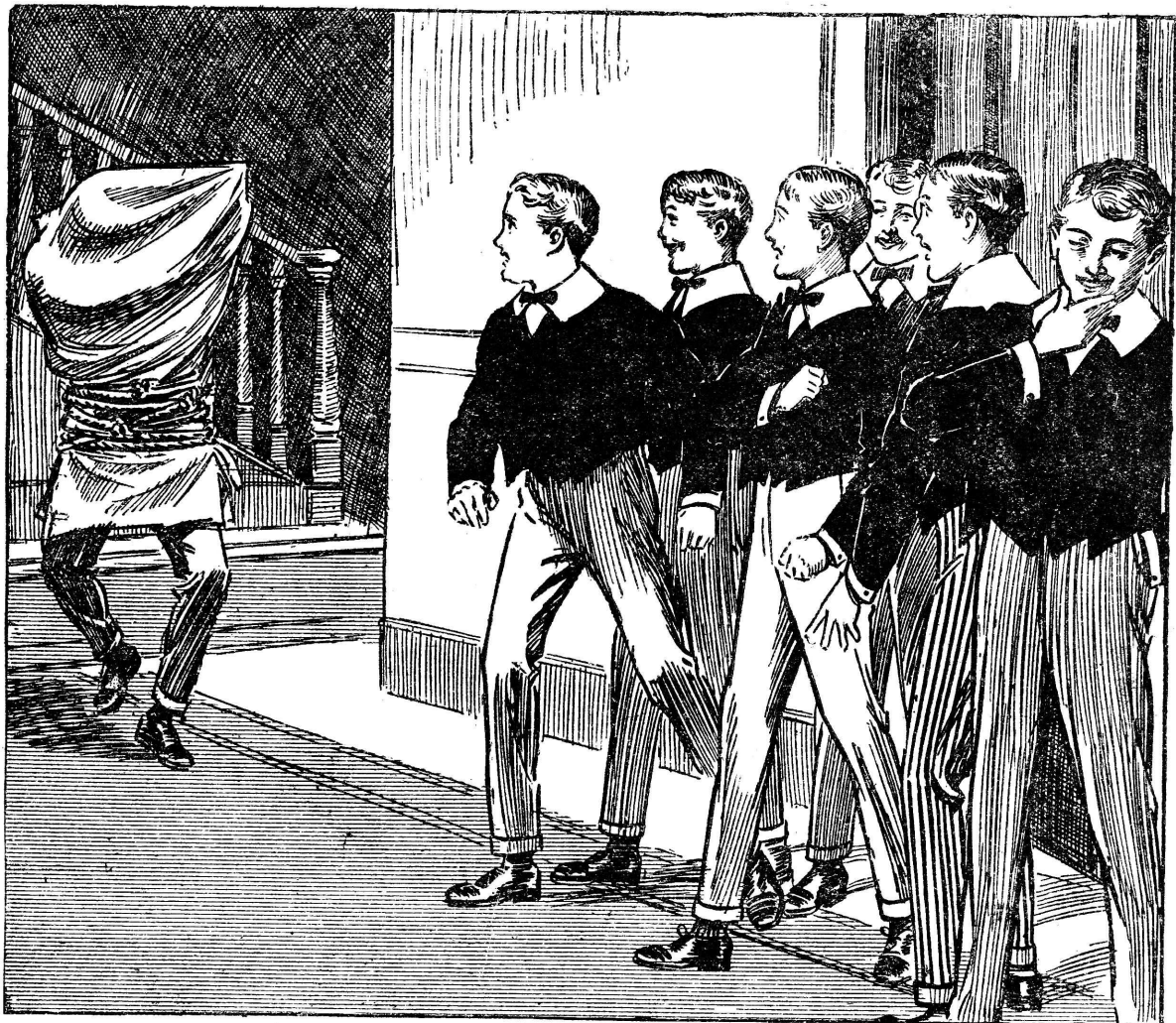
JACK BLAKE ON THE WARPATH!

A Splendid, Long, Complete Tale of the
chums of St. Jim's.

By MARTIN' GLIFFORD.

Make sure of reading this story by
ordering a copy of next Wednesday's
issue of "The Gem" Library in advance.

Price 1d.



"Lemme out! Lemme out!" came a muffled voice from the sack. "I'm Monteith! Ow! I've been tied up like this by a gang of young ruffians—yow—ow!" The discovery that the person in the sack was the New House Captain did not seem to make the School House fellows very eager to help him! (See Chapter 4.)

in a few seconds a Headlander would have had it; but in the nick of time Darrel rushed up, and, shoving Monteith unceremoniously aside, sent the ball up the field with a powerful kick.

Had Monteith been playing the game as he should have done, the action of the centre-half would have been inexcusable; but, in point of fact, it was only Darrel's prompt action that saved the situation, and relieved the home goal from heavy pressure.

But Monteith recked little of that. Darrel had barely taken the kick when the prefect swung round on him, perfectly white with rage, and struck him in the face.

The unexpected blow made Darrel reel. Phip! went the referee's whistle. The game stopped.

Kildare strode towards Monteith, his eyes on fire.

Darrel had seemed to be about to haul himself upon the prefect; but he remembered in time where he was, and his hands dropped to his side, and he stood quivering with passion.

Kildare made an imperious gesture to the prefect.

"Get off the field, Monteith!"

"What?"

"Get off the field!"

"I shall not go alone!"

"Get off the field, I tell you!"

Monteith cast a glance at the other New House players.

"Come!" he said. "I told you we should get no fair play here! Come!"

He strode away towards the pavilion. There was a momentary hesitation among the others.

All were strung to a pitch of high excitement, and only

one or two had a clear idea of what had happened, it had passed so quickly.

Monteith strode away without looking back. Then Gray turned and walked after him. Gray's example was all the others wanted. Baker and Webb followed him with down-cast faces.

The Headland fellows looked at one another in amazement. Such a sight as this they had never seen on a football-field before.

Kildare was pale but calm. He had hardly expected this wholesale desertion by the New House fellows; but, even if he had expected it, he could not have acted otherwise than as he had done. After Monteith's outrageous conduct, it was impossible to allow him to remain on the field.

But the most sanguine of the Saints looked downhearted at finding their ranks thus reduced to the hopeless number of seven players.

The crowd were silent. What was to become of this extremely peculiar situation they could not guess. Neither could the Headland fellows.

It was for Kildare to decide.

The captain of St. Jim's took about two seconds to decide. There was no time to think about the matter, and Kildare was not the kind of fellow to give in while a chance was left.

The referee looked at him inquiringly. Kildare gave a short nod. The whistle went, and the game continued.

St. Jim's had closed their ranks, and, of course, all their efforts were now devoted to defence.

Attack, under the circumstances, would have been folly, but there was a chance that, by a careful defence, the home team might keep their goal intact during the remaining

twenty minutes of the second half. If so, St. Jim's would win by the goals taken before half-time.

But they would not do it if Headland could help it.

"Buck up, you chaps!" muttered the Headland skipper. "We're not going to let seven players walk off the field winners!" And Headland bucked up.

But, great as was the disparity of numbers, the Saints put up a really splendid fight. Kildare, at least, had now only men he could fully rely upon, and who were devoted to him. The wind, too, was now very keen, and it was in the faces of the Headlanders. And Rushden in goal was a mighty keeper.

And so, for a time at least, the rushes of the visitors were checked, and though the struggle was now wholly in the home half, the goal long remained intact.

At last, however, a lightning shot from the Headland skipper found the net, and the teams had equalised. There were five minutes more to play. And the St. Jim's boys longed for Father Time to hurry up a little and end their suspense. For it seemed impossible for Kildare and his men to hold the Headlanders so long.

In the excitement of the moment the deserters were forgotten.

Monteith had walked away straight to the New House, and Gray, after a few minutes, had followed him.

Webb and Baker remained, looking on, and looking about the most woebegone fellows at St. Jim's. They had not had time to think before acting, and had followed their accustomed leader. But their feelings were not to be envied as they stood by and watched their comrades gallantly fighting a losing battle.

The Headland attack was growing desperate. But still Kildare and his men held their ground, and Rushden, between the posts, was a marvel. He seemed to be all head, hands, or feet, just as the occasion required, and loudly the crowd cheered their splendid goalkeeper at every escape of the home citadel.

Phip!

It was the whistle. The keen suspense was ended. The strain was removed.

The game was over, and it had ended in a draw, two goals to two; and, under the circumstances, such a draw was more honourable to the gallant seven than an ordinary victory.

Fagged out by that last gruelling twenty minutes, the Saints left the field, while deafening cheers rang far over the ground.

But the New House fellows were mostly silent.

The School House had covered itself with glory that day, but the New House colours had never been brought so low.

Even Figgins & Co. had nothing to say. But Study No. 6 were the last fellows in the world to "chip" their rivals in the face of a real misfortune like this.

"Never mind, Figgys!" said Blake, slapping his rival on the shoulder. "Thank goodness we weren't beaten, that's all! What price that feed?"

Figgins, who had been looking rather down in the mouth, brightened up.

"Right-ho!" he exclaimed. "Come along with me, you bouders!"

"But you haven't got the tommy in yet!"

"Nunno," said Figgins, who had seen the carrier's cart stop at the gates, and did not wish Blake to make the discovery of what the box contained till after the feed; "but that's all right. We want you to help us get ready for the feed, if you will. It's going to be a big affair, you see, in the common-room, and—"

"Right-ho!" exclaimed Blake heartily. "We'll come! Buzz along, kids!"

And Study No. 6 marched into the New House with Figgins & Co. in the most amicable way in the world.

CHAPTER 11.

After the Match.

THERE was a gloomy meeting in Kildare's study after the Headland fellows were gone. The captain of St. Jim's was looking and feeling extremely depressed.

His friends were none too cheerful, either, for though what had happened had not more than borne out their anticipations, they realised what a blow it was for Kildare, and for the fortune of the college in the football field.

Kildare had gone very far—too far, most of his House thought—to conciliate the other House, and this was the result. Four players had walked off the field in the middle of a game, leaving their side to win or lose, as it chanced.

Such a desertion was unpardonable.

The state of affairs was much worse than it had been before the captain's well-meant efforts to bring the two Houses into line.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 253.

AN AMUSING XMAS PARTY MASK IS GIVEN IN THE DOUBLE NUMBER OF "THE MAGNET" LIBRARY

The school had cut a ridiculous figure in the eyes of the visitors, and that was what worried Kildare as much as anything. He was very sensitive for the honour of St. Jim's. Then there was the Mexborough Town match to be considered. Was it to be played by a wholly School House side?

"There's no question about that, I think," said Darrel, when Rushden made the remark. "Even Kildare won't think of playing those rotters again after this, I suppose?"

Kildare coloured.

"You needn't reproach me," he said, in a low voice. "I can see that I have made a hash of the whole thing!"

"I didn't mean to reproach you, old fellow," said Darrel quickly, "and you haven't made a hash of it. You've done your best. But an angel from heaven couldn't get on with Monteith."

"I'm afraid that's the case," said the captain slowly. "I've made my last concession. He isn't fit to go on a footer field. He'll never play for St. Jim's again, as far as I am concerned!"

The School House seniors exchanged glances of satisfaction. This was the stand they had long wanted Kildare to take, and now that he had been driven to take it, they knew that he would be firm.

"It's impossible to play him, of course," went on Kildare. "I'm sorry it's happened, but it's no good blinking facts. He deliberately slackened down in the game, and his going for Darrel was the climax. He's out of the eleven for good and all."

"And a jolly good thing, too, for the eleven!" said Darrel. "Now the air's clear. But the New House are certain to get their backs up over it. Yet I don't see how even they can defend what Monteith did."

