

Long, Complete SCHOOL Novel Every Saturday.

# PLUCK

OUR CAPTAIN,

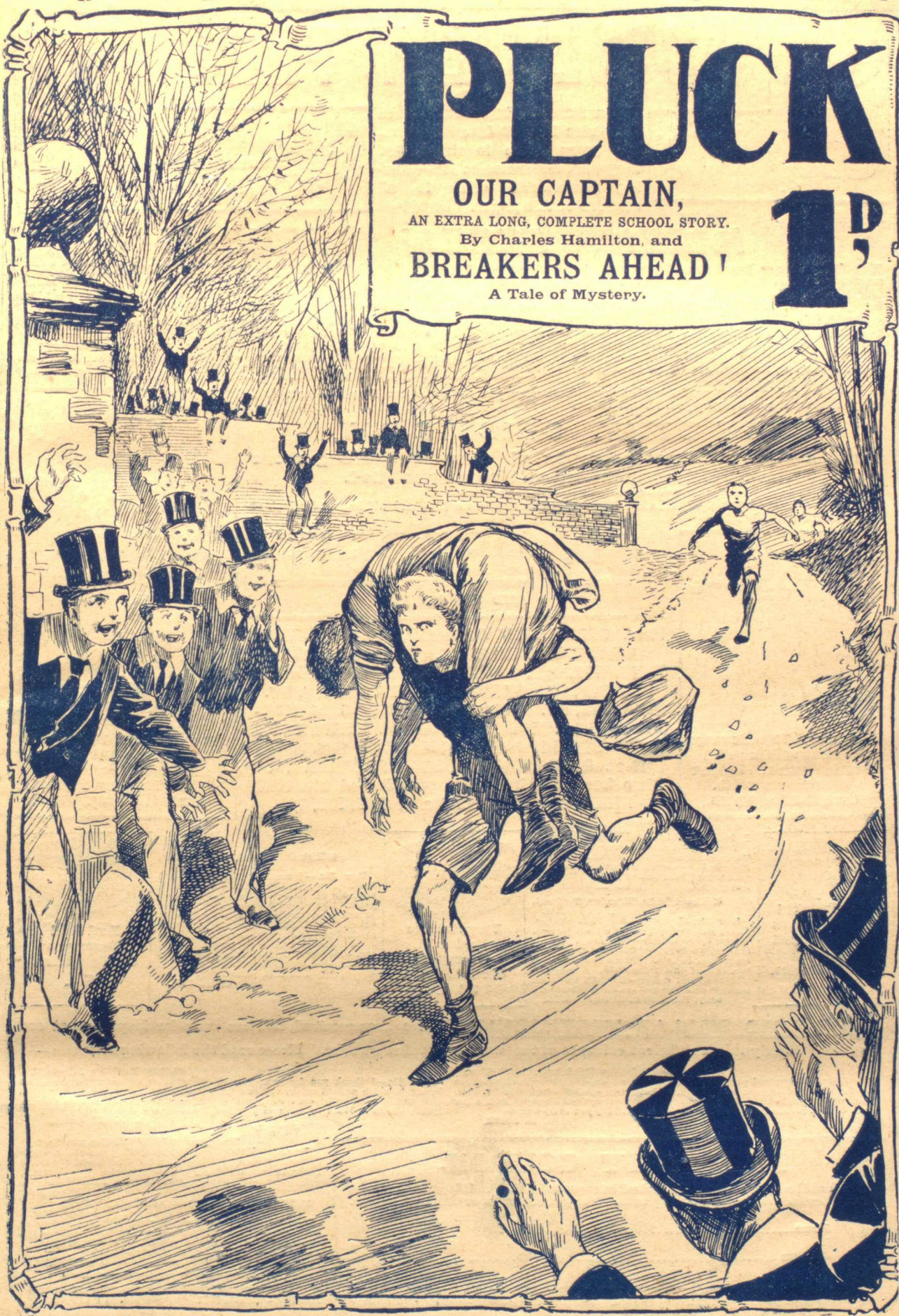
AN EXTRA LONG, COMPLETE SCHOOL STORY.

By Charles Hamilton, and

BREAKERS AHEAD!

A Tale of Mystery.

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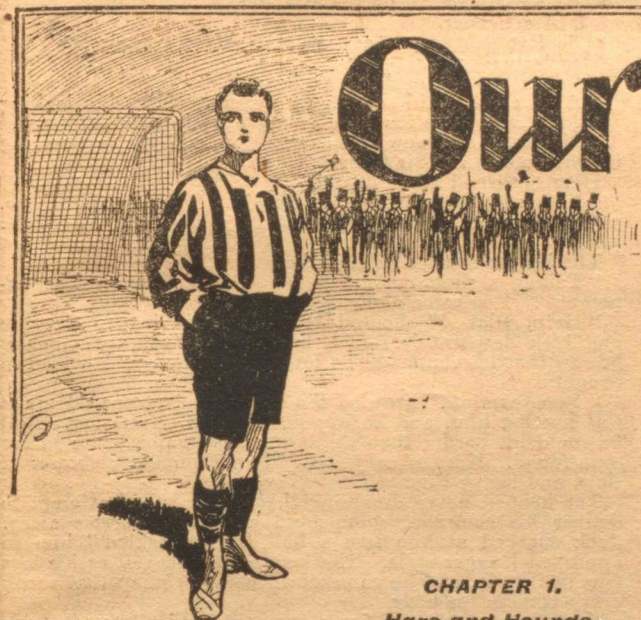
FORWARD WENT JACK BLAKE, OF ST. JIM'S, STAGGERING UNDER HIS HUMAN BURDEN, BUT GAME TO THE LAST. GROUPS OF SCHOOL HOUSE BOYS GREETED THE RETURNING HARES WITH RINGING CHEERS. (See "Our Captain.")

NO. 108. VOL. 5. NEW SERIES.

EVERY  
SATURDAY.ONE  
PENNY.

[VOL. 5, No. 108, NEW SERIES.]

THE FIRST LONG, COMPLETE STORY.



# Our Captain

(A fine School Story, by CHAS. HAMILTON,  
describing the Adventures of Jack Blake of St.  
Jim's and abounding with Comic and Thrilling  
Incidents.)

## CHAPTER 1.

### Hare and Hounds.

**K**ILDARE, captain of St. Jim's, took out his watch. "Are you ready, Blake and Herries? Five minutes' start, I think."

"That's it," said Figgins; "and they'll need it."

"Oh, rats!" said Jack Blake cheerfully. "Why, my dear chap, you New House wasters won't see us again before calling-over!"

A big crowd of juniors from St. Jim's had collected upon the border of Rylecombe Common, hard by the ancient school.

Most of them were clad in light flannels, in readiness for a long and hard run across country. Conspicuous among them were the two "hares," Blake and Herries.

The "hares" were two nice-looking lads, the champion junior runners of the School House, and, according to their school-fellows, the champions of the school. But this was not likely to be admitted by the fellows of the New House.

The rivalry between the two houses at St. Jim's was keen in everything, and especially in sports, and each party was firmly convinced that it could "knock spots" off the other at running, jumping, swimming, football, or anything else you liked to name.

Arguments upon the subject were long and fierce, and were often concluded behind the fives' court, with or without gloves.

But, so far as the question of running was concerned, it was likely to be settled and laid to rest, for a time at least, by the paper-chase fixed for this Wednesday afternoon, a half-holiday at St. Jim's.

For the School House juniors obstinately maintaining that either Blake or Herries could easily walk away from the fastest sprinters of the New House, Figgins, the captain of the New House juniors, had challenged them to do it.

The present meeting of hare and hounds followed.

The two School House boys were the hares, and practically the whole of the junior portion of the New House formed the hounds, so the result of the trial could not be disputed.

Kildare, the captain of the school, had agreed to time the start.

Blake and Herries were punctually on the spot, and the New House juniors came up in their dozens in their running clothes.

Most of the School House boys were there to see them off,

"Thirty seconds and you go," said Kildare, looking at his watch. "Quite ready?"

"Rather!" said Jack Blake. "Good-bye, Figgins & Co.! We sha'n't see your pretty faces again till the evening."

"Just you wait and see," said Figgins darkly. "If I don't run you down this side of the bridge, you can use my head for a football!"

"My dear chap, I've no use for a wooden football! It

"Off!" interrupted Kildare, laughing.

"Right-ho!"

And away went the two hares at a swinging trot, with their bags of scent slung behind them, across the breezy common.

Kildare waited, watch in hand.

The New House juniors showed signs of impatience before three minutes had passed.

"I say, Kildare," ventured Wynn, the fat boy of the New House, "ain't it five minutes yet?"

"Two more," said Kildare.

"Sure your watch ain't losing?"

Kildare laughed.

"Don't you worry, fatty," advised Digby, of the School House. "You won't run a hundred yards, anyway, so what are you bothering about?"

To which remark Wynn replied only with a disdainful sniff.

"How long now, Kildare?" asked Kerr.

"One minute more."

The New House boys looked wistfully in the direction taken by the hares. They had already passed out of sight beyond a belt of furze.

Kildare closed his watch with a snap.

"Time's up!"

Figgins blew upon his bugle, loud and clear, and the pack started off. Away they went, a straggling crowd of runners in the blue-and-white of the New House. The School House boys raised an ironical cheer as they started. Figgins snapped his teeth. He was determined that, by hook or by crook, the hares should be run down, and the colours of the School House lowered.

Kildare and the School House boys watched the runners till the last blue jersey had disappeared in the furze, and then the youngsters turned back towards St. Jim's, eagerly discussing the event, but all agreed upon one point, that Blake and Herries would never be captured by the New House pack.

Meanwhile, the ringing bugle-note had warned the hares that the hounds were on the track. Blake and Herries had

made a pretty good start, running at a steady trot, and saving up their wind for the harder work that was coming later.

"Hallo! They've started," said Herries, with a backward glance over his shoulder. "We've got to buck up, Blake. We've got to beat them if we kill ourselves. The New House would crow no end if they caught us on this run."

"Rather. We shall do it all right. The only one I'm afraid of is Figgy, with his thundering long legs."

The river was in sight now, gleaming through the bushes ahead. At this spot the Ryle was a mere stream, and was crossed by a bridge formed of a single plank, laid upon stones on either side. Herries grinned as they came in sight of the plank.

"I say, Blake, what a lark to shift it, and give them a swim! But I suppose it wouldn't be cricket."

Jack shook his head.

"Hardly, Herries. It doesn't look any too safe as it is, does it?"

"No; that's the rain, I suppose."

Recent rains had swollen the Ryle, and the water, which was usually low between the banks, was now almost on a level with the plank bridge, which, from its appearance, had lately been washed over by the stream. It looked decidedly insecure, but there was no time to hesitate, for the ringing of the bugle behind showed the hares that they had been sighted. The scarlet shirts were conspicuous objects from afar. Jack looked back, and saw the common alive with blue-and-white. He ran out lightly upon the plank.

"Look out! It—"

He did not finish. A desperate bound carried him on to the shore as the plank slipped.

He plunged up to the waist in mud and rusty rushes, and fell. He heard a splash behind. He was on his feet in a second, and he turned back, to see Herries struggling in the water.

Herries had gone right under in the middle of the stream; the plank was floating away towards Rylecombe. Herries came up in a moment, and floundered towards the shore. He had lost his head for a moment, and made for the bank he had just left.

"This way!" shouted Blake. "Come on, you duffer!"

Herries floundered back. Blake plunged thigh-deep in the water and seized him, and dragged him through the rushes. His bag of scent was sopped and useless, and he was soaked from head to foot, and gasping like a newly-landed fish.

"Hallo! This is a nice go!" he exclaimed.

Blake grinned.

"As bad for the hounds as for us, as far as that goes. But you are an ass, old chap, and no mistake! We shall have to buck up."

There was no doubt upon that point.

Precious minutes had been wasted by the mishap, and the hounds were streaming down to the other bank, and their shouts reached the ears of the hares.

"You'll soon get dry running," said Jack. "Come on!"

And off they started again.

Figgins was the first to come down to the water and see that the plank was missing. He stopped abruptly.

"Yah! School House cads!" exclaimed Kerr.

"They've shifted the plank!"

"I expect it shifted itself," said Figgins. "I thought I saw one of them in the water. Yes; there they are! They've lost a good bit here."

"How are we to get across?"

"I know how I'm going to get across," said Figgins.

And without a moment's hesitation he plunged into the stream.

Right across he went, swimming gamely, and the boldest of the New House boys followed his example, while the rest spread up and down the stream in search of some safer or easier means of crossing.

Figgins chuckled gleefully as he came out of the stream, and, shaking the water from him like a dog, took up the chase again.

The accident to the plank had worked out entirely in favour of the hounds, and they were now closer upon the track of the hares than they had dared to hope could be the case so early in the run. Figgins had hoped to catch the hares on the outward run. But to catch them in the first couple of miles was a triumph he had not dreamed of, and it now seemed within the realms of possibility. And he put his heart into the running, and his long legs simply flew over the ground.

Blake gave a backward glance over his shoulder.

"My hat," he exclaimed, "they're coming on! We shall have to give them some work to do. Here! Stop! We're going over this wall."

"But—"

"Rats! Come on!"

Herries obediently made a back, and Blake reached the

top of the wall in question, and gave Herries a hand up from the top.

The next moment they were down upon the inner side and running through the trees. The hounds were coming fast along the lane, and their cries came floating over the wall.

"I say, Blake!" gasped Herries again.

"Save your wind, old chap," replied Blake.

And he led the way with a spurt that made conversation impossible. Herries gave it up, but he was looking very uneasy.

"Hallo, hallo!"

It was a gruff voice, and a man stepped suddenly from the trees and made a grab at Blake. The lad promptly dodged, but Herries was not so lucky. His foot caught in a root as he attempted to dodge, and he went down. In a second he was seized by the stranger, a burly fellow, in the garb of a keeper.

"So I've caught you at last, you young scoundrels!"

Herries wriggled.

"Let me go! I'm doing no harm."

"Ain't you?" said the keeper grimly. "I've bin looking out for a long time for them young varmints that trespasses 'ere, I have. And now I've caught you, and you're a-coming up with me to see Sir George."

Herries turned hot and cold.

"Please let me go?" he said meekly. "It's a paper-chase, you know, and we were only taking a short cut across the park."

The keeper sported with indignation.

"Taking a short cut across Sir George's park! The impudence! You come along with me!"

"Help, Blake!" shouted Herries, beginning to struggle and kick desperately. Jack had turned back the moment he saw that his chum was no longer with him. "Help! I'm caught!"

"You varmint!" growled the man in velveteens. Herries was hurting him, and he was not slow in retaliating. And he could hit harder than the boy, as the unfortunate junior soon found. Herries wriggled and yelled under a shower of slaps and heavy thumps.

The keeper, never dreaming that Blake would attempt to deliver his comrade, commenced dragging Herries away. Jack charged at him like a bull, and "tackled" him in approved Rugger style. The keeper gave a yell as his legs flew in the air, and he came down with a thump that shook every bone in his body.

Herries was released for a moment, and a moment was enough. In a twinkling the two boys were off, running for their lives. The keeper staggered to his feet, dazed and astounded, and shook his fist after them furiously. It was useless for him to attempt pursuit, and he knew it.

The hares vanished from his gaze like a beautiful dream. Jack chuckled gleefully.

