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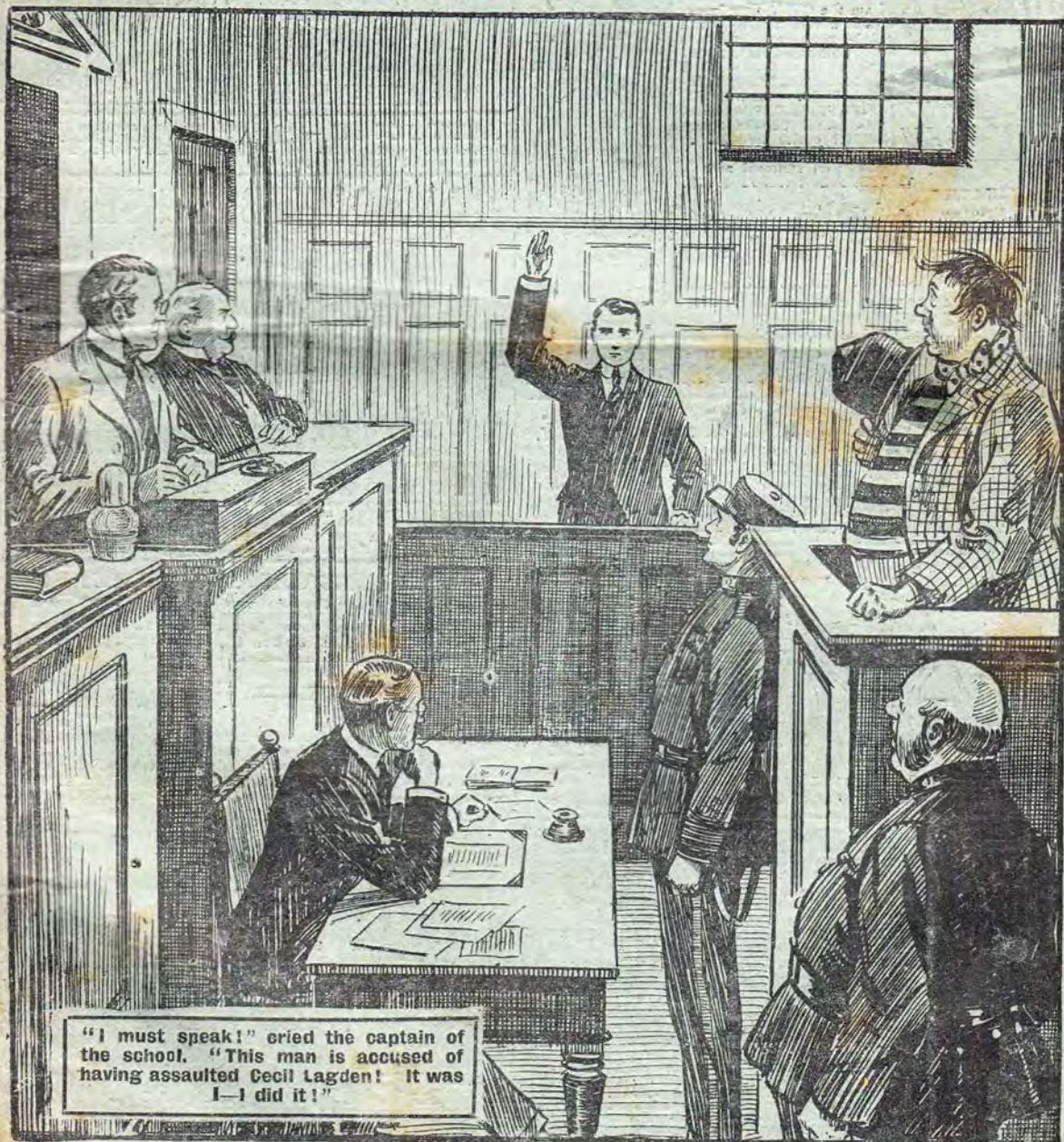
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AN AFFAIR OF DISHONOUR!

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School Tale of Tom Merry & Co.
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BY
MARTIN CLIFFORD.

CHAPTER 1. Simply Swank!

KILDARE, the captain of St. Jim's, frowned and bit his lip restlessly.

The big, handsome Sixth-Former did not look happy. It was an occasion upon which Kildare might have been expected to look very cheerful. For it was a half-holiday at St. Jim's, and the St. Jim's First Eleven were awaiting the arrival of a cricket team from Ferndale, and the prospect of a cricket match generally put Kildare, of St. Jim's, into his cheeriest mood.

But he was decidedly not cheery now.

The members of his eleven noticed it, and they shared his feelings. Even the juniors who had crowded round the field observed it. Kildare certainly did his best to hide his feelings; but he was not a good hand at that, and everybody knew that he was annoyed.

It was a glorious July afternoon, and ideal weather for cricket. The well-rolled pitch looked very inviting. The stumps were

pitched, and the St. Jim's First, in spotless white, were lounging outside the pavilion, quite ready. Round the cricket field were gathered fellows of all Forms to see the match. First Eleven matches always drew a crowd, and the St. Jim's fellows were specially keen about this match; they all wanted very much to see the visiting team licked. The Ferndale cricketers were not popular. There was, as Jack Blake of the Fourth had remarked, more swank than cricket about them, and the amount of "side" they put on made Blake, personally, feel quite ill.

And they were late!

They did not have to come very far from Ferndale, and as they always came to their matches in a swagger brake, there was no real reason why they shouldn't have arrived to time. And nobody on the ground believed that the delay was accidental. Five minutes or ten minutes might have been allowed, but half an hour was too "thick"—to quote Blake again. It was just one more sample of Ferndale "side," Blake declared, and D'Arcy, Digby and Herries, his chums in the Fourth, fully agreed with him.

The St. Jim's crowd had gathered to see the first ball bowled. They had been on time, and the First Eleven were quite ready. Everything and everybody, in fact, were in a state of great readiness, all excepting the Ferndale team. They hadn't arrived, and there was no sign of them so far.

And the Saints were exasperated.

The First Eleven—great and important personages in the Fifth and Sixth Forms—felt that they were beginning to look absurd. And the other fellows were angry. The juniors might poke fun at the Sixth themselves, and frequently did; but they objected very strongly to any rotten outsiders making the Sixth—their Sixth—look absurd.

In fact, everybody was beginning to feel rather ridiculous. Tom Merry, of the Shell, was quite pink with indignation. He had put off a match with Figgins & Co., of the New House, in order to watch the Ferndale game. And here he was, standing by the ropes ready to watch, and there was no game!

Next Thursday:

"THE LIMIT!" AND "THE SCHOOL UNDER CANVAS!"

"It's rotten!" Tom Merry declared. "They're simply cads!"

"Rotters!" agreed Figgins, of the Fourth.

For once School House and New House were united in opinion.

"Of course, there may have been an accident or somethin'," remarked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, of the Fourth, polishing his eyeglass in a very thoughtful way. "Accidents will happen, you know, deah boys."

Jack Blake grunted.

"There isn't an accident. This is swank!" he said.

"Yes, rather," said Tom Merry, in deep disgust. "When Kildare took his men over to Ferndale they weren't ready, and the First had to cool their heels for half an hour because Lagden had forgotten the time."

"Wotten!" said D'Arcy. "The fellow is a cad!"

"Swanker!" growled Figgins.

"Rank outsider," said Tom Merry.

"It's just Ferndale swank," said Monty Lowther savagely.

"If I were Kildare, I'd take my men off the ground and decline to play when the rotters do come!"

"Yaas, wathah! I should regard that as a weally dignified course, undah the cires."

"Only it would muck up the afternoon, and the Ferndale cads would say that the St. Jim's First had funk'd the match," said Manners.

"Yes, they've got us either way," said Tom Merry. "We've got to stand their cheek one way or the other."

"Kildare looks as if he's gettin' watty, though," said D'Arcy, turning his eyeglass upon the captain of St. Jim's.

"Time he did, I think."

"The rotters!"

"The swankers!"

"The cads!"

These and other remarks of the same kind showed the unfavourable opinion the St. Jim's juniors had of the visiting eleven. School House and New House juniors, who had come down to the ground prepared to rag one another considerably, forgot all about House ragging, and joined cordially in applying uncomplimentary names to the expected eleven.

Kildare was standing outside the pavilion, with Darrel and Rushden of the Sixth. The rest of the First Eleven were idling about, waiting. Some of them were saying things in low tones, others were grimly silent. Kildare's glance went up to the big clock in the tower of St. Jim's.

"Half an hour, Darrel," he said.

Darrel nodded.

"Yes; I suppose we're going to wait."

Kildare bit his lip.

"It would be rather drastic to cut the match, after they've had a journey over here," he said. "I'm sorry I accepted their challenge now. I knew that Lagden and his eleven were a set of swankers."

Darrel smiled.

"That was partly the reason, wasn't it?" he remarked. "It would be such a pleasure to take them down a peg or two, and the last match wasn't finished. If it had been finished, it would have stopped their crowing for a bit."

Kildare grunted.

"This match won't be finished, either, by the look of things," he said. "They're half an hour late already, and there's no sign of them."

"Might have been delayed," suggested Rushden.

"Perhaps. I don't think so, though. It's Ferndale swank."

"Better chuck the match, I think," said Monteith, the head prefect of the New House, joining the group. "The whole thing's beginning to be funny."

Kildare made a restless movement.

"Well, if they don't come soon, we won't play them," he said. "Anyway, this is our last match with Ferndale. We'll wipe out the fixture."

"Yes, rather."

"We're being guyed," said Monteith savagely; "and they can't play cricket, either. They've beaten little local teams that can't play for toffee, but we should lick them, with an innings to spare. They ought to know that."

"They will know it—soon!" growled Baker.

Kildare looked anxiously towards the distant school gates. Several fellows had posted themselves there to watch for the Ferndale brake. Murmurs were breaking out on all sides on the cricket field. The annoyance was deepening to exasperation.

But there was a shout from the gates at last.

"They're coming!"

"Here comes the brake!"

Kildare's face brightened.

"They'll be here in a minute now!" he remarked. "Mind, no growling, you chaps. Must be civil to a visiting team."

"I don't feel so jolly civil!" growled Monteith.

"Still, noblesse oblige, you know."

"There they are!"

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"THE STOLEN SCHOOLBOYS!"

The Ferndale brake had appeared at last. The sight of it was received in grim silence by the St. Jim's crowd. Even the most exuberant of the juniors had no cheer to waste upon the Ferndale swankers.

CHAPTER 2.

Not Popular!

L AGDEN and his men descended from the brake in a very leisurely way. Lagden, the Ferndale captain, was a tall, slim fellow, who cultivated elegant manners. He came towards the pavilion with his crowd, and their walk was leisurely and careless. They were evidently in no hurry.

Tom Merry & Co., in the junior crowd, glared at them. The Ferndalers seemed to be quite unaware of it. They walked on with a careless swagger, as if—as Blake remarked, with intense disgust—they considered the earth hardly good enough for them to tread on. Monty Lowther, the hummer of the Shell, detached himself from the junior group, and fell in behind the procession of Ferndalers, imitating with exaggerated fidelity the swagger of the visiting cricketers.

There was a chuckle among the juniors, and a dozen other fellows rushed to imitate Monty Lowther's example.

Lagden and his men walked on unconsciously. They were far too lofty even to glance at mere juniors, and they did not look behind them. They were quite unconscious of the fact that a dozen juniors in their rear were imitating their swagger exaggeratedly, and they wondered at the sudden outbreak of merriment all over the field.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The whole crowd roared.

Cecil Lagden turned pink.

He did not know the cause of the laughter, but it annoyed him.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Even Kildare smiled.

From where he stood at the pavilion he could see the oncoming cricketers and the swaggering juniors behind them, and he could not help smiling. He raised his hand, however, and made a warning gesture to Blake & Co. Blake & Co. did not seem to see it. At all events, they did not cease their antics.

Lagden looked round.

At the sight of the swaggering dozen his pink face grew scarlet.

"Stop that, you young rascals!" shouted Darrel.

He took a grip upon his bat and started towards the mischievous juniors. Jack Blake and his comrades promptly disappeared into the crowd.

Lagden was frowning haughtily as he arrived at the pavilion. He shook hands very coldly with the St. Jim's captain.

"You're late!" said Kildare bluntly.

"Are we?" said Lagden.

"Yes; over half an hour."

"So sorry, don't you know," drawled Lagden. "Would you mind telling us where our dressing-room is?"

The Ferndalers went in to change.

Kildare bit his lip.

"Not even an apology," he said to Darrel. "I was a fool to play them! But—"

"We'll take some of the swank out of them!" growled

Darrel. "I fancy they think the match will be unfinished, like the last. But—"

"But it won't!"

"No fear!"

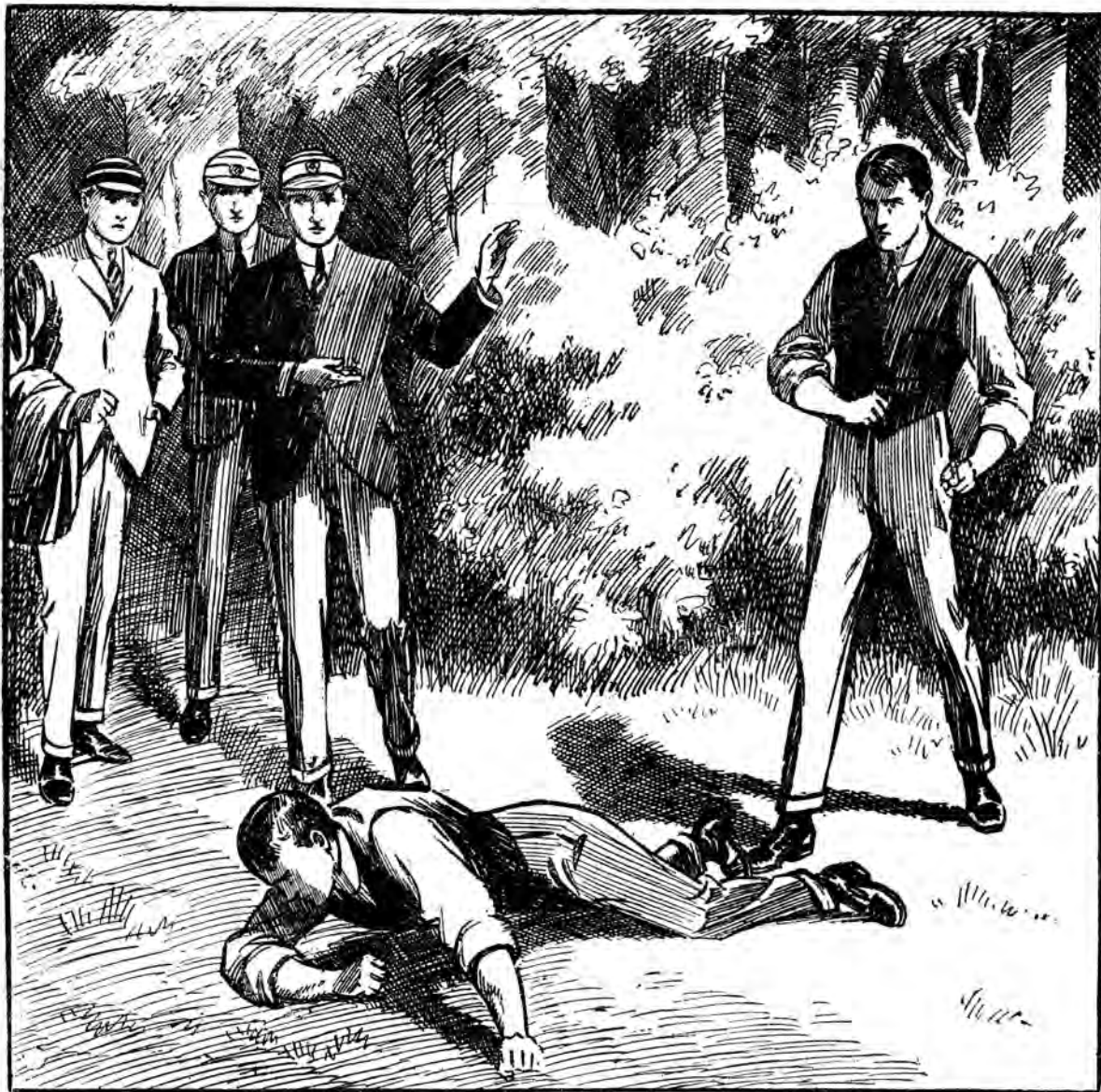
"They can't play for toffee!" said Monteith angrily. "They've licked little teams under their weight, but they've never tackled anything our size, or they'd have had some of the cheek taken out of them! We'll give 'em the licking of their lives!"

And that thought was a great comfort to the exasperated First. They had not the slightest doubt about their ability to do it. They had seen some Ferndale play, and they didn't think much of it. Every fellow there was grimly determined to play the game of his life, if only for the satisfaction of completely crushing the swankers.

Lagden & Co. were a good time changing. They did not hurry themselves in any way. Hurry, indeed, was incompatible with the repose which stamps the caste of Vere de Vere, which the Ferndalers cultivated with great assiduity.

But they emerged at last in flannels.

St. Jim's won the toss, and Kildare elected to bat first. He intended to pile up enough runs in the first innings to make it necessary for the Ferndalers to follow on, and then there would be no danger of the match remaining unfinished. Kildare had little doubt of finishing the match with an innings in hand. The Ferndalers had declined to entertain the suggestion of a single innings game. As a matter of fact, Lagden preferred an unfinished match to a licking, and if the Saints proved too tough for him, there was no doubt that he would try to hang out the match till the time when it was agreed that the stumps should be drawn, and that he would decline to play longer, whether the light was good or not. By methods of that kind



Kildare drew back his right hand and struck, and the blow crashed full in the Ferndale captain's face, and Lagden fell like a log in the grass! (See Chapter 10.)