"And the others, too!" exclaimed Rushden. "Fancy walking off the field like that, and leaving us to be licked, for all they cared!"

"Well, do you know, I don't blame them very much," said Kildare slowly. "They had no time to think, it all happened so quickly, and they're used to following Monteith's lead. He called on them to back him up, and they obeyed. I believe they were more than half sorry for it afterwards."

"Possibly. But you don't mean to say that you'll let them stop in the team after what they did!" exclaimed Rushden, aghast.

Kildare looked worried.

"It's no good closing our eyes to the state of affairs," he said. "We've got a big match on next week, and we want every ounce of talent we can find. Monteith is barred, but Baker is one of the best wingers we've got, and Webb showed up first-rate to-day, while Gray was a giant at back, and, I believe, saved us more than once."

"Oh, I don't find fault with their play; but what's the good of a player you can't depend upon for five minutes together?"

"They followed Monteith's lead, as I said, and we ought not to be hard on them. If they stick to Monteith, and stay out of the team of their own accord, we shall have to try and fill their places somehow, though, in that case, I tell you plainly, I don't believe we shall be able to stand up to Mexborough."

By all accounts, Mexborough have been pulling ahead lately; and, to tell the exact truth, they're above the weight of an ordinary school team, and it's a bit of cheek on our part to tackle them at all.

The others were silent.

"As I said," the captain went on, "if they stick by Monteith, we've done with them, for he sha'n't play again as long as I'm captain. But if they choose to play without him their places will still be open to them."

"But will they?"

"I don't know; but for the sake of the school I hope so."

"But, hang it all, you can't make any advances to them!" said Darrel. "There can't be any question of asking them to play."

"No need. I shall post up their names in the list for the Mexborough match, and if they don't intend to play they will say so."

"They can't very well leave Monteith out in the cold, unless they make up their minds to throw him over."

"Well, they might do worse than that."

"True enough. I don't see how they can stand for their captain such a howling cad as that fellow. Still—"

"Well, we'll give them the chance to stick to their colours," said Kildare. "I'll put up the list on Monday, so as to give them time to think it over."

And so the discussion ended. Meanwhile, Monteith's study over in the New House was the scene of a meeting equally gloomy and a good deal more bitter. After his conduct at the match, the prefect was a little dubious as to the results, but he tried to carry off the matter with a high hand.

"You all saw," he said, "Kildare was seeking trouble. He never meant to give us a fair show in the team."

His words were received in a grim silence. For a moment the head prefect of the New House looked uneasy. In that moment he seemed to see the leadership he had so long abused slipping from his fingers. The mutiny in his own House, the split in the New House side which he had dreaded before, seemed to be at hand at last.

"I admit," went on Monteith, "that I was wrong to lose my temper and slog Darrel. But what fellow's temper could have stood being shoved out of the way by a half? I was on the ball when he shoved me off."

Gray, Webb, and Baker looked at one another.

"Well, the School House fellows seemed to have an idea that you were slacking on purpose, Monty," said Webb at last.

"That's sheer nonsense, of course," said the prefect.

"Yes, I suppose so."

"It suited them to make that out," continued Monteith. "The fact is, Kildare was looking for an excuse to get rid of me. He wants me out of the team, but he doesn't want to part with you fellows; at least, till after the match with Mexborough."

"Of course, you won't be asked to play again," said Baker.

"Of course not," said the prefect tartly. "I don't expect to."

"And we sha'n't, either. I expect Kildare's had enough of us."

"You speak as if you side with him."

"Well, there's no getting out of it, Monty, you've always been unjust to Kildare, and never given him proper credit," said Baker. "You acted badly to-day, and if he wipes all our names off the list it's only what we ought to expect."

Monteith's eyes glittered.

"So you are going to desert your House and go over to the enemy?"

Baker shifted uneasily.

"No," he said. "I don't suppose Kildare will give any of us a chance of playing for the school again, and that settles it."

"But if he does?"

None of the three replied. Monteith's lip curled bitterly.

"You may as well speak out!" he exclaimed. "I'm kicked out of the team, and I tell you that's what Kildare has been aiming at all along. Now you're going to desert your captain and make his triumph complete. You're going to play for a captain who has insulted your House right and left, and—"

"We're not!" said Gray shortly.

"At least, I'm not!"

"Will you refuse to play?"

"I'm not likely to be asked again."

"But if you are?"

"Yes," said Gray slowly. "I shall refuse."

"That's better. I wish I could make you fellows realise that we've got to stand in together, shoulder to shoulder, if we're to get justice for our House."

"Well, we're doing it," said Webb. "I agree with what Gray says."

Monteith looked at Baker.

"And what do you say?"

"I shall think it out," said Baker. "I'm not likely to be asked to play for St. Jim's after to-day's exhibition; but if I am—well, I shall think it out."

And he quitted the study to avoid further argument.

Monteith scowled darkly.

"Any chap who plays for Kildare against the decision of his House will have to be sent to Coventry!" he exclaimed. "It's hard enough to keep our end up, without having traitors in the camp."

The others nodded a dubious assent. Monteith's face, when he was left alone, was black with gloom and chagrin. He was obstinately determined to persist in the course he had marked out for himself, but at the same time he felt that his position was tottering; the power was departing from his hands. Unless he was very careful indeed, there would be a split in the New House, the result of which he could not foresee—except that it would probably end in his downfall!

CHAPTER 12.

The Feast—and After.

"RIPPING!" exclaimed Jack Blake.

Whatever problems might be troubling the heads of their elders, the juniors of St. Jim's were not in the habit of allowing anything to trouble them for long, and the unpleasant incident on the football-field had been quite

banished from the thoughts of Figgins & Co. and their guests by the preparations for the feast in the New House.

The junior common-room presented an unusual aspect. Figgins's study, of course, was not nearly large enough for the purpose, and as all the juniors of the New House were to participate, the common-room was just the place. Blake and his chums had willingly lent a hand in getting the room ready. Tables were arranged in a row, with desks and some boards to eke them out, and ferns placed in order for the feasters.

Then the unpacking of the catables had followed. They had been brought into the common-room in a big clothes basket, having been taken out of the various bags in which they had been brought into the school, in Figgins's study. Figgie did not wish Blake to recognise any of the packages; the School House fellows were to know nothing of the truth until they got home to Study No. 6.

Blake's eyes opened as he surveyed the heaps of edibles produced from the basket and piled on the table. There was enough to feed a small army there. And the things were first-class, too. The puddings and pies were fresh, the tarts new and good, the cakes and biscuits excellent, the muscatels luscious. There were bottles of all kinds of harmless wine in goodly array to wash down the solids. There was lemonade and ginger-pop galore.

Study No. 6 exchanged glances of satisfaction.

"I say, Figgie, you're doing this thing in style!" exclaimed Blake. "You are, really!"

Figgins smiled.

"Hope you'll enjoy the feed!" he said hospitably.

"Oh, no doubt about that!" answered Blake. "It makes me wish I had an appetite like Wynn's."

"You let my appetite alone, Blake!"

"I'm not going to interfere with it Fatty, I'm going to attend to my own. I'll tell you what, Figgie. This is decent of you. You must come to a feed in Study No. 6 to-morrow."

"What! Are you going in for feeds, too?"

"Yes, rather! There's no harm now in telling you that we've dodged the beaks and got a big box full of tummy in the School House."

"Have you really?" asked Figgins innocently. "How did you get it in?"

"Crabb the carrier brought it."

"Not really?"

"Yes," said Blake, rather puzzled by the general grin that went round the room. "There's nothing funny in that is there?"

"Certainly not," said Figgins. "I was only wondering how it would pass the prefects."

"It's supposed to be a box of carpentry things from Rylcombe. Nobody knows what's inside."

"Well, that's a giddy wheeze!" exclaimed Figgins. "Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the New House juniors.

Blake looked gratified; the greatest of men is not above flattery, and it pleased him to see how his "wheeze" took the New House by storm. But gradually his look changed. It was all very well to laugh, and to laugh again, but surely the joke was not so howlingly comic as it seemed to the New House juniors. They seemed simply unable to leave off laughing. They yelled, they roared, they gurgled, till the tears ran down their cheeks.

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Figgins. "That takes the cake! A box of carpentry things!"

"Crabb the carrier brought it!" gasped Kerr.

"Nobody knows what's inside!" screamed Fatty Wynn.

A fresh whoop of laughter went up at that.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Nobody knows what's inside!"

"That's the funny part of the wheeze! Nobody knows what's inside!"

And the New House juniors roared, till some of them seemed likely to faint with excess of merriment.

Study No. 6 looked at one another. Their opinion was that they were being "rotted," and they were beginning to look extremely dignified. Figgins saw it, and hastened to pour oil on the troubled waters.

"Excuse us, you chaps," he gasped, "but the thing's so funny we simply can't help it. Now, you silly bounders, 'nuff's as good as a feast! Shut up!"

He cast threatening looks on all sides, and gradually the laughter died away. Yet still, from time to time, some spasm of mirth would pass through the room, and hardly a moment passed without a chuckle being heard.

"Oh, let 'em cackle!" said Blake. "Let 'em amuse their

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 253.

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.
Order in advance.

little selves. They ought to be in a lunatic asylum; but the New House is next door to it."

"Opposite to it, you mean," said Fatty Wynn.

This hint that the School House might be considered a lunatic asylum nearly led to war on the spot, but Figgins promptly sat on Wynn, and pinned him down till he apologised, which he did very handsomely, so harmony was restored.

When the table was laid, the place of honour at either side of the great Figgins was given to Blake and D'Arcy, and next them sat Dig and Herries.

"And now wire in," said the hospitable Figgins.

The juniors were not long in wiring in. They were all hungry after an afternoon in the keen, February air, and the feast was really a tempting one. Cold meats of all kinds, fowls, and rabbits, disappeared as if by magic. Pies and puddings galore followed them. Jams and jellies, pastry of all descriptions, filled up any crevices left by what had gone before. The whole was washed down by draughts of lemonade, ginger-beer, red-currant wine, and other innocuous beverages.

Truly, it was a feast of the gods. Seldom had the New House at St. Jim's seen the like of it. Under the genial influence of the feast, all faces were happy and comfortable, all beamed with smiles. No one, looking into the room just then, would have dreamed that the four honoured guests were the deadly foes of Figgins & Co.

The hatchet was buried deep.

"Well, this is all right," said Jack Blake presently. "Figgy, you're a great man. Here's to you, old chap, and may your shadow never grow whiskers."

"Same to you, and may you enjoy your feed when you open that box of yours," replied Figgy cordially.

This friendly wish made those who heard it nearly choke themselves.

But all good things have an end at last.

And so did that royal feed in the New House.

There was really no reason, as far as Study No. 6 could see, why the New House juniors should burst out laughing at intervals, without apparent cause, all the time.

Nor could they understand the meaning of the yell of merriment which greeted Figgins's toast to the founders of the feast.

"Well, we've had a ripping good time," said Blake, when the chums rose at last to go. "You've done us down well, Figgy, hasn't he, chaps?"

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus.

"Al!" chimed in Herries and Digby.

"The pleasure's quite on our side," said the polite Figgins. "It wouldn't have been half so enjoyable if you hadn't been here. Do stop that giggling, Fatty! I only wish Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther could have been here."

And arm-in-arm with their ancient enemies, Study No. 6 marched across the quadrangle to the School House.

At the door they parted quite affectionately with Figgins & Co., and went up to their study. Figgins and his followers waited till the window of Study No. 6 opened.

"Is it all right?" called out Figgy.

"Right as rain!" called Blake in return. "It's here as large as life, and it hasn't been opened."