"I say, Herries, what a surprise packet for the hounds," he panted.

And Herries grinned.

The hounds were almost upon the spot. The keeper, as he stood in doubt and wrath on the spot where he had been so roughly handled, heard a bugle-note, and gasped in astonishment as a lanky figure in blue-and-white came over the wall, and sprinted towards him. It was Figgins. The leader of the hounds was following the paper-trail, and it led him right up to the amazed, indignant keeper.

Figgins did not see the keeper till he was close upon him. Then he stopped with a gasp of dismay—too late! The indignant grip of the man in velveteen was upon his shoulder.

"I've got you, anyway!" grunted the keeper. "Come along with me, you young villain!"

"Leggo!" howled Figgins. "I'm in a hurry! Lemme alone!"

"I'll let you alone, you beauty! Oh, oh!"

Figgins, exasperated, was hitting out, and the keeper caught a smart tap with his nose. Then the vials of his wrath overflowed. He twisted Figgins over and began to slap him, and slap him hard. Figgins struggled and roared.

"Rescue, rescue!" he yelled.

The hounds—the dozen of them who had kept up with Figgins—were pouring over the wall. They saw their leader's predicament, and came on gallantly.

"Rescue!" shouted Kerr. And he charged the keeper.

The man went down under the rush of the St. Jim's juniors, and they fairly swarmed over him. He struggled and yelled, but against so many he was powerless, and they left him gasping on the ground as they dashed on, on the trail of the torn paper.

"Come on!" panted Figgins. "There will be a row over this; but I don't care, so long as we catch those kids."

In a few minutes they were out of the park, and following the paper-trail along a deep, rutty lane, and Figgins gave a whoop as he caught a glimpse of scarlet ahead. The hounds were still close upon the track.

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"AUNT EMMA AT LYNOCROFT." A Tale of Lynocroft School. By H. Clarke Hook.

AND "JUSTICE IS SURE." A Tale of Detective Mystery. By Arthur S. Hardy.

IN "PLUCK," ID.

## CHAPTER 2.

## Won by a Neck!

"BUCK up, Herries!" Blake's voice was a little anxious as he glanced at his lagging comrade. "Not pumped already, surely?"

"Nunno," gasped Herries. "I'm all right; but—that keeper chap did hit hard, and I feel a bit off colour, that's all. I'll be all right soon."

Blake gave a low whistle of dismay.

In spite of Herries's brave assurance, he could see that his comrade was a good deal the worse for his tussle with the keeper, now that he looked at him, though Herries was gamely keeping up.

"Think you can keep on?" said Blake, with a sort of gulp.

"Of course I can," said Herries. "I'm only a bit winded. Do you think I'm going to let those New House cads catch me?"

Blake made no reply. He knew that Herries would be game to the end. But how far off was the end likely to be?

It was clear that the hares must, for a time at least, depend more upon trickery than upon straight running; and Blake kept his eyes about him as he ran. He slackened down a bit, to make things easier for Herries, without saying anything about it. So long as he had made the pace Herries had laboured terribly to keep up.

Blake was distributing the scent, Herries keeping up by his side. Suddenly Blake uttered an exclamation:

"Shove on a spurt, Herries, and we shall gain a bit here."

The shouts of the hounds could be heard behind. Ahead was a level-crossing, and though no train was yet in sight, the man in charge was beginning to close the gates in his slow, country way. The two boys sprinted for all they were worth, and the gates closed behind them. They had just got through.

Then Blake led the way over a rising ground, in the direction of the ruined Abbey of St. James, which was the outward limit of the run.

From the top of the rise the hares looked back and saw the hounds collected at the gate of the crossing, vociferating and shouting threats and objurgations to the man in the signal-box, who grinned and took no other notice of them. Blake grinned.

"Come on, chappy; there's the Abbey!"

At a steady jog-trot they covered the ground, and reached the ruined Abbey without being sighted again by the hounds. How long Figgins & Co. were delayed at the level-crossing they did not know, but minutes were precious to them.

At the Abbey they sat down for a couple of minutes for a breather, and then started again. Herries seemed a good deal better for the rest, and, after circling round the ruins and laying a winding trail through the masses of masonry and ruined walls, the boys set their faces towards St. Jim's once more.

The return lay across Wildmoor, a lonely and desolate part of the country. After that, crossing the Ryle by the bridge near Rylecombe, the path would lie through the village and down the road to the college.

Blake looked back more than once as they crossed the moor. From the top of a knoll he caught sight of the hounds. Figgins was still in the lead, and Kerr was just behind him, and five or six others were straggled out at various distances. The rest of the New House pack had either given it up or had dropped hopelessly behind in the race.

"My aunt!" said Blake. "How old Figgy runs! Those spider legs of his do get over the ground. If anybody's in at the death it will be Figgy."

"Yes," gasped Herries. "Hang that keeper! Blake I'm afraid I can't stick it!"

Blake looked at him anxiously.

"If it was an ordinary paper-chase," he muttered, "we'd chuck it; but to have the School House beaten by the New House! Herries, my son, you've got to stick it!"

Onward they went. A new idea came into Blake's mind, and instead of aiming for the bridge, he led the way to the stream, just below that rustic structure.

The Ryle just here was broad and deep, and, especially since the rains, it had been swollen to an extent that made it dangerous for swimmers.

But Blake's intention was evident.

"We can't run them out, Herries," he panted; "but if they follow us here, I'll admit that the New House is up to our mark."

With a mighty heave he slung his bag of scent, now considerably lightened, right across the stream, and it dropped into the reeds on the other side.

Then he plunged into the rushing water. Without hesitation Herries followed. Gamely the two boys, excellent swimmers both, fought their way across the swiftly-running

stream. Blake kept his eye upon Herries, and his grip supported the weaker boy when he showed a sign of failing.

"Buck up!"

One more effort and they were dragging themselves ashore through the crackling reeds.

"I—I thought I was going!" gasped Herries.

"Never mind," said Blake cheerfully. "You didn't go. Now for a sprint to the school."

A cut across a field brought them into the road, and Blake stood for a moment on top of a fence to look back.

Figgins was just pulling himself out of the water, but the rest of the hounds had halted upon the further side of the river, and were turning away to go round by the bridge. Alone, dogged as ever, the chief of the New House juniors took up the chase; but Blake saw that he was running heavily, and with evident effort.

"Only Figgy left," said Blake gleefully, "and he's about pumped! He looks awfully groggy, but he's sticking it well."

"Come on!" said Herries.

Down the road they went gallantly.

"There's St. Jim's!"

Ahead, over the trees, rose the school tower. The sight was inspiring; the goal of the long run was in sight at last.

But Herries was now evidently failing. Blake again and again slackened his pace to accommodate him, and each time his anxiety increased. It would be absolutely "rotten" to be beaten with the goal in sight.

Herries lurched in his running. Then, with an almost agonised gasp, he sank down in the road.

"It's no good, Blake; I'm done!"

Blake's face set like iron. He drew a deep breath and stooped over Herries.

"Blake, what are you up to?"

"I'm going to carry you!"

"I say—you're not—you can't."

"I can and will!"

"But—"

"Shut up!"

Blake lifted the fallen lad in his arms and flung him on his shoulder, something like a sack of potatoes, and started onward with him.

Herries was almost fainting with exhaustion, and his senses were swimming. He made no further demur, but let Blake do as he liked.

Blake went forward, staggering under his burden, but game to the last. The school gates were in sight now, and round them were groups of the School House boys, and they greeted the returning hares with a ringing cheer.

"Bravo, Blake!"

"Buck up!"

"You'll do it!"

"There's Figgy! Buck up or he'll collar you!"

Blake bucked up. Every ounce of strength in him he threw into a last desperate effort to reach the gates of St. Jim's. He knew that Figgins was close behind, straining every nerve to catch him, and gaining now at every stride.

Patter, patter, patter! Figgins's footsteps—not six yards behind!

A few seconds more, and— Those few seconds were enough! Blake staggered under the arch of the ancient gateway, and Herries slid from his shoulder to the ground. The brave lad staggered, and Digby caught him.

A moment more and Figgins came bursting in. He reeled breathlessly against the gate.

"You've—you've done it, Blake!" he gasped. "But—but it was a near thing."

Blake gave a gaspy chuckle.

"Won by a beastly neck!" he said, panting. "You made a jolly good run, Figgy, old boy, and I'm proud of you! But you haven't beaten the School House!"

And the School House juniors gave a shout:

"Who's cock house of St. Jim's?"

And they answered their own question with a yell:

"The School House!"

"Rats!" gasped Figgins, defiant still. "We're cock house, and we're going to show you that before long, you bounders!"

And he staggered away towards the New House, to get a rub down after his run, and Blake and Herries were carried off to the School House by their comrades for the same purpose.

And now, at intervals, and in twos and threes, the New House boys came in from the run, and their anxious inquiries as to whether the hares had been caught were answered with doleful shakes of the head by their house-fellows, and with disdainful sniffs by the School House boys.

"My dear chaps," said Digby patronisingly, "you can't touch the School House. You can't expect to. Get over to

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that casual ward of yours and don't ask silly questions! Yah! Who's cock house at St. Jim's?"

"School House!" yelled his comrades. And the New House boys went disconsolately to their quarters.

The paper-chase had established the supremacy of the School House upon one point at least, and however they chose to dispute it, they were painfully conscious that it was so. And Figgins, in spite of the splendid run he had made upon that great occasion, was made to realise that unless he did something to lower the colours of their rivals, his leadership of the New House juniors was in danger.

And Figgins & Co. set their wits to work—not without result.

### CHAPTER 3.

#### Figgins on the Warpath.

**F**IGGINS!"

A diminutive fag put his head in at the door of the study occupied by Figgins, Wynn, and Kerr—more commonly known as Figgins & Co.—in the New House at St. Jim's.

Figgins & Co. were supposed to be busy at preparing their lessons for the morrow, but as a matter of fact the great Figgins was sitting upon the table, laying down the law about a new plan of campaign against the School House, and the "Co." were listening with eager approval.

"It's a jolly good wheeze!" said Figgins. He was pleased with his idea. "We must do something to make those Kids sit up, and—"

"Figgins!" The chief of the New House juniors looked darkly at the interrupting fag.

"Shut up!" "But Monteith wants you," said the fag. Figgins grunted.

Monteith was head prefect of the New House, and under Mr. Ratcliff, the house-master, he reigned supreme within the walls.

"What does he want?" The fag grinned.

"I fancy it's something about the paper-chase yesterday. I know Sir George Trevelyan has been up to see the Head."

"Oh skittles!" said Figgins. "I suppose I'd better go."

And he left the study and made his way to the quarters of the New House captain. Monteith looked at him with a very unpleasant expression as he went in. The prefect never looked very pleasant, as a matter of fact, but on this occasion his face was a little more acid than usual.

"Please, I've come!" said Figgins. Monteith rose and took down a cane.

"Sir George Trevelyan has complained about your trespassing on his ground yesterday," said the prefect. "The doctor has left Kildare and myself to deal with the matter, each for his own house. Why didn't you catch Blake?"

"I did my best," said Figgins ruefully. "He only won it by a neck."

"Well, hold out your hand!" Figgins unwillingly obeyed. He was by no means dull-witted, and he thought he could see that Monteith was going to punish him, not for his real offence, but because he had failed to catch Blake in the paper-chase. He knew that the prefect hated the School House junior, and had done so ever since Jack Blake first came to St. Jim's.

"You ought to have caught him," said Monteith sourly. "You're older than he is, and you shouldn't let those fellows take the New House down. I have enough to do to keep my end up against Kildare and his set, without having the School House juniors crowing over us. But, of course, I'm going to cane you because Sir George Trevelyan complained of your trespassing on his property. Kildare is dealing with Blake."

"Swish! The cane came down with a spiteful force upon Figgins's palm, and he squirmed. Monteith was nothing if not spiteful.

Swish again and again till Figgins had had six—three on each hand. He bore the infliction well, and uttered no sound, though his lips went white and hard.

"You can go!" said the prefect, throwing down the cane. Without a word Figgins left the study. The "Co." looked at him anxiously when he rejoined them. His look was sufficient to tell them that he had been caned, and they knew of old how the head prefect of their house laid it on.

"Hard cheese!" said Kerr sympathetically. "Monteith's a beast!"

Figgins nodded gloomily.

"Yes, he is a beast," he agreed; "a nasty, spiteful beast! Kildare will punish Blake and Herries, but he won't give them such awful stingers as Monteith gave me. It's because

the School House got the best of us that Monteith was so spiteful. He hates Blake."

"It's rotten we should have such a cad for captain," said Wynn thoughtfully. "The Kids on the other side call him Cad Monteith, and we can't deny that the name suits him. He's a cad and a beast! I wish Kildare were our captain. We could be proud of him."

"It can't be helped," said Figgins. "Monteith's a cad, but we have to stick up for him against the Kids. But to come back to our mutton," he went on. "What do you think of the idea we were discussing when that beast sent for me?"

"Ripping!" was Kerr's verdict.

"First chop!" exclaimed Wynn.

"Then we'll carry it out to-night. Is that agreed?"

"Passed unanimously," said Kerr. "But how are you going to do it?"

"Leave that to me," said Figgins.

"It won't be easy to catch Blake napping."

"Easy or not, we are going to do it!"

"Bravo, Figgy! If it comes off it will make the School House cads sing small for a bit, anyway. But there may be a row, you know."

"I don't care if there is," said Figgins.

"Then that's all right. Only if the masters spot the thing

"Stop your croaking! If we never did anything that wasn't quite safe, the School House would crow over us all the time."

"Oh, all right!" said Kerr. "I'm game if you are. I suppose it's certain that those three Kids will go out for their sprint to-night?"

"Of course it is!" said Figgins irritably. "Don't they sprint every evening, and get back just in time for calling-over? Ain't they trying to get themselves in form to beat us at the junior house match when it comes off?"

"They are, but they won't do it," said Kerr. "Anyway, we'll go for 'em this time, and when the School House sees Blake come home, they will have to acknowledge that it's one up to us, and no mistake."

And the three juniors chuckled gleefully. It was evident that a deep plot was being hatched, of which the destined victims, the chums of the School House, were in blissful ignorance.

Figgins sat with one eye on his work and the other on the window, which commanded a partial view of the quadrangle.

"There they go!" he exclaimed suddenly.

In the dusk of the quad three figures in running-clothes could be seen making their way towards the gates. They were Blake, Herries, and Digby.

Every day, when their preparation was finished, the three juniors of the School House went for a sprint, to keep themselves in form, Blake having secured a permit from Kildare for the purpose. In a few weeks the junior house-match was to come, and both houses at St. Jim's were very keen about it. The senior match had been won by the School House, and Blake and his chums were determined that the junior match should have a similar result.

Figgins & Co. were equally determined that it should not, and so the junior elevens were putting their best feet foremost in the way of training.

"There they are," added Figgins; "no mistake about it! And this is where we come in!"

Wynn and Kerr threw their books aside.

"Hurrah for the New House! Come on!"

"Go and get some of the fellows," said Figgins, "while I go to Monteith and get a permit. He's sure to give me one when I let him see that it's something up against Blake. Now, Kildare won't enter into a thing like that, so, you see, there's some advantage in having a cad and a beast for your house captain."

And, with this philosophical reflection, Figgins hurried off.