Lagden had often eluded defeat, and enabled a team of extremely indifferent cricketers to swank as undefeated champions.

Lagden led his men out to field, and the Ferndalers posted themselves in elegant attitudes, much more desirous of being taken for men of the world than for cricketers.

"Blessed set of duffers!" Tom Merry remarked to his clams. "The First will walk all over them."

"Yaas, wathah, deah boy! The juniah eleven would knock them into a cocked hat at weal cwicket," said D'Arcy.

"Hear, hear!" said Redfern of the Fourth. "I only wish we had a chance at them."

"Here comes Kildare."

"And Darrel."

"Now look out for fun!"

And the crowd settled themselves down to watch with great enjoyment. And they had plenty to enjoy, as they had anticipated. Tunstall, the crack bowler of the Ferndale team, went on for the first over, and he swaggered to his place as if he were a crack county bowler at the very least.

He might have been expected to perform the hat trick in the first over—from his manner. But he didn't.

The first over was to Kildare, and the captain of St. Jim's proceeded to make hay of it.

He wiped the very first ball away to the boundary, and there was a yell of delight from the crowd.

The second ball followed the first, and then came a three. The fourth ball came to Darrel, and Darrel sent it on its journey without an effort, and there was another three. Kildare played the fifth ball to the boundary, and took two for the sixth. And the St. Jim's crowd roared.

"Bravo!"

"Hurrah!"

Twenty for the first over!

No wonder the Saints were delighted, and no wonder the Ferndale fieldsmen looked grim.

As the field crossed over for the second over, there was a perceptible diminution of swagger in the bearing of the visiting eleven.

Lagden & Co. seemed to wake up to the fact that this was business, and they came down out of the clouds, as it were, and began to play.

CHAPTER 3.

Something Like a Score!

KILDARE grinned as Monson of Ferndale bowled the second over to Darrel. He could not help grinning. He had expected the Ferndale play to be feeble, but he had not supposed that it would be quite so feeble as this. Lagden & Co. could bat a little, but their bowling

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was weak, and their fielding almost comical. It was quite clear that they were nowhere up to the form of the home team, and they realised it themselves, and they did not look pleasant about it. And the cheers for the good hitting jarred upon them, and they heard remarks about themselves that were not flattering.

"My only Aunt Jane!" ejaculated D'Arcy minor of the Third Form. "Did you ever see fielding like that! We wouldn't have it in the Third."

"No fear!" said Joe Frayne, a member of that important Form. "I think we would bar it in our team. Go it, wooden legs!" he added, in a shout to a Ferndale fieldsman who was racing hopelessly after the ball.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Buck up, slow coach!"

"Get a move on!"

"You ain't on Sunday parade now, you know."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The fieldsman, red with exertion and with self-consciousness—for he heard all the remarks of the group of fags—clutched at the ball, and looked for a moment strongly inclined to hurl it among Wally & Co.

But he restrained himself and returned it, too late to be of any service. Kildare and Darrel had scored four.

"That's cricket—Ferndale cricket!" said Jack Blake of the Fourth. "That's the giddy team that had the cheek to keep our first waiting."

"Bai Jove! The silly asses ought to be playin' marbles, you know."

"Or hop-scootch."

"Or noughts and crosses."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And there was a yell of laughter in recognition of the amusement the visiting team were affording the juniors of St. Jim's.

Lagden cast an angry glance round, and left his place at slip and strode towards Kildare. The captain of St. Jim's looked at him in surprise, carefully keeping his bat on the crease. Ferndale players were not above stealing little advantages.

"What's the matter?" he asked.

Lagden waved his hand towards the laughing juniors.

"If that's the kind of manners you cultivate here, you might have let us know, that's all," he snapped. "Do you think it's a pleasure to play with cheeky fags hooting at us?"

Kildare turned red.

"I'm sorry," he said. "But—"

"Well, stop them, then."

Lagden's tone was decidedly unpleasant.

Kildare called to Monteith, who was standing outside the pavilion, with his bat under his arm. He was next man in.

"Monteith, old man, tell the juniors to shut up. The Ferndale chaps don't like it."

Monteith nodded.

"All right, Kildare."

And the New House prefect strolled towards the juniors. Lagden went back to his place, biting his lip, and Monson bowed again. The ball was driven to the boundary, and there was a fresh yell from the crowd.

The next ball flew past the fingers of short slip, and three were taken. A St. Jim's fieldsman would have caught the batsman out, but it was quite beyond the powers of the Ferndale captain.

The Saints yelled.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Butter fingers!"

"Go home!"

Monteith strode among the juniors.

"Stop that immediately!" he exclaimed. "The next fellow who calls out anything rude to the Ferndale men will get licked."

"Oh, I say, Monteith," exclaimed Tom Merry, "mustn't we laugh?"

Monteith laughed himself.

"No, you mustn't," he said. "There's such a thing as politeness."

"They ain't very polite to us," growled Blake. "They've kept us hanging about here for half an hour doing nothing."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Well, shut up, that's all," said Monteith. "Have you no manners, you young rascals. We don't want the Ferndale men to decline to play with the excuse that they were badgered by the crowd here."

"My hat!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "They'd be quite capable of it."

"Bai Jove! I nevah thought of that."

"Shut up, then," said Monteith, turning away.

"Yaas, wathah, deah boy!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy emphatically. "We mustn't give the wottahs an excuse for chuckin' the match as soon as they're half licked. Pway be vewy careful, you know."

Tom Merry drew a deep breath.

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"The rotters!" he said. "They'd be quite capable of it. Pass the word round—not a yell after this."

"Wathah not."

And, after that warning, the St. Jim's juniors were punctiliously silent. They were willing to suppress their merriment, in fact, to do anything rather than risk losing the pleasure of seeing the visiting team thoroughly beaten.

But there could be no objection to their cheering their own side, and they did that with great gusto, and they had plenty to cheer.

The St. Jim's batsmen were hard hitters, and they were playing their very best now. The score was at sixty when Darrel was bowled at last, and Monteith came in to join Kildare at the wickets. The St. Jim's captain and the New House prefect made the fur fly between them. The Ferndale bowlers laboured at their wickets in vain.

Even when the batsmen grew a little careless, as they did after a time on taking the measure of their adversaries, Lagden & Co. had no chance.

The fielding was, as Tom Merry said, simply rotten, and the bowling was of no use against bats like Kildare and Monteith.

Wickets fell very slowly, and runs piled up fast. Lagden caught Monteith out at last, but it was a fluke, and the crowd would have said so—loudly—but for the warning they had received. They did not want to give the visitors any excuse for finding fault, and they said nothing.

Two down—for one hundred runs! Langton of the Sixth came in to join Kildare, and the fieldsmen were given more and more leather hunting. The two batsmen drove the ball in turn into far corners of the field, and the Ferndalers panted and gasped after it, hopelessly winded. Lagden & Co. devoted more time to swanking than to keeping in condition, and it was telling upon them now. Two or three of the field were simply run off their legs, and could only totter after the ball when it came their way.

The runs piled up.

Kildare was still batting, and his individual score was close on the century now. By the time Langton's wicket fell the figure of the total was 200.

"Three down for two hundred," grinned Tom Merry. "I think it's about time that Kildare declared, my sons."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"He's going to make the rotters follow their innings on, I guess," said Lumley-Lumley of the Fourth. "They'll pile on some more so that they won't have to bat again."

"Yaas, that will be wathah deep, you know."

"Hundred for Kildare," roared Figgins, as the batsmen crossed over again.

And there was a roar.

"Brave, Kildare!"

"Hurray, hurray!"

Kildare had made his century, and the score was leaping up. Rushden's wicket went down, and Baker came in. Baker was bowled with a dozen to his credit, and by that time the St. Jim's First were five down for 260.

"Kildare will declare at three hundred," said Tom Merry, with the air of a prophet.

"Yaas, wathah!"

And Tom Merry was right.

It was still far from the time fixed for tea when the three hundred was reached, and it had cost St. Jim's six wickets. Then Kildare declared the innings closed, much to the relief of the unhappy fieldsmen. They had done their best by irritatingly slow bowling to hang the game out, but their knavish tricks, as the juniors considered them, were quite upset by the declaration on the part of the St. Jim's captain.

"Three hundred for six wickets!" said Blake, chortling. "A giddy county score, and no mistake! Three hundred! My hat!"

"Quite remarkable—if they weren't playin' a team of sillay

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duffahs!" remarked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "They couldn't have scored that against the Fourth here, deah boys."

"No fear!"

"Ferndale look a bit fagged," said Tom Merry, grinning.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The fieldsmen certainly did look a bit fagged as they came off. Some of them looked as if they could hardly walk. They passed between rows of grinning juniors. The Saints did not say a word, but they might have been excused for grinning. There was no disgrace in being beaten, even by a big margin, but the fact that the defeated cricketers had swanked over their victors made the matter comical. And the Ferndale men knew as well as the Saints that they had no chance whatever of pulling the game out of the fire now. Both their innings were not likely to total up to three hundred.

Lagden gritted his teeth as he walked off. He scowled savagely as he passed Tom Merry, and caught the glimmer of fun in his eyes. Lagden was fatigued with unaccustomed exercise, and his temper was at a dangerous point. He lost it then, and he swept out his arm, and dealt the Shell fellow a back-hander across the face.

Smack!

The blow was utterly unexpected, and Tom Merry staggered back under the force of it, and fell among the legs of the juniors.

CHAPTER 4.

Very Trying Circumstances!

TOM MERRY was on his feet again in an instant.

"You cad!" he yelled.

He was springing towards Lagden, with clenched fists and blazing eyes, when Manners and Lowther and Blake grasped him and dragged him back.

"Hold on, Tommy—"

"Chuck it!"

"Visitor, you know."

"Yaas, wathah, Tom Mewwy, deah boy! Lagden has acted in a vewy disgwacefoll mannah, but you must wemembah that he is a stwangah within the gates."

"Let me go!" yelled Tom Merry, struggling in the grasp of his chums. "Do you think I'm going to let that swanking cad smack my face?"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Hold on, old chap!"

Kildare hurried up.

"Stand back, Merry!" he said sternly.

Tom Merry panted.

"You saw what he did!" he shouted.

Kildare looked worried.

"I suppose you chipped him," he said.

"I didn't say a word!"

"Well, well, stand back! Hold your tongue! Don't play the goat, Merry!"

Tom Merry calmed down. He was longing to get at Lagden with his fists; and tall as the Ferndale captain was, he was very weedy in comparison with Tom Merry of the Shell, who was as hard as nails all through. It would probably have fared ill with Lagden if Tom Merry had hurled himself upon him. But the Shell fellow realised what an extremely awkward position Kildare was placed in, and he was loyal to his captain.

"All right, Kildare," he said quietly.

And he unclenched his hands, and stepped back amongst the juniors.

"Thank you, Merry," said Kildare. He joined Lagden as the latter was going into the pavilion. "You oughtn't to have done that, Lagden."

Lagden sneered.

"Let him mend his manners, then!" he said. "We didn't come here to be ragged by a crew of fags!"

"Tom Merry wasn't ragging you!"

"Some of them were—and the young cad was grinning, anyway!"

Kildare's eyes gleamed.

"Perhaps he had something to grin at!" he retorted. "Anyway, you'd better keep your hands off the fellows here, or there may be trouble I may not be able to stop."

Lagden shrugged his shoulders in a very irritating way.

"I suppose you mean that we may be mobbed, like a visiting team on some slum football ground," he said.

"You're not likely to be mobbed here."

"I don't know! My men have been put off their form by the conduct of your crowd," said Lagden.

"They didn't have much form to be put off, I should say!" growled Monteith. "A rottener exhibition I never—"

"Dry up, Monteith!" said the worried Kildare. "That isn't the way to talk to a visiting skipper."

"Sorry!" said Monteith shortly; but he did not look very sorry.

"Oh, let him run on!" said Lagden, with a sneer. "We

might have known what to expect when we came here! We did expect fair play, as a matter of fact!"

Kildare flushed.

"Do you mean to say that you're not getting fair play?" he demanded hotly.

"I don't mean to say anything. I've got my own opinion."

"In what way haven't you had fair play?" exclaimed Darrel fiercely, and his hands clenched as he spoke.

Lagden did not reply.

"What have you to complain of, Lagden?" Kildare asked quietly.

"I don't complain."

"You insinuated that you weren't getting fair play!"

"Well, a yelling crowd, for one thing—"

"Their yelling was stopped the moment you complained," said Langton.

"That and other things," said Lagden sulkily. "But I'm not complaining. I shall be a little more careful in selecting the teams I play with in future, that's all."

Kildare bit his lip hard.

Lagden was evidently in a quarrelsome temper, and it was equally evident that his quarrelsome temper was the outcome of defeat, not of any treatment he had been accorded while on the St. Jim's ground.

But Kildare did not wish to quarrel with a visitor. And he did not wish to give the Ferndale men the excuse that they had been badly treated and had had to throw up the match. He knew that Lagden & Co. would have thrown up the remainder of the match, and so escaped defeat, on the smallest pretext. Playing the game was something that was quite unknown to Lagden & Co.

"I'm sorry you're not satisfied, Lagden," said Kildare, with unexpected mildness. "If you complain of anything, we'll rectify it at once."

"Certainly," said Monteith, who guessed what was in Kildare's mind, and was equally anxious that the Ferndalers should not be given an excuse to escape upon.

"Oh, never mind!" said Lagden, shrugging his shoulders.

"As I said, I shall be more careful in future, that's all."

"Very well," said Kildare, restraining his temper with an effort.

He walked away.

"That cad's trying to fix a quarrel on you, Kildare!" Darrel murmured. "Mind your P's and Q's. They're all simply boiling at being made such an exhibition of!"

Kildare nodded.

"He won't quarrel with me," he said, "and pass the word round to the fellows to be careful. It would be disgraceful to have trouble with a visiting team, and people would never know which was in the right or the wrong."

"That's true!"

The St. Jim's cricketers took their cue from Kildare, and they were elaborately civil to the Ferndalers.

The visitors were allowed to shrug their shoulders, and to make sneering remarks, and they were met with the most urbane politeness.

And they were baffled. There was evidently nothing for it but to play the match out. They sat down to the plentiful tea provided by St. Jim's in a very ill humour, but they were given no chance of picking a quarrel.

"The rotters are actually looking for trouble!" Blake remarked, to a number of juniors who were having tea with him in Study No. 6 in the School-House. "Beautiful manners for a visiting team, eh?"

"Yaas, wathah! I am uttally disgusted!"

"Rotters!" said Tom Merry. "But Kildare's got his peepers open, and he won't be drawn. The rotters are going to be licked!"

"Hollow!" said Figgins, with much satisfaction.

And the juniors, anticipating that happy result, kept an eye upon the study window, to be ready when the Ferndale innings commenced. At the sight of the cricketers coming down to the field again, they hurried out of the School House, and raced down to the ground.

Kildare and his merry men were going out to field, and they all looked as fresh as paint. Lagden and Monson did not look equally fresh as they went on to bat. They were still feeling the effects of the leather-hunting. The St. Jim's juniors chuckled as they saw that Langton had been given the ball for the first over. Langton, of the Sixth, was the champion bowler of St. Jim's, and he had distinguished himself once in a match against a county eleven. He was not likely to make long work of the Ferndale batting, if it was anything like their bowling or their fielding.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy jammed his eyeglass into his eye, and prepared to watch the Ferndale innings with enjoyment.

"It won't last long, deah boys!" he remarked. "But I wathah think that it will be jollay good fun so long as it does last!"

And Tom Merry & Co. fully agreed with the swell of St. Jim's, and they prepared to enjoy the Ferndale innings to the full!

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CHAPTER 5.

Not Quite Cricket!

L AGDEN and Tunstall opened the innings for Ferndale.

Kildare put Langton, of the Sixth, on to bowl.

The crowd watched with joyous anticipation.

They knew Langton's powers; and although they had not yet seen Lagden or Tunstall bat, they thought they knew what to expect.

And they were right!

The St. Jim's champion bowler was in very good form, and he proceeded to make hay of the Ferndale wickets.

The first over was very slow, Lagden just succeeding in saving the sticks, but the last ball of the over woke him up.

His middle stump went flying, and Lagden uttered a sharp exclamation.

Langton, of the Sixth, grinned.

"How's that?"

"Out!" smiled the umpire.

Lagden, of Ferndale, gazed at his wrecked wicket, and then at the large round nought that indicated his score. His feelings, as he walked back to the pavilion, can be better imagined than described. To save his life, Wally could not help yelping:

"What price duck's eggs?"

And there was a roar.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Lagden ground his teeth.

He cast a furious glance round at the crowd, and disappeared into the pavilion. Monson came out to take his place.

There was plenty of time before the new batsman got in; the Ferndale players did not hurry themselves in any way.

"Trying to hang it out, you bet," said Kangaroo, of the Shell, with a sniff. "They won't have much chance, though, with Langton bowling."

"Wathah not, deah boy!"

"Darrel's giving 'em the second over."

"Good old Darrel!"

"Hurray!"

Darrel bowled to Tunstall. Tunstall lived through the over, and scored a two, and his comrades from the pavilion gave him a cheer for it.

Tom Merry sniffed.

"Lot to cheer about!" he remarked. "Can you see those rank duffers getting three hundred runs this side of Christmas?"

"Ha, ha! No!"

"Langton's going on again."

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

"Yaas, wathah!"

And fun there was! Laneton, of the Sixth, was in his best form just now, and prepared to play ducks and drakes with the visitors' wickets. Monson was looking out for the ball when it came, but as a matter of fact he did not see it, and he did not know where it was until he heard the crash of his wicket.

"How's that?" roared all St. Jim's.

"Out!"

"Hurray!"

"Well bowled, sir!"

Another batsman came in for Ferndale. He was dismissed with a duck's egg to his credit; and the next man in fared the same. And then the Saints roared.

"The hat trick! Hurray!"