"Oh, hasn't it!" muttered Figgins.

"What did you say?"

"Nothing, only I really hope you will enjoy your feed after you've opened the box. We all say the same, don't us, chaps?"

"We do, we do!" said the Co. solemnly.

And Figgins & Co. marched off, leaving Blake vaguely uneasy.

He turned back from the window into the study. Herries had lighted the gas. There was the big box, and it looked all right.

"I don't see quite what Figgy was getting at," Blake remarked. "He seems to have something funny on his little brain. There's nothing wrong with the box."

"If it wasn't impossible, I should think they had been up to something," remarked Herries. "But they didn't know about the box till we told 'em."

"Of course they didn't."

"Are you going to open it to-night?" asked Dig, as Blake cut the rope.

"Well, it won't do any harm to take a peep inside," said Blake, whose uneasiness was growing. "Come to think of it, it's rather queer Figgy having such a spread this very day, and then— Well, we'll see."

He tried to insert the key in the lock, but it would not enter.

"Hallo, something wrong here! The key won't go in!"

"Won't it? Something the matter with the lock?"

"My hat! It's been busted!"

"That careless ass of a Crabb! He's dropped the box, I

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 253.

suppose. Or perhaps Taggles did it getting it upstairs. It's heavy."

"A fall wouldn't do that," said Blake, with growing apprehension. "Besides, why doesn't the beastly lid come open? The cord's off and the lock's broken. Scissors! It's nailed down!"

"Crabb must have done it after busting the lock."

"Or—or Figgins. Get the brute open, for mercy's sake!"

They wrenched open the lid of the box.

Four pairs of eyes gazed vacantly on the contents.

Four gasps of utter dismay floated through No. 6 Study.

Blake rose to his feet.

"Figgins!" he said faintly.

"But how?"

"Don't ask me! That's where their feed came from!"

"Our grub!" said Herries wildly.

"Our grub!" groaned Digby.

"No wonder the horrid bouncer was so free with it!"

"No wonder they grinned when we told them about the box."

"No wonder they cheered the founders of the feast—us!"

Blake sat down.

The blow was too much even for him.

"Take me away and bury me," he said weakly. "They've done us. Oh, my only maiden Aunt Sempronia! Oh, crumbs!"

The silence of dismay filled the study.

Never since Study No. 6 had had a local habitation and a name, had it been so thoroughly, so scientifically, so helplessly "done!"

And in the silence a sort of triumphant chant floated in at the window.

Figgins & Co. were still in the quad., and now they were, like the conquerors of old, chanting their psalm of triumph.

"Who bought the grub?"

"Blake did!"

"Who paid for it?"

"Study No. 6 did!"

"Who collared it?"

"We did!"

"Who ate it?"

"We did!"

"Who takes the biscuit? Who collars the Huntley & Palmer? Who prances off with the giddy Peck Frean?"

"We do! We do! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Then let us smile!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Let us smile again!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Blake slammed down the window.

"Done," he said—"clean done!"

But the chums of Study No. 6 were wrathful.

"Scrag him!" said Herries. "He's a giddy chief, he is, and this is what comes of it."

"Your Uncle Blake is a big chief," said Digby, mimicking Blake's voice. "A big, blessed ass would be nearer the mark!"

"A weally idiotic and unwealiabie leadah," said D'Arcy.

And with one accord they fell upon Blake.

They fell upon him, and smote him hip and thigh, and smote him again till he cried for quarter. Blake dragged himself from underneath his indignant followers in a decidedly rumpled condition. He was in a chastened mood.

"I deserve it," he said. "How Figgins worked the wheeze I don't know, but I ought to have guessed when he cut the first half of the footer match. I ought to have guessed when they cackled so much over in the New House. I deserve it! But I give you free leave, kids, to jump on my neck as hard as you like if I don't make Figgins & Co. sit up in return for this jape!"

Faintly, through the closed window, came the chant of Figgins & Co.:

"Let us smile once more!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

CHAPTER 13.

Blake Means Business.

KILDARE'S decision as to the list for the Mexborough match was eagerly awaited at St. Jim's, and when it was put on the notice-board it was anxiously scanned at once.

The Headland match had ended with the most unpleasant incident that had ever happened on the school football-ground, and feeling ran very high in the School House.

The general opinion was that too much had been conceded to the New House, and that after this it was impossible for even the peace-loving captain to extend the olive-branch any more. The School House took it for granted that he would form a team to meet Mexborough wholly from his own side.

The New House had little to say for themselves in the matter.

The keenest and loyalest supporter of Monteith could not deny that the New House players had gone too far, and that no captain could possibly tolerate such conduct in his team.

At the same time they were feeling very sore, and the fact that they had not a leg to stand on only added to their irritation.

When the list was put up, therefore, there was a general gasp of astonishment in both houses.

The only name missing was Monteith's.

The head prefect of the New House was barred. Even Kildare could not overlook what he had done. But Gray, Webb, and Baker were down to play.

"They won't play without Monteith," was the verdict of the School House.

And in that idea Kildare's followers found comfort.

That they should not play without him was Monteith's own determination, but he found that he would have difficulty in getting his own way.

Webb and Gray adhered, though reluctantly, to their declared intention, and sent word to Monteith that they would stand by him.

Baker said nothing.

As Baker, with the exception of Monteith himself, was the best player the New House had ever sent out, the prefect was very anxious about him.

But in reply to a direct question, Baker only said that he was thinking it over.

"Webb and Gray are standing by their house," said Monteith hotly. "Do you mean to say that you are going to desert your side, and let the School House triumph?"

"It isn't a question of New House or School House," replied Baker. "It's a question of St. Jim's winning or losing the match at Mexborough."

"Yes, that's how Kildare puts it, but you know that's all humbug."

"I don't know anything of the kind," replied Baker obstinately. "I know that if we don't stand in with Kildare over this match, St. Jim's will very likely get licked."

"And if you do, the School House will crow over us all along the line. That's what Kildare has planned all along."

"I don't believe it. I always said you didn't do him justice."

Monteith set his thin lips hard.

"You'd better take a friendly word of warning, Baker. Any New House chap who sides against his own house will be cut by everybody here."

"Do you mean that I shall be sent to Coventry if I play?" asked Baker, in his direct way.

"Well, something like that."

"That won't make any difference to me," said Baker, after a pause. "It's a knotty point to decide, and if I play I dare say you can make things uncomfortable for me. But I'm going to think it over, and decide what I believe to be right."

"And, meanwhile, your name will remain on the notice-board?"

"Yes."

So the conversation ended, very unsatisfactorily for both. Monteith realised keenly enough how shaky his position was, and it seemed to him a time for bold measures. If Baker refused to come into line with the rest of the House, he must be coerced, and if he refused to be coerced, he must be cut. A few days in Coventry would probably bring him to reason. But would the New House back the prefect up in such a drastic measure? Monteith was determined that they should; yet in his inmost heart he felt a chill of doubt.

He called on Kildare the same day. He found him with Darrel and Rushden, both of whom gave the prefect decidedly hostile looks. Kildare was icily polite; a very different Kildare from the one Monteith was accustomed to. The prefect realised that he had got the captain's back up at last. The cheery, good-natured captain had shown an almost endless patience, which Monteith had mistaken for weakness. Now his patience was exhausted, and Monteith found him as hard and cold as steel.

"I want to speak to you, Kildare," said the prefect, with a meaning glance at the other two School House seniors.

"Quite at your service," replied Kildare. "Don't go, you fellows; Monteith has nothing private to say to me."

"As a matter of fact, I'd rather see you alone, Kildare."

"What is it about?"

"The footer."

"I don't see what you can have to say about that, as you are not in the team, but whatever it is, you need not say it in private. Don't go, you chaps. Monteith won't be staying long."

Monteith breathed hard.

It was borne in upon his mind then that all the cunning

tactics he had been so self-satisfied about amounted, in effect, to a twisting of the lion's tail—the lion being asleep. Now he had waked the lion.

"Well, I suppose it doesn't matter if Darrel and Rushden hear what I've got to say," he remarked, as indifferently as he could. "It's about the football, as I said. I see that you've got three New House names in the list for next Saturday."

"Yes."

"You have left mine out."

"Naturally, as you do not belong to the eleven."

"Is that a definite decision, then?"

"Quite."

"And you think our fellows will play if their prefect is barred like this?"

"I hope so."

"Well, they won't," said Monteith savagely. "Gray and Webb refuse."

"I shall be sorry to hear that they do."

"Well, you do hear it now."

"I shall not take off their names unless I hear from them personally. I must decline to accept any interference in the matter."

"Do you forget that I am head prefect of my House?"

"Certainly not; but that has nothing to do with the footer. The men are responsible to me, as their captain, and a House prefect has nothing whatever to do with it."

Darrel and Rushden looked at each other with grim satisfaction. They had never seen Kildare in this mood before; he had always been so good-natured that they had been hardly able to imagine him going on the warpath in earnest. It had taken a great deal of provocation to rouse him; but now that Monteith had succeeded in provoking him to a conflict, he was hard as a flint. Monteith himself was surprised and considerably dismayed.

"Very well, you can try and ride the high horse if you like," he sneered savagely. "But I tell you that if any New House chap played for you after this, he would be sent to Coventry by the House. Not a man of our side will meet the Mexborough fellows!"

Kildare shrugged his shoulders.

"I have said that I shall accept no statement from an outsider as to the intentions of my team," he said. "It seems to me useless to prolong this discussion."

The prefect glared at him. He was puzzled and dismayed by this new development of Kildare's character, and at a loss what to do and say. He had a curious feeling of helplessness in the presence of the captain in this unexpected mood.

"Very well," he said, "I've warned you."

"Thanks very much."

Monteith strode from the study and slammed the door. Ten minutes later, a fag from the New House brought a note to Kildare. He opened it and frowned as he read it. It was brief, but very much to the point:

"Unless Monteith is included in the team, we are sorry we cannot undertake to play for the school against Mexborough.

GEORGE WEBB.
ALBERT GRAY."

Kildare tossed the note to his companions.

"That's Monteith's reply," said Darrel, looking at it.

"How will you answer?"

"That won't take long," replied Kildare grimly.

He wrote on the back of the note with a pencil:

"Any member of the school eleven who fails to play on Saturday against Mexborough, except through illness or other similar adequate reason, will never be allowed to play for St. Jim's again as long as E. Kildare is captain."

The fag carried that note back to the New House.

"Baker has sent no word," remarked Darrel thoughtfully.

"It looks as if he is standing out against Monteith."

"Yes," said Kildare, with a nod; "and that was probably what Monteith meant by his allusion to sending to Coventry any of his fellows who played for the school. I've no doubt he tried to get Baker to sign that note along with Webb and Gray."

"Then that means—"

"A disagreement in the New House. From what I know of Baker, I fancy he'll stand by the eleven, in spite of Monteith. It will be a split in the New House, and Monteith will have only himself to thank for it."

Kildare was right; the threatened split in the New House side had come at last! Baker had refused to sign the joint note of Webb and Gray. The two latter looked far from cheerful when the fag brought back Kildare's reply.

"So we're out of it," said Gray.

"It's a rotten business!" muttered Webb.

"We must stand shoulder to shoulder for the House," said Monteith, with an appearance of cheerfulness he was far

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 253.

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.
Order in advance.

from feeling. "Kildare will have to be brought to his senses. And Baker must come into line with us."

"It looks as if he is going to be obstinate."

"He'll smart for it if he is," said the prefect savagely. And he went at once to Baker's study, where he found the fellow he sought, standing with his hands in his pockets, staring gloomily out of the window.