Monteith was still in his study, and his friend Sleath was there also, talking to him. The prefect looked sourly at Figgins.

"Have you come back for some more, youngster?" he asked.

"N-no, Monteith. I want to ask you for a permit to leave the school."

"You can't have it! Clear!"

"If you please, Monteith, Kildare has given permits to Blake and Herries and Digby. They've just gone out. I thought that if they went, half a dozen of us might go."

Monteith looked hard at the junior. Sleath grinned.

"Let them go, Monty," remarked the latter. "They want to train for the junior match, you know, and a sprint will do them good."

Monteith gave a quick nod.

"All right. You can go, Figgins. I'll write the permit."

And the precious paper was in Figgins's pocket when he

**NEXT SATURDAY:**

**"AUNT EMMA AT LYNGCROFT,"**

A Tale of Lyngcroft School,  
By H. Clarke Hook.

AND

**"JUSTICE IS SURE,"**

A Tale of Detective Mystery  
By Arthur S. Hardv.

IN "PLUCK" 11

The British

triumphantly returned to his study. He found Kerr and Wynn there, with four more New House juniors.

"Got it?" asked Kerr eagerly.

"Yes."

"I was afraid he wouldn't let you have it."

"He wouldn't at first, but he shelled it out all right when I gave him a hint that it was up against Blake," grinned Figgins. "It's all serene! Come along, kids, and your uncle will show you how to score off the School House!"

"Got the chinks?"

"Yes, safe enough."

And the seven New House juniors trooped out, with many a suppressed chuckle.

But nothing was further from their thoughts than the

the sudden onslaught, and before they recovered their wits they were flat on their backs, with their foes sitting on legs and chests, pinning them down.

"Hallo!" gasped Blake. "What's the little game?"

"Thieves!" shouted Herries.

"Help!" gurgled Digby.

"Shut up!" said Figgins. "Don't you know who we are, you silly cuckoos!"

"New House mongrels!" gasped Herries. "What are you up to?"

"You're prisoners of war!"

"Oh, rats!"

"You'll see. Chaps, bind these prisoners, and see that you tie 'em tightly! There's plenty of cord," said Figgins.



It was not very light in the shed, but Darrel could see that the object was a fellow tied hand and foot, and fastened also to a bicycle stand, and gagged with a handkerchief. (See page 9.)

spint which had formed their excuse for leaving the bounds of St. Jim's.

They stopped about a hundred yards from the school gates, and sought ambush in the shadow of the trees beside the lane. There, with the patience of Indian hunters, they waited and watched for their prey.

#### CHAPTER 4. In a Painful Plight.

**P**ATTER, patter, patter! The light sound of running-shoes came up the dark, lonely lane. Three figures abreast came out of the dusk, running steadily and easily. They came abreast of the ambush, and all of a sudden, without the slightest warning, seven forms detached themselves from the shadows and came hurling upon the runners.

"Here! What are you up to?" expostulated Blake, went down, with Kerr and Wynn clinging to him, Herries fell, with Figgins and another on top, and Digby was dragged to the ground by three New House juniors.

The trio were down in a twinkling, utterly astounded by

Blake and his chums began to struggle desperately, but the odds were too heavy against them, and the disadvantage they were at was too great.

Figgins & Co. had provided themselves with cord more than enough for the purpose, and the luckless three soon had their hands tied behind their backs.

Then Blake's right leg was tied to Digby's left, and his left to Herries's right, and tightly, too, and the prisoners were dragged to their feet. They swayed and staggered like some three-legged monster, Blake being in the middle, and, therefore, the most helpless of the trio.

"Here! What are you up to?" expostulated Blake. "You can't tie up chaps like this, you know. It ain't cricket!"

Figgins laughed.

"It seems that we've done it, whether we can or not," he replied. "You three chaps are very much attached to one another, and so there's no reason why you shouldn't be bound together in closer ties! Ha, ha! They call you the Inseparables in the School House, and now the name fits you, and no mistake!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the New House boys, quite tickled by this joke.

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AND

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A Tale of Detective Mystery,  
By Arthur S. Hardy.

IN "PLUCK," 1D.

"Did you ever see such a crew of cackling geese?" said Blake, in disgust. "Look here, Figgins—"  
 "Excuse me, I can't; your face worries me!"  
 "You silly bounder—"  
 "Go on!"  
 "I'll make you sit up for this! Let us loose!"  
 "My dear chap, do you think we have taken all this trouble for nothing?"

"Is that what you call fair-play—seven to three?" asked Blake. "Give me my hands free, and I'll lick the lot of you!"

But the New House party only laughed. They did not mean to be provoked into releasing the prisoners, which, of course, was what Blake wanted.

"Give 'em the chalks, Figgy," said Kerr.

"I'm just going to."

"Hallo! What's that?" ejaculated Blake, in alarm.

"What's the silly game now?"

"Bring 'em into the light," said Figgins.

The prisoners were hustled, lurching and stumbling at every step, into the dim circle of light cast by a lamp. Then Figgins set to work. He set to work with a will, and coloured chalks! The effect was not artistic, but it was quite satisfactory to the New House boys. They screamed with laughter as they watched the process.

The upper half of Blake's face was chalked white, and the lower half blacked with charcoal. The effect was startling. It became still more weird when Figgins added black rings about the eyes, and a white line round the mouth.

Then he started on Herries. One side of his face was coloured red, and the other side yellow. A black line down the centre gave a finish to the effect.

By this time Figgins, encouraged by the laughter of his comrades, was warming to his work, and Digby, the third to suffer, came off worst of all. His countenance was striped with nearly all the colours of the rainbow, and his ears were artistically blacked.

When Figgins had finished, the trio looked at each other in a grim way. Their aspect was screamingly comic, and, with their hands fastened behind them, they had no chance of cleaning the colours off their faces. They were utterly at the mercy of their rivals.

"There! I think that will do," said Figgins, with a look of satisfaction. "What do you think, Blake? I'm willing to meet you in any way, you know, and a touch of colour that you fancy could easily be shoved on!"

Blake smiled a sickly smile.

"Thanks!" he said. "You're too good. I think that will do."

"Right you are! Don't say I'm not obliging. Now, I hope you won't be incommoded by that cord in getting back to St. Jim's!"

Blake gasped.

"You're not going to send us back in this state?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" howled the New House juniors. "They will make a sensation!"

"Look here, Figgins—"

"Well?"

"Don't be a cad! It's rotten—"

"What's rotten—my colouring? Can't agree with you, my lad! It will be a sensation for the School House. You will have to wash yourselves for once in your lives!"

"I'll scalp you to-morrow!"

"I'd like to see you do it! Anyway, back to St. Jim's you're going. March them along, chaps! If they're obstinate you can use your feet. Feet were made to kick with!"

The trio stood their ground, and firmly refused to budge. But it was useless. The seven juniors of the New House hustled them along, and, after one or two painful falls, the School House chums gave it up, and tramped along, bursting with rage.

Their hearts sank when they re-entered the quad. The New House boys marched them across towards the School House, and left them in the light of the windows.

"Good-bye!" said Figgins. "I hope you won't frighten the maids into fits when you get in. Ta-ta, Kiddies!"

"Ta-ta!" howled the New House boys. "Who's cock-house at St. Jim's? Yah!"

And, shouting with laughter, they retreated through the dusk towards their own house.

Blake and his chums looked at one another in dismay. What were they to do? To be seen in their plight was to be covered with ridicule, and they wriggled at the thought of the derision their appearance would excite.

But it was evidently of no use to wait in the deserted quadrangle, and the sooner it was got over the better.

"Come on!" said Blake desperately.

"Hallo, hallo! What's this?"

It was Monteith's voice. He was coming towards them with Sleath. He stared at the unhappy juniors, and burst into a roar of laughter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And Sleath chimed in:

"Ho, ho, ho!"

Monteith doubled up with mirth, and his shouts of laughter attracted some more seniors, who were coming out of the gym. As fast as one set his eyes upon the hapless trio he went into fits of merriment.

"Come on, you chaps!" snapped Blake. "For goodness' sake, let's get out of this!"

But it was not so easy for the chaps to "come on." They stumbled and staggered up the steps of the School House in a wild, floundering manner, lurching to and fro drunkenly.

Somehow or other they reached the top, and blundered into the hall, and, as luck would have it, met one of the maids face to face.

The girl gave one glance at the dreadful apparition, and shrieked and fled. She burst, screaming, into the nearest doorway, which happened to be that of Mr. Kidd, the master of the School House.

"Help, help! Ghosts! Murder!"

Mr. Kidd jumped up, electrified.

"What's the matter—what's the matter?"

"Ghosts! Murder! Burglars! Oh dear!"

And the frightened maid collapsed into a chair, and screamed.

The startled house-master sprang to the door, to see what had frightened the girl. He heard a clattering and rumbling on the stairs, and looked in that direction. Blake and his companions in misfortune were making a desperate effort to escape, but the house-master was too quick for them.

"Dear me!" he exclaimed. "What can that be? What is it?"

He sprang up the stairs after the trio. He gave a jump as he caught sight of their faces, and stared at them helplessly; and just then the unfortunate juniors lost their footing. They rolled against Mr. Kidd, and he went rolling, too, frantically clutching at the banisters and missing them. A minute more, and the four were at the bottom of the stairs in a heap.

The disturbance had brought a crowd to the spot. Kildare, the school captain, helped Mr. Kidd up, and the trio were dragged to their feet none too gently. But when their faces were seen a yell of laughter went up that rang through the School House. Even Mr. Kidd, shaken as he was, could not help grinning.

"Boys, how have you got into this state? What does this mean?"

"It—it was an accident, sir!" ventured Blake.

There was a fresh shout of laughter at this innocent explanation. The house-master was not likely to believe that the three juniors had got tied up and painted like Red Indians by accident.

Mr. Kidd tried not to laugh, but only partially succeeded.

"I will inquire into this in the morning," he said. "Kildare, will you release these boys, and see that—"

"Gracious me! What is all this?"

The voice struck dismay to the hearts of the juniors. Dr. Holmes, the Head of St. Jim's, had come upon the scene. His severe face was full of amazement and wrath.

"What does this mean? How came these boys to be in this shocking state, Mr. Kidd?"

"I don't know, Dr. Holmes," said the house-master. He did his best to conceal his annoyance. He prided himself upon keeping his house in excellent order, and it was deeply annoying that the Head should have come upon the scene just then. "I intended to inquire into the matter in the morning."

"Ah, very well!" said the doctor majestically. "But please let the inquiry be conducted in my study, Mr. Kidd."

"Certainly, sir."

The doctor stalked away, with a rustling gown and a wrathful face. Mr. Kidd went into his study and closed the door.

"Well, you're in for it now!" said Kildare, as he opened his pocket-knife and cut the bonds of the hapless juniors. "I suppose this is some more of that absurd rivalry business? Get off and clean yourselves, do!"

Blake and his chums made a bee-line for a bath-room. In half an hour all St. Jim's were laughing over the story; but the unfortunate trio did not feel inclined to laugh.

"The Head meant business," said Blake. "There's a row coming in the morning."

And he was right.

**ANSWERS**  
 ONE PENNY.  
 Every Tuesday.

**NEXT SATURDAY:**

"AUNT EMMA AT LYNCROFT,"

A Tale of Lyncroft School,

AND

"JUSTICE IS SOLE."

A Tale of Detective M. S. 7,

IN "PLUCK" ID.

Law.

The British

CHAPTER 5.  
Figgins & Co. in Hot Water.

"BLAKE!"  
"Sir?"  
"Herries!"  
"Sir?"  
"Digby!"  
"Sir?"

"You will kindly accompany me to Dr. Holmes's study!" Jack made a wry face. He had expected that summons after prayers in the morning, and it had come.

The three juniors obediently followed Mr. Kidd, and the sympathetic looks of their fellows followed them. It was no joke to interview the Head of St. Jim's in his den.

The doctor was looking very severe.

"Now," he said, as the three culprits stood in a row before him, looking very sheepish—"now, I shall be glad of an explanation of the absurd exhibition you made last night, Blake, Herries, and Digby."

The chums looked at one another.

"We are very sorry, sir," said Blake.

"No doubt," said Dr. Holmes grimly. "Unfortunately, that is not sufficient. I require to know how you came in that state."

There was no reply.

"Answer me, Blake!"

"I haven't anything to say, sir," said Blake, turning red.

"Do you mean to say that you don't know who tied you up and painted your face in that absurd and barbarous fashion?"

"It was very dark, sir."

"Then you do not know?"

Blake was silent. The doctor frowned darkly.

"Am I to understand, Blake, that you refuse to answer me?"

"Allow me," said Mr. Kidd quietly. "I fancy Blake's silence is due to a boyish sense of honour, which will not allow him to betray the names of the boys who used him so."

"It wouldn't be cricket, would it sir?" said Blake apologetically.

Mr. Kidd concealed a smile. The Head who had a great respect for the house-master, changed his tone a little.

"I should be far from commanding any boy to do a thing he believed to be dishonourable," he exclaimed. "Is that, indeed, your motive for wishing not to speak, Blake?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then I will question you no further. The matter, however, must be sifted. I have not the slightest doubt that this outrage upon all propriety is due to the absurd rivalry between the two houses, which has been the cause of so many disturbances, and which I am determined to keep within bounds. I will have inquiries made in the New House. You may go."

"Thank you, sir!"

The three boys left the room, immensely relieved to get off so cheaply, but at the same time somewhat anxious about their rivals of the New House.

"The doctor's in a wax," said Blake. "There will be a row. But I don't see how Figgins & Co. can get hurt if they keep quiet about it. At any rate, we haven't given them away, that's one comfort. We've played the game."

The Head was in earnest. When Mr. Kidd and the juniors had left him, he sent a note over to the New House, asking Mr. Ratcliff to come and see him. The house-master came over immediately. He had heard the story of the ridiculous exhibition of the School House juniors the previous evening, and guessed what was wanted.

Mr. Ratcliff, of the New House, was a thin, bald gentleman of middle age, with vast mental acquirements and a pronounced distaste for sports and horseplay. He liked to keep his house quiet and orderly, and was heavily "down" on any ebullition of the feeling of rivalry between the houses. He was not a bad sort, but the St. Jim's fellows voted him slow and "cranky," and in truth he was both.

The master of the New House always did his best to keep in the Head's good graces, and so the present occurrence was especially annoying to him, for he could see that Dr. Holmes was angry.

The Head did not say much, but what he said was to the point.

"You know about last night's occurrence, Mr. Ratcliff?"

"Yes, Dr. Holmes, and I am extremely disturbed and

"Naturally. I am extremely disturbed, too. The boys who suffered from that absurd practical joke do not wish to give the names of the aggressors, from a mistaken sense of honour, and I have decided not to insist upon it. I am convinced that the aggressors belong to your house, Mr. Ratcliff."

"I am afraid it is only too probable, Dr. Holmes. I am extremely—"

"I depend upon you, therefore, to find them out and punish them adequately."

"I will leave no stone unturned to do so. I am——"

"Thank you, Mr. Ratcliff! I rely upon you. Good-morning!"

And the house-master returned to the New House in a very irritable frame of mind. He had not been able to say anything to the Head of St. Jim's, but in his own house he was monarch of all he surveyed, and he proceeded to pass the doctor's wrath on. After morning school he sent for Monteith.