Lagden, looking out of the pavilion, ground his teeth. He was white with rage. The Ferndalers were four down for two, and it was pretty plain how the innings was going. If it kept on like this, the visitors would be lucky to score twenty—against a total of three hundred on the home side. The whole thing had become farcical. Lagden was quivering with rage and annoyance. The scorn for his playing which he read in Kildare's tactics stung him deeply. The St. Jim's captain had declared on an overwhelming total, so that he could be sure of the right to demand that the visitors should follow their innings. He had not left them time for a good innings, and yet he evidently meant the match to be finished. The inference was plain—he believed that Ferndale would be dismissed for both innings before the time fixed for stumps to be drawn. And he was right, too; Lagden felt that, as he gritted his teeth, and watched the rapid defeat of his men in the field.

And he clenched his hands, and longed to plant his fist in the handsome face of the captain of St. Jim's. There was little sportsmanlike feeling about the Ferndale cricketers; and none at all about their captain. This was a personal matter with him, not cricket, and he felt a personal enmity towards the skipper who was defeating him so utterly and so scornfully.

And Lagden felt, too, that he had to face trouble with his followers afterwards. They had made themselves look utterly ridiculous by swanking so absurdly, and then taking a hopeless licking. They would have something to say to him about it, the Ferndale captain knew that.

And Lagden could hardly contain his bitter temper as he stood there, and watched wicket after wicket fall.

Kildare took Langton off from the bowling, from a consideration. THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 231.

tion of mercy towards the hapless Ferndalers, and Lagden fully understood his motive, and hated him for it. Darrel and Rushden and Monteith did most of the bowling afterwards, but they made the wickets fall very fast.

Runs were few and far between, and the total was nineteen when there was the announcement: "Last man in!"

Tom Merry grinned at his comrades.

"Kildare needn't have troubled about piling up three hundred," he remarked. "The Ferndalers will have to follow on."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Never saw such a show!" growled Monty Lowther.

"Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall!" grinned Kangaroo. "Ferndale have got it in the neck this time, and no mistake, and serve them jolly well right for their rotten swank."

"Quite wight, deah boy."

"There goes last man."

The last wicket was down, for a score of twenty. The crowd did not laugh. But they could not help grinning. The score was so utterly absurd, after the amount of side Ferndale had put on, that they could not take it seriously. The faces of the Ferndalers were very pink. They realised that, in challenging St. Jim's they had bitten off more than they could chew, so to speak, and the digestion of their defeat was a very painful process to them.

The crowd looked on while Kildare spoke to Lagden, and the word soon passed round that Ferndale were going to follow on their innings.

It was quite certain by this time that St. Jim's would have an innings in hand at the close of the match; the swankiest of the Ferndalers did not doubt it.

And the St. Jim's crowd smiled as the Ferndalers began their second innings, following their first.

Ferndale were tired, there was no doubt about that; the fancy cricket they were accustomed to playing was nothing like the gruelling game St. Jim's gave them. The batsmen were off their form, while the St. Jim's bowlers and fieldsmen were as fresh as paint.

The wickets went down fast.

One or two of the visitors made a stand, and the runs piled up to a bigger score than in the first innings, but the game was hopeless from the start.

Forty runs for the second innings was the total by the time the last wicket fell, and the Ferndale men were finished.

"Sixty the lot!" said Kangaroo of the Shell. "My only hat! Sixty—against three hundred for six wickets! I rather fancy that even Ferndale will sing small after this."

Kangaroo was right.

Ferndale were singing very small.

They all looked very self-conscious as they went into the pavilion to change for their journey. It wanted nearly an hour yet to the time officially fixed for the drawing of stumps, and the match was finished. The St. Jim's innings of six wickets had taken nearly twice as long as both the innings of the Ferndalers put together. And even the First Eleven could not help smiling. The unpleasantness they had been compelled to endure from the Ferndalers had been fully avenged.

"You'll stay and have something before you go, Lagden?" said Kildare, as the Ferndale captain came out of the pavilion with a dark face.

Lagden shrugged his shoulders.

"Thank you, no. I've had enough of St. Jim's hospitality."

Kildare flushed.

"I hope there's been nothing wrong with our hospitality," he said. "About the juniors, you must make allowances for their annoyance at being kept waiting half-an-hour."

"Oh, don't talk to me," said Lagden, savagely. "We shan't come here again, that's a cert. Your crowd is a gang of hooligans if you want my plain opinion, and I consider it a disgrace to have played St. Jim's."

Kildare clenched his teeth.

"You had better go," he said. "I don't want to quarrel with you, but I don't allow anybody to talk to me like that. You're a visitor here, and you're safe. But you'd better go, you cad!"

Lagden's eyes blazed. He raised his hand suddenly, and struck Kildare across the face.

"Take that, hang you!" he exclaimed.

Kildare staggered for a moment. Then, without stopping to think, he lashed out with his right, and Lagden rolled heels over head in the grass.

CHAPTER 6.
Kildare Declines.

"GREAT Scott!"
"Kildare!"
"My hat!"

There was a shout and a crowding round as the captain of Ferndale rolled in the grass. The Ferndale men drew closer together, as if expecting a rush.

Lagden sat up in the grass, blinking stupidly. He could hardly have expected any other reply to his blow, and yet he seemed surprised.

Kildare stood with his chest heaving, his eyes glittering. His temper, long held in check, had blazed out at last. And there was not a fellow there belonging to St. Jim's who blamed him for knocking down the insolent captain of the Ferndale eleven.

"Bwavo, deah boy!" chirruped Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "He's been asking for it long enough," muttered Tom Merry. "Yaas, wathah!"

Lagden staggered to his feet. He stood with unsteady feet, glaring at the captain of St. Jim's as if he would spring upon him. But Tunstall held him back.

"Hold on, Laggy," he whispered.

Lagden shook off his arm.

"I suppose you know what this means, Kildare?" he said.

"You've got to meet me."

Kildare's blaze of anger died away.

Not that he cared twopence whether he stood up to a fellow like Lagden. The reedy, lathy captain of Ferndale was not likely to give the athletic Kildare much trouble in that way. But the disgrace and humiliation of a fight with the captain of a visiting eleven troubled Kildare very much. He was almost sorry, now, that he had returned Lagden's blow. Yet what could he have done? Lagden had made it impossible for him to hold his hand.

Kildare calmed himself with an effort.

"I am sorry this has happened," he said.

Lagden ground his teeth.

"You'll be sorrier before I've finished with you," he said.

The St. Jim's fellows sniffed audibly. Ferndale swank had not been wholly cured by the crushing defeat on the cricket field, that was evident. To hear the slim, weedy captain of Ferndale threatening Kildare, who would hardly have made more than a mouthful of him in a stand-up fight, made the fellows restive. Kildare's quiet manner had deceived Lagden; he had jumped to the conclusion that the St. Jim's skipper was scared at the consequences of his action. He had never made a bigger mistake in his life—but it was very like Cecil Lagden!

"I don't think there's anything more to be said," Kildare said, coldly. "Good-bye; that's all."

Lagden's eyes glittered.

"You've knocked me down," he said. "Do you think the matter's going to end here?"

"I think so—I hope so."

"You're mistaken, then. You're going to stand up to me for that."

"Better let it drop."

"I'll let it drop, certainly, if you'll step up here for me to knock you down, and we will call it quits, then," said Lagden, with a sneer.

"You uttah-wottah!"

"Silence, D'Arcy," said Darrel, frowning.

"I refuse to be silent. It is impos to be silent while an uttah waseal makes such a degwadin' pwoposition to the skippah of this school!" exclaimed the swell of St. Jim's, indignantly. "I have a gweat mind to give the wottah a feahful thwashin' myself."

"Shut up, ass," murmured Blake.

"Weally, Blake——"

"If you don't agree to that," went on Lagden, taking no notice of the indignant swell of St. Jim's, "you'll fight me." Kildare shook his head.

"You can have the choice of fighting me here and now, or of meeting me at any place you choose to name," said the Ferndale captain.

"Look here, Lagden——"

"Give me an answer, please—here—or where?"

"I certainly sha'n't fight you here," said Kildare, "and I hope, when you've had time to think it over, you'll let the matter drop. I'm sorry I knocked you down, but you struck the first blow."

"We needn't go into that. If you prefer the matter to be put off to another time and place, well and good. I'll send a friend of mine to make the arrangements."

"I don't undertake to meet you."

"If you refuse, I'll see that everybody is informed of your cowardice!" said Lagden, between his teeth.

Kildare flushed scarlet. He clenched his hands, and took a step towards the Ferndale captain. Darrel pulled him back, and Kildare nodded to his chum, and walked hastily away. He did not care to trust himself near the Ferndale captain any longer.

Lagden turned upon his heel with a sneer, and the Ferndalers climbed into their brake, which was waiting for them.

It drove away from St. Jim's in the midst of a grim silence. The St. Jim's fellows had no cheers to waste upon the fellows from Ferndale. The visiting eleven had made the worst possible impression upon the school. They had swanked intolerably, and they had played rotten cricket; they had been beaten, and lost their tempers about it, and fastened a quarrel upon the

peaceable, good-tempered captain of St. Jim's. The whole affair had been utterly rotten from beginning to end, and St. Jim's was glad to see the last of the visitors.

Kildare had gone directly to his study. What he was thinking about the matter no one knew, but the other fellows talked of it freely. That the Ferndale fellows were a set of cads, and that Lagden was the biggest cad of all, was generally agreed, and the Saints wondered what Kildare would do about Lagden's challenge. He could hardly refuse it, and, at the same time, he could hardly accept it, considering his position as head of the Sixth and captain of St. Jim's.

"It places old Kildare in a vewy difficult posish, deah boys," Arthur Augustus D'Arcy remarked to his chums. "It will be wotten and disgwaeeful for the captain of the school to get mixed up in a fight like a fag, you know. The Head would be vewy much annoyed if he got to hear of it. But it is hardly possible for Kildare to wefuse to meet the fellow, you know."

Tom Merry nodded thoughtfully.

"I hope he won't meet him, all the same," he said. "It would do him harm with the Head if it got out."

"Yes, rather," said Blake. "And Lagden knows that. Lagden is a blackguard, as a matter of fact, and doesn't care twopence for decent appearances. A fellow would think that a cricket captain would have too much sense to lose his temper over getting beaten in a match, and fly out like that."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Kildare will take no notice of him, very likely," said Manners. "That would be the sensible thing to do."

D'Arcy shook his head.

"Impos, deah boy. This is an affair of honah, you know—it isn't poss, for a gentleman to wefuse a challenge from another gentleman."

"Affair of rats!" growled Monty Lowther.

"Weally, Lowthah——"

"I hope Kildare will refuse," said Tom Merry. "We all know he's not afraid of the worm, and that's all he need care about. What Lagden thinks isn't worth considering."

And most of the fellows agreed with Tom Merry. That evening there was little else talked of at St. Jim's but the fracas in the cricket field, and the fellows surmised incessantly on the subject of what Kildare would do. Meanwhile, the captain of St. Jim's kept his own counsel.

CHAPTER 7.

Tom Merry Chips In!

"BAI Jove!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy uttered that exclamation. It was the day after the cricket match, Ferndale v. St. Jim's. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy and Jack Blake and Tom Merry had gone out of the School House after morning lessons, and strolled down to the school gates. They intended to walk down to the village to see about the important matter of a new cricket bat Tom Merry was negotiating for. As they reached the school gates, two fellows came in, and the juniors recognised Monson and Tunstall of Ferndale.

The two Ferndale seniors took no notice of the St. Jim's juniors. They walked into the quadrangle with their noses high in the air.

The three juniors glanced after them.

"Bai Jove!" repeated D'Arcy. "That means mischief!"

Tom Merry nodded.

"They're going to see Kildare about the challenge from Lagden," he remarked.

"Serve them jolly well right to call up the fellows, and give them a ducking in the fountain," said Blake wrathfully.

"Yaas, wathah!"

Tom Merry laughed.

"Kildare would be ratty if we did," he said. "Better let them alone. I hope Kildare will be sensible enough to send them away without being drawn into a rotten fight with Lagden, that's all."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy——"

"I darsay Lagden's hanging about somewhere, for their answer," said Blake. "We may see the rotter as we go down to Rylcombe."

"I shall wefuse to take any notice of him," said D'Arcy loftily.

"Hear, hear!" said Blake. "That's sure to put him in his place."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Blake——"

"Oh, come on," said Blake, "we've got to get back to dinner, you know."

"You are intewwuptin' me."

"Exactly, come on."

And the three juniors walked down the lane. Blake kept his eyes about him for the Ferndale captain; he thought it very probable that Lagden had walked over from Ferndale with his friends, although naturally he would not care to enter St. Jim's.

"Bai Jove!" ejaculated D'Arcy suddenly. "Look there!"

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Co. at St. Jim's.

"Lagden!"

"And Weary Willy," chuckled Tom Merry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors had turned a bend in the lane, and they came upon the scene suddenly. Lagden of Ferndale was standing in the road. He had been leaning on the stile, evidently awaiting the return of his friends, when he was accosted by the man who was speaking to him now. His interlocutor was a ragged, dirty, whiskered tramp, with a complexion enriched by the incessant use of rum, and only one eye. The man was a most unpromising individual to meet in a lonely lane, and there was reason for the expression of alarm which had come upon Lagden's face. The manner of the tramp was decidedly threatening, and he could plainly have wiped up the ground with Lagden if he had been so inclined.

"Which it would be kind of yer to 'elp an honest man on his way, sir," said the tramp, and the juniors paused as they heard him. Neither Lagden nor the gentleman whom Tom Merry had named Weary Willy saw the juniors for the moment.

"I've given you a shilling," said Lagden.

"Make it arf-a-crown, sir."

"I haven't any more money to waste on you," growled Lagden. "You'd better be off."

The tramp did not stir.

"Can't you make it arf-a-crown, sir?" he said, with a more threatening tone in his voice.

"No, I can't."

"Some blokes would take wot they wanted, sir, instead of askin' fur it, on a lonely road," said the tramp, and he slipped the cudgel from under his arm into his hand.

Lagden faltered.

"Look here, if I give you half-a-crown will you be off?" he demanded.

The tramp grinned.

"Like a shot, sir."

Lagden fumbled in his pocket. He imprudently drew out a handful of silver, and the tramp's eyes glittered with greed. He made a sudden movement forward, and grasped the Ferndale fellow's wrist.

"And it over," he said hoarsely.

Lagden struggled to pull his hand away.

"Let me alone, you scoundrel!" he shouted. "I'll have the police set on you for this."

"And it over, I sez."

"You villain—"

"Then take that!"

The tramp swung up his cudgel, and as he did so, Tom Merry came speeding on to him, and his fist caught the ruffian on the side of the head.

The attack was so sudden that the tramp went down helplessly under it, as if he had been shot.

He sprawled in the dusty lane, yelling, and his cudgel flew into the hedge.

Lagden gasped.

"Thank you," he exclaimed. "The villain was going to rob me! Help me collar him, and we'll take him to the police-station."

That was enough for Weary Willy.

He was upon his feet in a second, and he started running down the road at top speed. In a moment he had disappeared round a bend in the lane and was gone.

The juniors burst into a laugh.

"Not much chance of getting him to the station," said Tom Merry. "It would mean a pretty stiff foot-race first."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I'm much obliged to you," said Lagden, looking at the juniors. "You belong to St. Jim's, don't you?"

"Yes."

Lagden looked more closely at Tom Merry, and laughed slightly.

"I think I remember you," he said. "You checked me yesterday, and I slapped you."

Tom Merry coloured.

"Exactly," he replied, "and if you like to repeat the performance now, I'll make you sorry you laid your paws on me."

"Bwavo, deah boy! I should certainly wecommend givin' the wottah a feahful thwashin'."

Lagden grinned.

"I won't lick you, after what you've just done for me," he said. "Not that you don't deserve it for your cheek."

"I'm ready for the licking, if you care to take it on," said Tom Merry disdainfully. "I suppose you're here waiting for those two cads who went into St. Jim's a while ago. I hope Kildare will kick them out."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"It will be jolly bad for you if Kildare consents to meet you, anyway," said Blake, with a scornful glance at Lagden. "You will get the licking of your life."

Lagden clenched his hands for a moment, and then, without

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a word, he turned and walked away in the direction of St. Jim's.

"Wottah!" murmured Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "It would have served him wight to let that twamp wob him, as a mattah of fact. I wegard him as a wank outsidersah."

And Tom Merry and Blake fully agreed with Gussy on that point.

CHAPTER 8.

An Affair of Honour!

KILDARE was standing outside the School House at St. Jim's, talking to Darrel of the Sixth, when Tunstall and Monson came up. Kildare's brows contracted a little as he caught sight of them. He guessed easily enough why they had come.

"Hallo!" said Darrel gruffly.

Tunstall and Monson exchanged a sarcastic glance.

"Good-morning," said Monson, "we've come to see you, Kildare."

"Well, I'm here," said Kildare shortly.

"We'd rather see you in a more private place, if you don't mind."

"Come into my study."

Kildare's manner was the reverse of cordial. Monson and Tunstall shrugged their shoulders, but took no other notice of it.

Kildare led the way into his study in silence.

Monson and Tunstall followed him in, and then Kildare closed the door. Then he stood and looked at the two Ferndale fellows.

"Well, what is it?" he asked. "I suppose you've come from Lagden?"

"Yes. Under the circumstances, it wouldn't have been exactly the thing for him to come himself," said Monson.

"What do you want?"

"We've got a message from Lagden."

"Well?"

"Where are you going to meet him, and when?"

Kildare made an angry gesture.

"I'm not going to meet him at all," he said. "I've thought the matter over, and I'm not going to be dragged into it. It's too disgraceful for the captain of a school like St. Jim's to be dragged into a fight like a fag. I can't do it."

"You should have thought about that before you knocked Lagden down."

"You know what he did to provoke that, and it's no good talking about it," said Kildare.

"Do you mean to say that you refuse to meet Lagden?"

