

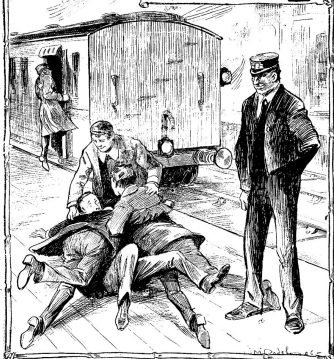
A GRAND LONG SCHOOL TALE.

PLUCK

THE RIVALS.
LONG, COMPLETE SCHOOL NOVEL.

THE DUFFER;
OR THE REPORTER DETECTIVE.

1^D



DIGBY RAN RIGHT INTO GEORGE EDWARD, WHO WENT DOWN ON THE PLATFORM. DIGBY FELL OVER HIM, AND HERRIES, COMING BY IN A HURRY, FELL OVER DIG, WHILE BLAKE AT ONCE MADE THE CONFUSION WORSE. (See page 77.)

NO. 110, VOL. 5, NEW SERIES.

"BAN CHANG'S SCHOOLDAYS" NEXT SATURDAY!

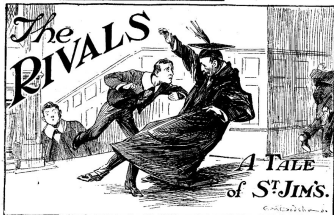
ONE
PENNY.

EVERY
SATURDAY.

PLUCK

[VOL. 5, No. 100, NEW SERIES.]

Our Long, Complete School Novel



A Splendid Story of Sport, Fun, and Adventure, and the Great Feud between the New House and the School House at St. Jim's College.

CHAPTER I.

School House versus the New House.

JACK BLANK came into Study No. 5 in the School House at St. Jim's, with a look of unusual excitement upon his face.

"Sit you down, Herries and Digby, were painfully busy with their preparation for the following morning, and they did not look up at his entrance.

"Now, you chaps!" exclaimed Jack. "Shut that no away. There's no time for that now!"

"Oh, bother your nose!" said Herries crossly. "Run away and play! Go and war cake! Bust off and hold your nose! Can't you see I'm busy!"

"Look here—"

"Success! Hail Nero!" cried Herries. "Caligula, avast! Nero!"

Jack picked up the book of *Katoplos*, and jerked him into a corner of the room.

"Now listen to me!" he exclaimed severely. "Talk about Nero killing while Rome was burning! How are you two bouders swilling over rotten Latin when the banner of the School House is at stake!"

"Hallo, what's the row?" asked Herries, getting in-

truded. "Those New House cabs been up in their tricks again?"

"They soon will if we don't stop them," said Blake impatiently. "The honor of the School House and the property of St. Jim's generally is at stake, and here I find you with your nose in a beastly book. I wonder what would happen if I wasn't here to look after you kids!"

As Jack was the youngest of the three chaps of Study No. 5, this was rather cool just then for him.

"Well, get on," said Herries. "What's the game?"

"I've just come up from the hall. There's a notice on the board."

"Concerning us?" asked Herries and Digby together, wide-eyed.

"Yes, in a way. There's to be an election to-morrow for the new treasurer of the school club. You see how short the time is, and if we School House chaps are to prevent one of these New House bouders from getting it, we shall have to look up."

And the three juniors looked at each other with a gravity becoming the seriousness of the situation.

A serious situation it was, from the point of view of Study No. 5, at all events.

Arrangements of the School House, had held the post referred

to, and he had left St. Jim's suddenly. Who would be his successor was a matter of speculation. The New House boys naturally would have been glad to see a fellow of their own side in Arrattage's place. This natural ambition was regarded as unwarrantable assumption by the School House boys, who wondered how the New House could have the cheek to think of such a thing. The juniors hoped that Kildare, the captain, would appoint a new treasurer by right divine the captain of all St. Jim's, and a hotly postulated the suggestion that the captain's powers were not hereditary.

The captain, however, had no idea of exceeding the prerogative of the juniors would have bestowed upon him, and as the election appeared on the board in the usual way, that an election would be held to fill the vacant post of treasurer.

Study 6 were inclined to regard this as rather a weak-kneed concession to the enemy; but so things were, and they had to make the best of it.

"So there's to be an election," said Digby. "The New House is certain to put up a candidate. Montholt won't let such an opportunity slip for giving the School House one in the eye."

"That's so," agreed Blake. "As a matter of fact, I have it from one of the Rats that Montholt, being head prefect, is going to put up Blah as a candidate. His own bludge—you know the beam—a howling and even for the New House. And he'll get in if we don't do something. Kildare is no slow. He's not up to their tricks. We shall have to look to it that the School House doesn't get left in the lurch."

"Of course, it would never do to let the New House get their man in. They showed in Montholt as vice-captain at the election at the beginning of the term, and Kildare stood by and let them do it."

"Oh, look no slow for anything!" said Blake. "We've got to look to it. And I can tell you that Figgins & Co. will be here, too. They'll get their man in if they can."

"Let's go down and begin scheming!" exclaimed Horrie. "There's no time to be lost. Fancy a Rat in as treasurer! He'd be slipping off with the funds one of these fine days. Come on!"

"What about prep?" hesitated Digby.

"Look here, if you say another word about prep, at such a time as this," exclaimed Blake, exasperated—"another syllable, mind, I'll jam your head against the wall."

"But there'll be a row!"

"Oh, try it!"

"You'll be a row to-morrow morning if we don't finish."

"But will be any good, you see?"

"Oh, all right," said Digby. "I'll come. Only—"

"Rats!"

Digby's doubt being thus set at rest, the trio left the study, and proceeded to join the crowd who were collected round the notice-board, where the announcements to the school were posted up. There was a paper in the captain's handwriting pinned up, and this was the centre of attraction. The announcement was laconic in the extreme.

"An election will be held to fill the office of treasurer to-morrow, Wednesday, at 8—E. Kildare, Captain."

In the crowd before the board was conspicuous the lady form of Figgins, the leader of the juniors of the New House, and Wynne and Kerr, his inseparable satellites, were with him. They were conversing upon the notice, and they raised their voices for Blake's benefit as they observed him approaching.

"Watch in the man," remarked Figgins. "I heard Montholt say so. Of course, we must get in a New House man. I don't say anything against Arrattage of course. He was a decent chap, though he belonged to the School House. Still, one can't be too careful. When it's a question of trusting the club funds into a chap's hands, you can't be too careful."

"Of course not!" said Kerr. "We must get one of our chaps in, for the sake of the school."

"That's it," said Figgins. "We ought to have the post, on each house at St. Jim's."

"Rats!" broke in Blake. "Who's your boss? What are those New House boys doing down here! Show them out, chaps."

"You'd better try it on," said Figgins threateningly. "Just you begin, and I'll—"

"What will you do? To a chap up in the bilge-ched like you did never any prefect!"

Figgins flushed hotly at this retort.

"Well, you wouldn't have dared to!" he exclaimed. "I'd like to see you show up one of here, you School House chaps! I'll only like to see it!"

"Anything to oblige," said Blake politely. "Come on, kids!"

"Back up School House!" shouted Horrie.

And there was a rush and a scuffle immediately.

The New House juniors, who were outnumbered, were pushed to the door and ignominiously hurled forth, amid jeers and gibes from the victors.

Figgins rolled down the steps, and Wynne rolled on top of

him. Now, Wynne was the tall boy of St. Jim's, and when he fell on a slippery, the individual underneath was certain to feel it. Figgins gasped and collapsed. Wynne rolled off him, and Figgins staggered rather dazedly to his feet.

"Cave!" muttered Horrie, in the midst of the laughter from the top of the steps, as he heard a steady door open, and the School House juniors vanished from the scene as a master came out to ascertain the cause of the uproar. The master had doubtfully brought a cane with him, but all he discovered was a glimpse of winking legs on the staircase and down the passageway. It was the master of the School House.

"Dear me!" said Mr. Kidd, looking round him. "Dear me!"

The next moment he gave a yawn.

Figgins, seeing red, and charged up the steps again, bent upon vengeance. He was oblivious of the fact that his comrades had disappeared.

Right in his case, and he charged the house-master in the frock flogger style, and floured him as if he had been shot.

"I'll give you something, you beast!" howled Figgins.

"I'll—I'll—Oh!"

He stopped, gasping, as Mr. Kidd rose to his feet, looking very disturbed.

"Figgins!" gasped Mr. Kidd. "So it is you, Figgins?"

"No, sir," gasped Figgins—"I mean you, sir."

"How dare you, Figgins. What do you mean by it?"

"Nothing, sir. I didn't mean anything."

"You didn't mean anything by charging into the house like a—like a ball of dust?" demanded the house-master sternly.

"No, sir. I'm sorry, sir. I was in a—in a hurry."

"I think you must have been. What were you in a hurry for?"

"I—I wanted to speak to Blake, sir."

"Oh, you wanted to speak to Blake, did you?" said Mr. Kidd dryly. "Quite in a friendly way, of course?"

"Of course!" agreed Figgins unthinkingly. "You see, sir, Blake and me were talking—"

"Blake and me?" exclaimed the master severely. "How can you say such a thing, Figgins?"

"I didn't, sir. I didn't mention you. I said Blake and me."

"You should have said Blake and I were talking."

"I didn't know you were, sir."

"Figgins!"

"I didn't, sir," Figgins fervently declared. "If I had known you were here, I shouldn't have rushed in as I did. I didn't know you were talking to Blake."

"I wasn't talking to Blake," exclaimed Mr. Kidd, putting unexpressed. "I do not know whether you are as stupid as you pretend to be, Figgins."

Figgins looked bewildered.

"But you said, sir—you distinctly said—"

"I said that you should say that Blake and I were talking. You must not say that I say that I said that you say—I mean—that is to say—"

Mr. Kidd was getting rather mixed.

"I mean to say that you should say—"

"Yes, sir!" said Figgins, with respectful attention. "Oh, I say!"

Mr. Kidd coughed.

"You may go, Figgins."

"Thank you, sir."

And Figgins scuttled off before the house-master had time to change his mind.

Mr. Kidd looked after him rather dubiously. He did not quite believe that Figgins was so dull as he affected to be. Had he seen the grin upon the features of Figgins as he left a retreat, his doubts would have been set at rest.

CHAPTER 3.

The Final Candidates.

JAMES MONTHOLT, head prefect of the New House at St. Jim's, walked across the quadrangle towards the School House. There was a lurking expression upon the prefect's face, a sour face that would have told a lot to observers that he meant mischief.

"Hallo!" said Blake, as he spotted the prefect, "here's the Montholt beast! I wonder what he wants over on our side."

"Come to jaw over the election with Kildare, perhaps," said Horrie.

"Like his cheek!" growled Blake.

Montholt smiled at the jokers as he passed them. He had a vivid recollection of the occasion when he had visited the School House, and Blake had scored a goal with a football upon his classic features, and he had never forgotten the vengeance. Blake replied to the sneer with a snarl and a few of extreme politeness, taking care at the same time to keep well out of the prefect's reach.

Harold's suggestion seemed to be the right one, for Montzith looked at the door of Kildare's study, and went in.

The big, handsome Irish lad who was captain of St. Jim's gave him a cheery nod as he came in. Kildare did not like the prefect, but he always strove to keep on a friendly footing with him and with everybody.

"Hello, Montzith!" he said. "Glad to see you. Come to talk about the election, I suppose?"

"That's it," said Montzith. "Sit down and make yourself at home."

Montzith sat down.

"I've fixed the election for to-morrow night," said Kildare. "I suppose that's all right for you? I hear the New House are going to put up a candidate."

"Yes, Sleath."

Kildare's brows knitted just a trifle. Sleath was Montzith's enemy, and was not greatly liked even in his own house. He was a buddy to Montzith, and was said to be no class by St. Jim's generally.

"Have you any objection to make?" asked Montzith, noticing Kildare's expression.

"Certainly not."

"You oppose of the candidature?"

"Well, I can't say that exactly," replied Kildare honestly. "Sleath is not a fellow I take to, and there are better men in the school for the post."

"That's not my opinion."

"Well, let each of us keep his own opinion," said Kildare carefully. "Darrel is going to put up, and the votes will decide which of them St. Jim's regards as the better man."

"So the School House has a candidate?" said Montzith slowly.

"Yes, Darrel."

"That's what I want to speak to you about, Kildare," said Montzith abruptly. "So far, you will admit, the posts have been very unevenly divided. You are captain of the club, and I am vice, and that's fair enough. But up till now both the treasurer and secretary have been School House fellows."

"They were elected by the whole school."

"I know that; but do you think it quite fair?"

"Yes, I must say that I do."

"Well, I don't, then," said Montzith vigorously. "I think it would be fairer if the offices were equally divided. Besides, of your house, I am secretary, and I don't see anything against Sleath of ours, being treasurer."

"He will be if he is elected."

"That isn't the question. I think, under the circumstances, the School House ought not to put up a candidate."

Kildare looked grave.

"I don't see that, Montzith. If a member of School House fellows think Darrel will make a good treasurer, why shouldn't they vote for him?"

"Because, as I have said, the offices ought, in common fairness, to be equally divided between the two houses."

"Oh, that's all that, you know? This is a matter that concerns the whole school and not either of the houses specially."

"Yes, I've heard that sort of talk before," said Montzith, with a sneer. "Talk is cheap, and so far, you School House fellows have managed to get things to suit yourselves, in spite of your talk."

Kildare bit his lip.

The prefect's manner was very hard to bear, but a quarrel would make matters no better, and Kildare had learned to be patient.

"Under the circumstances, it would be only graceful for the School House to allow the election to be a walk-over for our men," continued Montzith. "If you said a word, Kildare, Darrel would withdraw sharp enough."

"I dare say he would; but—"

"But you won't say it?"

"Let me finish. I might think it of, not because I regard your claim as just, but for the sake of peace and quietness, if your candidate were anybody but Sleath. But I think he would fill the post as well as Darrel, and that's a fact."

"I don't see that the post is so very onerous. Sleath is good at accounts, and I suppose he can be trusted not to embezzle the money?"

"Don't willfully misunderstand me, Montzith," said Kildare, rather sternly. "You know that I was thinking of nothing of the kind. But I'll tell you what might be done. Put up a man the whole school respects, and I'll speak to Darrel."

"I don't quite see your point."