"You are head prefect of this house, Monteith," said Mr. Ratcliff severely. "I have trusted to you to keep order. How have you done it?"

"I have done my best, sir."

"Indeed! You are aware of the outrage perpetrated last night, which has led to a painful interview between Dr. Holmes and myself this morning?"

"It was some joke of the juniors, sir."

"Quite so; but such a joke passes all bounds. It is your duty to keep the juniors in order, or to resign your position of prefect."

Monteith started.

"I will do anything you wish, sir," he replied meekly. "I had already determined to ferret out the truth, and make an example of the offenders."

"I am glad to hear it," said Mr. Ratcliff stiffly. "See that it is done. I leave the matter in your hands, Monteith, but unless you can report to me that the delinquents have been found and punished, I shall have to consider very seriously about allowing you to retain your position as head prefect of the New House."

"You may rely upon me, sir."

Monteith went straight to his room, and sent his fag to summon Figgins & Co. to his presence. He employed the interval of waiting in selecting his stoutest cane.

Now, if Figgins & Co. deserved to be punished for a trick upon the School House juniors, certainly Monteith was equally to blame, for he had guessed perfectly well what their intention was when he gave Figgins his permit.

But that reflection did not make any difference to the prefect. He was going to punish the culprits, not because they deserved it, but because he was angry at being lectured by the house-master, and to save his credit with Mr. Ratcliff.

Figgins & Co. came into the prefect's study with very doubtful looks. The sight of the cane in Monteith's hand warned them what to expect.

"Anything wrong?" asked Figgins nervously.

"Yes. It was you three that painted up Blake and the others last night, I suppose?"

"We ain't bound to incriminate ourselves," ventured Figgins.

"It isn't necessary," said Monteith grimly. "I know it was you. That was what you wanted the permit for, under pretence of sprinting for practice."

Figgins's jaw dropped.

"Why," he gasped, "you know——"

"What—I knew what?"

"You knew it was something up against Blake, and——"

"What do you mean, you young rascal? Hold out your hand!"

Figgins set his teeth.

"I won't! You've no business to take advantage——"

He got no further. Monteith's grip was on his collar, and he was swung round, and the cane began to play about him like lightning. Figgins roared and squirmed with pain, and kicked out. Monteith got a stinger on the shin that made him yell with pain, and then he set his teeth and lashed Figgins savagely.

That was more than the "Co." could stand. They exchanged a glance, and flung themselves upon Monteith and dragged him off.

Monteith was now beside himself with passion. The absurdity of a struggle between a prefect and three rebellious juniors was forgotten, and the undignified figure he cut made no difference to him. He flung himself upon the boys savagely, hitting out with all his strength.

Wynn received a terrible blow which sent him flying; but at the same time Kerr tripped up the prefect, and Monteith went down, and Figgins fell on top of him.

The juniors had the advantage now, but it was an advantage that frightened them. The head prefect of the house down on the floor of his own study, with three Lower Fourth boys scrambling over him.

Even in the excitement of the moment the thought of the consequences could not be absent from their minds. The door opened, and Sleath looked into the room. He gave a whistle of amazement.

"Hallo, Monty! What are you up to? New system of gymnastics?"

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IN "PLUCK," 1D.



"Help me, you fool!" gurgled Monteith. "Don't stand there like a dummy! Get hold of these brats!"

Sleath promptly did as he was requested. He gripped Figgins, and held him fast; and Monteith, staggering to his feet, seized Wynn and Kerr. The juniors were looking white and scared. Monteith's face was dark and convulsed with fury. He crossed to the door, and locked it.

"Now I'll make you smart, you little hounds!" he hissed.

"Look here——" began Figgins.

"Shove him over the table!" snarled Monteith.

Sleath grinned, and dragged Figgins over the table, face downwards. The cane whistled in the air, and came down with a terrible slash, and Figgins yelled and kicked. Wynn and Kerr made an attempt to go to his aid, for their blood was up; but Monteith slashed them unmercifully with the cane when they came within reach. He thrashed Figgins till his arm ached, and then the boy was released, white and quivering.

"You coward!" he said thickly—"you coward!"

Monteith gave him a cuff that sent him staggering.

"Get out of my study!"

He unlocked the door, and Figgins & Co. crept away, aching in every limb, and so white and gasping that every one they passed turned to look at them.

A little later Monteith, having removed the traces of the struggle from his person, reported to the house-master that he had found and punished the delinquents. Mr. Ratchiff expressed his satisfaction. Perhaps he would not have been so satisfied if he could have guessed what the outcome of the affair was to be.

## CHAPTER 6.

### Monteith Makes a Complaint.

**T**AP! Figgins & Co. were in their study, gasping and groaning in chorus, when the tap came at the door. The three were looking very white and worried.

"Come in!" said Figgins feebly.

The door opened, and Jack Blake walked in. The three stared at him in astonishment. Boys of one house were not allowed in the other as a rule, and it was not exactly safe for the chief of the School House juniors to venture into the enemy's camp in this manner. But Jack had come on a pacific errand.

"Pax," exclaimed he as he entered, "I——" Then he broke off, staring at the three. "What on earth's the matter? Been fighting, you giddy cuckoos?"

"No," said Figgins. "It's come out that we used you like that last night, and Monteith has been laying it on."

"The beast!" said Blake sympathetically.

"Who are you calling a beast?" replied Figgins, quick to resent any slight to his house, from the feeling of esprit-de-corps, though at that moment he hated Monteith like poison. "Just you leave Monteith alone, you bounder!"

"All right," said Blake. "I just came over to tell you that we've been wigg'd by the doctor, and we're not going to give you away. I wanted to warn you that you could rely upon us not sneaking."

"That's decent of you," said Figgins; "but they guessed. Thanks for coming, though. But you'd better cut it. If Monteith sees you on this side he will go for you."

"That's all serene. Ta-ta!"

Blake nodded to the suffering three, and walked out of the study. In spite of his careless words, he took very great care not to be spotted by Monteith, for he knew that the prefect only wanted an excuse to "go for" him.

Luck, however, was against him, for as he crossed the hall, Monteith came out of Mr. Ratchiff's study, face to face with the School House junior. The prefect smiled disagreeably, and, closing the door, came towards Blake.

"What are you doing in this house?" he asked.

Blake eyed him warily.

"I came to speak to Figgins," he said.

"You know that boys of one house are not allowed to enter the other?"

"That's because they row. I didn't come here to row, but just to speak to old Figgy," answered Blake meekly.

"That makes no difference, and I have only your word for it. You are one of the cheekiest and noisiest of the School House juniors!"

"My word is good enough, I suppose?" retorted Blake, with spirit. "I'm not in the habit of telling lies, whoever else may be!"

Monteith gritted his teeth savagely. He always found Blake's coolness and fearlessness very hard to bear.

"Come into my study."

"What for?" asked Jack.

Monteith did not trouble to answer the question. He made a grab at Jack, who promptly dodged, and eluded him. The next moment the junior was out of the New

House, clearing the steps with a single bound, and sprinting across the quadrangle.

There was a rapid beat of footsteps behind him. He looked over his shoulder, and to his dismay saw the prefect in full pursuit.

"Hallo!" muttered Blake. "Here's a go!"

He had not expected the prefect to take the matter up like this. He sprinted for all he was worth, but the senior was quickly running him down. Blake had only one chance, and he took it. It was an old trick, but it worked.

He heard the prefect close behind him, and suddenly threw himself down upon the ground. Right over him Monteith went sprawling, with a wild yell.

Blake was upon his feet in a flash, and he darted into the School House.

Monteith picked himself up more slowly. He was severely shaken, and his hands were bruised and hurt, and he was in a towering passion. He strode into the School House, and made straight for Kildare's quarters.

The captain of St. Jim's was there, and he was alone. He stared as the New House captain came striding into his room without the preliminary of knocking.

"Hallo, Monteith! Anything the matter?"

"Yes," snarled Monteith. "Don't pretend to be so innocent. You must have seen it all from your window, if you yourself didn't set that young rascal on to do it!"

Kildare rose to his feet and looked him steadily in the eyes. There was no love lost between these two—the handsome, sturdy captain of St. Jim's and the sour, evil-tempered prefect of the New House.

Kildare always made every effort to keep the peace, but Monteith, as was natural to a mean nature, attributed his patience to weakness, and was made only the more insolent by it.

"I don't know what you're talking about, Monteith," said Kildare quietly. "Will you be kind enough to explain?"

"I have been tripped up in the quad by Blake."

"Do you mean to say that he did that deliberately, without provocation?"

"I was following him, to punish him for entering the New House without leave."

"I quite understand," said Kildare, still quietly, but with a note of contempt in his voice that made the prefect wince.

"You picked up a flimsy excuse to punish him, because of your old hatred of him, which wasn't his fault. But you know as well as I do that you have no right to punish the juniors of the School House. You ought to have complained to me, and you know it. I never interfere with your side."

"You mean to say that he is not to be punished!" hissed Monteith. "I expected you to take his part. But I warn you that the affair will not end here. Are you going to cano him for tripping me up?"

The bullying tone adopted by the prefect was very hard for Kildare to bear; but he controlled his temper and answered quietly:

"No; you had no right to touch him."

"Very well. I'll take my complaint to higher quarters, then."

"You can do as you like," replied the captain of St. Jim's disdainfully.

Monteith gave him a bitter look, and strode savagely from the study. He went straight to Mr. Kidd's room. The house-master was just coming out. He stopped and looked inquiringly at Monteith.

"Do you want to speak to me, Monteith?" he asked.

"Yes, sir. I am compelled to complain of the conduct of one of the juniors of the School House," said the prefect.

A look of displeasure crossed the house-master's face.

"You should go to Kildare."

"I have done so, but he refuses to take the matter up."

"Indeed," said Mr. Kidd sharply. "What is your complaint?"

"Blake entered the New House without permission. I was following him to the School House to complain to Kildare, and he tripped me up—me, a prefect!"

"That is a serious matter. You may be assured that I will look into it."

"Thank you, sir! Of course, my only desire is to have discipline properly maintained. I have no personal feeling in the matter."

"You may trust me to do justice to your motives," said the house-master drily.

Monteith winced a little. He did not exactly like Mr. Kidd's tone. Still, he was satisfied that he had made trouble for Kildare. As he left the School House he saw the house-master enter the captain's study, and he went away feeling content.

What passed at the interview of course Monteith did not know; but when he saw Kildare shortly afterwards the captain of St. Jim's was looking very gloomy.

Mr. Kidd was foughy upon the question of the discipline of his house, and no doubt he had been annoyed, and had

spoken to Kildare a good deal more sharply than the latter deserved. Monteith felt pretty sure of it, and, knowing how extremely sensitive the Irish lad was, he felt that he had scored pretty well this time.

He half expected Kildare to utter some hot words when they met; but the captain had perfect control of his temper. He did not even look at Monteith.

The prefect shrugged his shoulders. He knew that the captain's indifference was only assumed. He had scored this time, and he knew it; and the meanness of his method did not trouble his conscience in the least. Things of that kind came very easily to the prefect of the New House.

But Nemesis was upon his track, if he had only known it!

## CHAPTER 7.

### A Sudden Attack.

**M**ONTEITH wheeled his bike through the quad in the darkness. The hour was late, and the prefect, who had been out for a long spin, had let himself in with a key, for at St. Jim's the two head prefects had keys as well as the masters.

There was no thought of danger at that moment in Monteith's mind. He knew the way to the bike-shed as well in the dark as in the daylight, and he whistled quietly to himself as he wheeled his machine along.

Some days had elapsed since his altercation with Kildare, and the prefect, who had looked for some kind of retaliation on the part of the captain of St. Jim's, had been disappointed.

Kildare seemed determined to let the matter drop.

But Monteith, always suspicious, and knowing well what he would have done himself, was more inclined to believe that Kildare was only biding his time, and intended "to get his own back" at a convenient opportunity, by hook or by crook.

But he was not thinking of that now, but of supper in his study and bed, for he had been out a couple of hours, and was both hungry and tired.

The lamp on his machine gleamed ahead as he wheeled it along, and, as he afterwards realised, served to warn ambushed foes that he was coming.

He opened the door, resting his bicycle against the wall for the moment; and then he gave a sudden startled yell as he was seized by hands that reached out of the darkness and dragged him to the ground.

Before he could struggle or cry out again he was down, and a slip-knot was passed over his head and tightened about his body, pinning his arms to his side.

He began to wrestle and wriggle, but he was taken at too great a disadvantage, and almost before he knew it another noose tightened about his legs, fastening them together, and he was helpless.

The sudden attack, and the complete success of it, had dazed him, and his heart quailed within his breast, for Monteith, like most bullies, was a poltroon at heart. But he soon realised that he could not be in actual danger: his assailants must belong to St. Jim's, and this was only a trick that was being played upon him.

As he comprehended that, his terror changed to rage.

"Let me go!" he hissed. "I know who you are, and I'll make you suffer for this! Let me go, I tell you!"

There was no reply. His assailants, of whom there appeared to be two, had uttered no word during the attack, made no sound save a hurried breathing.

Without speaking, they now proceeded to render more secure the bonds upon the prefect's limbs, and his wriggles and struggles availed him nothing.

He began to shout for help, but he had only time to utter one shout. A handkerchief was thrust into his mouth, stifling his cries and almost choking him, and he gurgled and gasped into silence.

"Gr—gr—groo—"

Then silence. And still his assailants did not speak. He wondered furiously what they were going to do next. Who were they? Why were they doing this?

The enraged prefect had little doubt upon the point. He could see nothing of them, hear nothing but their breathing; but he was certain that one at least was a fall fellow; and, besides, it was absurd to suppose that any junior would dare to make such an attack upon a prefect.

No; it was a couple of seniors from the School House who had assailed him, and he was quite certain that one of them was Kildare. It was ludicrous to think so, but Monteith was beyond himself with rage, and he judged others by himself.

This was the revenge of the captain of St. Jim's. Doubtless he hoped to effect it without discovery being made of the part he had taken in the outrage; but let him wait till the morrow, Monteith reflected savagely.

Fresh cords were placed round him, and he was tied up

to something hard; and he guessed that he was being lashed to one of the bicycle stands to prevent him from wriggling his way out of the shed.

He could make no resistance, he could only submit passively and register inward vows of vengeance.

There was a shuffling of feet, the sound of a closing door. He was alone. He felt a chill at his heart.

Did they mean to leave him alone there all night? The thought was terrifying. He knew that no one was likely to come to the bike-shed at that hour, nor was anyone likely to stay up for him. He would not be missed until the morning. He could make no sound, he could not wriggle himself free!

Unless his captors took pity upon him he was doomed to pass eight or nine hours there in the cold and solitude and darkness, with the cords cramping his limbs.

How could he endure it?

At that moment, with the terrible prospect before him, he would have forgiven his captors freely if they would only have returned and released him. But that, evidently, they had no intention of doing.

Could they really mean to leave him there till morning? He felt a sickening conviction upon that point. They could not return and release him without exposing themselves to discovery. They would leave his release to others, for the sake of their own security.

He groaned in anguish of spirit, and only a faint gurgle passed the gag.

Boom! It was the hour striking from the clock-tower. Eleven more strokes followed. Midnight! Monteith writhed and groaned in the cold and darkness.