"Yes."

"You know what people will say?"

Kildare flushed angrily.

"They can say what they like."

"You don't care, then, if you are called a coward?" said Tunstall.

"No one who knows me will think me a coward," said Kildare, "and nobody will call me one, certainly, in my presence, without getting hurt."

"That's all very well," said Monson, "but if you funk meeting Lagden, fellows will have to come to that conclusion. You know that."

"They can come to what conclusion they like."

"In a word, you won't meet Lagden?"

"I won't!"

"You've made up your mind about that?"

"Yes."

Monson and his companion exchanged glances. There were sneering smiles upon their faces now; it was pretty clear that they could imagine no reason excepting funk for the refusal of a challenge.

"We're empowered by Lagden to make all arrangements," said Monson, after a pause. "You'd better think it over, Kildare."

"I've thought it over."

"Lagden is determined to meet you."

"Oh, Lagden can go and eat coke!"

"Very well," said Monson coolly. "As a matter of fact, we expected something of this sort. A fellow hasn't always the nerve to do in cold blood what he's done in hot blood, and we anticipated that you would try to draw out."

"Just so!" said Tunstall.

Kildare clenched his hands.

"You'd better go," he said. "I don't want to throw you out of this room, as I asked you into it; but you may force me to do it."

"Yes; I daresay you're brave enough, with only the two of us here, and a crowd of fellows ready to help you if needed," sneered Monson. "But let's get the message delivered. Lagden demands a meeting."

"Well, he won't get it."

"If you refuse to meet him—"

"I do refuse."

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In a couple of minutes Harry Wharton & Co., helpless in the grasp of the press-gang, were rushed down to the waiting boat. "Let us go!" roared Harry Wharton, struggling in the grasp of the big boatswain. (The above incident is taken from the splendid, long, complete tale of Harry Wharton & Co., entitled: "THE STOLEN SCHOOLBOYS!" which is contained in our popular companion paper "THE MAGNET" LIBRARY. Now on sale. Price One Penny.)

"If you refuse to meet him," pursued Monson, unheeding, "he will come here himself."

"Let him come."

"He will pick you out and strike you before a crowd of fellows," said Monson. "You will have no choice about fighting him then, I suppose?"

"No, I suppose not," said Kildare between his teeth. "It would be pretty bad for Lagden if he did that."

Monson shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, that's what he's going to do, unless you meet him. Your only choice is whether you have the fight here, before a whole staring school, or whether you meet Lagden quietly, where it can be settled without a crowd."

Kildare was silent. He felt that he was caught.

There had been one unpleasant scene at St. Jim's already, and Kildare had felt sufficiently ashamed and humiliated about it.

If Lagden carried out his threat, there would be another scene, worse than the first, and he could not persist in refusing to fight a fellow who was actually attacking him. He would be compelled to hit out, if only in self-defence, and the fight would come off all the same.

And such a scene—under the Head's windows—made Kildare shudder to think of it. He had a very keen sense of his dignity as captain of St. Jim's—a sense of which the Ferndale captain was completely lacking.

If he was to be driven into a fight, it was better for it to take

place in some secluded spot, where the whole disgraceful affair could be kept a secret.

The two Ferndale fellows watched his face.

There was silence for some minutes, and Monson broke it at last.

"Well, what do you say?" he asked. "You can't refuse to fight if Lagden comes here. He doesn't want a scene in public any more than you do, but he is determined to have satisfaction. If you choose to arrange for a quiet meeting, where you can have it out without interference or a crowd, we're here to make all arrangements with you."

Kildare bit his lip.

"If Lagden really intends to play the hooligan in this way, it doesn't seem to me that I have much choice in the matter," he said.

"Quite so."

"Very well," said Kildare, setting his teeth. "If you drive me to it, I'll meet Lagden, and I'll make him sorry he's given me this trouble."

Monson nodded.

"Good. Will this evening suit you?"

"Yes."

"Where?"

"Oh, where you like!" grunted Kildare.

"Shall we say the glade near the old hut in Rylcombe Wood, at half-past six?"

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"If you like."

"Very well," said Monson; "we'll be there. I shall be Lagden's second, and I suppose you'll bring a second with you?"

"Yes."

"We shall want a referee. Are you satisfied with Tunstall here, as referee? It will save bringing another fellow into the matter."

"Yes."

"It's settled, then. Good-bye."

"Good-bye."

Monson did not offer to shake hands. He knew that his hand would be refused. The two Ferndale fellows left the study, and from the window Kildare saw them swaggering across the quadrangle to the gates. A yell from Wally and Joe Frayne of the Third followed them.

"Hallo! Have you learnt to play cricket yet?"

Monson and Tunstall did not deign to reply to that impertinent question. They walked out with their noses in the air.

Kildare turned away from the window as Darrel came into the study. Darrel looked keenly at the captain's clouded face.

"Well?" he demanded.

Kildare laughed a little awkwardly.

"It was a challenge from Lagden," he said.

"I know that. I hope you refused, old man."

Kildare coloured.

"I did at first, Darrel. But they said that if I didn't meet Lagden outside St. Jim's, he would come here and pick a row with me before the whole school. What was I to do?"

Darrel's brows contracted.

"The cad!" he said.

"Yes; he's a rotten cad. We all know that. If he had the sense of a baby, he'd know that he couldn't stand against me for five minutes," said Kildare. "But they think it was funk that made me want to keep out of it."

"They would," said the prefect scornfully. "Have you agreed to meet him, then?"

Kildare nodded.

"It's rotten! It wouldn't have mattered if Lagden had come here? We'd have thrown him out on his neck, and I fancy he wouldn't have come again. They're simply dragging you into this because they're ratty about the cricket match."

"I know that, Darrel. But I've agreed to meet him now; and—and I want you to be my second."

"Nice work for a prefect, I must say," growled Darrel. "I give the fags lines for fighting."

"I'll take Rushden if you don't care to—"

"Rats! I shall be your second, of course. Where and when?"

"Half-past six this evening, in the wood."

"All serene! We shall want a referee."

"I've agreed to Tunstall of Ferndale as referee."

Darrel gave him a compassionate look.

"Well, I must say you want a keeper!" he exclaimed. "Do you think you will get fair play from a Ferndale fellow?"

"I never thought about that!" confessed Kildare, rather shamefacedly.

Darrel grunted.

"Well, as you are a match for three or four Lagdens, it won't matter much," he said. "We will be there, and Lagden will find it worse than cricket, I think. But I don't like the affair and I wish you hadn't agreed to go. I suppose those swanking cads would call this an affair of honour. Affair of dishonour seems nearer the mark to me."

"Well, it can't be helped now, old man."

"No; and it will be some satisfaction to give Lagden the licking of his life."

And Kildare nodded assent to that.

"Keep it dark," he said. "If a word gets out, we shall have a gang of juniors there to watch us, and it will be the talk of St. Jim's."

"Right—ho!"

And outside Kildare's study, not a word was said on the subject.

CHAPTER 9.

The Juniors are Left Out.

TOM MERRY and his chums looked very thoughtful during afternoon lessons that day.

They were thinking of the visit of the two Ferndale fellows to Kildare, and of what it probably meant.

All St. Jim's guessed that Monson and Tunstall had come as bearers of a challenge to Kildare, but whether he had accepted it or not, was unknown.

Many of the fellows took the view that as it was an affair of honour, Kildare could not possibly refuse the challenge.

Others declared that as captain of the school, with the dignity of his position as head of the Sixth to keep up, Kildare could not possibly accept it.

But whichever consideration weighed more heavily with THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 231.

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Kildare, and whether he had accepted the challenge or refused, the school did not know.

It might have been supposed that it was not the business of Tom Merry or Manners or Lowther, as they were in the Shell, and naturally had very little to do with the head of that mighty and respected institution, the Sixth.

But the Terrible Three did not suppose anything of the sort.

They took a deep interest in the matter, and they meant to see the fight if it came off; and, indeed, there were few fellows at St. Jim's who hadn't the same intention.

The fight, if it happened at all, would certainly be worth watching. Fellows who had seen Kildare boxing with other Sixth-Formers, had often wished to see how he would shape in a real combat. That he would lick Lagden with perfect ease, nobody doubted. Lagden was not built to stand against Kildare, and it was pretty certain that he had not so much courage and grit.

And to see Lagden licked would be a very great pleasure.

"Kildare's such an innocent old duck," Tom Merry confided to Monty Lowther, in the Form-room that afternoon. "He won't get fair play from the Ferndale cads, but he won't suspect them, you know. They'll work in some trick on him if they can."

Monty Lowther nodded.

"Just what I was thinking," he remarked. "We shall have to keep an eye on old Kildare. We mustn't let him get into trouble."

"We shall have to see the fight, if it comes off," said Manners decidedly.

"You see——" said Tom Merry.

"Merry!"

Mr. Linton's voice rapped out.

Tom Merry started. In his interest in the great question of whether Kildare was going to fight Lagden, he had forgotten for the moment that he was in the Shell Form-room, and that he was supposed to be studying English history.

"Ye-es, sir!"

"Who commanded the Roundhead army at the battle of Worcester?" thundered Mr. Linton.

"Lagden, sir!"

The Master of the Shell jumped, as well he might.

"What! What!"

"I—I mean Kildare, sir. I—that is to say——" stammered Tom Merry.

"Are you mad, Merry?"

"N-no, sir; I—I think not, sir!"

"Take a hundred lines, Merry, and stay in after lessons and write them out," said Mr. Linton severely. "And now pay attention to your work."

"Ye-es, sir!"

And the great and important affair of Kildare v. Lagden was not discussed in the Shell Form-room any more that afternoon.

When the Shell was dismissed, Tom Merry remained behind with a somewhat lugubrious face to write out his lines. Monty Lowther gave him a comforting whisper.

"Never mind, old son. We'll have a ripping tea ready in the study when you get out."

"Good egg!" said Tom Merry.

And Manners and Lowther departed to the tuck-shop to lay in supplies for that consolation tea.

Thus engaged, they were not able to keep an eye upon Kildare of the Sixth, as they had intended. But the chums of Study No. 6 were performing that duty. Blake, Herries, Digby and D'Arcy strolled casually round near the end of the Sixth Form passage. If Kildare went out with an appearance of being prepared for war, they would know.

"Fag!" Darrel called along the passage.

"Oh, good!" said Blake. "I'll go."

He hurried along the passage.

Darrel was dressed for a walk, and he had a walking cane under his arm. He was standing in his study, with his hand resting on the table. He looked very keenly at Jack Blake as he came in, and the junior looked very demure and innocent.

"Hallo!" said Darrel. "You must have been pretty close at hand."

"Yes, Darrel," said Blake.

"Take some of the other young rascals and get Kildare's skiff out," said Darrel.

"His skiff!"

"Yes."

"Out of the boat-house?"

"Yes, you young ass! You don't suppose it's in the library or the clock tower, do you?" said Darrel, testily.

"Then he isn't going to——!" began Blake, and stopped suddenly.

ANSWERS

"Going to what?"

"Oh, nothing."

Blake hurried out of the study. He rejoined his chums in the passage, with an expression of disgust upon his face.

"Nothing doing," he announced, "we're to get Kildare's skiff out. He's just going out for rowing practice alone, that's all."

"Bai Jove!"

The chums of the Fourth went down to the boat-house. Darrel passed them, strolling away down the towing-path towards the village, swinging his cane carelessly. The juniors launched the boat, and ten minutes or so later Kildare came down to the bank of the Ryll.

He nodded to the Fourth Formers.

"Got the boat ready?" he said. "Thanks."

He jumped into the skiff, and sculled lightly away down the river.

The juniors watched the skiff till it was lost to sight behind a bend of the river. Then Jack Blake gave an expressive grunt. "No fight to-day, at all events," he said. "Kildare couldn't go without a second, anyway. I wonder when it will be."

"We must see it, when it does come off," Digby remarked.

"Yaas, wathah!"

The chums of the Fourth strolled back to St. Jim's in a rather dissatisfied mood, but they relieved their feelings by bumping Figgins of the New House, whom they chanced upon in the quadrangle.

Meanwhile, Kildare sculled down the river for about half a mile, and then he drew his skiff in to the bank, under the shadow of a wide-spreading tree on the edge of Rylecombe Wood.

He jumped ashore, and nodded with a smile to Darrel, who stepped out of the trees to meet him.

"All serene?" said Darrel, laughing.

"Yes, I think so."

Kildare moored the skiff, and they entered the wood together. "Half the fags had made up their minds to be on the spot, I think," said Darrel. "I think they will be disappointed, the young rascals."

Kildare laughed.

"Yes; I fancy we shall have the place to ourselves now," he said.

But his face became graver as they walked into the wood. The whole affair was bitter and troublesome to him, and even then, at the eleventh hour, he would have avoided it if he could.

The chums of the Sixth walked on in silence, under the shadows of the thick trees of the wood, till the glade opened out before them, in which the combat was to take place.

It was a secluded spot, in the heart of the wood. Bright sunshine fell upon the stretch of level grass under the big trees. On the further side of the glade the fellows from Ferndale were waiting—and they turned to look at Kildare and Darrel as the St. Jim's fellows came up.

CHAPTER 10.

The Fight!

L AGDEN'S lip curled as he looked at the captain of St. Jim's.

There was a gravity in Kildare's face, a hesitation in his manner, which conveyed only one impression to the foolish and conceited fellow from Ferndale—that Kildare was funkling the contest. He fancied that the St. Jim's captain had been forced into it against his will, and was worried at the prospect, and seeking some means yet of eluding it. Unfortunately, Kildare's first words only confirmed that mistaken impression upon the mind of the captain of Ferndale.

Kildare gave Lagden a short nod as he came up.

"Look here, Lagden," said Kildare, abruptly, "can't you let this matter drop? You know as well as I do that it's rotten for two fellows in our positions to meet and fight like a couple of fags in the Third Form."

Lagden sneered.

"You want to avoid the fight?" he asked.

Kildare coloured at his tone, but he answered quietly.

"Yes, I want to avoid it, because I think it's a rotten and disgraceful thing, and won't reflect any credit on either of us."

"No other reason?" sneered Lagden.

"None."

"Well, I think I could supply another reason," said the Ferndale captain, in the same sneering tone, "and I'm willing to let you off on the condition I've told you—that you stand here before me and take the blow back that you gave me."

"You cur!"

"Oh, that rouses your spirit a little, does it?"

"It's not spirit that's wanting," said Kildare. "I think I shall soon show you that. But I've done; I can see that it's no good appealing to you as a decent fellow. You're not a decent fellow; you're a cur."

Lagden's eyes glittered.

"I'm ready, if you're willing to get further than words in this affair," he said.

"I'm ready, too."

"That's right to business."

Lagden removed his jacket. Kildare followed his example. Tunstall opened a bag he had brought, and took out a sponge and a basin, which he filled at the little stream which flowed past the end of the glade. Darrel had no such preparations to make. Darrel knew Kildare's form, and Lagden's, and he knew that the stalwart captain of St. Jim's would make short work of the Ferndale man.

Tunstall took out his watch.

"Ready?" he asked.

"Yes," said Kildare.

"Quite!" said Lagden.

"Time, then!"

The two adversaries faced one another, with set brows and gleaming eyes.

Lagden prided himself upon his boxing, but his boxing was of a very fancy kind, and he had certainly never stood up to an adversary like Kildare before.

The captain of St. Jim's hardly noticed his fancy sparring; he sailed in with a grim determination, and the Ferndale captain was driven back before his heavy blows.

Lagden was soon panting.

Tunstall and Monson exchanged glances.

Kildare's display of strength and determination and boxing skill amazed them. If the fellow could box like this, what on earth had he been trying to avoid the fight for? That was the question the two Ferndale fellows asked themselves.

Darrel leaned against a tree, and looked on with a grim smile. He was prepared to see Lagden knocked into the middle of the next week, or still further along the calendar, and he knew that it would cost Kildare hardly an effort. Lagden's boxing was about on a par with his cricket.

"Time!" rapped out Tunstall.

Kildare dropped his hands and stepped back immediately.

Lagden retreated, gasping, to his corner, and sank down upon his second's knee, breathing hard.

Monson sponged his heated face, while the Ferndale captain recovered his wind. Darrel looked sharply at his watch.

"How long are the rounds in this fight, Mr. Referee?" he asked.

"Two minutes, and one minute rests," said Tunstall, flushing a little.

"That round lasted a minute and a half."

Tunstall scowled.

"Who's refereeing this fight?" he demanded.

"You are!"

"Then I'll manage to referee it without your assistance, thanks."

"There's such a thing as fair play, you know," Darrel reminded him.

"Kildare was satisfied with the selection of Tunstall as referee," said Monson, looking round. "It's not for you to interfere, Darrel."

"Let them have their way, Darrel," said Kildare, "it won't make any difference."

Darrel laughed.

"Well, that's true enough," he said.

It was pretty clear that the St. Jim's fellows were not going to get fair play. When Lagden was at a disadvantage, the referee meant to make short rounds, and when he was getting the upper hand, doubtless the rounds would be long. It was only what was to be expected, from what they knew of the Ferndale methods; but, as Kildare said, it would make no difference in the long run. Lagden had no chance of beating the stalwart captain of St. Jim's, whatever petty advantages the unfair referee gained for him.

"Time!" said Tunstall, after allowing his man a minute and a half's rest, and he gave a defiant look at Darrel.

Darrel shrugged his broad shoulders, but took no other notice. The adversaries faced one another again.

Lagden tried to keep at arm's length this time, avoiding in-fighting, and he succeeded in getting in two or three sharp raps upon Kildare's handsome face.

But they were returned with more than interest.

Lagden staggered under a heavy blow, and fell upon his back in the grass, and lay gasping.

Kildare stepped back disdainfully.

"Count!" exclaimed Darrel, as Tunstall fumbled with his watch.

The referee-timekeeper obeyed, slowly enough.

"One, two, three, four, five—!"

A pause.