"Well, withdraw Sleath, and put up, say, Webb or Baker. They are New House fellows, and respected by all St. Jim's. Sleath isn't respected."

"I know some of you make a set against him, because he is my class."

"I don't do anything of the kind. I only say he isn't

respected, and he isn't. To show I have no bias against the New House, I have suggested a couple of names belonging to your side. Darrel isn't at all anxious to stand, and he'd willingly step down to make room for either of the chaps I have mentioned."

"We are not likely to withdraw a candidate at your dictation, Kildare. We are old enough to know our own business best, I suppose."

"Very well, if you put it like that, there's nothing more to be said."

"Neither Webb nor Baker would be bad enough to take an advantage of Sleath like that," said Montzith. "I shall tell them what you suggest, but they will reject anything of the kind. I'm pretty certain of that."

"The fact is, you are determined to have a grievance!" exclaimed Kildare impatiently. "I'm sorry you can't agree, but really I think it's your own fault. Anyway, if the matter goes to a fair election, the whole school will decide it, and nothing could be fairer than that."

Montzith rose to his feet.

"Very well, you refuse my proposition. I shall know in future how much fair play to ask for from the School House. But don't think you'll carry this election easily, Kildare. We shall make a fight for it, and if we don't get our man in, it won't be our fault."

He left Kildare looking very worried.

The matter over trouble between the two houses, and a further widening of the breach, already wide enough.

But Kildare had done all he could, and he could make no further concessions. Besides, he had a strong suspicion that concessions would be futile. Montzith was on the warpath, and concessions would only encourage him to further claims.

The prefect went straight back to his house, to his own study, where half a dozen seniors of the New House were awaiting his return.

They were an election committee, called together by Montzith, and they were anxious to know what was the captain's answer to the proposition made to him.

"Well, what said the oracle?" asked Webb.

"I'll let be refused," exclaimed Sleath. "You won't catch the School House giving a single point away to us in a hurry."

"Sleath's right," said Montzith. "Kildare refused to entertain the proposition at all. He went over the old ground, that an election would show which side of us a whole wanted for treasurer, and that was it, done's master a rap to us who's treasurer, and that was it, the principle of the thing we've got to stand up for."

"That's so," said several voices. "So the School House champion is to stand?"

"Yes, Kildare made a counter-proposition, which I at once refused."

"What was it?"

"He suggested that we should throw Sleath over, and he would allow us to put up any other fellow in his place. He mentioned Webb's and Baker's names. I told him that neither of them would be bad enough to go back on his own candidate."

The two seniors mentioned looked at each other.

Montzith had put it cunningly, and after what he had said neither of them could very well show any desire to approve of Kildare's selection.

"So you see how it stands," went on the prefect. "If we let Kildare dictate to us, he'll graciously permit our candidate to have a chance. That won't do for us. He won't give us fair play, so there's nothing for it but to appeal to the school. And I think we shall be able to get our candidate in."

"We must," said Baker. "The School House have had it their way too long. We simply must get a New House man in as treasurer, and we don't ask any favours of Kildare, either."

"Right you are," agreed Webb.

"That's the tonic," said Montzith. "If we are careful we ought to pull it off. The voting is certain to be very close, so we mustn't miss a chance. Every kid must be whipped into line to-morrow afternoon for the election. I'll speak to Figgins about looking after the parties and seeing that they all vote."

After some further discussion, the committee broke up.

They parted with the determination to push their candidate for all they were worth, and to leave no stone unturned to get him in.

When he was alone once more, Montzith called Figgins into his study. There had been bitter blood between the head prefect of the New House and his leg, but that did not trouble Montzith in the least now. He knew that Figgins might be useful to him in the coming campaign, and he meant to make him useful.

CHAPTER 3.

Month After a Suggestion.

FIGGINS was looking very dubious as he entered the prefect's study. He had had some painful experiences in that room, and he knew that Monthaith had never forgiven him for some of the passages between them. However, the prefect was looking very amiable just now, and Figgins hoped for the best.

"Hallo, Figgins," said Monthaith, "I wanted to speak to you! Sit down."

Figgins wondered whether the sky was about to fall. For a lag to be asked to sit down in the head prefect's study, and in a tone of such gracious condescension, was a protest.

However, Figgins sat down, and to show how easy he was, and how willing he was to meet any friendly advances half-way, he put his feet upon another chair. Monthaith's brows wrinkled just a little bit, but he appeared not to notice the action otherwise.

"All right," said Figgins. "Go ahead."

"You know there's an election coming off to-morrow, Figgins."

"Oh?" muttered Figgins. "That's why we're so amiable. Is it? I thought we had an axe to grind somewhere."

"Did you speak, Figgins?"

"Nanna. I only said go on."

"You know we have put up a man, and the School House have done the same."

"Yes, Darro! he's a jolly good sort."

Monthaith scowled.

"I didn't call you here to sing Darro's praises," he said, "of course, as a loyal member of the house, you want to get out as much as I do."

"Oh, certainly!" said Figgins. "I shall vote for Bleak. I'd vote for him if he was twice the cad he is."

Monthaith's eye wandered furtively towards a ruler. But he knew it was necessary to keep the captain of the juniors in good humour, until after the election, at all events.

"Very good, Figgins," he said, with forced calm. "You're going to vote for Bleak. You'd vote, of course, that all the prefects are on the spot at the time."

"Rather!" said Figgins emphatically. "Let one of them try to cut the election, that's all! Why I'd snap him!"

"That's right," said Monthaith, satisfied of the junior's submission. "You'll keep them up to the mark, Figgins. But that isn't everything. You know, the election will be very close, and whoever is beaten will be licked only by a narrow margin."

"Yes, that's very likely."

"So that if a few voters on either side should happen to slip away, the candidate they back up would be pretty certain to get the worst of it."

"Yes, I suppose so. I'll see that none of our youngsters stay away. I don't suppose any of the School House kids will, either."

Monthaith coughed.

"I don't know. You youngsters are always playing tricks upon one another, aren't you? I shouldn't wonder if some of the voters got locked up in a bath-room, or a hen-room, or something, before the election, and didn't get out till too late. That's just the kind of trick Blake and his friends would play on you."

"Do you think so?" said Figgins innocently. "It would be rather sharp practice, wouldn't it, Monthaith?"

"Well, a good many things are considered fair in electorology, you know," the prefect remarked casually. "You see, what I want is to put you on your guard. Suppose Blake played such a trick, the New House might easily lose the election through it."

"I shall see that he doesn't," promised Figgins. "He shan't have a chance. I'll keep an eye on all our fellows, and warn them what to expect."

"So'll Blake may be sure to see many for you."

"Oh no, he won't," said Figgins, with sublime self-confidence. "He would have to get up very early in the morning to pull the wool over my eyes."

"Of course, you wouldn't think of doing anything of the kind yourself."

"Of course not," agreed Figgins, with a promptness that made the prefect close his teeth with a snap.

Monthaith was beginning to wonder, as Mr. Kibb had wondered, whether Figgins was really so dull as he made out.

"Although," went on Monthaith, in a casual sort of way, "what's worse for the goose is same for the gander, you know. If the School House boys tried that game, it would be only fair for you to retaliate."

"Bliss you, we'll retaliate fast enough if we catch them at it!" said Figgins. "Only let us catch them up to such a game!"

Monthaith muttered something under his breath.

"Is that all?" said Figgins, raising. "I'll be off, then, and warn the chaps what we've got to look out for, Monthaith."

"Sit down!"

The junior sat down.

"Look here, Figgins," said the prefect, "it's no good beating about the bush."

"You'd have saved time," said Figgins coolly. "if you had thought of that before."

Monthaith's glance wandered to the ruler again, but he managed to smile.

"Well," he said, "you understand? Blake and his friends are absolutely certain to try some game of that kind."

"I shouldn't wonder."

"Why, then, shouldn't you try it first, and be first in the field? Then, if you find some of ours are raising an election day, it will be all right, as some of the enemy will be sitting on the fence."

"Of course, it's only fair," assented Figgins. "I'll see to it, if you like, Monthaith."

"Of course," said the prefect hastily, "my name need not be mentioned. Nobody must dream that the suggestion came from me. It's all very well for you kids to get up to such a game, but a prefect is supposed to—"

"To know better," suggested Figgins innocently.

Monthaith seemed about to choke.

"You understand?" he said. "My name need not appear in it at all! but, except for that, you can do as you think best."

"Right you are! but some of your old cronies, you know, looking in for doing it just to cover up your own tracks," said Figgins. "You've done that kind of thing before."

"I'll promise to stand by you, so far as my position will allow; but, of course, you must be careful, and I rely upon your honesty not to give me away."

"I wish I could rely upon yours," murmured Figgins.

"What did you say?"

"Nothing. It's a go."

"Very well. And look here, there are a good many of the kids who would vote for anybody who stood them a few tarts. If you find any of the School House kids hanging about the lock-up, and get a promise out of them, why—"

"You understand? Here's ten shillings."

Figgins did not appear to see the prefect's outstretched hand.

"I'll tell the fellows," he said, turning to the door. "They shan't get the better of us if we can help it."

Monthaith breathed hard.

"Did you hear what I just said?" he asked.

"Something about tarts, was it?"

"Yes."

"I've had on that side of my head," replied Figgins politely; "but if you were saying that it's disgusting and mean to bribe a fellow for his vote, I quite agree with you. I'll see that there's no bribery and corruption in the New House. Right you are."

And Figgins bolted out of the study as the prefect jumped up and reached for the ruler. Figgins lost no time in repeating the "Oh."

"Here's a game!" he exclaimed; and he proceeded to relate the particulars of his interview with the captain of the house.

"Nice sort of a kind of a chap for a head prefect, ain't he? Still, a man's as good as a wick to a blind man, and we're not going to neglect a warning simply because it comes from a cad. Don't you think it very likely that Blake and his gang may get up to some such dodge?"

"Very likely," said Wynn. "if we ain't on the watch, we'll forestall them, anyway. If we could get say, three or four School House boys locked up in a room here, it would settle all the difference. It's no good trying it on Blake himself, though."

"Oh, I don't know!" said Figgins, with a gleam in his eye. "It would be a first-class job for him, wouldn't it?"

"Wynn and Kerr grinned.

"But how could it be worked?" asked the Co. together.

"Just get leave that to me," said Figgins. "I'll think of a way, or bust my brain-box trying."

"Don't do that; we don't want a hood," said Kerr anxiously.

Figgins threw a cushion at him, and settled down to think. What the result of his cogitation was, we shall see.

ANSWERS
ONE PENNY.
Every Tuesday.

CHAPTER 4.

A Deputation from the Fourth Form.

JACK BLAKE, in the meantime, was not idle. Study No. 8 had taken the election under their wing, so to speak, and they were swelling with the importance of the duties entrusted to their charge.

"I think," said Jack, after some reflection, "that a deputation ought to go to Darrel to tell him that the juniors approve of his candidature, and to assure him of their hearty support."

"Hear, hear!" exclaimed Horrie and Digby.

"Hear, hear!" echoed a dozen voices.

"It's only right to let him know that we're going to back him up," went on Blake, encouraged. "He'll be grateful to us for backing him up, and he'll know what to expect. Of course, he's a bit anxious now. Anybody knows where he is!"

"He came in from the gym, a little while ago," said Walth. "I think he went to his study."

"Yes, I saw him," said another.

"Then, to his study we go," said Blake decidedly. "Now, how many for a deputation? Six will be a good number. I shall be spokesman, and Horrie and Digby will support me. Three of you others follow on behind."

"What about the rest of us?" demanded Popsy Mellish, a young gentleman who did not wholeheartedly acquiesce in Blake's leadership. "You fellows are always showing your selves at the head of everything."

"That's our right place," said Blake severely. "A necessary of talent, you know. But you fellows can stand in the corridor and cheer."

"All right," said Mellish. "Let's leave when to begin, though."

"And off went the deputation to Darrel's study, about a score of juniors bringing up the rear at a distance. Blake tapped at the door.

"Who's there?" called out Darrel's voice from within.

"It," replied Blake cheerfully.

"Doesn't he say so?" called out Darrel's voice from within.

"A deputation of the Fourth Form."

"A what—of the what?"

"A deputation of the Fourth Form. Can't we come in?"

"Not till I've finished changing my clothes, at any rate. Never cut off!"

"But we're a deputation."

"But! Hook it!"

The spirit of the deputation were somewhat dumfounded by this unceremonious reception. But Blake assumed an air of unconcern.

"All right, Darrel," he called through the door: "you must have your your little joke, I know. We don't mind waiting."

An indistinguishable growl was the response; Darrel was a fellow of few words.

Some of the deputation began to doubt the wisdom of their coming. Horrie hinted that it might be wise to take Darrel's advice and "hook it."

"Both!" said Blake. The deputation was Blake's idea, and he was not going to abandon it if he could help it. "It's not his little joke."

"Darrel hates hearing, you know," continued Digby.

"If any gentleman here wishes to call a deputation of the Fourth Form hanging, he has only to come out to the front court with me and repeat his remark," said Blake, with elaborate politeness.

Digby subsided. They waited as patiently as they could for Darrel to admit them. A tall figure came striding along the passage, and ran into the juniors.

"Hallo! What are you all here for?" exclaimed Ruskton.

"What's the matter? Is there a fire, or what?"

"We're a deputation," said Blake rather uncomfortably.

"A what?"

"A deputation of the Fourth Form. We're waiting to see Darrel."

Ruskton grinned, and tapped at the door.

"Darrel, you're keeping a deputation of the Fourth Form waiting," he called out. "How dare you? But, I say, will you get off the reception a minute or two, and I'll bring along some of the fellows to see it." And Ruskton shut off Darrel's door was being wide open. The senior appeared in shirt and trousers, with a comb in one hand and a brush in the other. His face did not express a very hearty welcome.

"Now, what's the game?" he demanded.

"Ain't you going to let us come in?" asked Blake indignantly.

"Oh, come in if you like!"

Darrel stepped back. The deputation, looking extremely sheepish, marched into the study. The studies at St. Jim's, even the Sixth Form ones, are not notable on account of their

spaciousness. Six growing juniors made a demand upon the accommodation.

"Any more of you coming in?" inquired Darrel. "Don't mind me. Some of you had better get on the bed, and some of you under it. There's room for one on the washstand, and for one under the table. Then there's the window-sill—"

"Oh, chuck it!" said Blake, getting red in the face under the senior's chaff. "You might be civil to us when we're a deputation, come to offer you our support."