Then, if never before, he repented of past ill deeds. For, whoever his assailants were, this would not have happened if he had made himself respected and not hated. But it was too late to think of that.

His punishment was upon him, and he had to bear it as best he could, comforted only by the hope of vengeance on the morrow.

## CHAPTER 8.

### The Doctor Investigates.

"**H**ALLO, hallo!"

Darrel, a Sixth Form senior belonging to the School House, uttered the exclamation.

It was morning, but the hour was yet early. Darrel was up in the dawn, intending to get his bike out and go for a spin, the morning being clear and bright, though cold. He had come down to the bicycle-shed, and the first object that caught his eye was Monteith's bicycle leaning against the wall outside.

"Hallo!" said Darrel. "There's something up. That's Monteith's jigger. How the dickens did he come to leave it outside the shed?"

Considerably puzzled and mystified, Darrel opened the door of the shed and entered. A wriggling object on the floor made a gurgling sound, and at once attracted his attention. Darrel gave a jump.

It was not very light in the shed, but he could see that the object was a fellow tied hand and foot, and fastened also to a bicycle-stand and gagged with a handkerchief.

"Monteith, by Jove!"

Monteith groaned and gurgled. Darrel, amazed as he was, did not waste time. He bent over Monteith and extracted the gag from his numbed mouth, and then began to untie the cords. Monteith gasped.

"Thanks! I'm nearly dead. Oh, somebody shall pay for this!"

"How did you get like this?" demanded Darrel, in wonder. "Who tied you up?"

"I don't know."

"How long have you been here?"

"All night."

"All night? My hat!"

"I'll make him suffer for it! I've a suspicion who it was!" gasped the prefect. "If it's true I'll have him kicked out of St. Jim's. The beast! I'm nearly dead with cold and cramp. Go easy with that cord. Where's the handkerchief?"

"What handkerchief?"

"The one that was in my mouth. It was shoved in by the chap who collared me here in the dark. There were two of them. Give it to me."

"I don't know," said Darrel dubiously. "He wouldn't be such a mug as to give himself away by using his own handkerchief, I imagine. Here it is. My Aunt Matilda!"

He stared at the handkerchief in dismay. Monteith's eye followed his, and fastened upon the monogram in the corner of the handkerchief, which was in a very dirty and muddy state. The prefect's eyes gleamed.

"It's Kildare's!"

"Yes; and that only proves what I said, that the fellow

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didn't use his own handkerchief," said Darrel, recovering from his astonishment.

Monteith smiled unpleasantly.

"Where was he to get anybody else's from?" he demanded. "I suspected that it was Kildare all along."

"But it's rot! As if Kildare would play a trick like that!"

"We'll see what he has to say about it!" replied Monteith grimly.

"Do you mean that you are going to accuse him?"

"Yes, I certainly do."

"You'd better be careful what you are about. He—"

"When I want your advice I'll ask for it."

"Oh, all right! If you choose to make a fool of yourself it's no business of mine."

And Darrel turned and strode out of the shed. The School House senior was in reality somewhat uneasy. He did not believe that Kildare had done the deed, yet the finding of the handkerchief was certainly strange. Darrel was Kildare's closest chum, and believed in him implicitly. He gave up the idea of a spin for that morning, and went straight to Kildare's room. Monteith, looking white and haggard and very vindictive, went off more slowly to the New House.

Kildare was up when Darrel knocked at his door, and his cheery voice bade the senior come in. The captain was fastening his collar. He looked round inquiringly at Darrel.

"Hallo! You're an early bird. What are you looking glum about?"

"Was I looking glum?" said Darrel. "The fact is, Kildare, there's been a beastly unpleasant happening. I suppose you don't know that Monteith was surprised in the bike-shed last night, bound and gagged, and left there till this morning?"

Kildare looked very grave.

"No, Darrel."

"I thought not," said Darrel, with a breath of relief. "But he was gagged with your handkerchief, old chap, and he swears it was you that did it."

"My handkerchief! I lost one yesterday, after a spin on my bike."

"Then somebody picked it up and used it to gag Monteith with."

"I say, Darrel, this is a serious business! Monteith is not the kind of chap to take this lying down, and there will be an inquiry," said Kildare gravely. "He has made himself pretty obnoxious to most of our house; but I never imagined a School House fellow would play such a trick. But it must have been some of our side."

"I suppose so."

"It will have to be looked into."

"Yes, and the sooner the better, before that cad makes capital out of it. Of course, he's been badly treated, but he's jolly glad of an excuse for going for the School House."

"I'll go over and see him," said Kildare, after a pause. "It is ridiculous that he should think I was one of his assailants. I don't like the fellow, but he ought to know that if I hit him I should hit him fairly, not in the dark. I'd better have a talk with him before he drags the masters into it."

And Kildare a few minutes later walked over to the New House, and, entering, made his way to the prefect's quarters.

"Come in!" growled a surly voice, as Kildare tapped.

Monteith stared at the captain as he entered, and scowled savagely.

"What do you want here?"

"I have come to speak to you, Monteith," said Kildare quietly. "I hear from Darrel that you suspect me of having had a hand in the outrage you have suffered."

"I know you had," said Monteith.

"You are mistaken. I assure you—"

"Prove it, then. If it wasn't you, which of the School House fellows was it?"

"I shall make strict inquiry. If it is a practical joke of the juniors—"

Monteith interrupted him.

"It wasn't. There were two of them, and one at least was a big fellow. They were seniors, and not juniors at all. You can't shove it off on the youngsters."

Kildare flushed scarlet.

"Then you believe I was there?"

"I know you were."

"Then there's nothing more to be said. I give you my word of honour that I knew nothing whatever about the affair until Darrel told me ten minutes ago."

"I don't believe you!"

"Very well; there will be an investigation."

"I shall demand one!"

"You needn't trouble. As you have chosen to accuse me, I shall demand it myself!"

And Kildare walked away. The prefect scowled after him bitterly. He was cramped and aching all over, but there was a malicious satisfaction in his haggard face.

"It's my chance at last," he said to himself. "I'll bring him down over this affair. He has delivered himself into my hands at last."

The story of what had happened to the head prefect of the New House was not long in spreading over the college. The New House seethed with indignation from end to end. Monteith was not much liked by anybody, but he was their captain, the head of their house, and so any insult offered to him was as an insult to themselves.

The seniors were angry and incensed, and the juniors, who took up everything more vigorously than their elders, were in a state of boundless rage and indignation.

Figgins & Co., however, usually the leaders in everything, had little to say about the matter. Perhaps that was on account of their recent sufferings at the hands of the prefect. Figgins, indeed, was heard to say that it served the best right.

"Yes, so it does, as far as that goes!" exclaimed Wynn. "But it's the insult to the house. Don't you feel that, Figgy?"

"No, I don't," said Figgins. "I say, good luck to whoever it was. Monteith has wanted sitting on for a long time, and now he's got what he's been asking for."

"My sentiments!" chimed in Kerr.

Wynn looked at them rather queerly, and said no more about the matter. The rest of the New House juniors voiced their indignation whenever any two or three of them met together. The seniors discussed the matter more soberly, but with equal acrimony; but many hesitated to believe that Kildare had had a hand in the affair.

Monteith firmly maintained that he was sure of it, but that went for very little with fellows who knew the prefect well.

"I say, Monty," said Sleath, "do you really think Kildare had anything to do with it?"

"Yes!" snapped Monteith.

"Between ourselves, you know. Of course, in any case we're going to make as much capital out of it as we can; but—"

"Look here, confound you, I am certain of what I say! Darrel's a witness that the handkerchief shoved in my mouth was Kildare's."

"Kildare says he lost it."

"He couldn't say anything else, after such an oversight."

"Then you really think he did it?"

"Hang you, I know he did!"

"And the other fellow?"

"I don't know, but a School House chap, of course."

"You don't think it might have been young Blake and his set?"

"One of them might have been, but one of them was a senior at least, and that I will swear to. None of the School House juniors are so overgrown that I could have mistaken one of them for a senior by his size."

"No, that's so," agreed Sleath. "Well, we shall make something out of this, Monty."

"I mean to. Kildare will get kicked out of St. Jim's if I can manage it," said the prefect viciously. "At all events, I'll make him sit up."

Shortly afterwards the prefect, who felt too ill after his painful experience to go down that day, was visited in his study by the house-master.

Mr. Ratcliff was very sympathetic and indignant, and quite assured that the house rivalry was at the bottom of the business; but he, too, hesitated to believe Kildare guilty. But Monteith's positive assertion that a senior had been engaged in the attack, and the production of the handkerchief, helped to convince him.

"At all events, the matter will be very strictly investigated," the master said. "I will make my report to Dr. Holmes at once."

Monteith assumed an expression of concern.

"I don't want to appear in the light of a tale-bearer," he said. "If I had been able, I should have kept the affair from public knowledge. Unless you really think an inquiry will do good, sir, I should prefer to let the matter drop."

He knew perfectly well that Mr. Ratcliff was the last person in the world to let the matter drop. The house-master's answer at once assured him on that point.

"Your feelings do you credit, Monteith, but for the sake of the school the matter must be satisfactorily cleared up," he said.

"Very well, sir, it is in your hands," the prefect said meekly. "You will understand my reluctance. There has been bad blood between Kildare and myself, and my accusation might be regarded as malicious. The other day I was compelled to complain to Mr. Kidd because Kildare refused to take notice of an offence by one of his juniors. It was

Blake, who forced his way into the New House and behaved in a riotous manner. That, I have no doubt, was Kildare's motive in this attack."

"Quite probably," said Mr. Ratcliff. "The matter shall be threshed out."

And he repaired forthwith to the Head of St. Jim's. Dr. Holmes had already heard of the happening of the night, and he was as determined as the house-master that the culprits should be discovered and severely punished.

"I can hardly believe that it was Kildare," he said; "but if it was, I shall expel him from the school. Kildare or not, the guilty parties shall be found and dealt with severely."

The whole school was assembled in hall, and a thrill went through every boy there when the doctor entered, an awe-inspiring figure in cap and gown.

The doctor's face was very stern as he looked over the



Forward went Blake, staggering under his burden, but came to the last. Groups of the School House boys greeted the returning hares with ringing cheers.

assembly with a flashing glance, and began to speak in clear, hard tones.

"An extraordinary outrage was perpetrated within the walls of St. James's last night," began the Head. "A prefect of the New House was seized and bound in a most brutal manner, and fastened to a bicycle-stand, where he remained until he was released this morning."

He paused to give his words effect, but the boys, who knew all about it, were not very much impressed so far. The Head went on:

"I call upon the boys who were guilty of this outrage to stand forward and confess to their fault, and in that case I will deal with them as leniently as I can, though, of course, I shall have no option but to inflict severe punishment."

Another pause. The generous offer of severe punishment as the reward of open confession did not appear to appeal to the culprits' sporting instincts.

"No takers!" murmured Blake.

And Herries and Digby suppressed a giggle. The doctor waited for a full minute, but it became quite clear that no one intended to stand forward and confess, and he went on, in a still sterner voice.

"Very well. The cowardly assaulters having refused to

confess, the matter will proceed to a strict and searching investigation; and I may say now that every boy concerned in the outrage will be expelled from St. James's."

A sort of shiver went through the assembly. Expulsion was a terrible sentence, and it was certain now that the culprit would not confess. Would he be found out? Was it Kildare? Many curious glances turned towards the captain of St. Jim's, but he did not appear to notice them. His face was quite calm and composed. The Head was not done yet, and the boys waited breathlessly for what was to follow.

"Monteith!" The prefect stepped out of the ranks of the Sixth. "Kindly state what you know upon this subject."

"I know very little, sir. Of course, it was too dark for me to see the faces of the fellows who collared me, and they took care not to speak. I am certain that one at least of them was a senior."

"From his size?"

"Yes, sir."

"There are several big boys in the Lower Forms."

"Not in the School House, sir—not big enough to be taken for a senior, even in the dark."

"That is true."

"And then the handkerchief that was forced into my mouth, sir, belonged to Kildare."

It was out now, and the boys of St. Jim's held their breath.

"Kildare!" The captain of St. Jim's stepped forward. "How do you account for your handkerchief being used to gag Monteith?"

"I lost a handkerchief yesterday, sir," said Kildare, in a clear, calm voice. "I have no doubt it was the same one."

"Where did you lose it?"

"I don't know exactly, but some time when I was with my bike."

"Then it might have been in the bicycle-shed?" said the doctor.

"Quite likely, sir."

"It was very soiled and muddy, sir," struck in Darrel. "I noticed by its look that it had been trodden on."

"Thank you, Darrel! I may take it, Kildare, that you know nothing at all about this outrage?"

"No more than is known to the rest of the school, sir."

There was a pause. The inquiry had come to an impasse, and all wondered what would be the Head's way out of it. Things looked suspicious against Kildare, but his frank answers had completely cleared him of suspicion in the eyes of the School House.

With the New House boys it was different. Some of their rivals had been guilty of the outrage, and Kildare was the only one to whom the finger of suspicion pointed. That was enough for them.

"We are left in doubt," said Dr. Holmes slowly. "It appears to be the impression among a section of my boys that the outrage may safely be attributed to some inmates of the School House, owing to the absurd rivalry which has of late been so rampant between the two houses. I cannot admit that as proved. All we know for certain is this, that two boys, including at least one senior, attacked a prefect in a barbarous way. I must refuse, without further evidence, to attach the guilt to either house. It rests upon the whole school to discover the culprit, and until it is done"—here the doctor paused, and the school hung on his words—"until it is done, a stigma rests upon the school, and punishment must in common fairness fall upon all alike."

There was a murmur.

"Until the culprit is discovered," went on the Head, raising his voice a little, "the usual half-holidays will be cancelled. If I see any reason to change my mind, you will be informed; but I do not think that is likely to be the case."

A bombshell would not have startled and dismayed the boys more. It was not till the doctor's rustling gown had rustled out of the hall that the assembly recovered from their consternation. Then a chorus of disapproval and rage broke out:

"Gated till we find them out!"

"Both half-holidays stopped!"

"Shame!"

"What becomes of the football fixtures?"

"Shame!"

"Shame!"

The masters tried to restore silence and order, but for a time they were unsuccessful. The whole school was wild with indignation, and especially the New House. Not a boy of that house but was certain that the culprits, whoever they were, belonged to the School House side.

Upon this point the School House boys themselves had very uneasy doubts, though they were all ready to maintain the innocence of Kildare himself. To punish the whole school was bad enough, but to punish both houses, when the

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offenders were certainly in the School House, was unspeakable.

So the New House fellows declared, in no uncertain voice. Their last shred of doubt as to Kildare's guilt had vanished now. They were too angry to doubt it any longer. It was not logical, but very natural.

"Confess, Kildare!"

"Confess, you bounder!"

"Make a clean breast of it!"

Kildare walked to the door, apparently not hearing the cries. Some of the excited New House fellows appeared to be about to make a rush for him, but the School House closed up round their captain. The hall was emptied in great disorder, everybody talking excitedly, and nobody taking the trouble to listen.

"What a set of blithering silly asses!" exclaimed Blake, in disgust, as a group of New House boys passed him, loudly denouncing Kildare. "As if our captain would have had anything to do with such a trick! We can't say anything to the seniors, chaps, but we'll look out for Figgins & Co. after lessons, and see what they have to say about it."

"What-ho!" exclaimed Herries and Digby.