"Six—seven—eight—nine—!"

Lagden would certainly have been counted out, but the timekeeper gave him plenty of time to recover.

He staggered to his feet.

Tunstall put away his watch.

Lagden, with a savage scowl, sprang at Kildare, attacking him savagely. The captain of St. Jim's recoiled a little, and his foot caught in a root, and he stumbled. Lagden was on him in a flash, hitting out fiercely. Two heavy blows took

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effect upon Kildare's chest, and he defended himself a little dazedly against the sharp assault.

"Time, you cad, Tunstall!" exclaimed Darrel, fiercely.

"It's lasted two minutes and a half already."

"I'm timing this match," said Tunstall.

"You cad!"

Tunstall shrugged his shoulders.

It looked as if the advantage allowed him would give Lagden the upper hand. He had no hesitation about using it. He attacked Kildare fiercely, and the captain of St. Jim's received several sharp blows before he recovered his balance. Then he leaped erect again, and advanced upon Lagden, driving the Ferndale captain before him with heavy blows.

"Time!" rapped out Tunstall.

"Fast enough now," sneered Darrel.

"Mind your own business."

"I'll have something to say to you after this is over, Tunstall," said Darrel, between his teeth.

Lagden was breathing very hard as he sank upon Monson's knee.

"You nearly had him that time," whispered Monson. "Keep at him, old man."

Lagden nodded silently. He was saving his breath. He knew well enough that he would need it all.

"Time!" said Tunstall.

The third round began.

Kildare's face was very hard now. The utter unfairness of the Ferndale fellows roused his anger as nothing else could have none. He meant to bring the fight to a close in that round, and he pressed the Ferndale captain hard.

Lagden was driven before him, step by step, and the crashing blows of the St. Jim's captain came again and again through his guard.

Wild with rage, the Ferndale captain leaped at Kildare, grasping him, and hammering at him furiously.

Kildare drew back his right, and struck.

The blow crashed full in the Ferndale captain's face, and Lagden fell like a log in the grass.

Tunstall began to count slowly. Lagden did not move.

"One, two, three, four—!"

Lagden did not stir.

"Five, six, seven—!"

Still no movement from the Ferndale captain. He lay a little upon his side, as if the blow had stunned him.

"Eight, nine, OUT!" said Tunstall sulkily.

He jammed the watch back savagely into his pocket.

"Done!" said Darrel, "I wonder if he's shamming," he added in a lower tone, as the Ferndale captain did not move, even when the counting was finished.

A startled look came over Kildare's face.

"I hit him rather hard," he faltered.

"He was hitting you rather hard, old man."

"Yes, but—"

"Lagden! What's the matter?" exclaimed Tunstall, in startled tones. "Why don't you get up, man? Lagden!"

Monson ran quickly forward and knelt by Lagden's side. He raised his principal's head in his hands. It fell back heavily into the grass.

"Good heavens!" muttered Monson. "You've killed him."

CHAPTER 11.

After the Fight.

KILDARE uttered a sharp cry.

Darrel strode forward, and seized Monson by the shoulder and twisted him out of the way as if he had been an infant. Then he knelt beside Lagden. His belief was that the Ferndale captain was shamming. It would have been quite in accordance with what he knew of Cecil Lagden.

But he soon saw that in that, at least, he had done the Ferndale captain an injustice. Lagden was not shamming. He was insensible.

Kildare came forward eagerly.

"Darrel—!"

"He's fainted," said Darrel. "That's all. No need to be alarmed."

Kildare drew a breath of relief.

"Thank goodness," he muttered, "I—I was afraid—I know I hit him harder than I meant to, and—and—"

"He will be all right in a minute or two. Get some water, you gaping fool," said Darrel impatiently to Monson.

Monson sulkily obeyed.

He brought water in the basin, and handed the sponge to Darrel. Darrel bathed the face of the fallen senior. Lagden's eyes were closed, and he was breathing strangely and heavily. His eyes did not open. Five minutes passed away, and the Ferndale captain had not regained consciousness.

Kildare leaned against a tree, all his rage gone, all his enmity vanished. The thought that he had caused harm to the Ferndale captain, and perhaps had done him some permanent injury, haunted him, and filled him with dismay. He was not thinking of the possible consequences to himself; he was thinking only

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of the wretched fellow who lay there in the grass at his feet, without word or motion.

What a fool he had been to accept the challenge after all, what a fool he had been to meet this weedy fellow, who would have known that he was not fit to stand up in such a contest, if he had not been blinded by conceit.

Kildare reproached himself bitterly.

For fear of a scene in public, and of what people would say, he had been dragged into this—and this was the result.

He waited in an agony for some word or sign from Cecil Lagden.

But none came.

The Ferndale captain was still insensible. Darrel was looking very uneasy now, and Tunstall and Monson were utterly scared.

Darrel turned to them sharply.

"Had Lagden anything the matter with him—was he ill or anything?" he asked.

"Not that I know of," muttered Monson.

"I daresay he wasn't fit for this," said Tunstall, sulkily.

"We didn't expect slogging like a prize-fight."

"What did you expect—Kildare to let himself be licked?" demanded Darrel angrily.

"Well, he's got himself into a pretty hole now, anyhow," said Monson spitefully. "There will be a row over this."

Kildare started.

As he heard the Ferndale fellow's sneering words, it occurred to him for the first time that the consequences to himself might be as bad as to Lagden.

If the Ferndale captain was seriously hurt, the whole matter would come out, and Kildare would have to face the Head of St. Jim's, if he had to face nothing worse.

Darrel's lip curled.

"Well, we're all in it, so far as that goes," he said savagely. "If there's any trouble we're all in it—we're all parties to what's happened."

Tunstall and Monson exchanged a scared glance.

"It was your doing from beginning to end," said Darrel.

"You forced Kildare into this against his will, and you can say so, in public."

"We jolly well shan't say anything of the sort," said Tunstall, fiercely. "Kildare has hurt him, and Kildare can answer for it."

"And he can answer for it alone, hang him," growled Monson.

"Oh, shut up, you cads."

Darrel resumed bathing the fallen senior's face.

But Lagden did not recover consciousness. He was breathing faintly. A dark bruise was forming between his eyes where Kildare's heavy blow had struck him, and his face was marked all over with bruises and cuts. Brief as the struggle had been, Lagden had been very heavily punished.

"I—I say, this is rotten," said Monson after a long pause.

"We—we ought to get a doctor to him."

"We shall have to," said Darrel.

Tunstall uttered a dismayed exclamation.

"That means a row, and a scandal at Ferndale," he exclaimed.

"It can't be helped."

"Wait a bit, and see if he comes to, anyhow," muttered Tunstall. "We don't want to have an inquiry into this, and some of us sacked from the school."

"You might have thought of that a bit earlier," snapped Darrel. "You were given plenty of chances to keep out of it."

Some minutes passed. Then Lagden groaned and moved. His eyes opened with a wild stare. He looked round him, dazed.

"I—I—what—!" he stammered.

Darrel uttered an exclamation of relief.

"It's all right," he said, "You fainted, that's all."

"It's a lie," muttered Lagden, "I didn't faint."

"Very well, you didn't," said Darrel, pacifically. "I suppose you chaps can look after him now?"

"I suppose so," grunted Tunstall.

"We'll stay and help you if you want us," said Kildare.

"We don't want you."

Lagden looked at Kildare, and his eyes glittered.

"Well, you've knocked me out," he said. "Hang you!"

"I don't bear any malice, Lagden," said Kildare quietly.

"I'd like to shake hands with you before I go, if you will."

"Well, I won't," said Lagden.

"Just as you like, of course."

"I must have been hit pretty hard," said Lagden, feeling the growing bump on his forehead. "You rotten ruffian, I didn't know I was tackling a prizefighter. Is my face very much marked, Tunstall?"

"Well, a bit, rather," said Tunstall, hesitatingly.

"Got your pocket mirror?"

"Yes."

"Let me have a look."

Tunstall took out a pocket mirror, and Lagden looked at his reflection. He uttered an exclamation of dismay. He saw several large bruises and reddened cuts, and a black eye, and the other eye growing black, and a very swollen nose.

"Great Scott! How can I go back to Ferndale with a face like that?" he exclaimed. "I shall be questioned at once."

"You intended Kildare to go back to St. Jim's with a face like that, if you'd been able to bring it about," said Darrel, caustically.

"That's his business," growled Lagden. "Hang it all! The Head will spot this at once, you chaps, and I shall be called over the coals."

"You'll have to spin some yarn," said Tunstall. "It's no good thinking of letting out the facts, Laggy; it would mean an awful row."

Lagden grunted.

"Of course it would. But——"

"Say that you had a row with a tramp or something," said Monson. "There was that tramp who begged of you to-day, that you told us about—it can be put on him. I suppose he's disappeared by this time, so he can't deny it."

Kildare and Darrel exchanged looks. The Ferndale fellows were discussing a system of lies with perfect coolness, as if lies were their usual resource in any difficulty; as indeed probably was the case.

"We'd better go, I think," said Darrel, helping Kildare on with his jacket. "I suppose we can't be of any use to you fellows?"

"No, you can't," snapped Monson. "I think you've done enough."

"Come on, Kildare."

"We'll help to get Lagden back to Ferndale if you like," said Kildare.

"Oh, go and eat coke."

Kildare compressed his lips. The two St. Jim's seniors left the glade without another word, leaving the Ferndalers still discussing how they were to keep up appearances at Ferndale.

Kildare stooped beside the river when he reached the spot where the skiff had been left, and bathed his face, and rubbed it dry upon his handkerchief. There was hardly a mark upon his face, so little had Lagden been able to hurt him. Darrel looked at him with satisfaction.

"Not a mark," he said. "The fellow was a conceited ass to stand up to you at all. He fully expected to send you home as he's going home himself, and he didn't care twopence if you got into a row with the Head."

Kildare smiled.

"I should certainly have got into trouble with the Head if I'd gone home with a face like Lagden's," he said. "But I shouldn't have made up a lie to account for it, as those cads are doing. I'm glad we've done with them."

"Same here."

Kildare stepped into the skiff.

"I'll walk home," said Darrel. "No need for a word at St. Jim's. The sooner the whole affair's forgotten the better."

"Yes, rather."

And Darrel walked away, and the captain of St. Jim's sculled back to the school boathouse. Blake of the Fourth was outside the boathouse when Kildare carried his skiff in, and he looked curiously at the Sixth-Former. He had had a lingering suspicion that Kildare had not gone out only for a row. But the absence of any sign of combat in Kildare's face banished his suspicion.

"Had a good row?" he asked.

"Yes," said Kildare.

And he put up the skiff and walked back to the school.

CHAPTER 12.

Well Watched.

THE next day Kildare's movements were of great interest to the juniors of St. Jim's. When he was in the Sixth-Form room, of course, they could not keep an eye upon him, but when he was out of it, he was shadowed as assiduously as if St. Jim's had been a training school for Sherlock Holmes's and Kildare a suspected Professor Moriarty. If the fight with Lagden of Ferndale came off, the juniors did not mean to be left out. They were all agreed upon that. Tom Merry & Co., of the School House, and Figgins & Co., of the New House, were fully in accord.

They had no idea that the fight had already taken place; that secret had been well kept.

Kildare, as he found the juniors watching his movements with great keenness and anxiety, could not help smiling.

When he strolled out into the quad, the Terrible Three strolled after him in a careless sort of way. When he went into the gym, Blake and Co. had a sudden passion for gymnastics. When he wheeled out his bicycle, three or four fellows wheeled out bicycles. When he simply repaired the mudguard, and wheeled it back again, the other fellows all pretended to have punctures, and went through a pantomime of repairing them, and wheeled their machines in again after Kildare's.

After lessons, Kildare took a stroll on the bank of the Ryll; and five or six fellows strolled in the same direction.

They were seen going, and other fellows followed. The Terrible Three were a dozen paces behind Kildare, strolling along in a very innocent sort of way, and a dozen paces behind

them were Blake and Herries and Digby and D'Arcy, also looking extremely innocent. Figgins and Co. of the New House were a little further behind, and then came Redfern and Owen and Lawrence. Reilly and Kangaroo, and Clifton Dane and Bernard Glyn and Gore brought up the rear, and Pratt and Thompson and Lumley-Lumley and Mellish and Crooke and several more fellows appeared at various points on the towing-path, from unknown parts.

Kildare strolled along in a thoughtful mood; but something made him turn his head, and he stared in amazement at the crowded towing-path behind him.

The juniors paused, rather dismayed.

They felt that upon the whole it was perhaps a little too "thick."

Kildare's brows contracted.

"What does this mean?" he exclaimed.

The Terrible Three coughed.

"Ahem!" said Tom Merry.

"You see——" began Monty Lowther.

"It's like this!" explained Manners.

"Weally, Kildare——"

"Ahem!"

Kildare waved his hand.

"Cut off at once," he said.

"Ahem!"

Kildare made an impatient gesture, and walked back to the school. After him went the whole procession. Darrel and Rushden met him in the quad, as he came in, and they stared at his numerous following.

"Hullo!" exclaimed Darrel. "Have you been taking the juniors out for a walk?"

Kildare grinned, though he was rather red.

"No; they've been following me, the young asses."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's jolly annoying," said Kildare. "Look here, you juniors——"

But the juniors had melted away.

Kildare went into his study to tea. Wally D'Arcy, Jameson, and Curly Gibson of the Third, and Joe Frayne and Hobbs of the same Form, immediately posted themselves under his window. Kildare looked out with a frown.

"What do you fags want here?" he exclaimed.

Wally looked up to him with a grin.

"You might want a fag," he suggested.

"Well, I don't."

"You don't mind us waitin'?" asked Joe Frayne.

"Yes, I do; buzz off."

"Oh, I say——" said Frayne.

"Cut off at once, you young rascals. Do you think I don't know what you're here for?" Kildare exclaimed, in exasperation. "Buzz away before I get a stump."

"My hat!" said Frayne. "Come on."

And the fags buzzed off; but they did not go far. In elegant attitudes, they adorned the elms with their persons, within easy view of Kildare's study window. If the captain of St. Jim's had attempted to escape by the window, which he was certainly not likely to do, Wally & Co. would have been on his track at once.

There was a tap at Kildare's door, and he turned towards it with a gesture of irritation.

"Come in!" he rapped out.

Tom Merry entered.

"Well, what do you want?" asked Kildare, fixing a grim look upon the hero of the Shell.

"Like me to fag for you?" asked Tom Merry, cheerfully.

"You haven't come here to fag."

"Yes, I have," said Tom Merry. "Would you like me to make your tea, and to cook some eggs? I'm rather a dab at poaching eggs, you know."

"Get out!"

"Eh!"

"Get out!" roared Kildare.

"Oh, certainly."

Tom Merry got out.

Five minutes later Figgins, of the Fourth, appeared at the door. He knocked and looked in rather timidly.

"I say, Kildare, do you want a fag?"

Kildare glared.

"What do you mean? New House kids don't fag in the School House," he said.

Figgins nodded.

"No, I know they don't, as a rule," he said. "But you see, as you're captain of the whole giddy school, I don't see why you shouldn't have a New House fag sometimes, you know. I'm willing——"

"Get out!"

"Ahem!"

Kildare picked up a cricket stump, and Figgins vanished. The captain of St. Jim's burst into a laugh in spite of himself.

Ten minutes later there was another tap at the door, and the elegant form of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the swell of St. Jim's, insinuated itself into the study.

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"Kildare, deah boy——"
 "Oh, buzz off!"
 "Ahem! I have the honah to invite you to tea in Studay No. 6 in the Fourth, Kildare," said D'Arcy, with a great deal of dignity.

Kildare smiled as he recognised another dodge.
 "Oh, run away," he said. "Thanks, I can't come."
 "Weally, Kildare——"
 "There's the door."
 "I must say that I do not wegard your mannah as gwatifyin'," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, stiffly. "Howevah, I wish to pwess the invitation. We have saveloys and cold ham and fwied potatoes!"
 "Look here——"
 "And poached eggs on toast!"
 "You young ass——"
 "And weal coffee——"

Kildare made a step towards the swell of St. Jim's; and Arthur Augustus suddenly ceased enumerating the good things that were to be had simply for the trouble of walking to Study No. 6 in the Fourth. He skipped out into the passage, and departed.

A little later, Kildare went into Darrel's study to tea. As he did so, he saw juniors lounging in careless attitudes at both ends of the passage, and he laughed.

When he came out after tea other juniors were there. They were apparently relieving one another on sentry-go.

It was not till dark that the vigilance of the juniors relaxed. Kildare could not be going out to fight Lagden of Ferndale after dark, that was certain.

"I shouldn't wonder if the fight isn't coming off at all," said Tom Merry, that evening. "and I must say I hope not."

"An affiah of honah, deah boy——"
 "Bosh!"

"But of course, it is not so important for Kildare as it would be for a D'Arcy," said the swell of St. Jim's, thoughtfully.

"You see, a D'Arcy couldn't——"
 "Couldn't talk sense to save his life," suggested Monty Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 "Weally, Lowthah——"

"I quite agree with you," said Lowther.
 "You uttah ass! I wasn't goin' to say anythin' of the kind," shrieked D'Arcy, "I was goin' to remark that a D'Arcy——"

"That reminds me——" said Lowther.
 "You——are intewwuptin' me——"

"Yes, that reminds me of a limerick I have composed on the subject of D'Arcy——"

"I wefuse to have limericks composed about me——"
 "It runs like this——" said Lowther, blandly:

"I know a young duffer named D'Arcy,
 Who's not so much classy as sarcy——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 "I wefuse to stay here and listen to such wot!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, and he walked away with his aristocratic nose high in the air.

CHAPTER 13.

By Whose Hand?

MELLISH of the Fourth came into the School House with a very serious and important air. It was the day after that careful shadowing of Kildare—Saturday, and another half-holiday. Tom Merry & Co. were in the hall, about to go down to the cricket ground after dinner, when Mellish came in. And Mellish's manner showed that he had news. Mellish generally knew everything that happened, and knew it before everybody else. He came up to the chums of the School House with a grin.