Baker turned at his entrance, with a not very cordial expression.

"Hallo! Don't start on that same old topic again, for goodness' sake!" he exclaimed, before Monteith could speak. "I'm sick of it!"

The prefect scowled.

"I want to know what you're going to do!" he snapped.

"Gray and Webb have resigned from the team. Are you going to do the same?"

"No!"

"You will play for Kildare?"

"I shall play for the school!"

"It's the same thing. You've made up your mind?"

"Well, I hadn't quite, but now I will do it, as you're so pressing. Yes, I'm going to play for St. Jim's; and win, too, if I can!"

"Then you'll be sent to Coventry by the whole House!"

Baker's eyes glittered.

"I'm an easy-going chap," he remarked, "and you've found it pretty easy to lead me, Monteith. You won't find it so easy to drive me. You threaten me, if I stick to the team." He picked up his cap. "You shall see how much I care for that!"

"Where are you going?"

"To the School House!"

"What for?"

"To tell Kildare that he can rely upon me for Saturday!"

And Baker walked out of the room, leaving the prefect speechless with rage.

CHAPTER 14.

No Thanks!

"**H**EAR the news, kids?" exclaimed Blake breathlessly.

"No. What is it?"

"There's a split in the New House!"

"So it's come at last," said Herries, with a wise shake of the head. "How they could have stood Monteith so long I can't understand."

"There are lots and lots of things you can't understand, kid," said Blake; "but I agree with you there. Monteith is a bit too steep."

"But is it a fact?" asked Kangaroo.

"Solid fact. Webb and Gray are scratched off the list. They've resigned, but Baker's name is still there as large as life. I saw him come out of Kildare's study last night, but I didn't guess what he had come over for. But it's plain enough now. He's going to stick to the side and let Monteith rip!"

"Good old Baker!" said Lumley-Lumley.

"But it will mean a row in the New House," continued Blake seriously. "Cad Monteith will be like a bear with a sore head. I wonder if any of the others will back up Baker? I hope so. I should like to see Monteith take a giddy tumble."

Dig shook his head.

"I'll bet Monteith will look out for himself," he said confidently. "You'll never get a chap like that in a corner. He'll make things as warm for Baker as he can, but if the House sided with Baker, Monteith would turn round and pretend that was what he wanted all along."

Blake laughed.

"Shouldn't wonder. But to my mind it looks a good deal as if Baker will be cut by his House. Monteith will manage it if he can; and we School House chaps ought to back up Baker somehow."

"I don't see what we can do."

"Well, I don't either, as a matter of fact; but we ought to back him up."

"A testimonial, or something," hazarded D'Arcy. "Something to show him our appreciation of his patriotic conduct."

"That's it," said Blake. "We must think it over."

The famous four took a great deal of interest in the question, naturally, not only because of their strong regard for the honour of St. Jim's in the footer field, but also because Monteith was their special enemy, and they would have been exceedingly pleased to see him fall from his high estate as captain of the New House. And, as Blake elegantly put it, it was very likely that he would have to come off his perch this time.

It was easy enough to get news of the state of affairs in the New House. Baker had defied his chief, and he was taking

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 253.

the consequences. The edict had gone forth from Monteith's study that he was to be sent to Coventry by the House, and all the prefect's loyal backers cut him dead.

But the Coventry was by no means so complete as Monteith desired. Many fellows persisted in speaking to Baker, in spite of the sentence, and when Monteith called them to account, gave unsatisfactory answers. Still, Baker's position was extremely uncomfortable. He had to smart for the position he had taken up, as Monteith declared that he should. But he did not waver. He was an obstinate fellow, easy to lead, but hard to drive, and Monteith had succeeded in rousing all the obstinacy in his nature.

To all the condemnation of his House he opposed a stubborn silence, and went on his way without a sign of surrender. While most of the seniors were down upon him, he found support in the junior section. The split in the House extended down, even to the fags, and Figgins & Co. plumped for Baker, while a crowd of others, headed by Pratt, stood by Monteith.

Many were the arguments, often concluding in fisticuffs, among the New House juniors, and studies and corridors were frequently in an uproar, and angry seniors stuffed cotton-wool in their ears, or sallied forth with canes, according to their humour, when the disputes waxed high.

Baker was satisfied in his mind that his action was right and justifiable, but it was far from pleasant to be cut, and to hear himself alluded to as a traitor in the camp, and that week was certainly the most uncomfortable one of his life.

Monteith was all the more spiteful, because he had a secret feeling that Webb and Gray were wavering inwardly, and half inclined to throw in their lot with the delinquent. If they should do so, they would certainly have a good following in the House, and the sentence of "Coventry" would become a mere farce.

So Monteith looked anxiously forward to Saturday, when the Mexborough team were to arrive at St. Jim's to play the Saints on their own ground. For, what appeared an ominous circumstance to Monteith, the vacant places in the school eleven had not been filled up.

The list was left on the notice-board, with no alteration, except that a pen had been drawn through the names of Webb and Gray.

As Kildare, of course, could not be intending to play two men short against the visiting team, it was a matter of conjecture whom he would play in the place of the deserters.

Many School House seniors were practising hard, putting all they knew into it, in the hopes of being selected by the captain. But, whatever Kildare's intention was, he said nothing about it, unless it was to his immediate confidants.

Monteith was both puzzled and worried. It looked as if the captain still thought that Webb and Gray might play in the match, in spite of their resignation. And the prefect ground his teeth at the thought.

If such a thing happened, there was an inglorious end to his campaign against Kildare. The captain of St. Jim's would win all along the line.

Had the prefect, in provoking this conflict, taken too big a task upon his hands—"bitten off more than he could chew," in vulgar phrase!

Monteith himself began to think so. But he stuck to his guns obstinately. There was nothing else for him to do, in point of fact, unless he chose to surrender. This was difficult—more difficult than it would have been earlier, for now he would have to tamely accept his exclusion from the team. So that, during these days, Monteith was quite as much worried as Baker.

Meanwhile, the idea of backing up the rebel was taking more definite form in Study No. 6 in the School House.

"You see, kids," said Blake, "Baker is standing by the team in a really decent way, and those cads are making him sit up. I know from Figgy that he's cut by nearly all the House, and you can see for yourselves that he usually looks in doleful dumps. This is the time for us to show that we appreciate his action. If he can't get the credit he deserves in the New House, he ought to get it from us."

"Hear, hear!" said Herries.

"Vewy twue," said Arthur Augustus.

"But what are we to do?" asked Dig.

"Well, I was thinking of a sort of testimonial signed by everybody in the House, to be presented to Baker, testifying how much we approve of the line he's taken."

The chums looked doubtful.

"A testimonial!" said Herries. "But—"

"It would look all right with Kildare's name at the top."

"But would Kildare have a hand in it?"

"Well, I should think so. Then the other seniors would sign, and finally the juniors—everybody in the School House, in fact."

"It seems a good idea."

“I don't know whether we ought to put our names at the top as the idea's ours,” said Blake thoughtfully. “But perhaps it's better to be modest and take a back seat. And the captain's name at the top will be imposing.”

“Who's going to suggest it to Kildare?”

“I will.”

“Well, let's draw up the giddy document,” said Digby, producing foolscap. And the four juniors set to work.

“How do you begin?” murmured Blake, biting his pen.

“Lemme see. ‘Hereby’ is a good word, and has a sorter official sound; we'll shove that in. How does this sound?”

“The inmates of the School House do hereby—”

“Oh, I say,” struck in Dig, “that sounds as if you were speaking of an asylum!”

“H'm! So it does a little. ‘The denizens of the School House—’ No; that won't do! The chaps? That's better. Now—‘The chaps of the School House hereby desire to express their unanimous opinion—’ How many U's are there in unanimous?”

“Three, I think,” said Dig doubtfully.

“Right! ‘Their unanimous opinion that Baker has deserved well of his country—’ No—‘deserved well of the school, in sticking out against Cad Monteith, and hereunder—’”

“Here-in-what?”

“Hereunder, then,” corrected Blake. “‘Hereunder they sign their names in testification of—’”

“In wh-what?”

“Testification!” said Blake obstinately. “When you testify, that's testification, ain't it? It's a jolly long word, too, and will impress Baker.”

“I've never heard it before,” said Herries.

“There's heaps of things you haven't heard. If it isn't a word it ought to be; but I'm sure it's all right, and it sounds imposing.”

“Well, read out the whole thing now, and let's see.”

Blake read out his composition, not without an air of pride.

“The chaps of the School House hereby desire to express their unanimous opinion that George Baker, Esq., has deserved well of the school in sticking out against Cad Monteith, and in testification of this, their aforesaid opinion, they sign their names hereunder.”

“Sounds all right, doesn't it?” asked Blake.

The chums admitted that it sounded all right.

“There goes Kildare,” said Dig, nodding towards the open door. “Suppose you ask him now, and get his signature?”

“Right-ho!”

Blake ran to the door.

“I say, Kildare, ahoy!”

The captain of St. Jim's turned his head.

“Can you spare a minute, Kildare—just a minute?”

“Certainly!” said the captain, entering the study. “What is it?”

“We're getting up a petition—I mean, an address—that is to say, a testimonial,” Blake explained lucidly. “We want your signature at the top.”

The captain smiled.

“Better let me see the document first.”

“Here it is.”

Kildare read it through, and burst out laughing. The juniors looked at one another.

“I say, is there anything wrong with it?” asked Blake anxiously.

“Well, I know you fellows in this study have invented a new and entirely original system of orthography,” said Kildare, becoming grave again, and speaking quite seriously.

“still, it is not the common or garden custom to spell ‘unanimous’ with more than two U's.”

“Oh, that's all right! I was a bit doubtful myself about that last U. But I can easily scratch it out. Anything else?”

“Well, testification is an excellent word—a very excellent word; but—”

“I didn't quite know whether it was testification or testification,” said Blake glibly. “If you think it's too long I'll make it testification.”

Kildare grinned.

“You're so obliging, Blake, that I hate to have to refuse my name to this beautiful document,” he said. “I'm afraid I can't sign it, though.”

“Oh, I say, Kildare, don't be mean!”

“I'm sorry; but you will really have to excuse me. Better ask Darrel to head the list.” And the captain of St. Jim's quitted the study.

“Well, I never thought that of Kildare!” said Blake.

“But it's as clear as daylight!”

“What is?” asked Herries.

“He's annoyed that he didn't think of this idea himself, and won't back us up.”

“I suppose that's it.”

“We'll take his advice, and ask Darrel. Come on!”

The chums found Darrel in the seniors' room. They presented the testimonial, and asked for his autograph.

Darrel read the precious document, and grinned.

“Don't think I don't appreciate this honour,” he said; “I do. But Kildare's captain, you know, and his name ought to come first. Ask him. If he signs, I will.”

“But we've already asked him.”

“What did he say?”

“Sent us to you.”

“Ha, ha! Well, suppose you try Rushden? I'm too modest to put my name at the head of a list.”

So they gave up Darrel, and marched off to Rushden's study. Rushden looked at the document, and stared.

“Is this a joke?” he asked.

“A joke?” exclaimed Blake indignantly. “It's a testimonial. We want your signature shoved at the top. Here's a fountain-pen.”

“Have you asked Kildare?”

“Yes; but—but he was—was busy.”

“Better ask Darrel, then.”

“No; he says he doesn't want to head the list.”

“Well, I don't, either. Ask Drake.”

They left Rushden's study.

In the corridor they stood and looked at one another.

“Well, are you going to ask Drake?” said Herries at last.

“I don't think so,” replied Blake uncomfortably. “The seniors don't want a hand in it. I suppose it's envy because we're getting it up.”