And when the Lower Fourth were released from class, Blake and his chums fairly went on the war-path. They had expected to find Figgins & Co. loud in their wrath, but they were surprised and disappointed.

Figgins & Co. seemed to have been attacked by a new and phenomenal fit of industry, and remained in their study at work. Disappointed here, Blake found plenty of work to do in other quarters, for the main body of the New House juniors were holding an indignation meeting in the quadrangle.

"This is where we come in!" said Blake.

His voice called the School House juniors together, and they bore down upon the indignation meeting, and their onslaught changed it into a battle.

The New House were by no means "backward in coming forward," and they gave the School House pretty nearly as good as they received from them, and the uproar became terrific, till three or four prefects sallied out with their canes, and the youthful heroes were dispersed.

But that day, except when lessons claimed the boys, it was difficult to find a quiet corner about St. Jim's in which a couple of combatants were not fighting it out to their mutual satisfaction.

## CHAPTER 9.

### The "Rats" and the "Kids."

ST. JIM'S showed no sign of settling down into its old quiet. True, the fighting between the juniors came to an end, after a plentiful distribution of black eyes, swollen noses, and thick ears. But the feeling between the two houses was more strained than it had ever been before in the history of St. Jim's.

The doctor's sentence seriously interfered with the life of the college on the side of the sports. There were a good many football fixtures coming off shortly, and if the half-holidays were stopped, there was no resource but to write and cancel the matches.

It may be imagined how the football committee and the school generally viewed this prospect. Even more important, from the junior point of view, than the outside fixtures was the junior house match, the date of which was drawing nigh. Was that to be indefinitely postponed?

The Rats and the Kids had been eagerly anticipating the day when they should meet on the football field, and prove which was the leading house of St. Jim's. But until the doctor's sentence was rescinded it was plain that the match could not come off. The Rats, it may be remarked, derived their name from Mr. Ratcliff, master of the New House, and the Kids from Mr. Kidd, of the School House.

What was to be done? That was a question the School House youngsters could not answer, but the New House were quite ready to answer it for them.

It was necessary for the culprit or culprits to confess. The School House passionately maintained the innocence of their captain, and the New House just as passionately declared that there wasn't a shadow of doubt as to his guilt.

Who had done it if Kildare hadn't? Wasn't it certain that it was a School House fellow, anyway? Here the New House had the advantage, and they pressed it home. The School House felt that the offenders were most probably in their house. It was not probable that Monteith had been treated so badly by the boys of his own side; but as to who the culprits were nobody hazarded even a guess.

Darrel and one or two others had been inclined to suspect Blake, whose feud with the head prefect of the New House was well known. But Monteith's positive declaration that a senior had been engaged in the business staggered them;

and Blake, when questioned, asserted his innocence in a way that carried conviction.

"I dare say we might have done it," said Blake modestly, "if we had thought of it; but we didn't, you see. We never knew that Monteith was out on his bike that night even."

"I hope you would not have done it, Blake," said Kildare quietly. "It was a cruel trick to leave him tied up there on a cold night."

Blake nodded.

"Yes, Kildare; but I've been thinking about that. The chaps may not have meant to be so hard on the boundary; but, having tied him up, they were afraid to give themselves away by taking any steps to get him released before morning, because he is such a spiteful beast."

"You seem inclined to defend their action, at all events, Blake."

"Oh, no, I don't. I'm sorry it happened, in a way. But I don't think there's any doubt that it was done by some chaps whom that brute had been ragging, and if all was known, I dare say we should all think it served him right."

"That will do, Blake. You can go."

Kildare smiled when the junior was gone. "I don't think Blake had a hand in it, Darrel. It's a mystery."

"I'm of your opinion," agreed Darrel. "But what's to be done? The Head seems to have made up his mind, and it's not of the slightest use remonstrating with him. But the situation can't last much longer without open war between the two houses. And then the matches?"

Kildare looked gloomy.

"I don't know what's to be done. It seems hopeless to try to discover who served Monteith like that. With certain expulsion hanging over the culprit, we can't expect him to confess."

"Well, it would be expecting a lot."

"It's Friday now. I shall have to write to Redelyffe cancelling the match for to-morrow, unless something turns up."

Darrel shook his head.

"Nothing can turn up in time. There will be a row in committee to-night, Kildare."

"I'm afraid so."

"Why not scratch the meeting? The New House members are certain to make themselves obnoxious, and there's really nothing to discuss. We've got to cancel the match to-morrow, and it can't be helped."

"They would say I was afraid to face them."

"Well, perhaps they would."

Kildare compressed his lips.

"We'd better have the meeting. I know there will be a row, but I can face it."

The prospect was not a pleasant one to Kildare.

There was almost as many New House fellows as School House boys on the football committee, and they were certain to make things unpleasant, in their firm belief that Kildare was the cause of the present state of affairs.

Already the seniors of the two houses were scarcely on speaking terms, and both sides expected the meeting that evening to bring matters to a head.

Their anticipations were realised.

The committee met in a room in the School House, and when the New House members came over, there were some hisses among the juniors who watched them come in.

There would have been a greater demonstration but for Jack Blake, who kept the youngsters of the School House within bounds.

"Honour the stranger that is within thy gates" he said severely. "You must not be rude to even a pig like Monteith, or say rude things to a hopeless waster like Sleuth, while they're, so to speak, our guests. Let there be peace—in other words, keep your heads shut or I'll lam you!"

And there was peace, and the New House seniors passed on to the committee-room, scowling defiantly round them as they went.

Kildare came in a few moments after them, and as he entered the committee-room the New House members looked at one another, and did not return his greeting. Kildare flushed, but remained perfectly composed.

He stood up and looked at Monteith and his companions.

"Before we get to business," he said, "I should like to say a few words. Monteith, I believe, is still under the impression that I had a hand in the affair of the other night. That impression is shared by a good many in the New House—"

"By all!" interrupted Monteith.

Kildare bit his lip.

"Very well, by all, then. What I want to say is this. I have denied all knowledge of the affair. Now, I give you my word of honour that I am innocent. Has any one of you ever known me break my word or tell a lie?"

"I don't know," drawled Monteith. "I haven't taken the trouble to note all your words, but in this instance I certainly

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By Arthur S. Hardy.

IN "PLUCK," 10.

believe you are telling a lie! Now, don't get excited! You asked for it, and that's my plain opinion."

Kildare controlled himself with an effort. "Very well," he said. "I won't give you my opinion of you, Monteith; you wouldn't like to hear it. I can only say I am innocent, and that I should expect an honourable fellow to take my word."

"Your word is not good enough!" replied the prefect insolently. "The proofs are against you, you see."

"It's no good arguing it," said Kildare. "I can say no more than I have said. Let us get to business."

"Certainly. You started the discussion."

"The question is," said Kildare, taking no further notice of the prefect. "What are we to say to the Redclyffe fellows? The match cannot take place to-morrow."

"It will have to be cancelled," said Monteith, "and they will crow over us and say that we are afraid of them."

"Of course they will," Sleath remarked. "That's only to be expected. It's no good asking them for another date, for, unless Kildare confesses, the Head's sentence will last to the end of the term."

Kildare flushed with anger, and there came a gleam into his eyes that made Sleath wish he had not spoken. The captain rapped upon the table.

"I have already said," he exclaimed, "that I have nothing to confess! That matter is closed so far as this meeting is concerned. Any further reference to it I shall take as a personal insult, and shall close the meeting!"

Monteith shrugged his shoulders.

"You can do as you like, of course. I, for one, don't see what use the meeting is going to be, as there's nothing to be done. We can't meet Redclyffe, and it's useless, as Sleath says, to ask them to make another date, as we're not sure that we shall be able to meet them then. The fixture will have to be scratched."

"That is my opinion, and, if you are all agreed, I will write the letter to the Redclyffe skipper."

There was evidently nothing else to be done, and Kildare drew pen and paper towards him. But Monteith was not finished yet.

"What reason are you going to give?" he asked. "You can't say we are all kept in school like naughty infants, and mustn't go out to play."

"It doesn't matter much what we say," remarked Sleath. "In any case, they will set it down to an attack of funk."

"Owing to circumstances would do," suggested Rushden.

Kildare nodded. "It is not necessary to go into particulars," he said. "It is impossible for us to keep the engagement, owing to unforeseen circumstances. Regrets, etc. I suppose that will do?"

"I suppose it's as good as anything," said Monteith, ungraciously.

The letter was written. Then Monteith, who had been exchanging whispers with Sleath and Webb, the New House members, rose to his feet.

"Kildare commenced by saying a few words," he said. "I don't see why I shouldn't finish by doing the same. I want to make an appeal to you School House fellows, in the name of the school as a whole."

There was a grim silence. "Whoever it was did that dirty trick the other night, we all want him discovered," said Monteith. "There isn't much doubt that both the hounds belonged to the School House! Why don't you find them out? You have had some days to do it in, and you haven't done it. You don't like the attitude the New House take on the matter. Why don't you bring the guilty parties to light, then? You can't blame us if we think that you are shielding them, because you care less for the school than for the School House. That's what I want to say. You School House chaps get into the habit of talking as if you were specially concerned for the honour of St. Jim's. It's you who are smirching that honour now. Shut up, and let me finish! Some of your fellows did it, and are too cowardly to confess. You know that as well as I do. Until they confess, let's have a rest from your talk about the good of the school, and the honour of the school, and the rest of it! It makes me tired."

Monteith was scoring, and the School House fellows had nothing to say.

"That's all," said Monteith, "except that, if it wasn't Kildare, it's his duty to find out who it was; and if his talk about standing together for the sake of the school isn't all gas, he'll do it!"

"I have done my best," said Kildare quietly. "There is no clue."

Monteith laughed. "I don't know what you call a clue," he said. "It doesn't require a Sherlock Holmes to find one here. What about the handkerchief that was stuffed into my mouth? I fancy that was clue enough."

Kildare rose to his feet.

"You are coming back to the old subject," he said. "I don't want a row with you, Monteith, so as there's nothing more to be done, the meeting may as well end. Good-night!"

He walked towards the door. Monteith burst into a taunting laugh.

He was too mean-spirited to understand the captain of St. Jim's, or to appreciate his motives, and he did not know what a strict command Kildare was keeping over himself.

"Wait a bit," he exclaimed. "There's one more point to be settled. What about future meetings? Are we to keep up the solemn farce of committee meetings, to decide each time that there's only a letter of excuse to be written?"

"Have you anything else to suggest?"

"Yes."

"Go on, then."

"I suggest," said Monteith, emboldened by Kildare's quietness, which he wholly misunderstood—"I suggest that you play the man, Kildare, and own up like a decent fellow, and have done with this humbug! Now—"

Kildare walked to the door again. The contemptuous indifference of his manner was too much for Monteith.

"And if you haven't the manliness to do it," he hissed, "I suggest that you shall be cut by every decent fellow in the school, and ragged until you do! I—"

He got no further. Kildare's patience might have held out, but the other School House fellows were not made of such stern stuff. A back-handed slap from Rushden smote Monteith full upon the mouth, and stopped his utterance abruptly. The prefect reeled back in surprise and rage.

In a second everyone was on his feet, and School House and New House glared at each other like tigers about to spring.

Monteith, choking with fury, leaped at Rushden with clenched fists, and the School House senior was quite ready for him; but a sudden grip upon the prefect's collar swung him back. It was the grip of Kildare's hand.

Monteith glared furiously into the pale, calm face of the captain of St. Jim's.

"Let me go!" he hissed.

And, beside himself with rage, he struck Kildare full in the face.

The hot temper of the Irish lad, long hard-held, boiled over at last. His grip tightened upon Monteith like a vice, and the prefect was dragged to the door as helplessly as if he had been an infant, and flung bodily out into the corridor.

He went reeling and staggering along, till he fell with a crash, and lay gasping.

Kildare turned back into the room. His eyes were flashing fire.

"You'd better go, Sleath and Webb," he said, "and take Monteith with you! If he wants this to go any further he's only got to say so! I've stood about as much as I intend to stand from him and from all of you!"

Webb was looking warlike, but Sleath, anxious to escape, dragged him away; and they joined the dazed and enraged prefect in the corridor. Monteith was furious, and inclined to rush back into the committee-room and seek conclusions on the spot. They forced him away, however, and the trio returned to the New House.

It was not likely that the happening at the committee meeting would long remain a secret. Before bed-time it was all over the School House and most of the fellows—especially the juniors—agreed that Kildare had acted in the most judicious manner possible.

"There's only one way of shutting up a cad like Monteith," said Blake sagely. "That is by jumping on him! Kildare was quite right; I'd have done the same in his place."

This was a clincher. Blake's audience were not inclined to disagree with him. On the contrary, the approval was hearty and unanimous.

"So would I," said Walsh; "so would we all!"

"That's so," said Blake. "Old Kildare is innocent as a baby, and we've got to back him up. The seniors are fond of sitting on us, but I'd like to know where the glory of the School House would be if it wasn't for us youngsters, as they call us. Cheek!"

"That's so," chorussed the juniors. "We'll back old Kildare up; we'll stand by him!"

Exactly what form the backing up was to take or what good it would do Kildare, was not quite clear; but there was no doubt at all about the enthusiasm and determination of the juniors of the School House.

And when Blake and his chums met together in Study No. 6, free from other ears and eyes, the chief of the School House juniors had some more to say on the subject.

"The matter won't end here, chappies," he exclaimed. "Monteith's a coward and a pig; but he can't stand being chucked about like a sack of potatoes. The New House would rise up against him if he did."

**NEXT SATURDAY:**

**"AUNT EMMA AT LYNCREFT,"**

A Tale of Lyncreft School,  
By H. Clarke Hook.

**"JUSTICE IS SURE,"**

AND A Tale of Detective Mystery,  
By Arthur S. Hardy.

**IN "PLUCK," 1D.**

"You think there will be a fight?"

"I do."

"Between a prefect and the captain of the school!" said Herries, in an awed voice.

"Just that, my pippin! And when it comes off we are going to be there, just to see fair play to Kildare, and for the sake of things generally. So keep your eyes open, Kids, and take care that we don't miss the fun."

And his faithful followers declared that they would.

#### CHAPTER 10.

##### Captain Against Prefect.

THE same evening a fag from the New House brought over a note from Monteith to Kildare. It was brief, but to the point:

"After what has happened, there are only two alternatives for you to choose from. You will either send me a written apology, or meet me at Newstead's Barn tomorrow at one.

JAMES MONTEITH.

Kildare bit his lip. He had known the challenge was coming, and after what had happened, it was impossible for him to decline it. He wrote a still more laconic reply on the back of the note.

"I shall not apologise.—E. K."

The fag took the note back to Monteith, who was awaiting the reply in his study, with three or four other New House seniors. The fag was dismissed, and Monteith opened the envelope. He read the captain's reply aloud.

"That settles it," said Webb. "He will meet you."

Monteith nodded. He didn't particularly like the prospect of meeting the finest athlete at St. Jim's in single combat, but there was no getting out of it without showing the white feather. Kildare he also believed would never fight.

Public opinion in his house had forced him to send the challenge, but he had felt pretty certain, indeed had no doubt, that Kildare would stand upon his dignity as captain of the school, and refuse to accept it. He had not done so, and the fight was bound to come off.