"Have you heard?" he asked.

"Heard what?" asked Tom Merry.

"About Lagden."
 The juniors were interested at once.

"I've heard nothing," said Tom Merry. "I know Kildare hasn't met him, but I don't know anything else."

"Somebody's met him," grinned Mellish.

"What do you mean?"
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"He's hurt."

"What!"

"I've been talking to a Ferndale chap," explained Mellish. "There's a regular uproar over at Ferndale about it, and the police have been called in. Old Crump has been over from Rylcombe, and there's a regular row."

"Bai Jove!"

"But what's happened?" exclaimed Blake. "How is Lagden hurt? Has he had an accident?"

"He's been beaten."

"Beaten!"

"Yes. It seems that it happened on Thursday," said Mellish. "Thursday evening. Where was Kildare then? Anybody know?"

"Thursday evening," said Blake, thoughtfully. "Lemme see! That was when we got the skiff out for Kildare. He was rowing after lessons."

"And after he came in, he had a meeting of the Sixth-Form Debating Society," said Herries.

"And after that he was working in his study," Lumley-Lumley remarked.

"His time is fully accounted for," grinned Monty Lowther. "If Lagden's been out and got hurt, it's just as well for Kildare that we were keeping an eye on him. It will prove that he had nothing to do with it."

"Yaas, wathah."

"It may be lucky for Kildare," agreed Mellish. "It seems that Lagden is badly hurt. Chap from Ferndale told me all about it; Lagden went out for a walk on Thursday evening, and he came back with Tunstall and Monson of the Sixth."

"The two chaps who brought the challenge to Kildare?" said Tom Merry.

"Yes. They brought him home in an awfully battered state—eyes blacked, and nose swollen, and lips cut, and a big lump on his forehead—looked as if he's been fighting with a lawn-mower or a motor-car, young Diggle said. He explained to the Head of Ferndale that he'd been attacked by a tramp in Rylcombe Wood and hurt. The chap didn't succeed in robbing him, but mauled him very badly. Some Ferndale chaps think it was only a yarn, and that he'd really been out fighting—but of course he daren't say so, or the Ferndale beaks would be awfully down on him. But I don't see how it could have been Kildare."

"It couldn't have been Kildare," said Tom Merry, warmly, "we've had Kildare under our eye all the time."

"Quite imposs."

"I hear that Lagden fainted when he was taken in to Ferndale, and a doctor was sent for," Mellish went on. "Lagden is ordered to stay in bed for a week."

"Great Scott!"

"He was a very weedy chap," said Monty Lowther. "The silly ass was thinking of standing up to Kildare! Kildare would have made short work of him!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"The tramp hasn't been found, and Lagden doesn't seem to be able to give a good description of him, either," said Mellish.

"It may be true. I suppose it couldn't really have been Kildare?"

"Of course, it wasn't, you uttah ass!"

"Haven't we been shadowing him all the time?" demanded Blake.

"Well, he might have dodged us, you know."

"Wats!"

"Rot!"

"Might have met Lagden after dark somewhere," suggested Crooke of the Shell.

"Bosh!" said Blake. "Did the Ferndale kid tell you what time Lagden got back to Ferndale in that state on Thursday, Mellish?"

"Before dark," said Mellish.

"That settles it!" said Blake triumphantly.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"They might have met on Wednesday night—the night after the cricket match," said Crooke obstinately.

"Kildare didn't go out that night," said Tom Merry, "and Lagden got his damages on Thursday. That's certain, isn't it, Mellish?"

"Oh, yes," said Mellish.

"Young Diggle says Lagden looked just the same as usual when he went out on Thursday,

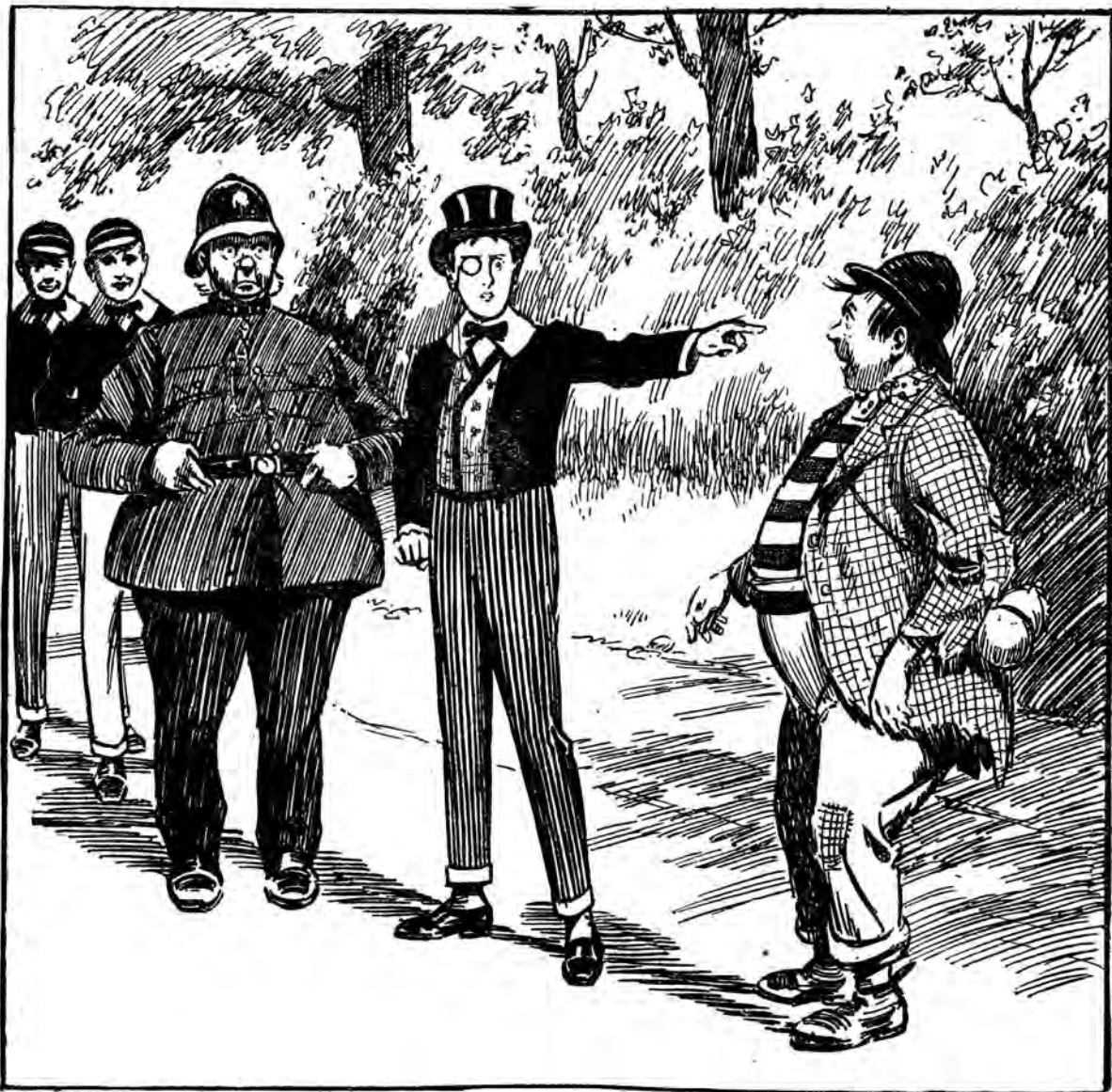
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"Wascal!" said D'Arcy, with his right hand raised to denounce the tramp. "Wascal! You are speaking untwuthfully, and I am uttably disgusted with you. Mr. Cwump, that is the man, and I call upon you to awwcast him!" (See chap. 16.)

and it was when he came back that he was battered. He got his injuries on Thursday."

"Well, that's settled, then. It wasn't Kildare."

"Well, I don't see how it could have been," admitted Crooke.

"But Kildare might have dodged us. He might have only pretended to be going rowing, you know, and might have landed down the river somewhere."

"Oh, rubbish!"

"Yaas, wathah! Wubbish, deah boy!"

"Were Tunstall and Monson with him when he got bashed?" asked Blake.

"No. They found him, and helped him home. So they say."

"Well, I'm glad it can't be fixed on Kildare," said Tom Merry.

And that was the general feeling among the juniors. They would most of them have been pleased to hear that Lagden had been licked by the captain of St. Jim's; but now that Lagden had been hurt, apparently seriously, they were glad to think that it could be proved that Kildare had had nothing to do with it.

The matter was talked of very much that afternoon at St. Jim's. It was not long before the whole school knew all about it.

Several fellows who had acquaintances at Ferndale cycled over there in order to learn all the details of the story.

The details they brought back were substantially the same as those supplied by Mellish.

Lagden had been attacked in the wood by a tramp, and had been badly hurt, and Tunstall and Monson had found him afterwards and helped him home. He could not give a very accurate description of the tramp, only that he was a burly and dirty fellow.

The story sounded straight enough, but some of the Saints had their doubts. If the two captains had met and fought, they were not likely to say so; and Lagden, at least, would have had no scruple about inventing a circumstantial yarn to account for the state in which he returned to Ferndale.

The juniors who had so carefully shadowed Kildare were quite certain that he was innocent in the matter; but their opinion was not universal.

Kildare declined to say a word on the subject.

Mellish, who was inquisitiveness itself, had the audacity to ask the St. Jim's captain for an assurance on the subject, and had his ears boxed for his pains—an act which the juniors of the School House heartily applauded.

Knox, of the Sixth, asked Kildare bluntly, in the prefects' room, if he had any knowledge of what had happened to Lagden.

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Knox was always Kildare's rival and enemy, and he fancied he saw a chance to score. But he did not succeed. Kildare looked him straight in the face. He could not box a prefect's ears as he had boxed the junior's. But the expression upon his face made Knox retreat a pace or two.

"Better say out plainly, so that the fellows will know what to think!" said Knox, a little dubiously.

"I've nothing to say on the subject," said Kildare. "I refuse to be questioned by you or by anybody else! It's no business of yours, and you will oblige me by attending to what concerns you."

Knox coloured with anger. He had never received a more direct snub, and the grins of the other seniors in the prefects' room added to his discomfiture. He consoled himself by spreading hints in all quarters that there was reason to believe that Kildare had been the author of Lagden's injuries. That opinion was held by a good many fellows, but after Knox's reception, no one ventured to ask Kildare questions on the subject.

"It's utterly wotten!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, coming into Study No. 6 that evening. "A lot of the fellows are muttewin' among themselves, you know, that Kildare was the chap who whacked Lagden. Of course, he had ewery wight to whack him, if he wanted to. I'm sure Lagden was askin' for it. But it isn't the case."

"Oh, those silly asses will say anything!" said Blake carelessly. "Fellows like Knox and Sefton are always up against old Kildare, and anything's good enough for them to use as a handle."

"And Mellish and Croke are making the most of it," said Digby. "Levison would make a regular history out of it if he were here now."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"It would be rather serious for Kildare if the story got about," said Blake, with a clouded brow. "Lagden seems to be laid up by the licking, whoever gave it to him, and if the Head thought that Kildare had done it, poor old Kildare would be called up on the carpet."

"Yaas. I have been thinkin', deah boys. Lagden says that he was attacked by a twamp, and although I do not wegard Lagden as an honouvable person, I see no weason to doubt the accuracy of his statement in that respect. You wemembah that last Thursday there was a twamp twyin' to wob him in Wylcombe Lane, and we came by just in time to stop the wottah?"

Jack Blake nodded.

"Yes. I was speaking to Tom Merry about that, and he thinks it's the same chap," he said. "I suppose it's bound to be. He knew Lagden had a good deal of money about him, and he hung about for another chance of getting at him. It seems clear enough."

"Just what I was thinkin', deah boys. If that twamp could be found and awrested, it would be all wight. The wascal ought to be punished for attackin' Lagden, you know, and for bein' a thief."

"Well, the police are looking for the man."

"Yaas; but the police aren't much good, you know," said D'Arcy, with a shake of the head. "I weally think we ought to look into the mattah ourselves."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I see no cause whatevah for wibald laughtah, Blake! I know that twamp by sight, for one thing, and the police don't, and, besides—"

"Besides, we've got Towser!" said Herries.

Arthur Augustus turned his eyeglass freezingly upon Herries.

"What did you wemark, Hewwies?" he asked.

"We've got Towser," said Herries. "My bulldog can follow anybody's trail, you know. You chaps know what he can do."

"I wefuse to entaintain the ideah of havin' Towser! That wotten bulldog has no wespect whatevah for a fellow's twousahs."

"Look here, you fathead—"

"I wefuse to be called a fathead! I considah—"

"Peace, my sons!" said Blake. "Gussy's idea is all right. We'll have a look for that giddy tramp, and get him arrested. It will be the best way of shutting up chaps who are jawing about old Kildare."

"Yaas, wathah!"

And when Study No. 6 consulted Tom Merry & Co. on the subject, the Terrible Three entered cordially into the scheme. It was evidently the best thing to be done!

CHAPTER 14.

A Sunday Visit.

THE next day was Sunday, and it was very quiet at St. Jim's. Kildare came out after morning service with a clouded brow. He strolled in the quadrangle, and Darrel joined him there. There was a peaceful Sunday stillness upon the old school; the Form-rooms were empty and silent, and the cricket-field deserted. Kildare had his hands thrust deep into his pockets, and there was a deep line upon his brow.

He raised his eyes rather miserably as Darrel joined him.

"This is rotten, Darrel!" Kildare said, in a low voice.

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Darrel nodded.

"About Lagden, you mean?"

"Yes. He's laid up in bed. I didn't mean to hurt him so much."

"I know you didn't, old fellow. But he did his best to hurt you. You must remember that, you know."

"I oughtn't to have met him," said Kildare uneasily. "I feel that now. I knew it at the time, for the matter of that, but I let myself be badgered into it. If I'd had the sense to take your advice, it wouldn't have happened."

Darrel was not the I-told-you-so kind of chum. Now that it had happened, he did not want to take any credit for having given good advice which had not been followed.

"Well, it can't be helped now," he said. "And I dare say I should have done the same in your place. Most fellows would have considered it an affair of honour."

"An affair of dishonour, it looks more like now," said Kildare. "And about his being hurt. That wasn't your fault. He oughtn't to have stood up to you. And you gave him every chance of getting out of it. And they weren't fair to us, either. They didn't play the game. You've very little to reproach yourself with, Kildare. I shouldn't think about it."

"I can't help thinking about it," said Kildare miserably. "I've done wrong, and when wrong's once done, it keeps on rising up against a fellow. Lagden is injured, and they are looking for a tramp to put the blame on. It would be just like the country police to find some wretched ruffian and charge him with it."

Darrel whistled.

"Lagden wouldn't identify him," he said.

"He had already said that he couldn't identify the man. If any kind of proof could be found, the man might be sent to prison. You know how loafers and vagrants are dealt with by country justices. They don't have much of a show. If a man could be proved to have been in the wood at the time, and to have robbed anybody hereabouts, I imagine that would be proof enough."

"I hope it won't come to that, Kildare."

"I hope so, too, because it would be necessary for me to own up," said Kildare. "I couldn't let such a thing go on."

"Quite right. But—"

"I shouldn't wonder if it happens. But even if it doesn't, I've got to go about keeping this rotten secret. I've never had a secret to keep before, and it worries me. I feel as if I were telling a lie all the time in letting the fellows suppose that it wasn't I who licked Lagden."

"It's not their business. You're not called upon to say anything," said Darrel. "I don't see why you should satisfy busybodies' curiosity."

"Well, no. But it makes a chap feel rotten! I feel like a rotten humbug!" said Kildare restlessly. "I say, Darrel, do you think I could go over and see Lagden?"

Darrel stared.

"Go over and see Lagden?" he repeated.

"Yes." Kildare flushed painfully. "Look here, it's Sunday. You remember the Head's sermon we've just heard? I—I don't know that I listen to sermons as a rule any more than other fellows, but—but somehow it seemed to hit me hard this morning."

"I'm afraid Lagden doesn't feel the same way," said Darrel. "If he were a decent chap, I'd recommend going over and making it up with him at once. But—but to be quite plain, Kildare, he'd think you were funky about the consequences, and in a state of fright."

"You think so?"

"I'm sure of it."

"Well, I suppose you're right," said Kildare, with a sigh. "Only—only as I knocked him up, don't you think it would be only decent to go and see him?"

Darrel smiled.

"Certainly, if you like," he said. "Shall I come with you?"

"Do."

The two seniors walked out of the school gates together. They took the road to Ferndale. Kildare's brow was very clouded as he went, and Darrel was silent. Darrel was only too keenly conscious of the reception they were likely to meet with, but he would not dissuade Kildare. He understood how his companion felt.

They reached Ferndale, and the fellows there stared at them in considerable surprise. Kildare asked to see Lagden.

Monson and Tunstall and several other fellows gathered round. "Lagden's in bed," said Monson. "He was shoved into the school sanatorium after his row with a tramp last Thursday."

"Isn't he any better?" asked Kildare.

"Not much. He will be laid up some time. The doctor says he's lucky not to have had concussion of the brain."

Kildare shuddered.

"Can I see him?"

"What do you want to see him for?" demanded Tunstall. Kildare flushed. He began to realise that Darrel was right.

and that he would have done better not to come over to Ferndale after all.

"I should like to see how he's getting on," he said, "and— and to tell him I'm sorry for— for what's happened."

"Oh, I'll go and tell him what you say, if you like!" said Monson carelessly.

He walked away, and Kildare and Darrel waited very uncomfortably. Monson returned in about five minutes. He was grinning.

"Well, what does he say?" asked Kildare.

"He says you can go and eat coke."

There was a chuckle from the Ferndale fellows standing round. Kildare's face went crimson.

"Did he say anything else?" he asked.