"Yes, we come to offer what?"

"Our support."

"I don't quite understand you. I'm not in need of being held up just at present, so far as I'm aware," said Darrel. "When I feel myself going—fainting away—I'll call you in, but just now—"

"I mean our support in the election. We're going to vote for you."

"Oh, I see! But the election hasn't to be held in my room; you can't come here to vote. Besides, it isn't till to-morrow at five."

"Look here, if you don't want our support, say so, and we'll give it to the other candidate," said Blake triumphantly. "You ain't the only pebble on the beach, you know."

Darrel pointed to the door. Blake followed his finger with his eye.

"Well, what does that mean?" he asked.

"Outside," said Darrel.

"Oh, come," said Blake persuasively. He heard Popsy Mellish's chaff from the corridor, and he didn't want his idea to turn out such a ghastly fiasco. "We're a deputation, you know. We've come to assure you of our approval—"

"Thank you for nothing."

"And of our support at this trying and important period of your career," went on Blake, quoting from some speech in the newspapers by half-remembered.

Darrel seemed about to choke.

"We mean to get you in," persisted Blake. "We're going to beat the New Stone candidate by hook or by crook. You'll be treasurer as sure as a gun. We'll look after you."

"I suggest you mean well," said Darrel.

"Well, I should say so."

"So, I won't hold your ears for being cheeky."

"What?"

"But you had better be careful how you start patronizing a senior next time," said Darrel. "Now, outside!"

"Look here—"

"Cut!"

"But—"

Darrel made a movement toward the deputation, picking up a belt as he did so, and the deputation scattered and fled. They bolted into the corridor, running right into the arms of a junior headed by Popsy Mellish, who, of course, had heard all that had passed.

"Hallo!" said Mellish accidentally. "Is it time to cheer yet? You haven't given the sign, Blake, you know."

Jack made no reply. His feelings were too deep for words. "Never mind," said Horrie. "It was a good idea, though it doesn't seem to have come off very well, does it?"

"Oh, chuck it!" said Blake.

"Darrel's a beast!" said Digby. "But, I say, Blake, you looked a precious ass, you know."

"Oh, dry up!"

"Ain't that the word?" chimed in Mellish. "Of all the silly, blithering gosses I ever saw! Oh, crying!"

Blake's manner was unbecoming. He interrupted Mellish's speech with a "hook" upon the nose which made him sit down in a hurry. He was still sitting there, looking dazed, when the chief of the deputation re-entered Study No. 8. The billing of Mellish had somewhat relieved Blake's feelings, and he was his good-tempered self again.

"Never mind, cheap," he said. "It was a bit of a frost, and we can't do it yet; still, we wasn't let it get our backs up against old Darrel. We've got to vote for him, and get him in, even if he is an ungrateful sort of a pig."

And to this loyal resolution his chums cordially assented.

CHAPTER 5.

The Eve of the Election—A Prisoner of War!

THE following day was a day of suppressed excitement at St. Jim's. The election filled all thoughts. Wednesday was a half-holiday at St. Jim's, and Killara had fixed the hour of the election so as not to interfere with the football practice in the afternoon. The shortness of the interval before the election took place allowed but little time for canvassing, and perhaps Killara was not unmindful of that. It was better to get the thing over and done with, he considered.

The office of treasurer in the school clubs was not a particularly important one in itself, yet the coming election

NEXT SATURDAY:

"BAN CHANG'S SCHOOLDAYS,"
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IN "PLUCK," P.

and all kinds, to the exclusion of almost everything else. For it was a trial of strength between the two houses, and had the question been a far less important one, there would have been just as much boozing manifested on both sides.

The School House wanted one of their own fellows to get in, and the New House was determined that its own candidate should have the post, and as the election meant a triumph for one party and a defeat for the other. But it was generally believed that some of the New House seniors would vote for Darral on account of their objection to Blaise personally. On the other hand, some of the New House youngsters did not want to see various underhanded methods of gaining votes from School House youngsters, as might be suggested from the unaccountably flash condition of some notorious inebriated juniors, who began to patronize the school tankard long to an unusual extent. So neither candidate could count upon the full vote of his house, and the result of the election was absolutely uncertain.

Anxiously Blaise and his chums waited for the hour of the election. From football practice in the afternoon was less keen than usual; though the date of the junior house match was close at hand. Glad enough were the boys when the time came to break into hall. The juniors, of course, were there first, and the hall was filled with the clamor of many voices. When Blaise and his chums came in they saw Figgins checking everybody up in the hall, talking together and then, after both looked towards Blaise and laughed.

"Hallo! You both looked towards Blaise and laughed."

"Have those two been something up together," muttered Blaise. "Have those two been getting up to any of their games, I wonder?"

"Let's go and handle them," said Figgins.

With this laudable intention the chums of Steady No. 6 rushed their way to the front. They couldn't help hearing what Figgins was saying as they came near him; as a matter of fact Figgins intended them to.

"Here Kerr's got them safe, Wynn!"

"Oh, yes he's turned the key on them, you see, so they can't possibly get out!"

"That's all right," said Figgins. He had his back to Blaise, and pretended to be unaware of his approach. "That's three votes lost to them, as long as Kerr doesn't let them get out of the box-room. He ought to be back here now, though."

"Oh, there's plenty of time yet; it's only a quarter to five!"

"I only hope—"

"Hark, there's Blaise; he'll hear you!" said Wynn, in a stage-whisper.

Blaise turned back, and drew his chums away.

"Do you know what that means," he whispered. "I rather wondered why Kerr wasn't loose. Those odds have locked up three of our chaps in the box-room in the New House."

"Scott!" muttered Horrie. "What a heastly, mean trick! We never thought of that ourselves."

"We've got to get them out!" exclaimed Digby. "Why, three votes may make all the difference when they count here. Shall we all go?"

"No," they all replied. "They'd start a row and keep us long till five, and then it would be too late. I'll just slip away, and I can get into the New House without being noticed. I'll get the chaps out, somehow, and if we get half a chance we'll lock up Kerr in their place, and lose his vote to the New House man."

The other two chuckled globally.

"What a game!"

Blaise slipped quietly away. Figgins and Wynn appeared to be paying no attention to him, but all the same they knew that he had left the hall.

"My hat!" muttered Figgins. "The scheme has worked all right. He's gone, Wynn!"

Wynn chuckled.

"I only hope Kerr will do the trick all right, Figgis."

"Oh, trust him!" said Figgis.

Blaise cut across the dark quadrangle, and hurried into the New House. As nearly all its occupants had assembled in hall, there was no one to observe him. He went upstairs and made his way to the box-room. All was dark there; the gas was not lighted in the corridor, or it had been turned out. Blaise tried the door. To his surprise, it opened to his touch. All was dark and silent within.

"Why, what the—!" muttered Blaise.

He got no farther. A sudden, fearful peep from behind sent him sprawling into the box-room, and he stammered over something and fell. The door was slammed behind him, and he heard a key turn in the lock.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Jack Blaise sat up. He had locked his door, and he was shaken, but he did not care for that. He could have got up and kicked himself as he heard Kerr's mocking laugh on the

outside of the door. He grasped the handle and shook it violently.

"Open this door!" he yelled.

"Shan't!" came back Kerr's reply. "Talk! School House and all!"

"Upon this door, New House pig!"

"Don't you hear I would! Don't worry; you won't have to stay there long, only till after the election, you know."

The school-house of the situation rushed upon Blaise. Till after the election! His vote was to be lost to his wife, and with the election on the edge as this was expected to be, his vote might turn the scales. And, without him as the watch, who knew how many of the School House juniors might carelessly fall to turn up in class, or might be spotted out of the hall by the New House partisans. He looked angrily at the door.

"Unlock this, Kerr, or I'll kick the blooming thing down!"

"Shan't! You can't kick it down. And it's no good making a row and bringing a master, because I've taken out the key and nobody could open it if he wanted to."

"Look here, Kerr!"

"There was no reply."

"Keep! Kerr!"

Great silence. The New House junior was gone. Blaise ceased kicking at the door. The swollen lams of school-house boozers took a master into any matter of the kind. He had himself to depend upon, and himself alone. It wanted only about ten minutes to the commencement of the proceedings in hall, and here he was, shut up, a helpless prisoner. He tried to force the lock with his pocket-knife. When he had snapped off both blades in the vain attempt he gave it up.

"Oh, my Aunt Elizabeth Ann!" he muttered. "What's to be done? Horrie and Dig will never guess, and if they did they couldn't help me, without smashing down the door, and that's out of the question. What's to be done? The School House will lose the election, and it will be my fault! Fancy me falling into a transparent trap like that! I wish somebody would come and kick me!"

He looked wildly round the box-room. It was dark and shadowy, and half-filled with lumber. He made his way to the window and looked out. A gleam of hope came into his face. There was a pipe down the wall about a foot from the window. It did not look very safe. But it was a trace to take risk.

Blaise opened the window. He reached out along the wall, and caught hold of the pipe. It was a stout one, and he thought it would bear him.

Below was darkness. It was a risky thing to do, but he was not so bad as to remain shut up there while the New House elected their candidate. He felt that he would never be able to live through the ridicule that would be heaped upon him when the truth came out. The sound of a distant shouting in the direction of hall decided him. They were beginning without him.

"I'll chance it!" he muttered desperately.

He got out on the wall and clutched the pipe, and swung himself down the wall. The pipe creaked, but it was firm enough, and slowly and surely Blaise worked his way to the ground. He had descended in such a way before, so it was not a new experience to him.

Another ringing shout, faint in the distance! Blaise dropped lightly to the ground. His hands were black as coal, his face was swarthy with dirt, and his clothes were soiled, his collar graying.

He had wiped a considerable quantity of weather-stain off that pipe. Back tribes muttered nothing to Jack Blaise just then. The moment his feet touched the ground he was off like a shot in the direction of hall.

CHAPTER 6.
At the Eleventh Hour.

HERRIES and Digby waited anxiously for the return of their chums with the rescued School House voters, but the minutes ticked away on the great clock, and he did not come. The hall was filling out now. The boys of the senior forms were crowding it up in front, and the two housemasters, who were to act as tellers, had come in.

With Mr. Kidd and Mr. Bassett, the latter the master of the New House, came Killebrew, the captain of all St. John's, and Monstret, the head prefect of the New House. The great men were now on the spot, a sign that the proceedings were about to commence.

The two candidates, Darral and Blaise, came into hall in the midst of their friends and backers about the same time, and were both of cheering greeted them.

Blaise smiled about him, and nodded in an insinuating way; but Darral marched up to his place without much acknowledgment of his heart's cheering. He never was a man of many words, and he hated harangue, and declamation

was a horror and abomination to him. How such a candidate was to get himself elected was a puzzle.

"Looks more like as if he were going to a funeral than an election!" growled Herrick. "Never mind; give him one more chance."

"Hip, hip, hooray!"
"Herrick" called the New House is return, cheering their candidate.

The cry heard of the clock pointed at two minutes to the hour. Herrick looked extremely anxious.

"What can have become of Blake?" he murmured.
"Hallo! Look there! There's Kerr coming in. What does that mean?"

Kerr had just stepped in, and was sheering his way towards Figgins and Wynn. He joined them, and Herrick saw the three burst out laughing.

"What's happened to old Blake?" he continued anxiously. "I say, Dig, what can have happened to Blake? Where is he? Can that net have trapped him, too?"

"Oh, he couldn't trap one side of him!" said Digby contemptuously. "There's no danger of that, Herrick."

"But where is Blake, then?"

"Can't imagine."
"Look, it's just five! There's old Kildare on his legs. He's going to begin. Look here, keep my place while I cut off and look for Blake."

"I say, I don't think I'd go," said Dig anxiously. "If Blake's been done in, you can't get him out in a few minutes. The counting may begin any moment. We haven't lost your vote as well as Blake's to our side."

Herrick looked worried.
"If he's in a fix somewhere we ought to help him."

"A fine risk of losing the election! It's warded off, and we must stick here, Herrick. You don't want to be wandering round the New House looking for Blake when the counting starts. Besides, if they've locked him in somewhere they won't have left the key in the door, so you couldn't get him out. I know what he'd do, in your place—stick here till after the election."

Herrick nodded.
"I suppose so."

And they turned their attention to the proceedings, albeit extremely uneasy about Jack's non-appearance, and doubtful whether he would turn up in time for the voting.

Kildare had only a few words to say—to the effect that the meeting was called to elect a new treasurer for the school club, in the place of Armitage, whom we all regret to cheer—and that the voting would now proceed. More cheers, and "Vote for Darrel!" from Herrick.

The captain of St. Jim's set down. Thorough James Montclair rose, and had the honour to propose his friend Lucas Sheath, and was seconded by Weldon.

There was a roar of cheering from the New House partisans. It rang through the hall for full two minutes, while the School House youngsters gazed and cheered. But Herrick and Digby were glad to see the demonstration passing itself. It gave more time for Blake, and increased the chance for him to return for the voting.

When something like silence was restored, Bushden rose and proposed Darrel, and Blake seconded. Then it was the time for the School House to cheer, and they did it till the old hall rang again.

"Oh, shut up, you silly goose!" exclaimed Figgins impatiently. "Shut up, and get on to the voting."

"Silly ass!" said Kerr. "Like to hear themselves baying of course!"

But the noise of Figgins & Co. had not the slightest

effect upon the backs of the School House candidate. They simply laid back their heads and roared and roared again. The New House had had an innings for two minutes in choosing their candidate, and the School House were determined to go one better.

For three full minutes they roared and cheered; while the masters grinned or frowned, according to their humour, and Kildare vainly strove to restore order.

Mr. Kild, the master of the School House, smiled good-humouredly, but Mr. Daintiff scintillated his brows anxiously. At last the shouting began to die away, and presently there was something like order.

Herrick, breathless but satisfied, looked at the clock. It was ten minutes past the hour. Blake had not returned, but time had been gained. There was a chance yet.



"Oh, you incomprehension! You waster! You slacker! You un-English anti-Sabbath sinabobbed apology for a scarecrow!" exclaimed Jack. (See page 11.)

"Silence!"

"Order!"

"Voters for Sheath, hold up your hands!"

Up went a forest of New House hands.

"Good business!" roared Herrick to his cheer.

"They're going to take the New House votes first. That's all right; it'll give Blake another chance."

"Where can he be?"

"Goodness only knows!"