“Perhaps they think—”

“Perhaps they think what?”

“Oh, nothing!”

“Anyway, we'll get the juniors' names down,” said Blake more cheerfully. “That will make a pretty long list; and I don't suppose Baker will really read them all, you know. Nobody ever does. It's just the look of the thing.”

It was easy enough to get the juniors' signatures. The mere fact that Monteith was alluded to in the document as Cad Monteith was quite sufficient to gather in every junior signature in the School House.

And when all the names were signed the look of the document was certainly imposing. It filled several sheets of foolscap, and though the array of blots and scratches rather detracted from the neatness of it, there were names enough to satisfy anybody.

Then the question arose as to the manner in which the testimonial was to be presented to George Baker, Esq.

“If we take it to him in the New House, Figgins & Co. may go for us, and spoil the effect,” said Blake thoughtfully.

“You can't present an address with one hand, and bash New House cads with the other.”

This was undeniable.

It was finally decided to corner Baker in the quad, or the gymnasium one day, and take him by surprise with the precious document.

And so the chums of Study No. 6 kept a sharp look-out for the New House senior, and ran him to earth in the gym.

Baker looked rather astonished when a dozen or more School House youngsters, with Study No. 6 at their head, marched up to him in the gym., and his expression became absolutely astounded when Blake placed the testimonial in his hands. He took it mechanically, staring at the junior.

“What is this?”

“Read it,” said Blake mysteriously.

The gym. was pretty well crowded just then, and the actions of the juniors had drawn every eye in their direction. Twenty pairs of eyes stared at Baker as Blake made his reply.

The School House juniors formed an admiring circle round Baker as he let his astonished gaze fall upon the blotched, smeared document in his hands.

Blake, with a confident smile, waited for the expected words of gratification from Baker. They didn't come. Baker slowly and methodically tore the document through from end to end, and then placed the pieces together, and tore them through from side to side.

Blake watched this proceeding in amazement.

“I say, what are you up to?” he exclaimed. “Don't you understand? That's a—”

“A piece of impudence!” said Baker, growing purple.

“You confounded, cheeky young rascals, I've a good mind to—”

“You don't understand,” said Blake feebly. “It's a—”

“Clear—”

“But let me explain. It's a testimonial that—”

“Get out!”

“It's a testi—”

“Be off!”

“It's a—”

Blake left the sentence unfinished, and bolted. Baker was

making a rush at him. The juniors tumbled over each other out of the gym. A disconsolate quartette gathered again in Study No. 6.

"What a giddy sell!" was all Herries, Dig, and D'Arcy could find to say.

Blake realised that the testimonial was a ghastly failure. But he had to save his prestige somehow. His look was very severe.

"The next time you want to get up a silly testimonial," he said, "you can leave me out of it. Nice asses you've made of yourselves!"

And he marched out of the study. And the other three could only look at one another and gasp feebly:

"Well, I'm blowed!"

CHAPTER 15.

The Big Match.

SATURDAY! The excitement was keen in the school that morning. The notice on the board in the hall remained unchanged, as Blake ascertained as soon as he came down. The vacant places were not filled yet. Was Kildare bent, then, on giving the deserters a last chance?

"That's the idea," said Blake confidently. "And if they don't come into line, Kildare's got his eye on the substitutes. Only he won't mention any names, you see, until he's sure about Webb and Gray, so as to save causing disappointment."

Which was doubtless the true explanation.

The afternoon, to the relief of all, turned out fine. The weather was propitious, the ground in excellent condition. After school Blake took another look at the notice in the hall. It was still unchanged. Kildare passed him, and he scanned the captain's face. But Kildare's face, except that it was calm and cheerful, expressed nothing.

The captain went down to the football-ground. Study No. 6 marched down together, and arrived at the same time as Figgins & Co. It was a rare opportunity for a row, but both parties were thinking too much about the coming match for that. They joined in cheering Baker when he went into the pavilion with Kildare. They joined even more heartily in hissing when Monteith appeared in sight.

Monteith came down with Webb and Gray. The two latter were looking decidedly glum. They started at the sound of hissing, and Monteith looked round in search of the hissers, but the juniors left off in time.

"The cad has got those two silly duffers under his wing," said Blake. "He's afraid they'll change their minds at the last moment."

"I believe they would if Kildare said a word," said Figgins. "I jolly well wish they'd play. The New House has suffered too much on account of Monteith already."

"You're right. Hallo! There's Mexborough!"

"My hat! They look a tough lot!"

"They are."

"A bit over our weight—ch?" said Figgins dubiously. "It will be a fight!"

The Mexborough men were certainly tough-looking customers. They were, as a team, older than the St. Jim's fellows, and mostly larger and heavier. Kildare had said that it was a bit of cheek on the part of St. Jim's to tackle them at all, and, really, it looked as if the captain was right.

The visitors, to judge by their looks and their remarks among themselves, had come to St. Jim's in the full expectation of wiping up the ground with the home team. Blake looked at his watch. It was getting near time for the kick-off.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Herries suddenly.

"What's the matter, image?"

"Look at old Kildare!"

Every eye was turned at once upon the captain of St. Jim's. He had come out of the pavilion, and was walking directly towards the spot where Gray and Webb stood with Monteith. The latter scowled blackly at him; his two companions looked awkward and uneasy. Blake gripped Figgins by the arm.

"He's going to get them in, you see."

"Bravo! Hope he does," said Figgins.

Kildare stopped before the trio of New House seniors.

"Are you going to play, you chaps?" he said, without taking any notice of Monteith. "The places are still open to you, if you like."

Webb turned red, and looked at Gray. Gray turned red, too. The prefect snapped his teeth.

"They are not going to play, Kildare!" he said savagely.

Kildare took not the slightest notice of him. His gaze was fixed upon the two deserters, and he appeared to be unaware of the existence of Monteith.

"We've got a hard fight before us," he said. "If we win, we shall only do it by the skin of our teeth. I appeal to you

in the name of the school to play up for St. Jim's. Will you do it?"

Webb came to a sudden determination.

"You really want us?"

"Yes."

"Then I'm your man!"

"If Webb plays, I play!" said Gray.

Monteith opened his mouth to speak. But before he could say a word Kildare linked his arms in those of Gray and Webb, and marched them off to the pavilion. Monteith sprang after them.

"Webb! Gray! Are you going to—"

"We're going to play. We can't let the school lose for the sake of spite, Monteith," said Gray, without turning his head.

The prefect was left standing alone, grinding his teeth. The two reclaimed deserters disappeared into the pavilion with Kildare. The captain had judged them rightly. They had been extremely dissatisfied with their position all along, doubtful as to the justice of their cause, uneasy as to the result of their action. The captain's appeal had been made in the right way, and at the right time. And it had not been made in vain.

The juniors had not heard what was said, but when Gray and Webb walked off with Kildare and left Monteith standing alone, they knew, of course, what had happened. Blake threw his cap into the air.

"Hurrah!" he yelled.

And Study No. 6 and Figgins & Co. joined him with all the force of their lungs.

The news spread round the field like wildfire. The School House welcomed it, the New House did not know how to take it, but upon the whole they were glad to have three men in the team for the big match.

When the eleven came out into the field, with Baker, Gray, and Webb in the school colours, the New House cheered them heartily. Monteith stood alone. He knew what this meant. The sentence of Coventry upon Baker had been rescinded by tacit consent. It had never been rigidly enforced, in spite of his efforts. Now it was over.

The action of Webb and Gray had decided the New House. If Monteith kept on in the path he had marked out for himself, he would follow it alone. With a heart burning with rage he realised it. A complete change of tactics, a complete surrender, was his only alternative to falling from the position he had abused, as captain of his House.

His face was white with rage and chagrin, but no one was looking at Monteith just then. The two teams were in the field, and the referee was looking at his watch. The Mexborough skipper had tossed with Kildare and won the choice of goals.

Phip!

"Now we shall see something," said Blake. "Go it, ye cripples!"

Mexborough kicked-off. The match commenced. Kildare's prediction as to the tussle the school had before them was verified. The men from Mexborough were decidedly the strongest opponents the Saints had ever had to face. Their rushes were deadly, and difficult to stem; their combination was good, and their passing very accurate.

The wind was against the visitors, but they came on splendidly, and the Saints fell back to defend their goal. But their defence availed them not. Right into the net went a whizzing shot from the foot of the Mexborough skipper, and even Rushden could not save that shot. It was a goal! A goal to the visitors in six minutes!

"Buck up, Saints!" called out Blake, as the sides lined up again. "Play up! You ain't playing dominoes, you know!"

But the Saints needed no urging to buck up. Kildare muttered a few words of encouragement to his men, and they faced the enemy again with a dogged determination. Again the Mexborough men came sweeping on. But this time a St. Jim's back cleared with a kick that sent the ball over the half-way line, and relieved the pressure when it looked deadly dangerous.

"Good old Gray!" shouted Blake.

"Good old New House!" roared Figgins.

And Gray was loudly cheered. Monteith was the only one of his House-fellows who was silent. And the cheers redoubled when it was seen that Baker had captured the ball and was away with it, taking it down the field with a lightninglike dribble.

"Baker! Baker!"

"Hurrah! Hurrah!"

The excitement grew delirious. The Mexborough defence seemed nowhere; Baker went through them like a shot, and kicked for goal, amid a tremendous roar. And when the Mexborough goalie was seen to grab at the ball, and miss—and the leather reposed in the net—then St. Jim's let itself go. The last vestige of Baker's unpopularity in his own

House vanished in a storm of cheers. And right heartily the School House joined in that cheering.

"Goal!"

"Bravo, Baker!"

"Hurrah!"

The sides had equalised. Kildare's face was glowing as they lined up again. The fight was hard and fast, but a good hope of victory was in the captain's heart. But what pleased him best was the knowledge that his New House recruits were playing up so grandly for the school. With the team pulling together so splendidly, they might accomplish anything.

The game restarted. That goal had been rather an eye-opener for the Mexborough men, showing them that they were not to have things entirely their own way.

And now they put their "beef" into it, and played up for all they were worth.

And ere long a second goal rewarded their efforts.

Two to one against St. Jim's.

But the faces round the ropes were quite confident.

They had full faith in their champions.

And their faith was justified. Just before half-time Kildare led a gallant attack upon the visitors' goal, and the ball went in from the foot of the St. Jim's skipper.

"Goal!" yelled Blake. "Give us another, Kildare, old chap!"

But no more was taken by either side before the interval.

The first half ended with the score equal.

"Jolly good game, ain't it, Monteith?" asked Figgins, with a grin.

He was prepared to dodge a cuff from the prefect in reply to his remark.

But, to his surprise, the usually sour face of Monteith was quite genial in its expression, and he nodded.

"Jolly good, Figgins! You're right!"

Figgins stared.

"Old Monteith ain't such a bad sportsman, after all," he confided to Kerr and Wynn. "You see, he's as pleased as anybody at our keeping our end up."

Jack Blake heard the remark, and winked at his companions.

Blake was under no delusion as to Monteith's change of front.

The prefect knew that he was in a corner, and meant to wriggle out of it, and that, to Blake's mind, accounted for his changed expression.

But Blake and his comrades had no time to think about Monteith at that moment.

Just as the whistle went for half-time, there was a sound of wheels on distant gravel, and two minutes later there was a rush of footsteps towards the footer ground.

Three sturdy juniors rushed into the crowd for places.

There was a roar from the juniors whom they displaced:

"Get out, Monty Lowther!"

"Mind where you're shoving, Tom Merry!"

"Yah! Gerroff my foot, Manners, you ass!"

"Here they are!" shouted Kangaroo. "Bravo!"