Well, there was a chance of a victory that would cover the prefect with glory; and even at the worst the fight would be certain to get Kildare into hot water if it came out, as Monteith meant that it should.

For a captain of St. Jim's to fight a prefect was unheard of, and the doctor would be terribly incensed when he heard.

"Yes, that settles it," agreed Monteith. "I'm not sorry it's come to this. Of course, it's a disgraceful affair, between the two head boys of the school; but I've never had a chance of getting my own back for the trick Kildare played me that night."

"I suppose there's no doubt Kildare did it?" hesitated Webb.

"No, there isn't!" Monteith snapped.

"I mean, he looked uncommonly sincere when he said he knew nothing about it to-night; and that other thing he said was true—none of us ever knew him tell a cram."

"Rats! Anyway, it was some School House cads, and he's shielding them."

"Yes, I suppose it comes to that."

"Of course it does!" growled Monteith. "Anyway, we're going to meet, and I shall do my best to lick him. If I get licked I can stand it."

"We shall have to be careful to keep it from the doctor's ears," remarked Webb. "There would be a beastly row if it came out."

"I don't see how it can come out."

At the same time, Monteith fully intended that it should come out. A careless word dropped in the presence of his fag was sufficient. The fight would not be without witnesses.

The next day—Saturday—matters were worse instead of better at St. Jim's. The boys of the rival houses did not speak—and usually scowled—when they met, either in class or out of it.

The masters took no notice, though they saw well enough what was going on. Even the doctor could not help noticing the bitterness that was rampant.

Perhaps it occurred to the Head then that his way of dealing with the matter had not been the most judicious possible; but if so he could not very well retreat, and so he affected to see nothing, and went his way, and made no sign.

After school Blake and his chums were keenly on the lookout. One of them kept watch without ceasing upon Kildare, taking the duty in turns. The usual half-holiday being rescinded, lessons were to recommence in the afternoon. Now, Blake was certain that the anticipated fight would not take place within the precincts of St. Jim's, and equally certain that the combatants would not go abroad after dark for the meeting.

He therefore sagely deduced that if they fought that day at all, the fight would come off in the middle of the day. He was right; and he knew it when Digby came racing in with the news that he had seen Kildare and Darrel go down to the gates.

"They're off!" said Blake, jumping up. "Come on, Kids!"

And the three juniors were soon hot on the track. Blake spotted the two seniors just outside the gates, and the three followed cautiously in the wake of Kildare and Darrel.

They took excellent care not to allow the seniors to see them, and this was not difficult, for the captain and his chum were thinking of anything but the juniors.

"They're going to Newstead's Barn," said Herries suddenly, as Kildare and Darrel left the lane by a stile. "What do you say to cutting across the fields and getting there first?"

"Jolly good idea!" said Blake.

And the trio did so at once. They quickly arrived at the barn, and as it would not have been judicious to allow their presence to be known, they climbed upon the roof. From this coign of vantage they would be able to view all the proceedings, themselves unobserved.

Five minutes later Kildare arrived, with Darrel. The two stopped by the barn. It was a quiet and solitary place, shaded by trees—the ideal spot for such an encounter. The two seniors stood waiting. Kildare's face was clouded. Darrel looked at him curiously more than once.

"If it was anybody but you, Kildare, I shouldn't know what to think," he said presently. "You look as if you were going to a funeral."

Kildare smiled faintly.

"I don't feel very cheerful, Darrel. This is a beastly affair."

"Monteith deserves all you can give him."

"I know he does, and more; but don't you see that this places me in his hands? This is really what he has always aimed at. I have allowed him to provoke me into a row. I ought to have kept my temper."

"You kept it too long as it was. Any other fellow would have wiped up the ground with the cad long ago."

"Still, it's different with the captain of the school. It's wrong for me to fight, but I couldn't refuse the challenge after throwing him out of the room. If it comes to the doctor's ears, what shall I have to say for myself?"

"But it won't. Even Monteith wouldn't be cad enough to tell. I suppose."

"These things have a way of getting out," said Kildare. "Well, never mind, it can't be helped now. Here comes Monteith!"

Monteith, with Sleath and Webb, was coming through the trees. The greeting of the two parties was of the curtest, and they immediately came to business. Preliminaries were quickly arranged. Webb took out his watch to act as time-keeper.

"Three-minute rounds and one-minute rests," he said, "and fight till one is licked. Is that satisfactory? Then fall to."

The combatants faced each other. Brave and stalwart Kildare looked as he stepped up to the line. Monteith did not cut nearly so fine a figure. However, he managed to make a pretty good show of spirit, and the fight commenced.

The first round was lacking in liveliness; the foemen were taking each other's measure. In the second round Kildare began to press, and his boxing was seen to be superior to Monteith's. His blows came home again and again, while the prefect hardly touched him, and Monteith was looking dazed at the end of the round.

In the third, Monteith succeeded in getting home a right-hander which made Kildare stagger; but as he followed it up, Kildare countered, and put in a splendid upper-cut with his left, which sent the prefect flying.

"Bravo!"

The group of seniors turned their heads at the sudden shout, and discerned the trio of juniors on the roof of the barn. It was Blake who had thus unintentionally betrayed his presence, but he was by no means abashed when he saw that he was discovered.

"It's all right!" he called out coolly. "We've only come to see fair play. You can get on, my pippins! Good old School House!"

"Yah!" came a counter-yell. "School House cads! New House is cock house!"

Blake stared. The shout came from a tree near the barn, and now that his attention was drawn towards it he discerned three figures among the bare branches—the lanky form of Figgins on a lower branch, and the "Co." on a higher one.

"Hallo! Are you there?" exclaimed Blake. "Come to see your captain licked?"

"No, yours!" replied Wynn.

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Kildare frowned at the rival juniors.  
"You'd better be off, all of you!" he exclaimed.

"Time!" said Webb.

And the fourth round commenced, and the juniors were forgotten. Both the seniors were warming to their work now, and heavy blows were given and received on both sides. But all along Kildare had the best of it.

Physically the two might be equal, but the captain's wind was sounder, and there was no question but that he was pluckier and more resolute.

When he really began to receive punishment, in fact, Monteith would gladly have thrown up the sponge, and it was only for the sake of appearances that he kept on.

His efforts were mainly devoted to self-defence, and his attacking was feeble, and such tactics could only end one way in the long run.

At last, in the sixth round, a tremendous drive from Kildare sent him with a crash to the ground, and at the call of "Time!" he only blinked and groaned. Kildare stood waiting for him to come on.

"Buck up!" said Webb, in a whisper. "Look at those Kids looking on and grinning! For the honour of the New House, you know!"

Monteith gritted his teeth. The honour of the New House did not seem so important to him just then as escaping from Kildare's knock-down blows; but it was the penalty of greatness. He was captain of the New House, and as such he was expected to fight till he dropped.

He rose, with Sleath's assistance, and faced Kildare again, with as good a grace as he could muster.

"Time!" said Webb.

At it again the adversaries went, hammer and tongs. Monteith, spiteful and enraged, did his best, and he got in some stinging blows; but the round ended in a right-hander from Kildare, and the prefect went down again with a crash. Sleath tried to raise him, but he pushed him away.

"Buck up!" said Webb.

"Hang you," gasped Monteith, "I'm done! If you want any more, take it yourself!"

"Done? Remember the honour of the New House!"

"Blow the honour of the New House! Shut up!"

Kildare looked at the fallen prefect steadily.

"I am quite satisfied, if you are, Monteith," he said, "and I am perfectly willing to take your hand in friendship if you will admit that you were mistaken about that matter."

Monteith scowled savagely.

"I am not likely to admit that I am mistaken, when I know I am not!" he snarled. "As for your friendship, keep it for those that value it!"

Kildare turned away. Darrel helped him on with his coat, and Sleath did the same for the prefect. Monteith had been licked—hopelessly licked—but the School House juniors on the roof of the barn made no sound, out of a chivalrous respect for a fallen foe; and the New House youngsters in the tree looked at each other glumly.

"Those kids will chatter," said Darrel. "It is unlucky. The affair is bound to get out now."

Blake heard the remark, and he flushed with indignation.

"Here, I say, Darrel, cheese it!" he exclaimed. "Who's certain to chatter, I'd like to know? You don't know what you are talking about!"

"Do you mean that that you will be able to hold your tongues?"

"Why, of course; and so will Figgins & Co."

"It's no good," said Kildare quietly. "Look there!"

He nodded towards a fence at some little distance, which was crowned with a row of heads, a dozen of them, all belonging to New House juniors.

Darrel's brow darkened.

"It looks to me as if all the New House had been let into the secret!" he exclaimed hotly.

Monteith gave a sneering laugh.

"Is that meant for me?" he exclaimed. "What about your own brats? There are at least three of them on the spot, I believe."

"Don't argue," said Kildare. "Come along, old chap! It can't be helped now."

The chums walked away together. Kildare's face was gloomy, and Darrel's scarcely more cheerful.

"There will be a row over this, Kildare," the latter said abruptly. "It will be the talk of the school before evening."

"No doubt about that."

"The Head will hear of it by to-morrow."

"I suppose so."

"There will be a row."

"I'm certain of that. It's no use complaining, Darrel. I know what to expect, and I can make up my mind to it."

"And what is that?" asked Darrel, with a deep breath.

"Dr. Holmes will ask me to resign my position."

Darrel gasped.

"Resign?"

"I expect so. And, as a matter of fact, I can't blame him. There's a stigma on the School House till the guilty party is discovered, and suspicion rests on me. He expects me to do something to clear it up."

"You have done all you can."

"Which is nothing. Now, this fight on top of my failure will be the last straw. Well, it's no good talking about it. I shall have to stand it, I suppose."

"Hang it!" said Darrel. "I wish I knew who played that trick on Monteith. I'd wring his measly neck!"

"I dare say it will never be discovered now. The fellows, whoever they were, will keep close for their own sake. Only there's one thing I am beginning to feel pretty sure about."

"What's that?"

"That they were not School House fellows at all."

Darrel looked thoughtful.

"I can't call to mind any chaps it might have been," he said. "But is it likely that New House fellows would use their own captain like that?"

"He's not popular there. They only back him up because it's the New House against the School House. He has enemies on his own side."

"It's rough that we should stand all the odium if that's really the case."

"There seems to be no getting at the truth," said Kildare. "The only chance is that the fellows will confess, and that's not likely. The affair has given Monteith a hand to play that he knows how to make the best of. Unless the unexpected happens, Darrel, I am afraid St. Jim's will be electing a new captain next week."

## CHAPTER II.

### Kildare Resigns.

THE School House juniors descended from the roof of the barn. Figgins & Co. had slid down from the tree.

The seniors walked away from the spot without taking any notice of them, and the rival parties were left on the scene of the combat, eyeing each other very dubiously.

"I suppose you chaps won't deny," said Blake sweetly,

"that the School House is cock house of St. Jim's now?"

"Well, rather!" said Figgins hotly. "Yah! School House Kids! Cads!"

"Who licked your blooming prefect?" demanded Blake.

"Who wiped up the ground with him?" hooted Herries.

"Who could do it again, with one hand?" howled Digby.

"Kildare! School House is cock house!"

"Rot!" said Figgins. "Kildare may have licked Monteith, but there isn't a junior in the School House who could lick me!"

"Isn't there?" demanded Blake, with a warlike look.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Wynn. "There's the bell. Come along!"

The sound of the bell prevented the threatened outbreak of hostilities. The juniors trooped back to the school.

Now, Blake and his chums, and perhaps Figgins & Co. might have kept the secret of what they had seen at Newstead's Barn; but the dozen or so New House juniors who had also witnessed the fight had no idea of keeping it dark.

They talked of it right and left, and spread the story of the fight through the length and breadth of St. Jim's.

If anyone had felt doubt as to its accuracy, the looks of Kildare and Monteith were sufficient to prove it.

Kildare had escaped the more lightly of the two; but his face bore very visible signs of punishment, while Monteith's physiognomy was extremely cut and bruised.

Sooner or later the masters were bound to hear of it, and from them it was certain to pass to the ears of the doctor.

It was only a question of time, and the time was a most unpleasant one for Kildare. He knew that he would be called over the coals for it, and he would have been glad to have the expected interview with the doctor over and done with, whatever the result of it.

The next day was Sunday, and a quiet one at St. Jim's. The storm held off. But on Monday it burst. Kildare received a message asking him curtly to come to the head-master's study.

"It's come," he said to Darrel. "Well, it's no use complaining."

And his head was very erect as he walked to the dreaded apartment. He had done nothing to be ashamed of; he was only the victim of unfortunate circumstances and of the cunning of an unscrupulous enemy, and he did not fear to look the doctor or any other person in the face with his fearless Irish eyes.

"Come in!" said the doctor coldly. He looked at the captain of St. Jim's with a stern glance as he entered the room. "A very painful matter has come to my notice, Kildare," he went on, in the same uncompromising tone.

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"I am informed that you have so far forgotten the dignity of your position in the school, and the confidence placed in you, as to enter into a fight, and with a prefect."

"Yes, sir."

The frank, quiet admission seemed to puzzle the doctor.

"It is true, then?"

"It is true that I have had a fight with Monteith."

"Why?"

"It was over that old affair, sir. He persists in believing me guilty. I do not mean to cast the blame upon him. Believing as he does, it is natural, I suppose, that he should bear malice. That was the reason."

"But you should have refused to fight. With what justice can you stop the fighting among the juniors if you indulge in it yourself?"

Kildare was silent.

"About that other affair?" resumed the doctor. "Nothing has come to light. I need not say that, as captain of the school, you should be better able to form an opinion, and to make an investigation among the boys, than myself. I have, in fact, relied upon you, and nothing has come of it."

"I have done my best."

The doctor coughed.

"No doubt; but your failure has given colour to the suspicion that you had a hand in it."

Kildare flushed hotly.

"Do you believe that, sir?" he exclaimed.

"Not at all. But the suspicion remains; and, as I have said, it gains ground. So long as it exists, you must see for yourself that the situation is awkward in the extreme, as you hold the position of captain of the school."

"I understand, sir," said Kildare quietly. "You wish me to resign?"

"I did not say so. I have pointed out the facts as they stand, and I leave you to act according to your judgment. I may say that I had formed my opinion even before hearing of this latest exploit of yours."

"Very well, sir, I will resign."

The doctor nodded.

"I cannot deny that I consider it the wisest step you could take, Kildare. When your name is cleared of suspicion, the case will be altered. I have no more to say."

Kildare left the study in a very depressed mood. Darrel met him in the corridor.

"Well?"

"I have resigned."

"And the doctor has accepted it?"

"Yes."

"Rotten!" said Darrel.

Blake was coming along the corridor. He stopped, and stared open-mouthed at the two seniors.

"Hallo! What's that?" he exclaimed. "Are you off your rocker, Kildare? Resigned! What do you mean by it?"

"Shut up!" said Darrel.

But Kildare gave the boy a nod and a smile. Blake's evident concern rather touched him, and he could forgive the junior's way of expressing himself.

"Yes; I have resigned the captaincy," he said. "All St. Jim's will know it soon, as I am going to put it on the notice-board."

"But you'll tell us why, Kildare, won't you?"

"That's no secret. It's because the chaps haven't been found out who used Monteith so badly that night in the bike-shed. The New House believes me guilty, and will until the right parties are discovered, which may be never. Things will go on more smoothly under a new captain."