"Yes; he said it was like your check to come here, and that he doesn't want any of your humbug."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Very well," said Kildare quietly. "Thank you."

The two St. Jim's seniors walked away. They did not speak until they were near the gates of St. Jim's again.

"Well, you were right, Darrel, old man," said Kildare at last, with a rather forced smile.

"Shove it out of your mind," said Darrel. "The fellow's a cad, and he's not worth thinking about."

Kildare nodded. The advice was good; but he could not "shove" it out of his mind. In spite of himself, it persisted in remaining in his thoughts.

CHAPTER 15.

Police-Constable Crump Arrests His Man!

"YOU fellows ready?"

"Nearly," said Tom Merry, picking up his bat out of a corner of the study, as Arthur Augustus D'Arcy looked in at the door on Monday afternoon.

"What are you gettin' that bat for, Tom Mewwy?"

"Cricket, of course."

"You uttah ass! We are not goin' to play ewicket, we are goin' to look for that twamp."

"My hat! I'd forgotten."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"I'll tell you what," said Tom Merry, with the air of a fellow making a very good offer, "we'll go down to the cricket now, and look for the tramp afterwards."

"That's a jolly good idea," said Monty Lowther. "You see, Gussy, the tramp may have gone to seek fresh fields and pastures new by this time."

"And I've got some films to develop," said Manners. "Upon the whole, I think we'd better give the tramp a rest."

"Wats!" said D'Arcy indignantly. "I wedard you as elackahs. I have just spoken to Blake about the mattah, and the silly ass has pwoposed to leave it till aftah dark, so as to get the ewicket in first."

"Jolly good idea!"

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Take Herries and Dig," suggested Tom Merry.

"But they've gone down to the ewicket, too."

"Well, there's Lumley-Lumley—"

"The ass has got lines to do."

"Try Mellish."

"I wefuse to associate with Mellish. He is one of the wottahs who is twyin' hardest to fix this on Kildare."

"There's Figgins & Co., or Redfern—"

"They're playin' ewicket."

Tom Merry laughed.

"There doesn't seem to be much enthusiasm for hunting tramps," he remarked. "I suppose we shall have to come. If we let you go out alone you'll run into some trouble."

"Weally, you ass—"

"Oh, we'll come!" said Lowther. "You coming, Manners?"

"How can I come when I've got my films to develop?"

"Pway come on, deali boys!" said D'Arcy. "We are losin' time, you know, and we've got to get back before lockin' up. Mannahs can go and develop his wotten films."

"They're not rotten films!" said Manners warmly. "They're jolly good films, and I give three bob a dozen—"

"Oh, wats! Come on, you fellows."

Tom Merry and Monty Lowther clumped their bats into a corner of the study, and followed the swell of St. Jim's. They felt that they were in for it. They walked down to the gates, and strolled out into the road. It was barely five o'clock, and the July sun was blazing on the woods and the meadows.

"Warm!" said Lowther, with a puff. "You've forgotten to bring your parasol, Gussy."

"Weally, Lowthah, you ass—"

"Hallo, here's Crumpy!" said Tom Merry. "He looks as if he were going to melt."

Police-constable Crump, of Rylecombe, touched his helmet to the St. Jim's fellows. Tom Merry and Lowther nodded, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy raised his silk topper very gracefully.

"Very 'ot, young gentlemen," said P.-c. Crump, breathing hard. "Very 'ot."

"Yaas, wathah! Have you found the twamp yet, Mr. Cwump?"

"What tramp, sir?"

"The one who attacked Lagden in the wood last week."

Mr. Crump shook his head.

"We ain't found any tramp, sir. Master Lagden wain't able to give much of a description, and atween you an' me, sir, we've 'eard a yarn that Master Lagden was fighting somebody else, and that it was all bunkum about the tramp."

D'Arcy shook his head.

"That is not cowwect, Mr. Cwump. As a matter of fact, Tom Mewwy and I saw a twamp twyin' to wob Lagden last Thursday in this lane, and we interfered. Tom Mewwy gave him a feaful wap on the head, and he wan away like anythin'. My suspish is that he found Lagden again and twied to wob him."

Police-constable Crump looked very interested. He seldom had a "case" in the quiet district of Rylecombe, and he would have welcomed any sort of one.

"That throws a different light on the matter, sir," said Mr. Crump. "I'm werry glad I met you, sir. Can you give me a description of the tramp?"

"Certainly, deah boy."

Police-constable Crump took out his notebook and a stump of pencil, and wetted the latter with his lips in a very business-like way.

"Go a'ead, sir," said Mr. Crump briskly.

Arthur Augustus went ahead. Tom Merry aided him, and between them they gave Mr. Crump a pretty good description of the tramp. Police-constable Crump took copious notes. He had plenty of blank pages for that purpose.

"Thank you very much, sir," he said, as he closed the pocket-book at last with a snap. "I'll know that man if I see 'im. You're sure he had only one eye?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"He had the other one covered up, anyway," said Tom Merry. "It may have been only damaged. But that's a good description, as near as we can remember."

"Good enough, sir. We'll have him."

"As a mattah of fact, we're goin' to look for him now," said Arthur Augustus. "Vewy likely he's hangin' wound, you know; lookin' for somebody to wob."

P.-c. Crump pursed his lips thoughtfully.

"More likely he's bolted, sir, considering the fuss that's been made about Master Lagden bein' attacked," he said. "He wouldn't be likely to 'ang about 'ere arter that. But we'll 'ave him, wherever he is."

"If we find him we'll send him on, this side up with care, carriage forward," said Monty Lowther blandly.

"Pway don't be an ass, Lowthah! Good-aftahnoon, Mr. Cwump! I hope you will find him."

"I shall try, sir."

The juniors sauntered on. Mr. Crump looked after them, and then seated himself upon a fence by the roadside, and fanned himself with a large, red-spotted handkerchief. That was doubtless Mr. Crump's way of looking for the culprit. Perhaps he was a believer in the old saying that everything comes to him who waits. And he was waiting.

"Spare a copper to 'elp a pore man?"

It was a whining voice from a rough-looking, dirty man seated upon the stile as the juniors passed it.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy jammed his eyeglass into his eye, and stared at the man in amazement.

It was the tramp!

He was not wearing the patch over his eye now, but he was the tramp—the ruffian who had begged of Lagden in the lane the previous Thursday, and who had attempted to snatch the money from the hand of the Ferndale captain.

The tramp evidently did not recognise the juniors. He had had hardly time to look at them on that occasion, when his head was singing from the knockdown blow Tom Merry had given him. To him they were simply three well-dressed boys from the school of whom it was possible to beg.

"Bai Jove!" exclaimed D'Arcy.

Tom Merry grinned.

"The very man!" he ejaculated.

The tramp blinked at him. He had been drinking, and his face was flushed, his legs unsteady as he slid off the stile.

"Which I'm a pore man," he said. "I'm a 'ard-workin' man, lookin' for work. If you could 'elp me on my way, sir."

"I'd help you with pleasure, if my boot would do," said Lowther politely.

"Jest a copper or two, sir."

"Would one copper be enough?" asked Lowther humorously, thinking of Police-constable Crump not a hundred yards down the lane.

"Yes, sir; any little 'elps, sir," said the tramp, looking over the juniors to calculate whether they would be too much for him if he attempted threats or violence.

"Well, I can show you where you can get a copper," said Lowther sweetly. "There's one down the lane yonder."

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"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tom Merry.

"Pway be awxious, deah boys!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, fixing his eyeglass very severely upon the tramp. "You uttah wascal, you are the feahful wottah who twied to wob Lagden the othah day, and who attacked him in the wood. I awwest you—"

"Wot!" ejaculated the tramp.

"I awwest you in the name of King George!" said Arthur Augustus majestically, advancing upon the ruffian.

Tom Merry and Monty Lowther advanced at the same moment; and the tramp backed away a pace, and then turned and took to his heels.

"Aftah him, deah boys!" shouted D'Arcy. "Wun like anythin'!"

They dashed in pursuit.

"It's all right!" panted Tom Merry. "Old Crump's just ahead of him, and he'll pass him if he keeps on."

"Bai Jove! Yaas."

"Crump!" roared Monty Lowther. "Crump! Look out, Crumpy! Crump! Crumpy! Crump!"

P.-c. Crump hearing his name shouted in the distance, detached himself from the fence he was seated upon, gave his fat face a last wipe with the red handkerchief, and looked down the lane.

The tramp was dashing directly upon him, and the three juniors could be seen in pursuit behind.

P.-c. Crump grinned with satisfaction: he understood. He stepped out into the middle of the road with a majestic gesture.

"Old on!" he said. "Old on, in the name of the lor!"

The tramp halted in dismay.

It was not the name of the law that made him halt, but the evident impossibility of getting past P.-c. Crump.

He looked back. The juniors came racing up.

"That's the man!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

The tramp whined.

"It's all a mistake," he said. "I'm a pore man, 'ard-workin'! I'm lookin' for a job. I ain't seen them young gents afore, 'pon me davy I ain't."

"Wascal!" said D'Arcy, with his right hand raised to denounce the tramp. "Wascal! You are speakin' untruthfully, and I am uttably disgusted with you. Mr. Cwump, that is the man, and I call upon you to awwest him."

"Wotto!" said Mr. Crump.

His heavy right hand dropped upon the tramp's shoulder.

"I ain't done nothing," yelled the tramp. "'Pon me davy, I ain't done nothing. I—"

"Which it's my dooty to warn you that anything you says may be taken down to be used in evidence agin yer," said Mr. Crump severely. Mr. Crump rolled those words out with great relish. He did not often have an opportunity of uttering them.

"But I ain't done nothing!"

"Which the magistrates will settle that," said Mr. Crump. "You come alonger me. Put hout your 'ands."

"But I ain't—"

Click!

"Now you come quietly," admonished Mr. Crump. "I'm much obliged to you, young gentlemen. You've been of great 'elp to the lor. Kin on, my man!"

And P.-c. Crump marched the furious tramp away with great satisfaction—to himself, of course, not the tramp. The three juniors of St. Jim's walked back to the school. Arthur Augustus was brimming with satisfaction.

"It's all wight, deah boys," he said. "We have wid the countryside of a vewy dangewous chawactah, and we shall cleah Kildare of all suspicion in connection with that wottah Lagden! I veward this as a twiump!"

And Tom Merry and Monty Lowther agreed that it was.

CHAPTER 16.

Honour for Arthur Augustus.

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY, of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's, was not given to swanking. He had an excellent opinion of himself, and he never concealed it. But he could never really be considered to swank.

But upon this occasion, perhaps, the elegant junior somewhat forgot his usual rule, and his nose was certainly carried a little high in the air on his return to St. Jim's after the successful arrest of the tramp.

He almost, if not quite, swanked!

For it was really a triumph. The local police, from Rylcombe and Wayland and round about, had searched for Lagden's assailant in vain for nearly a week. Arthur Augustus had taken the matter in hand, and behold—it was finished!

Cassar, on a celebrated occasion, made the remark known to every schoolboy, "Veni, vidi, vici." Which, as Monty Lowther construed it—not in the Form-room meant "I trotted, I spotted, I potted." Surely now Arthur Augustus was entitled to say with the great Roman that he had come, and seen, and conquered. He had taken the matter in hand, found the man, had him arrested, and there you were—voila tout! It was not surprising that Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's noble nose was elevated a little in the flush of his triumph.

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And the School House juniors were quite willing to give honour where honour was due. Some of them suggested that D'Arcy had probably caused the wrong man to be arrested. But the majority declared that Gussy had done it—done it brown! Gussy was the man!

"Good old Gussy!" said Blake, when he came off the cricket-field and heard the news. "Why, this beats Sherlock Holmes! How did you track him down, Gussy? Was it by the colour of his whiskers, or the smell of his boots?"

"As a mattah of fact, I was vewy much helped by chance," said D'Arcy, with true modesty. "I found him sitting on the stile."

"Never mind, we've got him, and that's the chief thing," said Kangaroo. "I suppose he's the right man!"

"Weally, Kangaroo—"

"That's a secondary point, of course," said Reilly. "Sure, we've got somebody, and it's ripping. Where is the spalpeen now, Gussy darling?"

"Mr. Cwump has taken him to the police-station. He will be brought before the justices at Wayland in the mornin'."

"Then you chaps will have to go as witnesses," said Kangaroo.

"Bai Jove! I nevah thought of that."

"We shall, I suppose," said Tom Merry. "We shall have to identify him. We can prove that he attacked Lagden last Thursday afternoon, anyway."

"Attacked!" said Blake, dubiously. "He tried to grab his money."

"Well, that's enough. It shows that he's a ruffian, and that he would have robbed Lagden. The presumption is that he waited about for another chance, and got it."

"Yaas, wathah."

"And Laggy got it—in the neck," grinned Lowther. "Well, I suppose he's the right man. Anyway, the magistrates will settle that."

"Yaas, the law will take its course," said D'Arcy, "and nobody will be able to say anythin' against Kildare aftah this, deah boys, now that the wight man has been found and punished."

"Hear, hear!"

"I am not often given to blowin' my own twumpet, deah boys," said Arthur Augustus: "but on this occasion I must remark that I weally considah that I have done wathah well."

"Bravo!" said Figgins of the New House. "You've done rippingly—almost as well as if a New House chap had been on the job."

"Weally, Figgins—"

"I really think that the whole Lower School ought to show their appreciation of what Gussy has done," said Fatty Wynn, looking round.

"Hear, hear!"

"That is weally very decent of you, Wynn," said Arthur Augustus, very much flattered by this appreciation from the rival House.

"Not at all," said Fatty Wynn stoutly. "I'm only stating what I think. Gussy has deserved well of the whole school, you fellows, and New House and School House ought to unite to do him honour."

"Oh, weally—"

"There ought to be a celebration," said Fatty Wynn, with conviction. "I suggest a really ripping feed—something quite stunning in the way of feeds."

"Hear, hear."

"And as Gussy is rolling in wealth, I think he ought to stand it," went on the fat Fourth-Former.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Hear, hear!"

"It ought to be made quite plain that Gussy is a man whom the school delights to honour," said Fatty Wynn. "A feed is the thing—a really stunning feed, and Gussy shall stand it himself, and we'll all come."

"Yes, rather."

"Good egg!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Weally, Wynn—"

"Not at all," said Fatty Wynn. "Don't thank me, Gussy." "I wasn't goin' to thank you, you ass—"

Fatty Wynn did not seem to hear. "No thanks for me," he repeated blandly. "It's just yourself that you've got to thank, Gussy. You've done splendidly, and we want to celebrate it. That's the long and the short of it. This way to the tuck-shop."

The crowd of juniors roared.

"Hurray! Come on, Gussy!"

"Weally, you fellows—"

"This way, Gussy."

"Hear, hear!"

"Of course, I feel vewy much flattered, you chaps. But—"

"Come on! We're going to honour you, Gussy, or we'll know the reason why," said Monty Lowther, taking the arm of the swell of St. Jim's quite affectionately.

"What-ho!" said Blake, taking his other arm. "Fatty's idea is simply ripping. Come on, Gussy, and be honoured."

"But surely a chap ought not to stand his own feed—it is weally quite unusual—"

"Yes, but you're an unusual chap," said Kerr of the Fourth. "You see, a chap like you has to be honoured in some way a bit out of the common."

"Yaas, that is quite wight. Still—"

"Now, look here, Gussy, it's all very well for you to be modest, but we're not having it," said Thompson of the Shell. "On an occasion like this, the whole of the Lower School stands shoulder to shoulder to back up Gussy."

"Hear, hear!"

"March!" said Tom Merry.

And the juniors marched.

Arthur Augustus had to march at their head, with a junior holding either arm, and the rest of the crowd pressing on from behind. It was not quite clear to D'Arcy how he would be honoured by standing himself a feed, and the rest of the crowd at the same time, but the fellows seemed to have made up their minds about it, and D'Arcy had to bow to the force of public opinion.

He led his followers into the tuck-shop, and Dame Taggles came out of her little parlour with the sweetest of smiles upon her face.

She scented good custom. And she was right. A fiver which Arthur Augustus had lately received from his noble "governor" changed hands, and the good things were handed out in the most lavish way.

Arthur Augustus tried to speak once or twice, but it was in vain; there were too many voices going at once for his observations to be heard. The juniors played up nobly. If honour could be done to Gussy by excessive eating and drinking, the juniors of St. Jim's were not likely to fail in honouring him. Fatty Wynn distinguished himself; but it must be said in justice that all did very well.

It was a great celebration.

And Arthur Augustus, feeling that he was greatly honoured, to say nothing of expensively—to himself—made a little speech after the feed was done, and though nobody heard what he said, his remarks were loudly cheered.

CHAPTER 17.

Kildare Surprises the Fourth!

D'ARCY'S exploits were the theme of much talk among the lower Forms that evening, and the feed was still more widely discussed. Arthur Augustus went to bed feeling very well satisfied with himself. He was prepared to go up to the court at Wayland on the morrow and swear to the identity of the tramp, if necessary, for the sake of helping justice to be done—and he would not be displeased with a little excursion instead of lessons. Tom Merry and Blake were equally ready to sacrifice their lessons in a noble and disinterested way for the same purpose.

If Kildare had known about the matter, he would not have been so well pleased as D'Arcy and his friends; but the chatter of the junior studies did not often reach to the Sixth Form, and Kildare went to bed that night in blissful ignorance of the fact that the tramp had been arrested.

When Tom Merry came down on the following morning, the Fourth Form were already down, and he found Blake and D'Arcy waiting for him.

"You two are wanted at Wayland this morning," Blake said. "They don't want me—that's rather curious, but perhaps the justices think that they can manage the affair without my help. Dense chaps, these country justices."

"Weally, Blake—"

"You've got to go in and see the Head," added Blake. "He's heard from the court."

"Good egg," said Tom Merry.

"You can mention to the Head that I'll go instead of either of you, if you like," said Blake.