The Terrible Three had returned.

CHAPTER 16.

Bravo, St. Jim's!

TOM MERRY thumped Blake energetically on the back.

"How is it?" he roared.

Blake gave a yelp.

"Broken, I think, you silly ass!" he gasped. "Let my back alone!"

"Ha, ha! I mean, how's the score?"

"Two to two."

"Yaas, wathah! Level, deah boys!"

"Tooter-too," said Monty Lowther, who had evidently returned as humorous as when he departed. "That reminds me of the railway-porter who said—"

"Cheese it!"

"The railway-porter who said—"

"Rats!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Who said 'The two train departs any time from two to two-to-two—'"

"Oh, blow the railway-porter and what he said! Here come the boys!"

"Hurrah!"

"Good old Kildare!"

"Play up, St. Jim's!"

The Terrible Three joined in the cheering with all the force of their lungs. Monty Lowther, in his enthusiasm, swept off Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's silk toppler, and waved it frantically in the air.

Arthur Augustus gave a yell.

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Hurrah!"

"You'll damage my toppah!" shrieked D'Arcy. "Let me see if you've damaged it already."

"It's all right; I have," said Lowther calmly. "No need to look."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Lowthah! You uttah wottah—"

"Play up, St. Jim's!"

The ball was rolling, and Arthur Augustus forgot even his damaged toppler in the keen excitement of watching the second half of that great match. Indeed, the swell of St. Jim's remarked that it was very nearly as exciting as one of the junior matches with Gordon Gay & Co., of the Grammar School, and the other fellows agreed that it was.

A plump-faced youth, who had come round to the tradesmen's entrance with a basket on his arm, edged round the house to get a distant view of the match, and Lumley-Lumley, of the Fourth, gave him a yell:

"Hallo, Grimes! Come here!"

And Grimes, the grocer's boy from Rylcombe, who for a brief space had been a Fourth-Former at St. Jim's, joined the crowd of juniors, grinning.

"Yaas, wathah! Come here, deah boy!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"I got ten minutes to spare," said Grimes. "I've hurried up 'cause I 'eard this 'ere match was on, Master Lumley, and I wanted to see it."

"And you're in good time, Master Grimes," said Lumley-Lumley.

"Yaas, wathah!"

And then Grimes gave a roar:

"Go it, Master Kildare! On the ball, sir! Go it!"

"Yaas, wathah! Make 'em wun, Kildare!"

"Put her through!" yelled Tom Merry. "We're here to back you up, Kildare! Put her through! Goal—goal—goal!"

"My 'at!" said Grimes. "That was a corker!"

And the general opinion seemed to be that it was a "corker." St. Jim's cheered itself almost hoarse over that goal. St. Jim's first were one up now.

Even Monteith was seen to clap his hands and cheer, though exactly how much cordiality the New House prefect felt at that moment we cannot undertake to say.

But if Monteith did not feel enthusiastic, he found it necessary to assume a virtue if he had it not, to borrow an expression from the immortal William. And if he was assuming it, he certainly was assuming, it very well.

"One ahead of us!" said Monty Lowther, quite as if he were a member of the first eleven. "We're getting on!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Beating them hollow!" said Manners jubilantly. "My hat! I'm jolly glad we got back in time for the match! Might have missed this!"

"Bai Jove! That would have been feahful, deah boy. It's a lot to wisk when you tie pfects up in sacks," said Arthur Augustus, with a shake of the head.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'm going to have some pictures of this," said Manners.

"Mind my place while I get my camera!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

The amateur photographer of the Shell was back in five minutes with his camera.

Manners was very enthusiastic in that line. On the never-to-be-forgotten occasion when Tom Merry's team had played the Thebans, Manners had actually stood out of the match for the purpose of taking photographs of it. The keenness of the amateur photographer could no further go.

By the time Manners returned, however, his place near the ropes had been filled by a New House junior—Thomson, of the Shell.

"My place!" said Manners.

"Rats!" said Thompson, of the Shell, politely.

"Clear!"

"Bosh!"

"I'll shift you!"

"Do!"

And after that laconic dialogue, Manners did. Figgins & Co. and Redfern & Co., as in duty bound, rushed to the aid of the New House fellow; and Tom Merry & Co. crowded to the assistance of Manners. There was a terrific scuffle, till a couple of prefects came along with walking-canes and restored order. But Manners was victoriously in his place, and after that the snapping of his camera was incessant.

Mexborough were playing up desperately now. The walk-over they had anticipated had not come off, and the St. Jim's eleven did not seem to be suffering much from leaving Monteith out. The visitors played their hardest, and they succeeded in putting the ball in once more; and within ten minutes of time the score was equal again—three to three.

Tom Merry looked anxious.

"This won't do!" he said, with a shake of the head.

(Continued on page 27.)

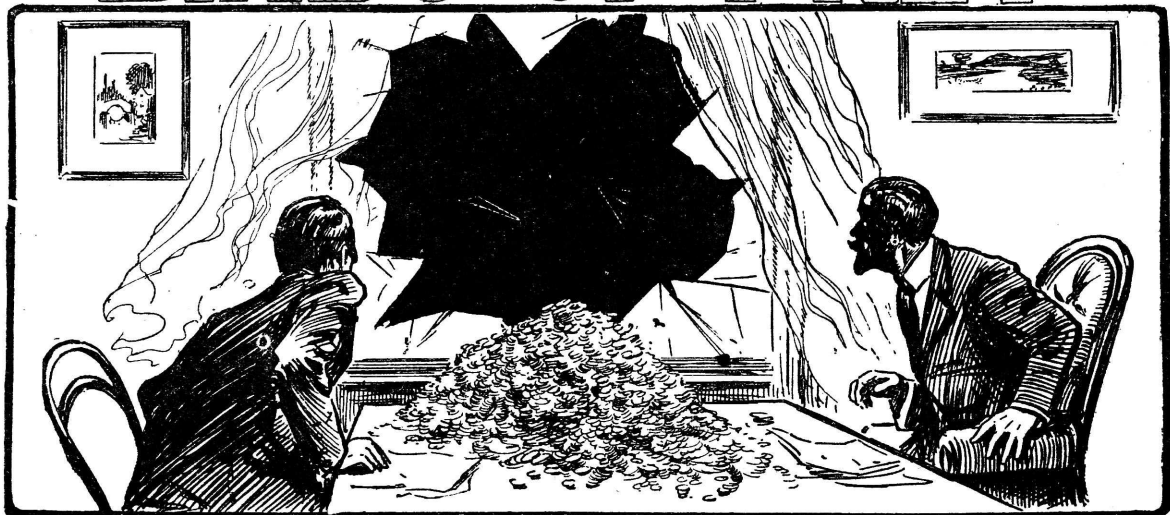
THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 253.

WEDNESDAY: "JACK BLAKE ON THE WARPATH!" By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

Order in advance.

OUR SPLENDID SERIAL.

BIRDS OF PREY



A Thrilling Story Dealing with the Adventures of Nelson Lee, Detective.

By **MAXWELL SCOTT.**

WHAT HAS HAPPENED SO FAR.

Jack Langley, a young engineer, falls into the power of an infamous secret society known as the Order of the Ring, at the head of which are three villains, known as the Chief, the Squire, and the Doctor. When a prisoner on board the yacht *Dolphin*, belonging to the Order, Jack Langley escapes by plunging overboard, only to be picked up by the liner *Firefly*, also owned by the secret society. The *Firefly*, under the command of the Doctor, is run ostensibly as a pleasure-steamer, but on every voyage one or more passengers is "removed"—murdered by the scoundrelly Doctor, in consideration for large sums of money paid to the Order of the Ring. On board the *Firefly* Langley finds the famous detective, Nelson Lee, who is on the track of the infamous Order. Among the passengers is also Miss Edith Aylmer, Jack's fiancée. Little as she guesses it, her uncle, Sir Philip Aylmer, has paid the Order of the Ring a thousand pounds to have her "removed" during the *Firefly's* voyage. Trouble is stirred up among the passengers by Langley and the detective, and the Order determines to scuttle the ship with all on board. The crew, therefore, abandon the *Firefly*, and go on board the *Dolphin*, taking Ethel and Jack with them. A great storm springs up, and the *Firefly* goes ashore on the rocky coast of Cornwall, close to Sir Philip Aylmer's house. The passengers are all saved, Nelson Lee being carried ashore unconscious, and the rescue

work is hardly finished when the news is brought that the *Dolphin* has also struck, and gone down with all hands.

As a matter of fact, however, the Chief and the Doctor, with their two prisoners and five of the crew, manage to save themselves, and find refuge at Sir Philip Aylmer's house. Nelson Lee suspects Sir Philip's connection with the Ring, and shadows him one day to *Dashwood House*, a large mansion standing in Chesham Place, London, and supposed to be owned by a certain Mr Stephen Meredith.

By taking the place of one of the footmen, Nelson Lee learns that "Mr. Stephen Meredith" is none other than the Chief himself. One day while he is waiting at dinner, when the Chief, the Squire, and the Doctor, also "Lady Ursula,"—a beautiful woman who is a member of the Order of the Ring—are all present, Nelson Lee's disguise is discovered, and he flees from the house.

Returning shortly after with a force of police, the detective finds that the birds have flown. Searching Lady Ursula's room, however, they find a secret door, which opens to reveal a narrow slit in the wall. One at a time the constables follow Nelson Lee down a flight of steps, which lead to the entrance of an underground tunnel.

(Now go on with the story.)

A Stern Chase.

Lantern in hand, Nelson Lee led the way along this tunnel for over a hundred yards; then the tunnel came to an end, and they found their further progress blocked by a massive, iron-sheet door.

"Clever—very clever!" said Nelson Lee, as he surveyed this ponderous door. "Mr. Meredith is a wiser man than I gave him credit for being. He has evidently had this underground passage constructed in order to provide himself with a way of escape in case of emergency."

"Then what do you think there is on the other side of this door?" asked one of the police.

"Another flight of steps, no doubt."

"Leading—"

"To one of the houses in Belgrave Square."

"How do you make that out?"

"Surely it is clear enough! This passage, as you see, follows the line of the street, and is, roughly speaking, a hundred and twenty yards long. If you were to go outside and measure a hundred and twenty yards in an easterly direction from *Dashwood House*, where would you land?"

"About the middle of the south side of Belgrave Square?"

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 253.

"Exactly. And that's where the house is that we are standing under now. In other words, Mr. Meredith has evidently rented two houses in this neighbourhood—*Dashwood House*, in Chesham Place, and another house in Belgrave Square. Between the two he has had this underground tunnel constructed, and at the present moment, without a doubt, he and his four accomplices are in the house above our heads."

"Then the sooner we break down this door the better."

"I agree with you," said Nelson Lee. "In the meantime, I'll measure the length of this passage, and then I'll go into Chesham Place and measure the same distance along the street. In that way I shall be able to find out which is the house in which our men are hiding, and, whilst you're bursting open the door down here, I'll see that they don't slip away."

He handed the lantern to one of the constables, and set to work to pace out the distance between the door and the foot of the steps. It was a hundred and fifty-seven paces. He then returned to Lady Ursula's boudoir, hurried downstairs, and left the house.

Starting from the front door of *Dashwood House*, he began

AN AMUSING XMAS PARTY MASK IS GIVEN IN THE DOUBLE NUMBER OF "THE MAGNET" LIBRARY

to measure a hundred and fifty-seven paces in an easterly direction. Before he had taken twenty strides, he had measured the distance with his eye, and had decided in his own mind which was the house in Belgrave Square where his enemies were hiding. His suspicions were confirmed by the fact that a brougham was standing outside the door of this house, and a moment later an electric thrill shot through his nerves as he saw a woman, closely veiled and cloaked, glide out of the house and step into the brougham.