The counting of the heads proceeded. It was done slowly and methodically, to make sure that there was no mistake. It was finished, and the tallies conferred, and agreed upon the number—summarily to the disappointment of Herrick who had hoped that there would be a disagreement, an uproar. The announcement of the number was received with breathless interest.

"One hundred and twenty votes for Sheath!"

The New House partisans burst into a roar of cheering, and the faces of the School House fellows grow greenish to say plain.

If Herrick polled a hundred and twenty votes, the school was certain to be the closest that had ever been known in

St. Jim's. There could not be more than about that number left for Darrell, if every boy in the school voted.

"Oh, I say, where's that boaster Blake?" growled Horrie. "One vote may settle the thing; and then those other chaps. He said there were three of them locked up in the New House."

Dig shook his head.

"Some mistake about that. I've been going over them a dozen times while we've been standing here, and there's not three missing. I'm certain."

"Then it was a plot!" growled Horrie.

"I can't have been."

"And Blake's tumbled into a trap like a haly!"

"Looks like it."

"I'd never have thought it of him!" said Horrie, sore to scrowd than in anger.

"Order!"

"Hands up for Darrell!"

The School House voters elevated their hands. Again the task of counting commenced.

"I say, you chaps," said Percy Mellish, looking at Horrie and Digby, "where's Blake? He isn't in the hall anywhere. I've been looking for him."

"Here you!" snapped Horrie.

"Yes. Where is he?"

"Oh, he'll turn up before the counting has finished!" said Horrie, desperate.

Mellish shrugged impatiently.

"Nice sort of a captain of the juniors of the School House," he said, "going wandering off just when the election is on."

"You mind your own business!"

"It is my business, and all the houses!" replied Mellish.

"I suppose those New House lads have got at him, that's about the truth of it. Clever sort of chap for our leader, I must say! We shall win the election now, I don't think!"

"Oh, you shut up!" said Horrie, exasperated. "It's led enough, without you jawing!"

"Shut it! Where's the boaster got to?"

"Dry up!"

"Oh, where and, oh, where can he be?" chanted Percy indignantly. "Up, you beast!"

Horrie gave him a shove, which sent him against Digby, and Digby showed him off, and he fell into a mass of feet, where the juniors were crouched together.

They dragged him up, fearful that his vote would be missed, and up went his hand again, and he counted scrupulously at Horrie. The counting was nearing the end, and Horrie and Digby had given up hope.

"Now it's over," muttered Horrie wrathfully. "Now it's too late even if—"

The door quietly opened. Blake, looking about as clean as a chimney-sweep, stepped into hall, and took his place with the voters.

One glance showed him that it was the School House voting, and up went his going hand with the rest.

"One hundred and nineteen—one hundred and twenty—"

The hands went down. Blake joined his chums. They looked at him with feelings too deep for words.

"Just in time!" said Blake cheerfully. "Another minute, and I should have been out of it!"

Horrie drew a deep breath.

"Thank goodness you came! It's going to be an awfully close thing!"

"Hallo! Listen!"

A thrill went through the meeting at the announcement was made.

"One hundred and twenty votes for Eleuth!"

"One hundred and twenty votes for Darrell!"

The whole meeting drew a deep breath of amazement. The votes had tied, and neither candidate was elected.

CHAPTER V. News For No. 6 Study.

FOR some seconds silence lay upon the packed hall. The thing was amazing; it was not remembered to have happened before in the history of St. Jim's.

The votes for the two candidates were exactly equal; neither was elected, and neither was rejected. What was to happen now? The housemasters, the captain, and the prefects were all looking worried and puzzled.

The silence was broken by a confused hum of discussion. Everybody was disappointed, everybody was excited. What was to be done?

The meeting slowly dispersed.

Nothing further, at all events, could be done then. It was a matter for consideration. Probably the only way out of the difficulty was a fresh election at a later date, which would give the candidates a chance to whip up more voters, if all had not attended the present meeting.

"But all were there," declared Blake, when Horrie sug-

gested that. "I'd give any School House lad that stayed away, and I know Figgies was on the watch to whip up his voters. As for any of them changing their minds, that's not to be thought of. It will be a point of honour for each chap to vote next time as he voted this, of course!"

"Then I don't see what's to be done," said Horrie.

"We shall have to find some way out of the difficulty," replied Blake severely.

Study No. 5, with their usual coolness, had taken the matter under their wing.

"How jolly lucky you turned up in time!" said Horrie. "They'd have had it by a majority of one if you hadn't."

"Yes, it was a narrow squeak."

"What or what kept you away?"

Blake explained.

The chums listened with mingled feelings in the credit of his adventures, not knowing whether to feel more kindly indignation at the tactics of the Blue, or regret that they themselves had not thought of looking up some New House voters somewhere.

"I say," exclaimed Digby hopefully, "we might take a lead out of their book, you know. If we could get Figgies & Co. fastened up in the coal-cellar before the next election, it would be O.K."

Blake shook his head.

"I fancy they'll be too well on their guard, my son. Besides, we're not going to borrow any of their second-hand wares. Hang it, we ought to be able to think of some way of circumventing the beast."

"Well, you're awake, you think of something," said Horrie comfortingly. "It's depend upon you, Blake."

"I'll think out a plan, or bust a back," asserted Blake.

The whole school was at least about the matter as Study No. 6. Over in the New House Figgies & Co. held a council of war.

"It was heavenly entirely Blake getting out like that," said Figgies. "He went down the drain-pipe. He's got a nerve on him. He might have broken his heavenly neck. I rather wish he had."

"He's got a way of getting out of fixes, the brute!" said Kerr. "I looked him in ribs enough, but, of course, I never thought of the window. Next time we'll have a gang on the spot, and do his head and feet."

"Yes, we might work something like that," said Figgies thoughtfully. "Of course, we've got to pull off the election. Any complete afterwards as to how a voter came to be kept away would be history. Besides, to do those School House kids justice, they ain't smokers they don't preach. Let's put our heads together and see if we can think out a scheme."

And Figgies & Co. put their heads together, as Blake and his chums were doing near in the School House.

The next morning there was a notice on the board in the St. Jim's captain's handwriting, which was eagerly read by the school.

It stated laconically that, owing to the unusual circumstance of a tie in the voting, a fresh election for the post of treasurer would be held upon the following Wednesday at the same hour as before.

"All right," said Blake, when he read the notice, "that gives us a week to work in. Lots of things may happen in a week."

"Next Wednesday," remarked Horrie, "and the junior house match is on the Saturday after. This election business is all very well, but we mustn't neglect the footie, kids."

But the School House were not likely to neglect the footie.

They knew that Figgies & Co. were keeping their town ring up to the mark, and meant to leave the colours of the School House on the soccer field; and Blake intended to give the New House team the licking of their lives on that famous Saturday.

So the junior eleven of the School House devoted most of their spare time to football, and well they played the grand old game.

A few days after the abortive election, while Blake and his chums were doing their evening preparation, the door was suddenly burst open, and little Bobby Barnes of the Third Form projected himself into the room.

"Hallo," exclaimed Horrie, picking up a rule, "what do you mean by halting into a study like that, you cheeky little boaster?"

"Let him alone," said Blake, noticing that Bobby's mouth was agape, and his eyes wide open. "He's got news, I can see."

"That's no reason why he should blurt it like that," growled Horrie. "What's the silly kid gapping about, I wonder? Why didn't you knock, you little beast?"

"I've got something to tell you, Blake," gasped the youngster, "something about the election."

The three chums were all attention instantly.

"Go ahead," said Blake tersely.
 "I feared Figgins & Co. talking about it."
 "Mean little beast to listen," said Digby. "What were they saying?"

"Look here, if you call me names, I won't tell you anything," said the tag tranquilly.
 "Won't you? Guess that goes, Herries."
 "Shut up!" said Blake. "Let the kid speak. He looks as if he had found out something."

"So I have," purred the tag, in his shrill voice. "So I have, Blake. It's important."
 "Well, get on with it. Mind, it's a secret, un-English, rather hard to listen, but as you've been and gone and done it, there's no harm in your telling us, then I can see."

"Look here, I ain't—"
 "Oh, get on."
 "Figgins and Kerr and Ryan were talking," said the tag. "They were talking in the block-shed while Furry was cleaning his bike, and they didn't know I was just outside the window. It was open."

"Little mean beast!"
 "All right, I won't tell you anything."
 "Oh, get on, before I am put!"
 "Well, Figgins said he had heard the doctor tell Mr. Rat-
 cliff that there was a new boy coming to St. Jim's this week,"
 said the tag triumphantly. "He's coming on Wednesday."

"The three chums looked at one another."
 "A new kid coming?" repeated Herries.
 "Oh Wednesday," murmured Digby.
 "A new kid coming on Wednesday?" shrieked Blake.
 "Oh, my maister Aunt Selina Scrupulous! The missing
 boy!"

"The one thing needed!"
 "The last straw that will give the camel the hump—the
 New House being the camel."
 "Oh, I could fold him in my bottom and sweep!" exclaimed
 Blake. "Oh, we won't give him a welcome! Not half! I
 don't think! What?"

"Not half!" echoed his faithful followers.
 "It makes me smile," said Blake. "Hear me smile! Ha, ha, ha! How, how, how! Likewise, he, he, he! I could
 throw and sing! Jump up, you bippers!"
 The three chums jumped up, and, joining hands, performed
 an impromptu Sir Roger de Coverley round the astonished
 tag.

"Here, I say, don't set the giddy goat," said that young
 gentleman. "None of your larks, you know. I ain't told
 you all of it yet."
 "Listen to the words of wisdom," said Blake. "Out of
 the mouths of babes and sucklings and Third Form
 scoundrels!"

"Look here, if you call me any more names, I shall hock
 it, and you won't know the rest," exclaimed the tag threaten-
 ingly.
 "Fardon, gracious lord!" said Blake, unfolding into his
 chair. "But really, you chaps, this is great! It is gorgeous!
 We must bag the stranger."

"We must collar him," said Herries. "We must rope him
 in. We must capture him!"
 "We must fasten him up in a locker if necessary, to keep
 those New House chaps from getting at him!" exclaimed
 Digby. "You know what they are. They'd be quite strong
 enough to try and bag him, and save him up for the election."

"Ha, ha, ha!" howled Blake.
 "What are you laughing at?"
 "Nothing. Got on with your job, Barnes."
 "Give us a chance, then. Figgins and his lot were planning
 how to get at the new kid, and keep him safe so that you
 couldn't get hold of him before the election."

"Blake and his chums looked at one another."
 "What, did I say?" said Digby, with the air of an oracle.
 "Oh, the New House are too mean and low-down for any-
 thing!"

"Well, we're going to foist our little knavish tricks," de-
 clared Blake. "Do you know which house the new kid is
 going into, kid?"
 "No, and Figgins didn't know, either; but from the Head
 mentioning him to Mr. Beediff, he thought he would most
 likely be going into the New House."

Blake gave a whistle.
 "I say, that's loudly!"
 "But I heard Furry say he wasn't sure," the tag hastened
 to add. "He didn't know. Only he said that they mean to
 catch it bag the new kid, only—"

He hesitated, and stopped.
 "Well, what else did he say?"
 "—I don't think you'd like—"
 "Rats! Go on! Now you've begun, you may as well
 finish, I suppose."
 "Yes—"
 "So on, I tell you. What did he say?"

"Well, he said that they must be careful to bag the new
 kid, or else those rascals Blake and Herries and Digby would
 be trying some disgusting mean dodge to get hold of him
 first."

The three chums exchanged rather sickly glances.
 "Oh, he said that, did he?" muttered Blake uncomfortably.
 "Yes, and he said you were a silly cuss, and—"
 "Never mind the rest."
 "And he said Herries was a—"
 "Oh, shut up!" said Herries. "I don't want to know what
 he said. Did they say anything about the way they mean to
 bag the youngster?"

"Yes. He is coming by the train that gets into Rycomb
 from Wapland Junction at four. They are going to be at the
 station to meet him, and have a trap in the village for four
 kids to bring him to the school. Furry thinks that will pre-
 vent any of the New House getting at him, and they'll be
 able to talk in his country, too, and persuade him to vote
 for Bleath. The chances are he won't know which house he's
 going into, and if he does, they'll fill him up with some yarn
 till he's voted for Bleath."

"By Jove," said Blake. "It's a deep game, and Figgins &
 Co. are doing it in style. Wasey awaking four boys on a
 trap for the sake of the kid's vote! If we hadn't heard of
 this, you chaps, we should have been done brown."
 "But what are we going to do now?" said Herries. "Take
 a lot of us to the station, and surround the rats, and collar him
 under their eyes."

"No go," said Blake. "A row's no good. They'd be
 ready for us the moment we got him to the school, and
 there'd be a free fight over him. Then if he really belongs
 to the New House, some master would chip in and send him
 there, and leave him to Figgins & Co.'s tender mercies. No,
 we've got to work the trick quietly."

"But how are we to see hold of him quietly, when the New
 House kids will be ready to seize him the moment he steps
 out of the train at Rycomb?"
 "You trust your wits," said Blake, with a satisfied smile.
 "You leave it to me. Now, young Barnes, we've awfully
 obliged to you, but mind you don't breathe a word to any-
 body else. It would show Figgins & Co. that we were up to
 their game, and then they might get the better of us some-
 how. Have you told anybody yet?"

"No, Blake. I came straight to you."
 "Well, that showed your sense, at all events," said Blake.
 "But I say, you chaps, how can we make certain that this
 image won't go jawing all over the school? If a word gets
 out it may lead to trouble."

"By Jove! Yes," said Herries. "If the rascals got a
 hint of a game, a monitor would be sent down to meet the
 new arrival, and it would be a case of no larks for the rats
 and for us, too."

"I won't say a word," vowed the tag.
 "Mind you don't," said Blake. "If you do, I shall get
 to hear of it, and if I don't warn you, then it will be funny."
 "Not a syllable!" squeaked the tag. "Honor bright,
 Blake! Ain't I as much interested as you are in getting the
 better of the New House chaps? I give you my word."

"All right; we trust you," said Blake.
 And the tag departed well satisfied with himself. The door
 of Study No. 6 closed. Then Blake danced a horreopop and
 chorled with glee. His two chums watched him with interest.
 "I thought you had something in your outside," said
 Herries.