And Kildare walked away, leaving Blake dumbfounded. The junior hurried off to Study No. 6. He burst into it like a whirlwind, making Herries and Digby jump in alarm.

"I say, you chaps, what do you think?"

"What's the news, you howling wild Indian?"

"Kildare's resigned!"

"Done what?"

"Resigned the captaincy. And now, you mark my words, if Cad Monteith doesn't have a try for it!" said Blake impressively.

The juniors looked at each other in genuine alarm.

"We must stop that!" said Herries decidedly.

"Rather," agreed Digby. "Fancy that cad as captain of St. Jim's!"

The trio left their study. They found a crowd round the notice-board in the hall. There was a brief notice on it, in Kildare's handwriting, on a sheet of paper. It stated that, owing to the mystery still surrounding the affair of the bike-shed, and the suspicions entertained by a section of the school, the captain of St. Jim's had deemed it advisable to resign his post. A new election for captain would be held at some date and time to be specified by the Head.

The School House read the notice with dismay. A new election! Then, as likely as not, some New House cad would get in as captain.

That would be a blow from which the college of St. Jim's would never recover—at least so declared the youngsters of the School House.

Very different views were held in the rival house. The news was received "over the way" with unmixed satisfaction.

Monteith's eyes gleamed when he heard it. This was what he had been working for for a long time, and now suddenly, success more complete than he had dared to hope for, and he was proportionately jubilant.

"Now's our chance," he said to Sleath. "Now's our chance to run a candidate, and get the post of captain for the New House. That will be a take-down for them. Sleath, we simply must get me in as captain when the election comes off."

"Right you are, Monty! We'll work it. I hardly expected the thing to pan out like this, though. We are in luck!"

The other New House seniors were of the same mind. Monteith would be their candidate, and they were determined by hook or by crook to carry the election of the head prefect of the New House when the date came round for appointing the new captain of St. Jim's.

It would be a heavy blow at the prestige of the School House, and a signal triumph over their rivals, if they could succeed in carrying their point.

The juniors of the New House were still more enthusiastic about the matter than the elders. A mass meeting was held in the common-room, and speeches were made, and a great deal of excitement followed; but the meeting was not complete, for Figgins & Co. were absent. The three leaders of the New House juniors had been a good deal less in the public eye of late than was their custom, and their house-fellows were beginning to wonder what was the matter with them.

They had not usually been backward in coming forward. After an excited discussion, a deputation of the Lower Fourth went to the study where the trio were doing, or pretending to do, their preparation, to interview them upon the subject.

"Hallo!" said Figgins ungraciously. "What do you kids want?"

"We want you," said Gunn. "What are you hiding yourselves for? Why didn't you attend the meeting, you bouncers?"

"Got something better to do," said Figgins. "Blow your old meetings!"

"But it's about the election."

"What election?"

"For a new captain."

"Why, the date ain't fixed yet!"

"Nothing like being ready."

"Oh, you're too precious, you are! Travel!"

"But I say, Figgy, what's the matter with you? We've got to get in our candidate, you know, against the one the School House put up. They're sure to put up Darrel. We're going to get Monteith in as captain by hook or by crook."

Figgins gave a jump.

"Monteith?"

"Yes."

"As captain of St. Jim's?"

"Yes, of course. Why not?"

"That chap?" exclaimed Figgins. "Why, he is about fit to be captain of a convict prison, that's what he's fit for. It's bad enough to have him for our prefect, without making him captain of St. Jim's."

"I don't say he's an angel," replied Gunn, "but he's our man. It's up against the School House, you know."

"Rats! Besides, how do you know Kildare's going to lose the post?"

"He's resigned, ain't he?"

"Only because they haven't found out who tied up Monteith."

"Oh, Kildare did that, right enough."

"You're a silly ass!" answered Figgins politely. "Kildare didn't; and if the truth comes out in time, he'll withdraw his resignation."

"Oh, that's all rot, you know! It won't."

"That's all you know, young Gunn. Anyway, we're not going to attend any of your blessed kids' meetings. Get out of my study, do!"

The deputation retired crestfallen.

"You can go and join them, Wynn," said Figgins. "I see you want to."

"Oh, no, Figgy; it's just as you like. I—"

"Oh, go, do!"

"You're beastly snappy to-night, Figgy!"

"Rats! Get along!"

Wynn followed the deputation. Figgins and Kerr were left alone in the study. There was a long silence, and the two



"I am quite satisfied if you are, Monteith," said Kildare.

stared at each other across the table. Kerr was fidgety and nervous; Figgins was pale, and looked strained.

"What are you going to do?" said Figgins.

"I don't know," said Kerr helplessly.

"What a precious fool I was!" went on Figgins thoughtfully. "Not that I'm sorry for what I did, the beast! But it was a fool's trick."

"It was I as much as you."

"I suggested it."

"I helped to do it."

"It was my idea."

"It's no good, Figgy. One and both, we're in it together," said Kerr. "But—but is it necessary to give ourselves away? I can see what's in your mind."

"Look here, you shut up! I'm going to think."

Figgins leaned his head on his hands. Kerr watched him anxiously. Presently he looked up wearily.

"I think I'll take a turn in the quad," he said. "I can't think here."

"Shall I come with you?" asked Kerr timidly.

"No."

And Figgins left the study, leaving his chum looking very depressed. But it was not merely for a stroll in the quadrangle that Figgins had gone. Straight down the path he went, with a steady, unhesitating stride, towards the School House.

## CHAPTER 12.

### Good Old Figgins!

"MONTEITH!"

Jack Blake calmly put his head in at the door of the study, where Monteith sat in consultation with half a dozen New House seniors, discussing the pros and cons of his candidature for the captaincy. Monteith looked at him with a scowl.

"What do you want here, you cheeky brat?"

He reached for a cane.

"Keep your wool on, old fellow!" said Blake. "I didn't want to come into your measly old casual ward of a house; but the Head has sent me with a note."

"Give it to me." Blake handed it over. Monteith looked at it in wonder. "What on earth can the Head want with me? It can't be about the fight at this time of day?" His expression deepened when he read the note. "He wants me to go over on an important matter. So-long, you chaps! I dare say I shall be back soon."

Blake had already gone. The prefect walked across the quadrangle wondering. He entered the School House, and went straight to the doctor's study. He passed a group of juniors, and caught a word or two that puzzled him.

"I don't know what's the matter with old Figgy," Blake was saying. "He looked as pale as a ghost when he came in. I don't know what he can want with the doctor; but if he's in Queer Street, you chaps, we've got to back him up. He's a good sort, old Figgy is, though he does belong to that measly New House; and if anybody don't agree with me, I'm ready to fight him at once!"

As this generous offer was not accepted, it seemed to be unanimously agreed that Figgy was a good sort, and should be backed up if necessary.

Somewhat puzzled, Monteith passed on and knocked at the doctor's door. The deep voice of the principal bade him enter, and he started on seeing that the two others were already present—Kildare and Figgins.

Figgins was looking white and wretched, but there was an unusual firmness about his face and his form was held very erect.

"You sent for me, sir!" said Monteith wonderingly.

"Yes," said the doctor. "I have heard a very strange story, and I have sent for you and Kildare in order that it may be repeated in your presence."

Kildare and Monteith exchanged glances. It was evident that neither knew what was coming. The doctor, looking very troubled, made a sign to Figgins.

"This unhappy boy has made a startling confession," he said. "Proceed, Figgins. You adhere to your statement?"

"Yes, sir. It was I who attacked Monteith in the bike-shed that night."

Monteith gave a jump, and Kildare started. The doctor's keen eye was upon the prefect's face.

"You had no suspicion of this, Monteith?"

"Absolutely none, sir."

The doctor drew a breath of relief.

"I am glad of that. I was sure that you would not shield a boy of your own house at the expense of casting suspicion upon an innocent person. Proceed, Figgins."

"I did it," said Figgins doggedly. "I'm not sorry for it; only as it's turned out. I know you're going to expel me, sir, so I may as well speak out. I never had any idea that suspicion would fall upon anybody in particular. I never intended it to. I meant to use a duster, or something, for a gag, and, feeling about in the dark, I must have picked up Kildare's handkerchief. I didn't know it was his, and never knew it till the next day, when all the boys were talking about it."

"I am sure he is speaking the truth, sir," said Kildare.

Figgins gave him a grateful look.

"Thank you, Kildare!" he said quietly. "That's good of you, seeing what a beastly mess I got you into, though I didn't mean to. I thought it would never be known who had done it, and I was struck all of a heap when I heard about the handkerchief, and that Kildare was suspected. I know I ought to have owned up then; but I hadn't the pluck. And then, sir, before I had time to think it out, you said that the chaps who did it should be expelled, and that scared me off. I couldn't speak out. I've had a rotten time since. I never knew much what it was before to have a conscience, somehow, but the last week or two I've been having a rotten time. I'm glad it's all out."

"And I'm glad to hear you say that," said the doctor, very gravely. "But you were not alone in this matter, Figgins?"

"No, sir."

"Who was your companion?"

Figgins was silent.

"I will not press that question," said Dr. Holmes, kindly enough. "But I must have a little further explanation, Figgins. I understand that you have kept silent all this time, in spite of a pricking conscience. Why have you spoken out now?"

"Because I couldn't stand it. It was Kildare losing the captaincy through me that helped me to make up my mind. I hope that's all over now?"

"Yes," said the Head quietly; "that's all over now. Kildare will, I am sure, accede to my request, and remain captain of St. Jim's."

"If you wish it, sir," said Kildare.

"I do wish it."

"Then I withdraw my resignation, sir."

Monteith's lips came together in a tight line.

"And now, Figgins," resumed the doctor, "since you have told me so much, you may as well tell the rest. What were your motives for this unparalleled outrage? What caused you to inflict such a cruel trick upon your prefect?"

Figgins hesitated to speak.

"Speak freely," said Dr. Holmes. "Had your guilt been discovered by another, Figgins, I should have expelled you at once. Your voluntary confession places the matter on a different footing. I shall consider the matter very carefully, and show you as much mercy as is consistent with my duty as a reward for taking this honourable course. I hope it will not be necessary for me to expel you."

Figgins brightened up.

"Thank you, sir!" he muttered, with tears glistening on his eyelashes. "If—if you would let me off that, I could stand the rest."

"We shall see. Why did you attack Monteith?"

Still the junior hesitated. Precarious as his position was, schoolboy honour and custom were strong, and he could not bring himself to "sneak" upon his prefect.

"Come, come!" said the doctor, not unkindly. "I must insist upon an answer. You do not wish me to believe that your action was unprovoked?"

"No, sir," said Figgins.

And then he stopped again. The Head looked at Monteith.

"Have you any explanation to offer, Monteith?"

The prefect's brain had worked rapidly during this strange interview. He had been utterly taken by surprise at first, but now he had had time to think, he realised that his position was worse than Kildare's had been before the revelation.

If Figgins chose to speak out, and to call witnesses to prove his words, the doctor would hear a tale of thorough brutality, and Monteith would not long retain his position as head prefect of the New House.

Figgins's hesitation gave the prefect a chance, and he took it.

"Yes, sir," he said calmly. "I think I can explain it. I had occasion to punish Figgins shortly before that occurrence somewhat severely. I may have been too severe, though that was not my intention: I don't know how you will receive what I am going to say, sir, but I should like to make an appeal to you."

"Make it, by all means."

"I should like you to pardon Figgins. As the party who suffered by his action, sir," said the prefect, with an air of great frankness, "I have a sort of right to ask it. I am sure he never meant to act as badly as he did."

"We didn't mean to," said Figgins. "We meant to tell someone, and have you released, but we couldn't without giving ourselves away, and—"

"So I think, sir," went on Monteith, "a good casing will meet the case, if you are willing to rescind the sentence of expulsion."

"Quite so," said the doctor. "I— Come in!" He broke off as a timid tap came at the door.

The door opened, and Kerr entered. He was looking very pale and scared; but there was a sort of quivering determination in his face.

"What do you want, Kerr?"

"If you please, sir, I—I— Figgins has given the game away—I knew he would—and I want to tell you I—"

"Shut up!" said Figgins.

"Sha'n't!" said Kerr defiantly. "I was in it, too, sir. There! You can't make me shut up now, Figgins. I told you I would if you did."

"So you were in it, too?" said the doctor severely. "Very well, as you shared Figgins's fault, you shall share his punishment. I leave you both in the hands of your prefect, and I trust that he will cane you both to-morrow as the way you deserve. You may go."

"We—we're not to be expelled, sir?" gasped the two together.

"No."

"Oh, thank you, sir!"

And Figgins and Kerr left the study.

"And now," said the doctor, "I cannot say how glad I am this affair is cleared up. You will acknowledge, Monteith, that you were very unjust to Kildare. You see that it was a very tall junior, whom you were certain was a senior, and the culprits belonged to your own house, and not to the School House at all. I think you will see that you should apologise to Kildare for your unjust suspicions."

Monteith bit his lips.

"I am sorry, Kildare," he said, in a low voice.

Kildare nodded.

"That's all right," he said, cordially enough. "This has cleared the air a bit, and I hope we shall pull together better in future."

"I hope so, too," said the doctor. "One word more, Monteith. I'm afraid you have been too severe with your juniors, and I hope you will make it a point to temper justice with a little more mercy in future. Good-night!"

Monteith returned to his own house, with black hatred in his heart. His brief dream of becoming captain of St. Jim's was over, and Kildare's position in the school was stronger than ever. To save himself he had had to save Figgins. But he consoled himself with the prospect of taking it out of that young gentleman on the morrow. And he did.

Figgins had the caning of his life the next morning, but he bore it with fortitude, glad to escape with that. He had fully expected to be expelled from the school, and a caning, however severe, seemed cheap in comparison.

The clearing of Kildare's name from all suspicion was rather a blow to the New House fellows, who had so loudly and so confidently asserted his guilt. But, upon reflection, the best of them went over to the School House and asked the captain's pardon.

Figgins's revelation had come like a bombshell to the juniors of his own house, and they were inclined to rag him pretty severely. But the long-limbed chief of the New House juniors was quite able to defend himself, and the "Co." stood by him faithfully, and so the symptoms of mutiny were stamped out. And, at the same time, Figgins had jumped into popularity in the rival house.

The chap who had "scrapped" Cad Monteith was a hero in their eyes, and his coming forward to clear Kildare was an action they could admire and appreciate. And Jack Blake really put the sentiments of the School House juniors into words when he went over and interviewed Figgins.

"You're a jolly good sort, Figgins," said Blake, affectionately tapping his old enemy on the shoulder. "And you can call yourselves cock house of St. Jim's, old man, and not a fellow on our side will say you nay—till the football match, which will settle the question for the rest of this term."

THE END.

(The famous football match, and the further adventures of Jack Blake, Figgins, and the others, will be recorded in Charles Hamilton's next great school story, "The Rivals," to appear in PLUCK Saturday week. Next Saturday "Aunt Emma at Lyncroft," by H. Clarke Hook, a screaming school tale.)

**NEXT SATURDAY:**

**"AUNT EMMA AT LYNCROFT."**

A Tale of Lyncroft School,  
By H. Clarke Hook.

AND **"JUSTICE IS SURE."**  
A Tale of Detective Hardy,  
By Arthur S. Hardy.

IN **"PLUCK," 1D.**