He quickened his pace; but, ere he could reach the house, four men came out, three of whom sprang into the brougham, whilst the fourth took his seat on the box, beside the driver. Owing to the darkness and the distance the detective was unable to see their faces; yet, in spite of this, he had no doubt whatever that they were the Chief, the Squire, and the Doctor.

He was equally certain that the woman was Lady Ursula, and that the young man on the box was the secretary. Yet what could he do? Until he saw their faces, until he was able to identify them with positive certainty, he was helpless.

On the other hand, if he could only reach the brougham before it drove away, if he could only make legally sure that the people inside were the people he was after, he had only to seize the reins and yell for assistance, and his triumph would be complete.

All this flashed through his mind in a thousandth part of the time it has taken to set it down. Quivering with excitement, he broke into a run, but, even as he did so, the coachman whipped up the horse, and the brougham rattled off in the direction of Grosvenor Place.

As the detective pulled up, raging with mortification, an empty hansom dashed into the square. Quick as thought, the detective hailed the driver, and boarded the hansom before it had actually stopped.

"I am Nelson Lee, the detective," he said, pointing to the brougham, which was now almost out of sight. "There's a five-pound note for you if you'll keep that brougham in sight until it reaches its destination."

"Right you are, sir!" said the cabby with alacrity. "I'd follow 'em to the North Pole for five pounds! Gee up, boss!"

He cracked his whip, the horse sprang forward, and the long, stern chase began.

Nelson Lee in a Trap.

Where was the brougham making for? That was the question that the detective asked himself as the hansom, following in the wake of the brougham, swung round the corner of Chapel Street and turned up Grosvenor Place.

Were the Chief and his companions simply going to some other house in London? Or were they making for one of the stations, with the intention of leaving London altogether? In the latter case, which station were they going to?

It was clear that they were not going to Victoria, for they had turned their backs on Victoria when the brougham had turned up Grosvenor Place. Were they going to Charing Cross or London Bridge, with the object of catching a boat-express and crossing to the Continent? It seemed likely enough, yet it was not so, for on reaching the top of Grosvenor Place the brougham crossed over by Apsley House and passed into Hyde Park.

Was it Paddington they were making for? No. The brougham crossed the park and turned into Edgware Road. Surely, then, it was Marylebone? Or Euston, perhaps? Perhaps St. Pancras or King's Cross?

It was none of them. After entering Edgware Road the brougham kept steadily on in a bee-line towards the North. Maida Vale was passed and left behind. The Kilburn High Road was traversed from end to end. London itself was at last left in the rear, and green fields took the place of shops and houses, yet still the brougham rumbled on, with never a sign of a stop.

At Elstree they crossed the Middlesex boundary and entered the county of Hertford. For some time past, to Nelson Lee's chagrin, the hansom had been dropping farther and farther behind, for the horse was visibly tiring, and more than once had had narrow escapes of coming down. The brougham, on the other hand, still forged ahead with the same exasperating speed as ever.

"Look here, how much farther are we going?" asked the cabby at last, raising the trap and addressing Nelson Lee. "We've followed 'em now for close upon fifteen miles, and they look to me like going on for another fifteen. Where are they bound for?"

"I wish I knew," said Nelson Lee. "I'd no idea, when we started out, that we should have to come all this distance. But now that we've started we may as well see the thing through. Keep them in sight, if you have to follow

them all night, and I'll see that you're not out of pocket over the job."

"That's all very well," said the driver, in a grumbling voice; "but this 'ere 'oss 'as been in the shafts since one o'clock this afternoon, and he'll not stand very much more of this on these 'ard and frosty roads. He's had one or two narrow shaves already of—"

His sentence ended in a shout of alarm, for at that moment the horse put his foot in a rut in the road, and came down with such unexpected suddenness that the detective was flung out of his seat and thrown on his face in the fore part of the vehicle.

He picked himself up, no worse for his fall, and sprang out into the road. At that same instant the lights of the brougham disappeared round a bend in the road about half a mile ahead.

"He's not much the worse," said Nelson Lee, after a rapid examination of the fallen horse. "One of his knees is slightly grazed, but that's the worst that's happened to him. At the same time, I'm afraid he's finished work for to-night."

They unharnessed the horse and assisted him to rise. Then they backed him into the shafts again, and had just finished harnessing him when the lights of the brougham suddenly reappeared, coming towards them down the road.

Quick as thought, the detective backed the hansom into a neighbouring field, and a moment later the brougham rattled past on its way to London. The driver was still on the box, of course; but he was alone, and the brougham itself was empty.

"That was the carriage we were following, wasn't it?" asked the cabby, when the brougham had disappeared.

"It was," said Nelson Lee, in tones of suppressed excitement. "When it started from Belgrave Square there were two men on the box, and three men and a lady inside. That can only mean that the others have arrived at their destination, and have sent the brougham back to Belgrave Square. In other words, the house to which they were driving—the house at which the brougham has dropped them—is somewhere along this road, and not much more than a mile away."

"Less than a mile," said the cabby, as he led the hansom out of the field and into the road again. "It wasn't more than ten minutes from the time the carriage vanished round that corner to the time it came back empty. What are you going to do?"

"I'm going to look for that house," said Nelson Lee. "Take the hansom back to Elstree, and put up there for to-night. Here's a five-pound note I promised you for yourself, and here's a sovereign for the hire of the cab. Good-night!"

The cabby thanked him, mounted his box, and drove away at a walking pace towards Elstree. The detective trudged off in the opposite direction, and presently came to a large stone house, standing back some distance from the road, and surrounded by a small but well-wooded park. The park was enclosed by high stone walls, and the iron gates which gave admittance to it were locked; but by peering through the bars the detective saw that one of the lower windows at the front of the house was brilliantly lighted. As it was then nearly two o'clock in the morning, at which hour most people are in bed, this lighted window was certainly suggestive.

"This is the house, I'll be bound!" muttered Nelson Lee. "At any rate, I'm not going any farther till I've had a peep through that window and seen who's inside that room."

He scaled the gates, and threaded his way between trees and bushes till he came to the lawn in front of the house. He glided across the lawn to the lighted window. Then all of a sudden he caught his foot against something on the ground. The darkness was illumined by a blinding flash, the silence was rent by a deafening report, and Nelson Lee pitched forward on his face.

So great is the power of imagination, that for one brief moment the detective was fully convinced that he had been shot. Then he realised that he had merely stumbled over the tightly-stretched wire of an alarm-gun, which had evidently been placed in the grounds to give warning of the approach of burglars or poachers. Beyond a few bruises, he was none the worse for his headlong fall; but the report of the gun had alarmed the inmates of the house, and almost before he had time to pick himself up the front door was flung open, and four dark figures rushed out.

The detective turned and fled, but the fates were against him. Right in his path, invisible in the darkness, was a powerful man-trap, and before he had taken a dozen strides he planted his foot in its jaws.

With an ominous click the strong steel jaws snapped to and fastened themselves on his ankle. Sick with despair, he exerted all his strength to free himself, but the fiendish thing held firm and fast, and refused to disgorge its prey.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 253.
Order in advance.

And in the midst of his frantic but fruitless struggles the four men suddenly caught sight of him, and rushed towards him with yells of exultant triumph.

"I am Nelson Lee!"

The detective ceased to struggle, and resigned himself to his fate. With one foot fast in the man-trap, he folded his arms and clenched his teeth, and prepared to meet his death—for he never doubted that his enemies would shoot him—with that calm unflinching courage which had ever been his most characteristic trait.

Nearer and nearer came the four dark figures, till at last he was able to distinguish their faces. For one brief instant he stared at them in unbelieving amazement, then a rapturous thrill shot through his nerves, and a glad-some cry rose to his lips.

The four men were total strangers! In other words, he had made a mistake in thinking that the house in front of him was the house to which his foes had driven. It was not the house for which he sought, and the four men who were coming towards him were not, as he had thought, the Chief and his three accomplices.

Almost before he had fully grasped this joyful fact, the four men had surrounded him, and were peering into his face. One of them, he afterwards learned, was the owner of the house, a retired Indian colonel, who had a perfect mania for electric-alarms, man-traps, spring-guns, and similar devices of an "anti-burglar" type. The other three men were friends of the colonel, whom he had invited to the house for a rubber of whist, and who were "making a night of it."

"Why, it's a footman!" exclaimed the colonel, planting himself in front of the imprisoned detective, and regarding him with an air of mingled ferocity and surprise. "What's your name, you rascal, and what are you doing in my grounds at this hour of the night?"

"My name is Nelson Lee," said the detective quietly.

The colonel snorted, and his three companions burst into a peal of laughter.

"Try again, my good man!" said one of them. "Haven't you made a slight mistake? Aren't you too modest? Are you perfectly sure that you aren't Sir Henry Irving, or the Duke of Connaught or the German Emperor?"

"No, no!" said another. "I recognise him now. He's the Tsar of Russia in a new disguise!"

"When you have quite finished," said the detective, "you will perhaps be kind enough to release me from this somewhat painful and entirely illegal——"

"Illegal!" roared the colonel, turning purple in the face. "Who the deuce are you, sir, that you dare to prate to me of illegality?"

"I have told you," said the detective, shrugging his shoulders. "I am Nelson Lee."

Something in the tones of his voice carried conviction to the colonel's mind, and the next moment he was released from the man-trap. After examining his ankle to make sure that no bones were broken, he turned to the colonel, and briefly described the stirring sequence of events which had led to his appearance there.

When he had finished, the colonel tendered him a handsome apology, on behalf of himself and his friends, for the inconvenience they had caused him.

"I will accept your apology on two conditions," said Nelson Lee, with a humorous twinkle in his eyes. "My ankle isn't seriously hurt, but it's far too stiff and painful to permit me continuing my investigation to-night. By to-morrow morning it will probably be all right, so that my first condition is this, that you ask me to stay at your house to-night instead of limping back to town."

"Certainly, certainly!" said the colonel. "I shall be only too delighted to put you up for the night. What is your second condition?"


"That you lend me a suit of clothes instead of this beastly livery."

"With pleasure!" said the colonel; and the five men accordingly wended their way together to the house.

Half an hour later, the colonel's friends had taken their departure, the house was wrapped in silence, and Nelson Lee was sound asleep.


(A grand instalment of this thrilling serial will be contained in next Wednesday's "Gem" Library. Order in advance. Price One Penny.)

The Man from Scotland Yard



In this week's "Dreadnought" you will find a remarkable story of Sexton Blake's wonderful strategy in coping with the machinations of George Marsden Plummer, the Master Criminal, who adopts many disguises in his endeavours to outwit the famous detective.

If you like a good detective story you should not miss this splendid yarn.



George Marsden Plummer is one of the most weirdly skilful characters ever conceived.

The DREADNOUGHT

1^D 1^D

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 253.

THE XMAS SPORTS LIBRARY

ONE PENNY!
Out This Week!



THE DANDY CHAMPION

A MAGNIFICENT BOXING SERIES By Clement Hale.

THE CAPTAIN'S RIVAL.

(Continued from page 23.)

"They wouldn't have got that with Fatty Wynn in goal!" declared Figgins.

"No fear!" said Kerr.

"What do you think, Fatty?" asked Tom Merry, laughing.

"I think there ought to be plenty of butter," said Fatty Wynn, who had been buried in a deep, deep reverie.

"Eh?"

"And a little onions would give them a flavour."

"What are you talking about?" roared Figgins.

"Frying chips," said Fatty Wynn innocently.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Then there was a roar.

"Go it, Kildare!"