"Only you couldn't spot it out before that blooming kid,"
 smiled Digby.
 "You were right, my children," said Blake, seating him-
 self on the table; "quite right. Did you ever know your
 own tail as a snake?"

"No, sir," said Herries; "except when he got himself kid-
 napped at elections."
 "I've got an idea, of course," said Blake rather hastily.
 "It's a dead secret between us three, of course. Don't either
 of you whisper a whisper or breathe a breathe of it outside
 these sacred walls, or I shall fall upon you and slap you!"

"We won't jaw," said Herries. "What's the jape? Get
 on!"
 "This new kid is coming by the train from Wapland
 Junction to get to Rycomb at four."
 "So the kid said."

"The New House masters are going to be at Rycomb
 station all ready to meet him, with a trap—and he's to fall
 into the trap."
 "That's their programme."
 "Let them go," said Blake, his face luminous with
 humor; "let the dear little innocent laddies go! They
 shall have their little trap, they shall lay their little plot, they
 shall discover their little snare at the station, but the new boy
 won't come."

"Won't come?" gasped Herries and Digby simultaneously.
 "No."

"But why won't he come?"

"Because an individual about my size will meet him at Wayland Junction, before he takes the local train to Rylands, and bring him on to St. Jim's by another route. He won't come by rail to Rylands Station at all. Figgins & Co. will wait there patiently, while I am bringing the new recruit to the school in a hack from the junction."

"For a moment his chums stared at Blake in silent admiration. Then they hugged him.

"Hallo! Draw it out!" howled Blake. "Admire me as much as you like, but don't raffle my necktie. Moderate your transports, you howling imbeciles!"

"Good old Blake!" chuckled Berwick. "You are a great man. The School House doesn't hold your equal. Never mind, Nerrow will, Nerrow could."

"Never did," advised Digby. "Never will. Nerrow could."

"Well, we'll pull it off, you see," said Blake, receiving these tributes with becoming modesty. "The School House will go ahead this time. What's each home at St. Jim's, old A or B disconnected?"

"No."

CHAPTER 8.

Figgins on His Mettle!

BLAKE and his chums kept their secret. They kept it well. By dint of continual threats of hanging, drawing, and quartering, mingled with vague promises of benefits to come, they succeeded in keeping silent the tongue of the lag who had imparted to them such valuable information. Not a boy in the School House, so far, knew but themselves what was in the wind, and Figgins & Co. were on their way in sublime unconcern to the counter-plot brewing in the rival home.

Figgins & Co. were jubilant in those days. Figgins felt himself to be a great man and a born tactician, and his admiring "Co." fully assented. Figgins had already made arrangements about the trap at the station. There was nothing to be done but to walk down to Rylands on Wednesday afternoon, meet the train, and carry off the new top. It was as easy as rolling off a log.

"We'll explain things to him in the trap, while we drive to the school," said Figgins gleefully, "and make him promise to vote for Bleeth. We won't arrive until ten minutes before the election, and we'll keep him in the middle of us in hall on that score; if those School House brutes can get at him and corrupt him."

"Only we must take jolly good care not to let Blake get a hint of it," said Kerr.

"You bet," said Figgins emphatically. "It may leak out by Wednesday that there's a new boy coming, though. I think perhaps you two had better go to the station to meet the new kid, and I'll hang on and keep an eye on Blake."

"Yes, that would be wiser," assented Wyman. "Still, Blake and his lot are pretty certain to be at footer practice, and they won't be thinking of us."

"Yes, never can sell," replied Figgins. "In dealing with Blake I've learned that a chag can't be too careful."

And so it was arranged. The hours of the competitors beat high when the eventful Wednesday dawned. Morning lessons were got through somehow. The afternoon was clear and cold, and the playing-field was thronged. Figgins & Co. early left Littlefield and changed from their football things. They were crammed with suppressed excitement.

"Now," said Figgins, "it's 1:30; that gives you plenty of time to get to the railway-station for the Wayland train. Mind you don't miss him. I haven't the least idea what he's like, but you've bound to find him. There won't be anybody else coming to St. Jim's. Bring him with you in the trap if you have to haul him. This is no time for sticking at it."

"Right you are," replied the Co. dutifully; and off they went down the line to the village.

Then Figgins studied over to the School House pith to have a look at Blake and his friends. The School House was out in force for footer practice, and there were its ping-pong barbarians all at play—but no Blake! No Horrie! No Digby! Figgins rubbed his eyes and looked again. The claims of Study No. 2 were conspicuous by their absence.

Figgins was puzzled. He knew Blake; knew him but too well. Had he scented the little game? Was he off on some expedition destined to bring discomfiture to the New House? Yet, surely that was not possible! Perry Mellich was looking on at the practice. Mellich never joined in any games if he could help it. He was a slacker of the first water.

"Hallo, Mellich!" said Figgins affably.

Perry stared at him.

"Hallo!"

"I wanted to speak to Blake," said Figgins. "Knew where he was?"

"That I don't," said Perry; "and don't care, either!"

"He don't seem to be here."

"No, he don't."

"Goes for a walk, perhaps."

"Perhaps," assented Perry.

"I should like to see him."

"More than I should."

"Look here," said Figgins, "if you'll tell me where the three of them are gone, I'll—I'll give you my knife."

Perry Mellich looked over the prostrate temptingly offered.

"Done!" he said.

He took the knife and put it away in an inner pocket, possibly to secure it in case Figgins should change his mind.

"Where are they, then?" asked Figgins impatiently.

"Goes for a spin," replied Perry.

"I see them start on their bikes on the west road. That is all I know. Which asked Blake if he was going to cut footer practice, and he said he could have to this afternoon, as he was going for a long ride. Shouldn't wonder if he means to go all the way to Wayland. It's in that direction."

Figgins gave a horrified gasp.

"Hallo! What's the matter?" said Perry. "Are you ill?"

"Ill?" said Figgins vacantly. "Oh, no! I'm the biggest go in St. Jim's, that's all. Oh, I wish somebody would kick me hard!"

"I will, if you like," said Perry.

But Figgins only walked away, his face long as a fiddle, and his hands thrust deep into his trousers' pockets. It had come to him in a flash what Blake and his comrades had gone to Wayland for.

"Somehow or other—goodness knows how—they've managed to intercept the new kid. I know it just as sure as if Blake had told me so. Perhaps he's heard that a new kid was coming, and guessed that we might know of it and lay in wait for him at the station. Oh, my hat! They'll have the new recruit in their clutches, as sure as a gun, and they'll hit him up with some talk, and make him vote for Harrel before we can rescue him. Hang it all! What a giddy old fellow!"

But Figgins's despondency did not last long. He had won the grand position of chief of the juniors of the New House by pluck and resource, and it was not like him to be down-hearted for long. The blood of the Figginses boiled at the prospect of defeat to his House.

"Hang it all! It shouldn't be a walk-over for those School House rascals!" he exclaimed. "We shall have to go out by better means, I wish Kerr and Wyman were here. Blithely of wasting their time at that beauty station. Never mind, there are plenty of others. If Blake has captured the new kid at Wayland, he'll have to bring him to the school by there, and there's only one road he can come by. That's where the New House comes in."

Figgins's eyes gleamed. plan of action had come into his active brain; it was not yet hot. He broke into a chuckle of delight.

"My hat! Yes! They won't be thinking of that! I'll gather half a dozen of the fellows, and we'll ambush them. There's no need to get into hall before now. Blake, my dear heart, I fancy that the New House are going to wipe up the ground with you, after all, this journey!"

And Figgins hastened to gather five or six of his house-fellows whom he was sure he could depend upon, and communicated to them his hopes and fears, and as dusk half a dozen pairs of vengeful eyes were watching for the return of Blake and his chums.

CHAPTER 9.

First at the Station.

"HALT!" said Blake. He and of his bike, and the others followed his example. They had scooped into Wayland, and the station clock was pointing to twenty minutes past three. The horses of the School House were in ample time, leaving his machine with his chums, Blake strode into the station.

"What time does the train leave for Rylands, please?" he asked at the booking-office.

"Three-thirty-five," said the clerk.

"Thanks! Has the London train come in yet—the one that catches the local to Rylands?"

"No; three-thirty."

"Thanks awfully!"

Blake retraced his chums.

"He came on I in ten minutes yet," he said; "then fifteen or ten minutes before it leaves for Rylands. That gives us plenty of time. We must get to the New House station, to leave ourselves a margin."

"To do with us, eh?"

"Rather!" said Blake.

The machines were put up, and then Blake bought three tickets, which gave the chance access to the platform from which the Rykomohe train would start. Among all the passengers alighting at the junction they might not be able to pick out the boy who was bound for St. Jim's; but there would be no mistaking him when he came on the local platform to board the train for Rykomohe. There the three elms lay in wait.

"He's not to go by the train, said," said Blake. "I will get on in talk, and keep him if I can; but if he makes a bid for the train, you trip him up, Dig. I don't want to hit him myself, you see, because I've got to play the friendly game, and persuade him somehow to visit the Marvel."

"All right," said Digby. "Then we had better pretend to be strangers."

"Yes; that's right, if I get him safely into the back, and drive off to St. Jim's, you two can follow behind with the bikes, in case you're wanted. We don't want to leave the machines here."

This arrangement made, the boys separated, and from different parts of the platform waited and watched for the appearance of the new boy.

A train came snorting up from a siding, and waited. Then there was a roar and a clatter, as the London express thumped into a direct van at the station. The clock on the platform indicated 3.30.

"Five minutes more!" said Blake to himself. "This is the Rykomohe train waiting here, of course. Not many passengers about."

As a matter of fact, the platform was deserted, save for the janitor from St. Jim's. The train waited aimlessly.

Soon people began to come on the platform and onto the train. Slow, stolid country folk most of them, and never a boy among them. Blake began to get anxious. Where was the new boy for St. Jim's? Was the whole affair a hoax—a ruse?

"Is this the train for Rykomohe?"

Blake gave a gasp of relief. The question was asked by a slim, snuffy-looking post-boy who had just handed his ticket to the man at the barrier to be clipped.

"There's no mistaking that youth. He looked exactly what he was—a green lad bound for school, and, as if to make assurance doubly sure, a porter was following behind him with a trunk. Blake read the direction upon the trunk, and knew that he had found his quarry."

"Yes, sir."

The snuffy youth received back his ticket, and walked on the platform. The porter went along the train with the box, and put it in the guard's van. Blake assumed his most unassuming air, and approached the strange youth.

"Excuse me," he said. "I hope I am not mistaken, you are the new boy coming to St. Jim's—St. James's College, is it?"

The youth looked him over rather superciliously.

"Yes, I am going to the school," he said.

"Glad to meet you!" said Blake. "I've come from the school to meet you here. Thought you might feel a little strange at first, you know. My name's Blake."

"My name's Barby," said the new boy—"George Edward Barby. Do you belong to the school?"

"Yes."

"Glad to meet you."

George Edward Barby turned to the train. Blake tapped him on the arm.

"Just a minute. That's a rather old slow train, Barby. I've got a book waiting outside, and I thought you'd like a drive to the college in my motor to pay."

"The new boy about his hand."

"You're very good," he said suspiciously. "But how do I know anything about you? Father said I was to be careful in speaking to strangers."

"My dear Barby, your father is a sensible man, and that advice of his shows that you have brought him up properly," said Blake—"but, I tell you, I belong to St. Jim's, and I've come here to meet you and give you a drive instead of this wretched old train."

"Try to, there."

"The going to take the train," said Barby; and he caught hold of the handle of a carriage door. Blake's eyes were following him, and ran right into George Edward Barby, who went down on the platform, with his heels in the air. Dig fell over him, and Herries, coming by in a hurry, fell over Dig, and Blake, apparently trying to help George Edward, at once made the confusion worse.

George Edward scrambled out of the heap at last, considerably dusty and dishevelled, and gave vent to a hoarse cry, as he saw the train disappearing down the line.

"Stop the train!" he shouted frantically—"stop the train! There isn't another train to-day. I must go. Stop it!"

The porter laughed, and walked away. Blake exchanged a wink with his classmate, who were picking themselves up.

"Sorry I upset you," said Digby. "Couldn't be helped."

"Go away, you snuffy, rude boy!" said Blake. "You've made Marley Barby lose his train. You have caused him to be left behind. Now he can't get to the school to-night. There's only one hack, and I've engaged that."

Barby looked up quickly.

"I'll come with you in the hack!" he said eagerly.

"Will you? I don't know whether I'll let you go."

"I—I didn't mean anything, you know; and I'll give you a shilling!"

"Keep your blessed shilling! You can come. I should say from your looks you're a decent chap."

"Oh, thank you!"

Blake looked his arm in the new boy's, and marched him off the platform. Digby and Herries brought up the rear. Blake had already spoken to a driver, and the hack was waiting. The two boys stepped into it, and were driven away. Herries and Digby fetched out the bicycles.

"I'll tell you what, Dig," said Herries, "you wheel Blake's jacket, and I'll scotch on ahead and do some counting business. We never know what those New House rats may get up to by your knee."

"Jolly good idea," said Dig.

So Herries rode on alone, and as he passed the hack he called out to Blake to let the latter know his intention. Then he shot ahead, and kept his eyes well about him in the dark as he peddled on. Behind the hack Digby followed, riding his own machine and wheeling Blake's.

Blake was in high good-humour with himself. He had foreshadowed the New House plotters, and captured the new recruit. He had been first in the field, and fortune had favoured the brave. Would he get his captive safe to St. Jim's, and in the shelter of the School House? That was the question now.

"I say, it's lucky for you I was there to meet you, Barby," he remarked. "You hadn't arrived at the school there would be mischief. We shall get in just in time to see you from a new angle of light."

"I'm awfully glad," said the new boy. "Are the masters very strict at St. James's?"

"Strict isn't the word for it!" said Blake impressively. "But the masters are not so bad as the boys. I really don't know what would happen if Figgins and his lot were to get hold of you on your first day at the school."

"Who are they?"

"A set of rough characters—regular hoodlums!" said Blake. "We keep 'em in order as much as we can; but, bless you, they're a rough old lot!"

"I wonder Mr. Haines allows ruffians at the school!"

Blake coughed.

"Well, you see, he doesn't know how bad they are," said Blake. "He would expect Figgins at once if he saw him putting on a hot coat down a new boy's back, or passing paraffin on his trousers, and setting fire to them."

This was strictly true, but Figgins was not likely to call down the Head's wrath upon himself by these enormities. It was not necessary to explain that to the new boy. He could draw what inference he liked from Blake's speech.

He seemed to draw a most alarming one, for his face changed colour, and his eyes opened wide. He shifted uneasily in his seat.

"I say, does he do things like that, Blake? I wish I had never come to St. James's!"

"Keep your pocket up!" said Blake encouragingly. "Figgins can't touch you if you keep close to me. Just you hang on to me and I'll see you through."

"Yes, that's awfully kind of you," said the new boy.

"Are there many hacks at the school as bad as Figgins?"

"Oh, he's rather a formidable specimen for the New House," said Blake carefully.

Barby gave a cry of dismay.

"The New House! Did you say the New House?"

"Yes. What about it?"

"I am going to belong to the New House!" gasped Barby.

Blake looked preternaturally grave.

"You're sure about that?" he asked, in a hollow, solemn voice.

"Yes, yes, I know I am."

"Then I'm afraid there's no hope for you. I'd do anything for you if I could, but, you see, I belong to the School House, that's the other house—the decent one—and I can't interfere with Figgins in his own house."

"Oh dear, oh dear! Can't I change, and come into the School House? I should like to," said the prospective victim of the Gordian Figgins anxiously.

Blake seemed struck by the idea.

"I'll tell you what," he continued. "I'll sneak you into the School House now, at first, and keep you safe there, and then we'll see what can be done. I've no doubt that it can be arranged satisfactorily. I'll do my best."

"Thank! I'd like to be in your house if I could, Blake."

"That's all right. Anyway, I'll stick to you. By the way, I dare say you'd like to know the reason a bit. There's something on at St. Jim's to-day."

"Yes?" said Barby inquiringly.

"An election," explained Blake. "Our candidate is a splendid chap, and the enemy is a regular beast. Would you like to vote?"

"May I if I like?"

"Oh, yes; I can arrange it for you," said Blake loftily. "I'll just speak to the others, and you shall vote with the rest of us, if you like."

"I'd like to," said the new boy unobtrusively. "You'll tell me when to vote, and who to vote for, won't you?"

"With pleasure," said Blake, very truly. He was bubbling over with delight. The new boy was an ace in his hands. "We vote by holding up our hands, you know. You keep by me, and three years for up when I shake mine, and that will be all right."

"I won't forget."

"Have some tobacco," said Blake hospitably. "This is a jolly nice packet."

The new boy willingly accepted the offer, and in very pleasant chat they began the journey. It was dark, the early winter evening, before they came near St. Jim's. Blake was glad when he saw the lights in the distance that indicated that they were coming to the college at last.

Suddenly there was a crash and a yell along the dark road. The driver of the trap uttered an exclamation:

"Lor-a-mercy, what's that?"

Blake knew what it was. It was the crash of a falling bicycle, and he knew that Herrick had come to grief. He was quick to take the alarm.

"Stop!" he cried, from the window. "Here, get out, you kid! Something's wrong!"

He jumped out, followed by the startled Barby. Blake gripped the new boy by the arm, as if afraid that his presence would escape him at the crucial hour. Digby came rushing up, Blake called out to him:

"Here, stop, Dig, and see what's the matter. You afraid it's those New House cuds? Herrick would have called out—"

Digby for the like he was standing by the ditch, and that ahead, Blake, standing in the road, watched anxiously. It was too dark to see anything. He handed the driver of the hack his fare, in case it should be necessary to look suddenly. Digby's light came gleaming back along the road.

"What is it?" shouted Blake.

"New House cuds," yelled Dig, as he ran. "Look out, there's a score of them, and they're after the new kid!"

"Oh, dear, oh dear!" gasped George Edward Barby, in terror. "Whatever shall I do?"

Blake's grip tightened on his arm.

"I'll save you yet," he said, with generous devotion. "Never fear, they sha'n't have you! Can you run?"

"Yes, yes!"

"Come along, then. Over the fence?"

The new boy hung back, but Blake firmly lifted him over the fence. The dark, shadowy wood that bordered the road did not look inviting.

"Where are we going?" gasped George Edward.

"It's a short cut to St. Jim's. Come on."

And Blake hurried his companion into the wood, and the top story. With triumphant shouts, the New House contingent came running up the road, and surrounded the boy.

CHAPTER 10.

Figgins Makes a Capture.

Figgins and his comrades had waited and watched patiently in their ambush for a long time. Everything, they say, comes to him who waits, and at last Figgins discerned the gleam of a bicycle-lamp coming up the road.

"It's Herrick!" he exclaimed, as the rider came nearer. "He's alone! The others must have gone a different way—or perhaps he's a scout. Anyway, catch him!"

And as the pedlar came abreast of the ambuscade, the New House champions rushed out upon him.

Herrick saw them coming, and made a gallant attempt to escape. He unobtrusively turned his machine in its own length, but unfortunately a rut in the road made the evolutions a ghastly failure. The bike went sideways, and the next moment it was clattering in the road, and Herrick was struggling in the grip of three or four pairs of hands.

"Don't let him get away," growled Figgins. "Now, you School House waster, where's Blake? Where's the new kid?"

Look out, Blake!

Herrick tried to pull the reins, but a school cap slammed

over his mouth effectually muffled it, and it died away in a gurgle.

"Get him!" said Figgins. "Blake must be close here, or he wouldn't want to warn him. I dare say Blake's following with the new boy. This animal is a giddy scoundrel. Keep him quiet, and hold him, some of you."

"There's some kind of a go-cart up the road," said Pratt.

"I can see the lights."

"Hold the horses, two of you!" cried Figgins. "The rest of you follow me!"

He started up the wood at a run.

He saw Digby on his machine, and heard the shout of warning to Blake. He knew that Blake was there, with the previous new boy in his company. He shouted to his followers and put on a spurt. A minute more, and they were round the back.

"Get you!" yelled Figgins. "Go on the horses! I say, this is gorgeous!"

He did not know yet that Blake and the new boy had left the back. Digby saw his error, and seized upon the chance to gain time. He flung himself before the door of the back, and shouted to the driver to get on.

Pratt clung to the reins. The driver sat still, grinning. Figgins and two or three more heaved themselves upon Digby. For a couple of minutes Dig kept them busy in spite of the odds. Then, much surprised, he was dragged away and hurled into a ditch. Figgins flung open the door of the back.

"Got you, Blake! You may as well give in. Where's that new kid? Climb him out to us, and we'll make it quick. By Julius Cæsar's whiskers, the beauty, that's a sorry cudy!"

Figgins staid into the empty vehicle calmly.

"Simply!" he greeted his followers.

"Yes, nobody's been!"

"It's a plant!"

"Oh, we're done—diddled—clean spoiled!"

"It's all Furry's fault! He ought—"

"Shut up, you cuds!" growled Figgins. "Lead me a hand with that waster Digby! We'll make him talk!"

Dig was dragging himself from the ditch. He looked a fearful object. They pounced upon him. They flattered him down in the road, and sat on his cheek.

"Where's Blake, Digby?"

"Where's the new kid?"

"Where are they?"

"Speak!"

"Talk!"

"Explain!"

Thus the New House justices, all speaking at once.

"Blake!" gasped Digby. "I won't say a word."

"But his nose is in the dirt?"

"Somehow in the ditch?"

"Frog's march him?"

"Stick pins in him!"

"Pinch his legs!"

"Twist his arms!"

"You can kill me if you like," gasped the hapless Dig, "but I won't say a word, you—New House misanthropes!"

Courage ever appeals to British hearts; and Dig's pluck saved him. They held him fast, but they did not hurt him. None of the suggestions were carried out.

"Wait a bit, chaps," said Figgins.

He jumped up and stepped towards the driver. A two-shilling-piece was held temptingly between his thumb and forefinger.

"Did you see where those two cuds went?" he asked.

"That I did, sir," said the driver, looking at the coin.

Figgins plucked it to him.

"Where did they go?"

"Through the wood, sir. They got over the fence just there."

"Come on, chaps!" howled Figgins. "This is the way! Leave those two bounders alone. We'll have the new kid yet! I leave this wood like a hawk!"

The New House justices assembled after him. Shouting vengeance, they vanished into the dusky wood. Herrick came down the road and joined Digby, and the two looked at each other ruefully. Both were extremely dirty and dishevelled, but they didn't care for that. All their thoughts were for Blake and his protégés.

"Trust Blake," said Herrick. "He'll do them." But he spoke a little doubtfully. "Look here, Dig, it's not good following them. We should never find Blake in the ditch, and they're six or seven against us. Our cue is to cut to St. Jim's, and get there as fast as we can, and rally the chaps in case they're wanted. If Figgins and his crew get the new kid away from Blake, we may have a chance yet, if we make them let the wind."

"Right you are," agreed Dig.

They remounted their machines, Dig wheeling Blake's as before, and scorching off to the school. The driver of the

back toward his horse back to Wayland. The shouts of the New House juniors were dying away through the wood.

Figgins and his men were hot on the coast. Through Dig's diversion, Blake had a fine start, and had he been alone, he would have romped home. But he was combated with the new boy, and the new boy was not a runner.

George Edward Barby was a fitness freak, much given to eating pastry and smoking secret cigarettes, and so, before he had run fifty yards, he was panting and lagged.

But for Jack Blake's grip, he would have fallen headless in the first minute, and now he was heaving a heavy weight upon the School House key.

Blake gripped his teeth as he dragged on the stumbling, straggling pair.

"Come on!" he exclaimed. "Haven't you got any wind at all? Don't you run? Oh, my hat! What kind of a silly, stumbling sort of a raggie do you call yourself, anyway? Haven't you ever played football, you man?"

"Noooo," panted Barby. "I haven't, and I don't want to, I can't run! I don't want to run! I shall die if you make me keep on! Oh dear, oh dear!"

"You must run! Do you want that crew to catch you?"

"Can't we hide somewhere? I can't keep on."



Digby fell over George Edward, and Herrison fell over Dig, and Blake only made the conventional excuse. (See page 11.)

And the boy simply flung himself to the ground, and lay there gasping and panting. Blake looked down at him with deep disgust. Barby was in no condition for a foot race, but that only made Jack more angry. Every boy ought to keep himself fit.

What was to be done?

He could hear the New House boys crashing through the traps and calling to each other, and coming nearer every moment. If they came upon Barby, all would be up. It would not take Barby long to learn that their intention was hostile to Blake alone, and extremely friendly to himself. There he would be certain to wait for the New House, to try out Blake for that extraordinary run, if for nothing else. Not that he would have much choice in the matter, if Figgins were not held of him.

"Can't we hide?" gasped George Edward feebly. "I can't run!"

"Oh, you nincompoop!" exclaimed Jack. "You waster!

You waster! You an-English anti-football slanted apology for a snarecrow!"

George Edward only gasped.

"Well, we'll try hiding—that's the only thing," said Blake. "I can't carry you, and if those fellows get hold of

me, they will not finish. He jerked Barby to his feet and led him into the thickets. They lay in covert in a mass of branches.

"For goodness sake be quiet," whispered Jack, as he heard the New House lads coming up the footpath. "You'll give us away if you start like a blinking grasshopper."

"I can't help it," gasped the miserable Barby.

He had "beliefs to mend," with a vengeance, and his breathing was audible at a distance. He tried to breathe more quietly, and gasped and panted.

"Quiet," whispered Jack fiercely.

He had heard someone halt close to the thicket; he felt that that someone had heard a sound, and was listening. There was a shout.

"Come on, you chaps!"

Jack gritted his teeth.

He knew what it meant. They were discovered. He jumped up. A shadowy figure came lurching towards them. Jack hid, and the shadow went down with a thump.

"He's out! That's Blake, I know! Here he is, chaps!"

"Never mind Blake!" sang the voice of Figgins. "It's the new chug we want! If we can get hold of him, we shall be all right."

George Edward Barby shivered as he heard the words. He had no doubt that the intentions of the speaker were of the most ferocious description.

Blake dragged him away from the spot, deeper into the wood.

"Can you run now?" he whispered.

"None, I'm lagged out."

"Then lie close, and don't say a word, and I'll lead them off on a false scent, and come back for you."

"All right."

And leaving the new boy lying close under the branches, Jack Blake set off, making as much noise as he could, to attract the attention of the New House lads.

They fell into the trap at once.

"Where they go?"

"Alike way."

There was a rush towards Jack. He glanced to himself as he led the pursuers further from the spot where George Edward Barby lay in the darkness. But a few minutes later he gave a start as he heard a shout.

"I've got him!"

Figgins, in the darkness, had stumbled over something in the thicket, and he was not long in discovering that that "something" was a boy crunched there, shivering with fright.

And Figgins's shout of triumph went up to the skies.

"I've got him!"

The chase of the slender Blake ceased, and the New House boys gathered to the joyous call of their leader.

"Only one!" asked Faint. "Which one?"

"The new kid," replied Figgins promptly. "I can't see him, but if it had been Blake he'd have been all over me before this."

He shook his captive, who began to whimper.

"Halls, kid! What's your name?"

"George Edward Barby, if you please," whispered the new boy.

"I don't please. How can you expect to please anybody with names like that?" roared the Figgins. "What were you running off with that tender Blake for?"

"He—he—he—"

"My hat! He's laughing at us! What do you mean by your he—he—he?"

"He—he—he said that brute Figgins would—"

"What? I'm Figgins!"

"Oh dear!" said George Edward, sighing. "Please don't! I—I—I—"

"Oh shut up, with your he—he—he, and your I—I—I!" exclaimed Figgins. "Gather round, chaps! We're going to see this dear boy safe to St. Jim's. Let's get back to the footpath. Take my arm, youngster. Take his other one, Faint."

Between the two New House juniors George Edward was marched away, and the rest walked round them like a body-guard, hissing over with triumph.

"Now, kiddie," said Figgins persuasively, "I suppose that brute Blake has been filling you up with yarns about us."

"Yes."

"I'm ready he was your friend, and not me! Said I would walk you 'rags. Look here, I'm your friend, George, and I'm going to see you through. You stick to me, and vote as I tell you at the election, and I'm your champion for life. Is it a go?"

"You—you won't put hot coals down the back of my neck, nor—nor those paraffin tapers over my trousers and set fire to them!"

"Ho, ho, ha, ha. Given as your charge! My dear kid, I'm so grateful as a soaking down. Follow as I direct, and you'll be me because I remind them of their mothers and fathers by my simple ways. I simply take on new fellows, I love them, I love their souls! I've taken a lot of trouble to get you out of that horrid ruffian's hands."