"Buck up, there!"

The St. Jim's forwards, passing like clockwork, were fairly away. They brought the leather up to the Mexborough goal with a terrific burst, passing and re-passing in wonderful style, and the Mexborough men seemed hopelessly beaten. Only the goalie remained to be beaten as Baker centred to Kildare, and Kildare slammed the ball in, beating the defender all the way. And St. Jim's roared:

"Goal!"

"Hurrah!"

"St. Jim's wins!"

"Hip, hip, hurrah!"

Mr. Raitlon blew the whistle. The match was over, and it had ended in a glorious victory for the school. The Mexborough men had fought hard, but they had been beaten, and St. Jim's First were covered with glory.

And as the victorious team came off, amid a cheering crowd, James Monteith strode forward and held out his hand to Kildare.

"I'm sorry!" he said. "I'm glad you won—jolly glad! And I could kick myself for not having had a hand in it! Will you take my hand?"

Kildare gave him a keen glance.

Then he grasped the New House prefect's hand in his old frank way.

"Yes; and glad to!" he said.

"Hear, hear!" shouted Figgins. "Bravo! Hear, hear!" And Kildare went off the field, his face glowing as the deafening cheers rang over the wide quadrangle and echoed round the old buildings of St. Jim's.

In Tom Merry's study, after the match, there was a large party.

The Terrible Three had come back from their enforced holiday in great funds, and they expended those funds nobly. Fatty Wynn, of the New House, was called upon for his services as cook—services that he was only too willing to render. And the study was crammed with fellows till there was not even standing room; and some fellows fed in the passage, and some went away with tarts and cakes in their hands to feed in their own studies. It was a glorious celebration—to celebrate the return of the Terrible Three, and the victory over the men from Mexborough, and the renewed friendship between the captains of the two Houses at St. Jim's. The juniors had plenty of reason to celebrate, and they celebrated! And when Tom Merry gave a toast amid the crowd, it was warmly applauded:

"Gentlemen, here's to us!"

"Hear, hear!"

"May the School House and the New House be united, and may their shadows never grow less! And may we always be here to stand up for our Houses, and give each other the giddy kybosh to keep our hand in, and stand shoulder to shoulder for St. Jim's against all outsiders!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Bravo!"

The cheering was deafening. And the toast was drunk with enthusiasm, lemonade, and ginger-beer. And while Tom Merry & Co. were celebrating in the Shell passage, there was a little tea-party in Kildare's study, and among the guests was Monteith, of the New House. And there was great cordiality between the captain of St. Jim's and the captain's rival.

THE END.

(Another grand, long, complete tale of the Chums of St. Jim's in next Wednesday's "Gem" Library, entitled, "JACK BLAKE ON THE WARPATH!" by Martin Clifford. Order your copy of this splendid issue in advance. Price One Penny.)

NEXT
WEDNESDAY:

"JACK BLAKE ON THE WARPATH!" By MARTIN CLIFFORD,
Order in advance.

A NEW FREE CORRESPONDENCE EXCHANGE.

The only names and addresses which can be printed in these columns will be from those readers living in any of our Colonies who desire Correspondents in Great Britain and Ireland.

Colonists sending in their names and addresses for insertion in the columns of this popular story-book must state what kind of correspondent is required—boy or girl, English, Scotch, Welsh, or Irish.

Would-be correspondents must send with each notice two coupons, one taken from "The Gem," and one from the same week's issue of its companion paper, "The Magnet" Library. Coupons will always be found on page 2 of both papers, and requests for correspondents not containing these two coupons will be absolutely disregarded.

Readers wishing to reply to advertisements appearing in this column must write to the advertisers direct. No correspondence with advertisers can be undertaken through the medium of this office.

All advertisements for insertion in this Free Exchange should be addressed: "The Editor, 'The Gem' Library, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C."

Miss F. Cohen, 50, Raleigh Street, Yeoville, Johannesburg, South Africa, wishes to correspond with English readers.

G. Marshall, 163½, Jarvis Street, Toronto, Canada, wishes to correspond with an English girl reader, age about 18.

A. D. Robarts, age 18, of 2, Hou Fok Terrace, North, Szechuen Road Extension, Shanghai, China, wishes to correspond with English girl readers about the same age.

W. Carter, 331, Flora Avenue, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada, wishes to correspond with a girl reader, age between 17 and 19, living in England or Ireland.

J. A. Maguire, 257, Young Street, E., Easthope, Hamilton, Ontario, Canada, wishes to correspond with a girl reader. Photo of correspondent to be enclosed with each first letter.

M. Stephens, 22, Alexandra, South Yarra, Victoria, Australia, would like to correspond with a boy or girl reader, age about 16.

G. Brown, 18, McNamara Street, Orange, New South Wales, Australia, wishes to correspond with a boy or girl reader interested in "Compulsory Training."

L. Harrison, care of W. Sutton, barrister and solicitor, Camperdown, Victoria, Australia, wishes to correspond with a girl reader living in England.

E. Jones, care of G. L. Perrett, Loch Lomond, Tarro, New South Wales, Australia, would like a few readers of "The Gem" and "The Magnet" to correspond with him.

C. Cook, of 339, Humffray Street, Ballarat, East Victoria, Australia, would like to correspond with a girl or boy reader living in the British Isles.

E. Miles, Myrtle Cottage, 60, Lygon Street, Carlton, Victoria, Australia, wishes to correspond with a girl reader, age about 17 or 18.

Miss S. Levington, Windsor Post Office, Albert Street Windsor, Victoria, Australia, wishes to correspond with an English boy reader, age 15-17.

Miss J. Lawless, Windsor Post Office, Albert Street Windsor, Victoria, Australia, wishes to correspond with an English boy reader, age 15-17.

Miss B. McCay, Windsor Post Office, Albert Street, Windsor, Victoria, Australia, wishes to correspond with an English boy reader, age 15-17.

E. Anderson, age 16, wishes to correspond with a girl reader living in London, England, age 16. Address, care of District Lands and Surveys Office, Northam, Western Australia.

L. W. Allen, care of Kidson and Forbes, barristers and solicitors, Purser's Buildings, Northam, West Australia, wishes to exchange postcards with a girl reader, age 16, living in New Zealand.

W. Massey, 48, Tuesnel Street, Montreal, Canada, wishes to exchange postcards with readers living in other countries.

The Editor specially requests Colonial Readers to kindly bring the Free Correspondence Exchange to the notice of their friends.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 253

OUR SPECIAL WEEKLY FEATURE



For Next Wednesday.

"JACK BLAKE ON THE WARPATH!"

By Martin Clifford.

The above title is sufficient to ensure that next week's splendid long, complete tale of the juniors of St. Jim's is full of excitement, "rows," and all sorts of schoolboy fun. When the sturdy Yorkshire junior, backed up by his chums of the famous Co. inhabiting Study No. 6 in the Fourth Form passage, gets on the warpath, things are bound to happen.

As a matter of fact, things do happen, with a vengeance! Every Gemite should read

"JACK BLAKE ON THE WARPATH,"

and pass it on to a chum when he, or she, has finished with it.

ONE WAY OF DOING IT!

One of my loyal Hampshire readers, having made up his mind to give "The Gem" Library a real helping hand, has devised one of the most practical and efficient ways of doing this that has yet come under my notice. His letter, published below, speaks for itself:

"Cosham, Hants."

"Dear Editor,—Once again I thought I would write to you. I have been taking both papers in ever since they first came out, and I cannot speak too highly of them. I advertise them as much as ever I can, and have just hit on a decent wheeze.

"You see, we live close to a railway-station, the platform being at the bottom of the garden. I have made out a few bills something like this:

**"BUY THE GEM—THE ALL-SCHOOL-STORY-BOOK.
"OUT ON THURSDAY. PRICE 1d."**

"Of course, the letters are much larger, and I have stuck them on the fence in full view of the platform. What do you think of that? It might bring some more readers, I thought.

"Wishing you every success,—I remain yours truly,—

"BILLY A."

What a splendid idea, "Billy A.," which does credit alike to your generous intentions and to your practical ingenuity!

Next time I am down Hampshire way I will look out for the sign at Cosham Station.

You have my heartiest thanks!

A Bumper Christmas Number.

By the time these lines are in print, the Grand Christmas Double Number of our companion paper, "The Magnet" Library, will be on sale—and a real "bumper" issue it is, too! The principal item of the strong programme is the great long complete story of Harry Wharton & Co., by talented Frank Richards, entitled:

"DRUMMED OUT OF GREYFRIARS."

—one of the most powerful tales of school life ever written.

The second long, complete story is a particularly thrilling and interesting tale of the amazing adventures of three midshipmen afloat and ashore, and is entitled:

"THE GUN-RUNNERS!"

—a story no one could help enjoying.

In addition to these two grand "completes," there is a

SPECIAL ENLARGED COMIC SUPPLEMENT.

full of seasonable jokes and pictures. Also a bright and chatty article, entitled:

"CHRISTMAS TOPICS."

—a veritable fund of interesting and helpful suggestions for the festive season.

Then there will be a magnificent extra-amusing and exciting instalment of Sidney Drew's great serial,

"TWICE ROUND THE GLOBE,"

in addition to another splendid

FREE NOVELTY,

consisting of a highly-amusing

CHRISTMAS MASK,

the grotesque features of which will at once be recognised.

Altogether, "The Magnet" Grand Christmas Double Number is something you must see. If you have not ordered it already, get it to-day! You will regret it if you miss this extra-special number of our grand companion library.

Replies in Brief.

Miss D. Hollis (B'ham).—I am sorry I cannot insert your request. The only way you can get into correspondence with a boy reader of "The Gem," is to answer some advertisement appearing in the "Exchange" column.

L. Stedman (Melbourne, Australia).—Thank you for your letter. I was very pleased to hear how well you enjoyed reading the stories contained in "The Gem."

Something About Old Coins.

A coin, like a book, need not be of value merely because it is old and worn. Let collectors bear this fact in mind, and they will be spared many disappointments.

Hopes beyond number have been dashed to the ground by old Georgian coppers, the scratched, rubbed, and defaced condition of which appeal strongly to the novice's imagination. True, some of these are "catalogued" at over a shilling each; yet, in the condition in which one usually finds them, they would hardly realise more than a penny or two apiece.

Silver pennies, again, of the reign of Henry II.—seven hundred and fifty years old—average in worth a mere shilling to half-a-crown. Another bitter disappointment for the novice, who cannot understand why a brother-collector, who knows his business, has bought a King John silver halfpenny for a five-pound note, and is chuckling over the bargain!

Yet the contrast between the values of many of the earlier British coins is even more startling. Mercian pennies of the period of Burgred—over a thousand years old—do not fetch more than five shillings, but a penny belonging to the next reign—Coelwulf II.—twenty years later, may easily be worth a hundred times this sum. One particularly fine specimen was sold recently for £81.

The fact of the matter is that, although a great many old coins are valuable because of their rarity, a number of others are extremely common.

I have often been asked to give the value of a coin, and have been considered a very poor expert because of my equivocal answer. It is, nevertheless, quite impossible to be definite about the selling value of a coin unless one knows (1) the exact state of preservation, (2) the issue, and (3) the conditions under which it is to be sold.

Take a Queen Elizabeth shilling, for instance. What is it worth? Well, I must know whether it is hammered or milled. If the former, it may fetch from 2s. to 5s.; if the latter, from 6s. to 15s. Then, is the writing clear and defined, or is it badly worn? Has the coin a hole in it? And so on.

So an Elizabeth shilling, undescribed, may be worth from half-a-crown to fifteen guineas. But what novice will respect the connoisseur who tells him so?

THE EDITOR.