George Edward was considerably bewildered; it really seemed that Blake and Higgins were rival philanthropists deeply concerned for his welfare, and he could not quite make it out.

"Now, do you know which house you are going into?" asked Higgins earnestly.

"Yes, the New House, Blake said he would try and get me into the School House, but as you are so decent, I don't think—"

"He did, did he? Oh, my eyes and stars! Change, this kid is coming into our house! And that waster of a Blake was near by rubbing him and getting his vote. But we've got him. You've rescued him! We triumph! Hear me smile! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the New House juniors jubilantly. George Edward hardly began to feel a sense of importance. It was clear that he was to be a much-sought-after young gentleman at St. Jim's.

"You see, Barb'y," explained Higgins, "there's a vote at St. Jim's. It's the New House—our house, you know—against a rotten old cannot ward they call the School House. You're coming into our house. Our candidate has got to be elected. But there's a tie in the voting. They polled just the same figure. One vote does it. You're the man who is going to win a victory for his house! Do you savvy?"

"I see," Barb'y said, "I've been taken in. That waster was going to make me vote against my own house. I see it all now. And he was running me off my legs for nothing. I'll make him sit up. I'll vote with you, of course."

"That's right. We'll vote as handy as we can, now, and you will be the guest of the evening. The New House won't know how to make enough of you. You'll be a giddy one!"

George Edward parried. The juniors came out of the wood into the lane, and St. Jim's was before them. Higgins looked round suspiciously, but there was no sign of the enemy.

"Get ahead, and warn our fellows to be on the look-out, Pratt," he said. "Those wasters may try to raid us and carry off the new kid under our noses. Blake won't give in if he can help it. You stick close to me, Barb'y."

Pratt obeyed. Just within the gates he found Kerr and Wynn, waiting. The "Co." had waited for the train at Rykomba; the train had come in, but the new boys, of course, had not. They had returned disappointed, to learn at the school of Higgins's new departure. They were waiting anxiously for news. Pratt gasped out the tale of triumph in a few words.

"Call up the chaps," he added, "while I go back to Figgis."

The "Co." lost no time in slaying. Pratt rejoined Figgis. The New House contingent, with the new boy in their midst, reached the Macaulay platform into the quadrangle, prepared for attack if it should come.

CHAPTER 15. Rescued!

BLAKE had wasted no time in useless regrets. Figgis had captured the new boy, and there was no getting away from that. Blake could not rescue him from half a dozen foes. He stopped only a few seconds to think, and then he tore off through the wood in the direction of the school. He arrived at St. Jim's a good ten minutes before Higgins and Digby, who covered the distance at a walk. Higgins and Digby were there before him. They had gone to a bath-room to clean up, and Jack met them coming out. The three looked at each other.

"They've got him!" asked Herries.

Blake nodded.

"Yes. The little beast couldn't run for his life. He was pumped out in a tick. They've got him, and by this time Figgis has explained things to him. He's a New House kid, or going to be, and they've got him."

"Oh, my Aunt Georgiana!" gasped Herries. "Is it all up, then?"

"All up?" said Blake severely. "Did you ever know your uncle to give in? Of course, it isn't all up till the last tick of the clock. Figgis will have to bring the kid to the school. We're going to gather our forces and seize them tap and thigh, and carry off the kid by main force."

"And?" asked Herries, "and Digby?"

"And!" said Blake, politely. "So long as there was a chance of doing the trick by diplomacy it would have been

stupid to make a row. But this is the last throw of the dice. It's either that or knockable under, and let the New House carry the election."

"That's so," agreed Herries. "There's no time to lose, then. They're already beginning to go to hall. Come on!" The School House juniors joyfully greeted the sign of battle. Blake was their leader; they were willing to follow Blake anywhere, especially to a row with the rival house. Blake led his merry men into the quadrangle. As it was a half-holiday, and an election was pending, unusual crowding and noise attracted no special attention. The School House forces lay near among the alms, watching the gates.

"Look out!" muttered Blake. "There they come!"

Figgis and his comrades were marching in.

"That's the new kid in the middle of them—that sandy-haired waster! Mind he doesn't escape. Capture him! Don't kill him if you can help it—bat, anyway, capture him!"

"We will—we will!"

"There's a crowd of New House cads coming out to meet Figgis," said Herries.

"Better mind," said Blake. "There's thirty or so here: enough to eat up the New House, body and boots. Are you all ready for war?"

"Yes!" came in a fierce whisper.

"Then follow me. Forward!"

And forth rushed the School House crowd from the shadows of the alms. Right at Figgis and his party they rushed.

"Shoulder to shoulder!" shouted Figgis. "Stand together! New House to the rescue! Rescue—rescue! Back up, New House!"

"School House! School House! Down with the Rats!" roared Blake's party.

And there was a terrific melee immediately. Figgis and his faithful few closed desperately round the new boy, fighting like tigers. But the rush of the School House overwhelmed them. Figgis shouted frantically for rescue, and Kerr and Wynn, at the head of the New House, were dashing up. But a number of the Rats, headed by Herries, met them and engaged them, while Blake and the rest went for Figgis. Blake knocked down Pratt and another, and laid hold of George Edward Barb'y, who squeaked with terror.

"Rescue!" roared Figgis. "School House cads! They're sneaking our vote! Rescue!"

Blake swung Barb'y over his shoulder like a sack and started off with him. Digby and some more manfully covered his retreat. But Figgis, raging, tore through them, and gripped Barb'y's collar, and strove to pull him away from Blake.

The New House juniors rushed up, and a desperate battle raged round the hapless stranger. Blake had a firm grip upon him round his body and legs, and Figgis was hanging on to his collar like grim death. Round them the conflict eddied and whirled. It was like a scene from the *Black and White* upon the unhappy new boy in the place of the body of Patroclus. George Edward was too dazed and terrified even to yell. He could only wriggle and give utterance to faint squeals.

Fortunately for the succeeding juniors, the darkness hid them from the houses, and noise mingling in the quad went unnoted on half-holidays. But the uproar was growing tremendous, and presently Montebell, with a scowling brow, called forth from the New House, came in hand; what time Kildare also emerged from the School House, armed with a pointer.

In their excitement the juniors never noticed the approach of vengeance in the shapes of captain and prefect. Blake, with a final, tremendous effort, had torn Barb'y away from Figgis, and his chains closed round him as he bore him off. They passed Kildare with a rush, and in the gloom the captain could not see what was going on. They bore the prize into the School House, and, without a pause, up the stairs to Study No. 5.

"Got him!" said Blake, plumping down the prisoner into the only easy-chair. "Cheer up, kiddo! Your uncle won't hurt you. Get him!"

"Got him?" shouted Herries and Digby.

"I smile," whispered Blake. "Hear me smile! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I won't stay here," parried Barb'y—"I won't! I belong to the New House! I'm going to my own house."

Blake gently pinned him down as he strove to rise. Outside the study a couple of juniors were on the watch. The noise had died away in the quadrangle. The willings avoid the suspicions of Jack Blake.

"Keep that waster safe!" he exclaimed; and he crossed to the window.

He threw it open and looked out. In front of the School House, in the light of the windows, was a crowd of juniors mingled from both houses, their fighting ended now. Blake's heart sank a little as he saw Kildare and Montebell in the

wider of them. The voice of the prefect came clearly through the night air:

"What's all this rowing about? Answer me, Figgins!"

"Nothing, Mestith!"

Figgins was snipping the "cheer" from a damaged nose.

"Good old Figgins!" muttered Blake. "He's loyal to the backbone. He won't give us away, even to save a vote for his house. Masters and prefects are barred in house rows."

Mestith gripped Figgins by the shoulder.

"Don't tell him, Figgins! I heard some of you shouting. I know there was a row last evening today, and I believe you kids were fighting for him."

Figgins made an reply.

"I wish that you were fighting about! Where is the new boy?"

"I don't know."

Mestith smiled disapprovally. The wild war-cries of the combatants had, in fact, told him all three ways to tell about the row. He knew that a new boy had arrived at St. Jim's, and had been carried off by the School House janitors. The inference was that it was a New House recruit, and he was not slow to see what this might mean to him. He left Figgins and strode towards Kildare.

"Do you know what this means?" he asked roughly. "A boy belonging to my house has been kidnaped by your juniors, Kildare."

"Impossible!" proclaimed the captain. "Who is it?"

"I don't know; a new boy."

"I did not know a new boy was coming to the school today."

"Neither did I, until a few minutes ago. But he has come, and your kids have collared him. I know what it's for, too. I don't see you had a hand in it, but if I hadn't come upon the spot you would have pulled off the election through this sharp practice."

Kildare coloured scarlet.

"Don't talk rot!" he said sharply. "You know I know nothing about the matter, Mestith. If a boy of your house is here you can claim him, and I'll see that you have him. Why do you think he is?"

"I expect Blake could tell you," answered Mestith. "He's at the bottom of every piece of rascality that goes on in the school."

Kildare compressed his lips.

"I think I saw Blake going in just now," he said coldly. "Come with me to his study."

"Very well."

The two seniors entered the School House. The youngsters looked at each other. Figgins was looking decidedly queer.

"This is rotten!" he said. "Well, we didn't ask. It can't be helped."

"What did Mestith want to poke his nose into the business for?" gasped Kerr. "I've a good mind to let the election slide."

And the juniors dispersed in grim ill-humour. The matter was out of their hands now.

CHAPTER 12.

A WIN FOR THE NEW HOUSE.

BLAKE had heard every word from the study window. He turned back into the room with compressed lips and a glass in his eye.

"Quick, chap!" he said. "Mestith and Kildare are coming here for the new kid. He's got to be showed out of sight somewhere."

"The coal-bunker!" asked Horrie.

"Under the table!" suggested Digby.

Blake shook his head.

"No, in the cupboard!" he replied. "I'll go in with him and keep him quiet. You understand, you enrolling him, and you're to keep quiet, or you'll get slain!"

"I won't!"

"Come on!"

Blake jerked him into the cupboard, entered with him, and the door closed. With Blake's iron grip on his collar, George Edward dare do nothing but whisper.

Horrie threw a chair before the cupboard door with exaggerated reluctance, and sat down. Digby opened a book at random, and took up a pen. There was a knock at the door. Kildare always knocked before entering, even if it was only a dog's room.

He came in with Mestith. He was looking very grave, and the head prefect of the New House was scowling. The captain glanced curiously round the study.

Horrie was reclining gracefully in the chair before the cupboard, his eyes upon a book; Dig, at the table, was a picture of unostentatious industry.

"Where's Blake?" asked Kildare.

"He was here a moment ago," said Digby, without looking up.

Kildare smiled. He knew how strong an objection Study Six had to lying, and he spotted the evasion in an instant.

"I didn't ask where he was a moment ago," he replied.

"I want to know where he is now."

"Do you know where he is, Horrie?" asked Digby.

"As much as you do," said Horrie, with a shrug.

"You see, Kildare?" said Digby appealingly.

"Yes, I see more than you think," replied the captain.

"Are you very busy, Digby? Do you usually work so hard on that on a half-holiday, and only a quarter of an hour before an election?"

Digby coloured to the roots of his hair.

"Deeply interested, Horrie!" asked the captain.

"Always read your book — or do down — and!"

Horrie turned crimson.

"Perhaps you wouldn't mind getting up while I look in your cupboard?" said Kildare blandly. "You're sitting just in the way."

Poor Horrie rose without a word. The door of the cupboard opened, and Blake stepped out, very flushed, but cool as ever. He nodded calmly to the captain.

"Want to speak to me, Kildare? I took cover because — because —"

"Where is the new boy?"

"The what?"

"The new boy. Mestith says a new boy has come. I don't know anything about it, but I think it's a New House boy, and that that's no't got him here."

"You can search the room if you like," said Blake, with dignity. "I don't know what Mestith thinks I want with his ready boys. I wouldn't be found dead with one of them!"

Kildare threw open the door of the cupboard.

"Come out!"

George Edward Early stepped out, looking extremely well-to-do.

"Who are you? What house do you belong to?" asked the captain.

"My name's Barby. I'm going into the New House."

"You had better take him along, Mestith."

"Thank!" said Mestith dutifully, and he led the new boy from the study, and out of the School House, and across to his own quarters.

Kildare turned severely to the charges of Study Six.

"I suppose this was only a lark," he said, "but it is a serious business to kidnap a voter before an election. It is not fair play."

"Oh, along as we search as you like," said Blake, much gratified; "we deserve it. You victor, the lower page, you know."

"It was a fair game," explained Horrie. "The New House chaps didn't know which house he was going into at first, any more than we did. Don't you get your little back up, Kildare, over nothing!"

"Oh, he has got on!" said Blake. "I could kick myself, and I don't mind being slugged."

"Well, I won't slug you any more," said Kildare, laughing. "You'd better cut along, or you'll be late for ball."

And he strode from the study.

"Well, we did our best," said Blake, looking round. "We beat Figgins & Co. all along the line, but we had no show when a heavenly perfect slipped in. We've got nothing to approach ourselves with; only the election is a guess."

"I'd say some of the kids may have changed their minds about voting for that water Boker," said Digby hopefully.

"Not much chance of that. Still, we won't give up hope till our man's beaten at the poll. Come on, let's get down to ball. Oh, I could slug Mestith!" said Blake.

The chaps made their way into ball. The meeting was already pretty full; the ships on either side were gathering the voters into the field. The seniors were in their places in front, and the body of the hall was packed with juniors.

As the eyes were directed the figure of Master Harker, washed in a solid pallidness of New House youngsters. The New House evidently meant to run up chances with him.

The hall was crammed, and the doors were closed. The proceedings opened as before. The captain's speech was short and to the point.

A tie in the voting had occurred, as they all knew, at the previous election, so the matter was now being put to a second test. If the result was again a tie, the appointment of treasurer to the school state would be left to the discretion of the headmaster. There was no other way of settling it. Then, as Kildare sat down amid cheers, Harker rose and proposed Daniel again for the post, and was seconded, as before, by Drake.

"Give us a cheer!" said Blake. "We can yell one better than they can, if we can't shoot our man. Yell! Whoop!"

And the juniors gave a roar that made the roof shake:

"Harrsh for Darrel!"
 "Back up, School House!"
 "Harrsh!"

The clamor died away—and all the juniors were breathless. When silence was restored Montoth got upon his feet. The impassioned expression upon the proctor's scar ringle was a warning that he was going to say something nasty. There was an expectant hush.

"Goodness," began the proctor, "I have every hope that the present election will settle the question. It is a matter that requires to be settled without delay, for during the past week some very shady tricks have been tried on by some supporters of one of the candidates."

"There was a buzz, and a shout of 'Name—name!'"
 "I do not wish to mention names—"
 "Yah, New House out!" yelled a voice from the rear of the hall.
 "Yah, you dare not!"
 Montoth offered to take no notice of the interruption.
 "I only mention the matter," he went on, "to assure the school generally that I do not believe Kildare or Darrel had any hand in the shady business done by their backers."

"There was a roar;"
 "Name—name!"
 Kildare got upon his feet.
 "Silence for the captain!"
 "I insist upon Montoth explaining himself," said Kildare.
 "I am unaware of any foul play of any kind."
 "I am referring to the list-making of a voter."
 "Yes," yelled Blake, "and looking him up in a box-room of the New House! Is that what you are talking about!"
 There was a general laugh.

"There have been some cracks among the juniors," said Kildare. "I fancy they were six of one and half a dozen of the other. But if Montoth wishes an investigation—"
 "I wish nothing of the kind. I only mentioned the matter—"

"Out of nasty spite!" said a voice.
 "Because he was a silly ass!" said another critic.
 Montoth flushed angrily.
 "Silence!" said Kildare, and he sat down.
 Montoth rather wished he had let the matter alone; but he could never lose the opportunity of a dig at the captain. He went on hastily:

"As the matter came to nothing, it may be allowed to pass. I beg to propose Lucas Sleath as treasurer of the school clubs."
 He sat down, and after he had been accorded the question was put to the vote. Hands were called for Darrel, and the counting showed the same figures as at the previous election—one hundred and twenty. Evidently none of the voters had changed.

"Hands up for Sleath!"
 Figgins nudged the new boy. George Edward's hand went up with the rest. The counting was proceeded with slowly and carefully. The tallies agreed on the number, and it was announced:

"One hundred and twenty-one votes for Sleath!"
 The New House cheered lustily, and the School House cheered in chorus.

"Lucas Sleath is elected treasurer to the school clubs."
 The meeting broke up. The New House had won the election. The juniors of the victorious house called out of the hall ringing words of triumph. Figgins & Co. carried off George Edward Barkley to their study for the protracted brew. Blake and his chums walked away together with feelings too deep for words.

"Well," said Blake at last, "it can't be helped. They've got their man in, and the school will go to the dogs."
 Jim chums nodded a gloomy assent to this sad prediction.
 "But there's the football match!" said Blake, brightening up. "They're on top just now, but wait till we meet them at good old footer; we'll wipe up the ground with them. That's where the School House comes in."

"Right-ho!" exclaimed Digby. "After all, who cares who's treasurer? It's nothing, even if their cads have got it."
 "Ho, ho!"

"What are you cackling about?"
 "I was thinking of a tale of fat and grapes. All right. They're welcome to the messy election, since they've got it. But seriously, we shall pull up over the football match. We are going to lick these fellows. Are we disappointed?"
 "No!"

"Who's cock-horse at St. Jim's?"
 "School House?"
 "And we'll prove it on Saturday!" exclaimed Blake determinedly.

CHAPTER 13. The House Match.

THEIR was great rejoicing in the New House at St. Jim's.

They had carried the election, and Lucas Sleath was treasurer to the school clubs, in spite of all the efforts of the School House.

The New House were not particularly proud of Sleath, but he was of their house, one of themselves, flesh of their flesh, and bone of their bone.

And so they rejoiced.
 They rejoiced with an aggressive joy. They "kept it up" during the evening following the election, and their songs of triumph floated across the quad. Montoth had a party in his study, and they made speeches, and sang.

The juniors could not contain their glee. In the joy of his heart, Fatty Wynn proposed to raid the School House and lick the juniors there on mass. Figgins sat on the embankment, and there was a feast in his study instead. George Edward Barkley was the lion of the evening, and he related a dozen times his adventures in the hands of the School House party, and his escape by the heroic Figgins.

"Now all we've got to do," said Figgins, "is to lick the School House at footer on Saturday, and up we go! They'll never be able to hold their heads up again if they lose the match after losing the election. We've simply got to win, kids."

The "Go," roared that they would.
 The election of Lucas Sleath was to have results which were far from being foreseen by the jubilant partisans, or by their opponents, for that matter. Had for the present, there was rejoicing in the New House. The School House did its best to bear the pressure with equanimity.

There were some discontented souls who blamed Blake because things had not gone to their wishes.

It is not always entirely pleasant to be a leader of men, or of boys. A leader does not always get the credit of success, but he inevitably has to bear the blame of failure, and it was with Blake, as with other generals whose fortune has not flourished.

Blake wanted to know how he could possibly make one hundred and twenty voters outside one hundred and twenty-one, and there was no reply to that pointed question; but Percy Mallish voiced the sentiments of the malcontents when he retorted:

"Don't ask any of your talented comrades. You're a leader, and you ought to have managed it, or got out and let somebody else lead who could have done it better."

Blake's eye glimmered.
 "Perhaps there's somebody here thinks he could give me points," he remarked. "I'm ready to be as hard as he says, and to change him within an inch of his life afterwards."

This generous offer was not accepted.
 But though the grumblers were silenced, they were not convinced, and Blake saw clearly enough that his prestige was trembling in the balance.

If the football match did not spell victory for his house, it was quite possible that he might fall from his high estate as captain of the School House juniors.

But the junior match was not likely to be lost if hard work and grit could win it.

Blake kept his men at practice till he drove them to the point of rebellion. He promised each of them a terrific liding if the match was lost, and they knew he would keep his word. But, as a matter of fact, that great incentive was not needed. The players were already determined to do their best for the honor of the house.

Saturday came round at last, and to the relief of the footballers, it dawned fresh and cold, and clear. The afternoon was an ideal one for football. The kick-off was timed for two o'clock, as it was dark so early. Kildare had consented to referee the match, and he was on the ground to receive the captain of St. Jim's who always had a chance to encourage manly instincts among the younger boys, and the junior house match met with his whole-hearted approval. And though he would naturally have been pleased to see his own house victorious, every boy in the school knew that he could depend upon Kildare for the strictest fair play.

Most of the Upper Form boys strolled down, in rather a condescending manner, to see the match. As a matter of fact, all the sportsmen of St. Jim's were keenly interested, for the junior house teams were known to be in excellent form, and the game was certain to be a keenly-contested one.

Fit enough looked the School House lads in their red jerseys, and the New House looked in fine fettle in their blue. Blake correctly named the coin, and the New House kicked off; but there was hardly any wind. The game commenced, and the junior footballers played with the knowledge that all the eyes of St. Jim's were upon them.

For ten minutes or so the ball was kicked about in mid-

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field, while the teams were taking each other's measure. Then, led by Blake, the School House forwards got away. Blake made a fine run down the field, unobstructed for goal and a pair of cheering from his house.

But Fatty Wynn, in goal, was on the alert.

Out came the ball from Wynn's ready hand, and the New House backs cleared, and then it was time for the New House to fall.

And they did fall!

Up the field came the blue shirts, Figgins's long legs taking him over the ground in fine style, and right through the School House defence they went.

"Back up, School House!" was a frequent yell across the tops.

"Back up, Blake!"

"On the ball! On the ball!"

"Hurrah!"

Blake, with a fine burst, had robbed Figgins of the ball, and was away with it like a flash of lightning.

The New House halves closed in upon him, and he passed to Herries at centre, and Herries dribbled the leather on, and passed again to Digby at inside-left as he was wanted.

Digby got clear, and raced for goal, dodging a New House half-back as neatly as could be desired, and alarming the teacher in at Fatty Wynn.

And this time Fatty was not so lucky. He charged madly at the whizzing ball, and slipped, and missed it, and the ball climbed up the back of the net.

And then the School House let themselves go.

"Goal!"

"Goal!"

"Hurrah!"

"Good old Dig!"

"Good old School House!"

"Hurrah!"

The boys, looking very hot, walked back to the entrance of the field. Figgins looked off, and once more they mingled in strife.

Encouraged by their success, the School House were very dangerous. The New House backs had plenty of work to do, and Fatty Wynn in goal was kept pretty busy.

Presently enthusiastic shouts broke forth again.

Blake had the ball, and was dribbling it down the field in fine style. He dribbled it fairly round the feet of a back who rushed up to stop him, and streaked for goal, and shot the leather in a way that gave Fatty Wynn no earthly chance.

Wynn looked glass at the ball lodged in the net. His expression was reflected upon the faces of the rest of the New House team.

The School House team were two up, and the game was not twenty-five minutes old. Figgins told his men to back up. The School House crowd were shouting gleefully.

"Good old School House!"

"Yah, Yah! Whom did you learn to play fustler?"

"Learn to play? They never learned. They can't play fustler for tiffin!"

"They're trying to learn now, but, bless you, they can't!"

"Yah! Who's sock-house at St. Jim's?"

Figgins's eyes gleamed with the light of battle.

"You hear them? He snarled, as the teams lined up.

"You hear those wasters? I tell you we've got to win. Back up! For goodness' sake back up, and meet Blake!"

"We will! We will!" answered his half-backs.

Figgins kicked off.

The ball flew from his feet, and a rush of the School House followed.

The red shirts came gaily on, and the School House were shouting in gleeful anticipation of another goal. But a change came o'er the spirit of their dream.

The long legs of Figgins stood him in good stead.



Blake swung Barby over his shoulder like a sack and started off with him. Digby and some more manfully covered his retreat.

He was on the ball, and away with it at a pace that was equal to Blake's when he made his successful run. The others could not keep up with him, and Figgins did not pass the ball; he simply sprinted for all he was worth. Blake raced after him in vain. A School House half charged him desperately, and was felled himself by the impact. Figgins kept on. He dodged one back, and shouldered off another. Walsh, in goal, watched him like a cat, but Figgins changed his feet at the last moment, and sent in the ball just where the goalie did not expect it.

A football about hard from the New House ground.

"Goal!"
It was their first in the match, and it delighted them beyond measure.

Again and again they scored and the glad word,

"Goal!"

"Goal!"
"Hoora, Figgins!"

Wip! went the whistle, and the first half closed.

The School House were two to one at the interval, and their hopes were high; but the New House, congratulating themselves on Figgins's fine performance, were equally hopeful.

The players needed the brief rest, for the game was a fast and a hot one. The spectators waited impatiently for the whistle to blow again.

When the teams lined up for the second half, excitement was at its height.

The New House, led by Figgins, made a gallant attack, which Blake and his men had some difficulty in repelling.

But presently the red shirts were seen advancing, and the New fell back before them, and the School House cheered as Blake captured the ball and sprinted down the field.

Wipe down, dodge and beat, with Figgins close on his track, straining every nerve to gain one step, which would have been enough.

Blake, quite sure of himself, turned his head for a moment, and looked into the straining face of his rival, and smiled accordingly—a smile of conscious power that irritated Figgins. He forgot for the moment that he was on the football field, and comprehended only that his rival was making fun of him. He stretched out his long arm and seized Blake by the ear, and gave it a twist.

"Oh! Good!" yelled Blake, in surprise and pain.

He was off the ball in a moment, of course, and a New House back rushed up and took it from his feet.

Wip!
It was the whistle, loud and clear. The game stopped, and Figgins stood dumbfounded, remembering whom he was, and observing, with a thrill of horror, that Figgins fairly on the penalty mark.

Kidder came quickly up.

"Fool!" yelled the School House.
"I—I longest!" stammered Figgins.

Blake grinned.
"That's all right, Figgins. I say, I don't claim—"
The captain of St. Jim's interrupted.

"The game's the game! A foul in the penalty area has only one result. I'm sorry for you, Figgins, but you should learn to keep cool."

Figgins groaned in dismay.

A penalty kick to the School House—already a goal ahead.

But the referee's word was law. Blake took the kick. A host of eyes watched him in hungry expectation. Fatty Wren was all eyes. But Blake was one too many for the New House goalkeeper. Right into the net the ball whizzed, and the School House roared:

"Hurray! Hurray!"

Figgins's face was a study as the kick lived up. He desperately realized that the New House should win yet, and, after the kick-off, he threw himself into the game with fearless ardour. And while fortune, for a moment, favored the hopes of the New House, a gallant attack brought the blue shirt right up to the School House goal, and the ball went in from the feet of Keen, and the New House roared:

Those was a chance yet. Three to two—and twenty minutes more to play. It would be too bitter if the New House were beaten by that penalty-goal. But that, it was soon evident, was not likely to happen. The School House attack was determined, untiring, irresistible. They came on splendidly, and besieged the New House goal, and shots were rained in upon Fatty Wren, and as last one escaped him and went into the net.

"Goal!"
The School House were lost up. After that the New House team defended desperately, and the School House had no further chance of scoring. But their present score was sufficient to satisfy their most enthusiastic partisans. Four to two! And it was growing plain that the New House could not equal the figures. They had all their work cut out to defend their citadel against the attacks of Blake and his merry men.

Right up to the finish the play was fast and furious, and when the final whistle was blown both teams were in mood of a rout. Wip! The play ceased, and the ground was instantly invaded by a surge of boys of all sizes and both houses. The School House players surrounded their champions, and seized them, and bore them off shoulder-high, shouting with triumph:

"Hurray! Hurray!"

"Who's the rock horse at St. Jim's?"

"School House! School House!"

Blake struggled out of the grip of his admirers. He made his way to Figgins. The chief of the New House jokers was looking a little glum. Blake gripped his hand.

"Huck us, Figgins! It was a fine game, and we had all the luck that's all. We deserved it, you know; you captured the objective."

Figgins grinned, and returned his grip.

"All right, Blake! We'll lift you at the next match, don't you fear. You're a good sort!"

"Being the Co. and come to tea in our study," said Blake.
"Make it a treat for to-night, and to-morrow we'll be twice less than ever. What?"

"Right you are!" grinned Figgins.

And that evening there was a jolly party of half a dozen in Study No. 5 in the School House; Blake and his comers entertaining right royally their rivals and foes, Figgins & Co.

THE END.

(The next story of Jack Blake and Figgins & Co. will appear in **PLUCK** next Saturday week, with a tale of Dr. Huxford.)

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