Tom Merry laughed.

"No fear! It will be ripping to get a run out instead of grinding Latin with old Linton," he said. "Come on, Gussy! This is where we score."

"Yaas, wathah!"

And the captain of the Shell and the swell of the Fourth made their way to the Head's study. Dr. Holmes looked at them curiously as they came in.

"You sent for us, sir," said Arthur Augustus.

Dr. Holmes nodded.

"Yes, D'Arcy. I have had an order from the court at Wayland. You two boys are required to give evidence as to the identity of the tramp who attacked a Ferndale boy in Rycombe Wood."

"Yes, sir," said Tom Merry.

"It seems to have been a most brutal affair," said Dr. Holmes. "Lagden, the boy in question, was the captain of a cricketing team who visited St. Jim's last week, I believe."

"Yaas, wathah, sir. He's the captain of Ferndale."

"I heard about his unfortunate experience," said the Head. "But it is a surprise to me to hear that you boys know any-

thing about the matter. Will you kindly explain to me how you come to be able to identify this tramp?"

Tom Merry and D'Arcy explained simultaneously.

"Ah! There is no doubt in my mind that it was the same man who caused the injuries to Lagden, later in the same day," said the Head. "However, you boys will, of course, be careful to give evidence only on points that you actually know, and will not be led away by any surmises you may have formed."

"Oh, certainly, sir!"

"I shall ask a master to take you to Wayland, and you will come back to St. Jim's with him when your services are finished with."

"Ahem!"

"H'm!"

"Have you anything more to say?" asked the Head.

"Upon the whole, sir, I—I think we needn't trouble a master to come, sir," said Tom Merry diffidently. "I could look after D'Arcy all right, sir."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"It would be a lot of trouble to a master to leave his Form for the morning, sir," Tom Merry hinted. "We'd rather not bother him."

The Head smiled.

"I shall certainly not allow you juniors to go there yourselves without a master," he said. "I shall ask Mr. Lathom to go, and the Fourth Form will be taken by Kildare during his absence."

"Yes, sir; but—"

"You may go," said the Head mildly.

"Yaas, sir. But will you allow me to wemark—"

"D'Arcy!"

"I should look aftah Tom Mewwy with the gweatest care, sir."

"You may go!"

"And undah the cires., sir, I considah—"

"I shall cane you if you say any more, D'Arcy!" said the Head.

"Oh!" ejaculated D'Arcy.

And he did not say any more.

The two juniors left the study. Arthur Augustus was frowning a little.

"It is weally wathah widiculous to send a mastah with us," he said. "Doesn't it stwike you in that light, Tom Mewwy?"

Tom Merry nodded cheerfully.

"Yes; but I suppose the Head feels a bit doubtful about allowing a Fourth Form kid out without a keeper," he remarked.

"You uttah ass! As a mattah of fact, of course, I should look aftah you. As a fellow of tact and judgment—"

"Br-r-r-r!"

"I do not wegard that as an intelligible wemark, Tom Mewwy. It is widiculous sendin' a mastah with a fellow of my experience!"

Tom Merry laughed.

"Well, thank goodness it's not Selby or Ratty!" he said.

"Yaas; but I was goin' to wemark—"

"Coming!" called out Tom Merry, as he heard Monty Lowther's voice in the passage.

"I was speakin' to you, Tom Mewwy!"

"Aren't you finished yet?" demanded Tom Merry.

"No. I was goin' to say—"

"Well, you can go on," said Tom Merry considerably. "Don't hurry for me. You don't mind if I go out in the quad, do you?"

"You fwightful ass—"

"Well, good-bye."

And Tom Merry sauntered out into the quadrangle with Lowther, leaving Arthur Augustus to finish his remarks at his leisure, if he chose. He did not choose.

After breakfast, Mr. Lathom told the two juniors to wait for him in the hall, and went to put on his hat and coat. Then he left St. Jim's with Tom Merry and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, and a crowd followed them to the gate. It was understood that the arrested tramp was to be brought up before the justices at their first sitting early in the morning, and there was only one train in time for Wayland. Mr. Lathom and the two juniors walked away to Rycombe to catch it, followed by a cheer from the crowd of juniors who watched them off at the gate. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy walked with a very lofty air. He felt that he had distinguished himself. Was it not to him that the very arrest of the dangerous ruffian was due, and, incidentally, this little run out in the morning at a time usually devoted to lessons?

"Good old Gussy!" grinned Blake. "We'll make him stand another feed when he comes back, to celebrate his first and only appearance in court."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Jolly good idea!" grinned Fatty Wynn. "I believe in giving honour where honour is due. And Mrs. Taggles has fresh jam-tarts to-day."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors went in to morning lessons. Dr. Holmes spoke

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"THE LIMIT!" Next Thursday's Amusing Long, Complete School Tale of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's. "THE LIMIT!"

to Kildare on his way to the Sixth Form-room, and asked him to take the Fourth during the absence of Mr. Lathom.

Kildare assented at once, and went into the Fourth Form-room. The captain of St. Jim's had heard nothing so far of the cause of Mr. Lathom's absence. It was talked of among the juniors, but the seniors did not take any interest in the matter, and the proceedings of a Shell fellow and a Fourth-Former were not likely to be specially noticed by the captain of the school.

Kildare frowned a little as he came into the Fourth Form-room. The Form-master being absent that morning, the Fourth were allowing themselves a little latitude; and there was a buzz of voices, which did not cease as Kildare came in.

The captain of St. Jim's rapped on the desk with Mr. Lathom's cane.

"Silence!" he exclaimed.

"Right-jo, Kildare!" said Jack Blake cheerfully.

"None of your nonsense, Blake!" said Kildare sternly. "You will be quiet, or there will be trouble! What is the matter with you this morning?"

"Gussy's distinguished himself," explained Figgins. "We're going to celebrate the occasion after lessons."

Kildare glanced over the class.

"D'Arcy is absent!" he exclaimed.

"Yes, that's all right."

"Has he had permission to be absent?" asked the prefect.

"Haven't you heard?" said Blake and Figgins together.

"Heard what?" asked Kildare testily.

"Gussy's gone over to Wayland with Tom Merry to give evidence," said Blake.

"Indeed! I hadn't heard about it."

"Mr. Lathom's gone with them," said Blake. "I'd have gone in his place, only for some reason the Head didn't think of me. And I know the tramp. I could have given evidence, too, if they'd wanted some more. I'd have given evidence on every case they've got before the justices this morning, if necessary, only—"

"I don't understand you," said Kildare, an anxious shade coming over his face. "What tramp are you speaking about? Has D'Arcy got mixed up in some row with a tramp?"

"The tramp who walloped Lagden, you know," Blake explained.

Kildare turned pale.

"What—what did you say?"

"Gussy and Tom Merry have gone to identify the tramp who walloped Lagden in the wood the other day—last Thursday," said Blake, wondering at the emotion in Kildare's face. "Haven't you heard about his being caught?"

"Caught! Oh! Good heavens!"

"Wh—what, Kildare—"

Kildare's face was white. He strode towards Blake.

"Is this true?" he demanded fiercely. "Has a tramp been arrested for assaulting Lagden?"

"Yes," said Blake, in wonder.

Kildare set his teeth.

"He's being brought up before the justices at Wayland this morning," said Blake. "It's a chap who tried to rob Lagden one day last week, and it's supposed to be the same fellow who assaulted him in the wood. He—why—what—my hat!"

Kildare had not waited for him to finish.

He turned, and with a bound he was at the door. He rushed out of the Form-room, and all the juniors were upon their feet in astonishment.

"What on earth's the matter with Kildare?"

"He's off his rocker."

"Great Scott!"

The Form-room was in a hubbub. The juniors were all out of their places, and all talking at once, in utter amazement. The Form-room door was left open, and the noise was audible up the passage; and Mr. Railton, the Housemaster of the School House, put his head in.

"Boys, go to your places at once! What is the cause of this disturbance?" he exclaimed sharply.

"I—I—"

"You see, sir—"

"We—Kildare—"

"Where is Kildare?" asked Mr. Railton sharply.

"He's gone, sir."

"Gone!" exclaimed the Housemaster.

"Yes, sir—bolted."

"Bless my soul!"

Mr. Railton left the Form-room hurriedly. But he looked for Kildare in vain. The captain of St. Jim's had indeed "bolted."

CHAPTER 18.

Kildare Faces the Music!

KILDARE had rushed from the Form-room with his brain in a whirl.

The news had come suddenly, unexpectedly, and he was almost bewildered by it. One thought was clear in his brain—that a man was before the justices charged with

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what he, Kildare, had done, and that he must speak up and clear him.

There was not a moment to be lost.

He knew the way of a country bench with tramps and vagrants. The case of the tramp, who was already known to be a dishonest ruffian, was not likely to detain them long. The fact that he had interfered with Lagden early in the day upon which Lagden had been injured would probably be enough for that. He had tried to rob Lagden, he had been hanging about the neighbourhood. What more proof would they want? And the justices would probably consider it an excellent thing to rid the countryside of such a character for six months. Probably it would be a good thing; but that was not Kildare's business. The man—rascal was, might be—was innocent of this particular charge, and he must be cleared, whatever it cost the captain of St. Jim's.

He must be cleared! That was Kildare's one clear thought.

The Fourth Form, his duties at St. Jim's—everything must make way for that! He ran into the quadrangle, without even stopping for his cap. He paused there for a moment to think. How was he to get to Wayland in time?

He knew the times of all the local trains—they were not many—and knew that there was none to serve his purpose. One second's reflection, and he ran to the bicycle-shed. He dragged out his machine, mounted it, and rode down to the gates, and out into the road.

Bending over the handlebars, the captain of St. Jim's scorched away at top speed. It was a good long ride to Wayland if he followed the road; but he did not intend to follow the road. Fellows often cycled through the footpath in the wood, at the risk of punctures. At the stile Kildare lifted his machine over, remounted on the footpath, and rode on bumping on the way to Wayland.

Even so, the market town was at a good distance; and he knew that before he arrived the matter might have ended for the wretched man whose name he did not even know, but whom he was bound in honour to save.

He rode hard, with the perspiration streaming down his face in the blazing July sun.

Crack! Sizz! Kildare groaned. He knew that it was a puncture.

A long, sharp thorn had driven itself right into his tyre, and the lagging of the machine showed him how serious it was.

He drove on, regardless of the puncture, for some dozen yards, or so, and then jumped off the machine. He could run faster than he could ride with a flat tyre.

He leaned the machine against a tree, and dashed down the path on foot. The way seemed very long to him.

He ran on, putting in a speed that he seldom showed on the cinder-path at St. Jim's. The white road before him at last—the Wayland road, and the smoke of the market town in the distance.

Kildare ran out into the road, breathing hard.

He paused one moment to draw breath; and then he dashed on towards Wayland.

Fast as his pace had been he had had time to think, and he realised what his action would mean for himself.

He had to stand up in open court and declare that he, the captain of St. Jim's, had inflicted the injuries for which a tramp was being charged with assault!

The humiliating thought made his cheeks burn more than the exertion or the blaze of the summer sun.

It was his punishment. He had yielded weakly in accepting the challenge from Lagden, when he knew very well that his position and his duty demanded that he should ignore it. The unexpected result of the fight, certainly, no one could have foreseen. It had come as a surprise—and as a punishment. There was no hope now of keeping it dark. All St. Jim's and all the countryside would know. True, he did not risk being charged with assault as the unfortunate tramp had been. But people—especially people who did not know him—would have their own opinions about a fellow who had inflicted serious bodily injuries in a savage personal contest. The true facts would not be known, either; only that he had fought and badly beaten a fellow weaker than himself. That was how it would look to the public. All his efforts to avoid the fight, and the fact that Lagden had forced him into it, would not be known.

But that was his punishment for having allowed himself to be drawn into an "affair of honour," which he knew well enough all the time had more of dishonour than of honour about it.

Wayland at last!

He knew the way, and he ran on without a pause. He reached the court-house, and brushed past an astonished and indignant doorkeeper. A policeman put out a large hand to push him back, but he thrust the hand aside, and burst in.

There was a loud murmur.

Kildare, with a scarlet face, looked breathlessly round.

The whole scene was like a dream-picture to him in his confusion of mind—the justices on the bench, the rough-looking, savage tramp standing between two policemen, the bald

headed usher, with his queer gown—the people in the body of the little court-house staring at him.

There were two justices—one, a bald old gentleman, who seemed to be dozing through the proceedings; the other, a younger man, with a mouth that shut like a vice, and a reputation for making things very hot indeed for vagrants, tramps, poachers, and other noxious persons who ventured to come between the wind and his nobility. This gentleman frowned and stared hard at Kildare.

"Silence!" exclaimed the usher. "Silence in court!"

Kildare panted.

"My only hat!" murmured Tom Merry. "It's old Kildare!"

"Bai Jove!"

"What on earth does he want here?"

"Kildare!" ejaculated little Mr. Lathom. "Dear me!"

"Please excuse me, Sir George," Kildare panted.

The stern-browed J. P. glared.

"But I shall not excuse you!" he rapped out. "How dare you interrupt the proceedings of the court in this way?"

"I—I—"

"Stand back!"

"Horder!" said the clerk of the court severely.

"I must speak!" cried Kildare. He swung his hand towards the tramp. "That man is accused of having assaulted Cecil Lagden! It was I—I did it!"

There was, as the local paper recorded the next day, a sensation in court. Sir George stared blankly at Kildare, and the other justice almost woke up.

"What?" ejaculated Sir George. "What?"

"It was I, sir!"

"You! Who are you?"

"My name is Kildare," said the captain of St. Jim's quietly. "I'm in the Sixth Form at St. Jim's. I am here as a witness to clear that man! Put me on oath!"

"My heve!" murmured the tramp, in wide-eyed astonishment. "My heve! Wot a lark!"

"Huh!" ejaculated Sir George.

"Good old Kildare!" exclaimed Tom Merry from behind Mr. Lathom. "Good old man! How the dickens did he dodge us, after all?"

"Bai Jove!"

"Silence! Horder!"

"Must have been when he went in the skiff," said Tom Merry. "Fancy his having fought Lagden after all, and we never knew! My hat!"

"Horder! The pusson who is disturbin' the court will be hejected if he does not immigritly horder!"

"Swear him!" said Sir George curtly.

Kildare was sworn.

"And now tell us what you know about this matter," said Sir George ominously; evidently not at all pleased to see his prey escaping him, owing to this unexpected interference on the part of the captain of St. Jim's.

"Lagden challenged me to a fight, and I fought him in the wood," said Kildare quietly. "It was agreed that nothing should be said about it; the secret was to be kept on both sides. Lagden did not consult my wishes in declaring that a tramp had attacked him; but it was not my business to contradict him. But when I heard that this man had been arrested, I came at once!"

"You were guilty of the assault upon the unfortunate youth?" demanded Sir George, in a terrifying voice.

"It was not an assault, sir. It was a fair fight."

"A fair fight, eh? I have a doctor's certificate stating that the boy is too ill to appear here this morning!" snorted Sir George.

"I fought him fairly, sir, and never meant to hurt him—"

"You are not here to tell us that. Your evidence clears this man, and that is enough. I consider, sir, that you have acted like a disgraceful young ruffian!" snorted Sir George. "That is my opinion, Master Kildare, of the Sixth Form at St. Jim's. And I shall certainly communicate my opinion to your Head-master!"

"May I explain—"

"You have explained quite enough. Stand down—"

"But I—"

"Stand down! The prisoner is discharged. If that witness does not immediately stand down, have him removed from the court."

Kildare stood down.

Tom Merry and D'Arcy took an arm each of the captain of St. Jim's, and walked him out into the street; Mr. Lathom following in a state of great astonishment and bewilderment.

"You boulder!" said Tom Merry. "You licked Lagden, and you didn't let us see! Is that what you call playing the game, Kildare?"

"Yaas, wathah! I must say that I wegard it as wathah wotten, Kildare!" said Arthur Augustus, shaking his head.

Kildare did not reply; he did not even hear. He shook off the detaining hands of the juniors, and strode away. He had done his duty; and now he had the music to face at St. Jim's!

CHAPTER 19.

The End of the Affair.

THERE were serious faces at the old school after morning lessons that day.

Tom Merry and D'Arcy had told what had happened; and when Kildare went into the Head's study, the fellows knew that he was "on the carpet."

What would be the result for the captain of St. Jim's?

They did not know; and they were very uneasy. Mellish, who ventured near to the Head's door, heard nothing but a murmur of voices.

The juniors knew that Kildare was having a most unpleasant time, and that was all. In their eyes he was a hero. He had licked Lagden—and that was to his credit—and he had thrown up all other considerations to save the man who was charged with it. That was splendid! But they knew that the Head might not take the same view. The Head was very sensitive about the good name and reputation of St. Jim's; and the talk there would be on the subject, inside and outside the school, would be as gall and wormwood to him.

Kildare faced the Head bravely, though he faltered under the keen grey eyes of the old gentleman. The Head knew all; and Kildare waited for his judgment. Dr. Holmes was stern.

"You have disappointed me, Kildare," he said, very gravely. "I had expected better things of you. You say you were challenged, you could not very well refuse. Of course, I believe every word you have told me. But you have done wrong. You should have remembered your position here; the example you were called upon to give to the younger boys."

"I know it, sir," said Kildare humbly. "I've played the fool. I know that!"

The Head's frown relaxed.

"I am glad that you see it in that light," he said. "It was a fault, Kildare—a very great fault—but I shall say no more about it. I am sure that it will be a lesson you will not forget. The affair, I hope, will be forgotten, and you will never again act in a manner unworthy of your position as captain of the school! Let us say no more about it, then."

And Kildare, with a muttered word of thanks, left the Head's study. He found a crowd awaiting him outside; and the cheer that greeted him showed him that St. Jim's, at all events, thought as well of him as ever.

"All right, Kildare?" asked Tom Merry anxiously.

The St. Jim's captain nodded without replying.

"Oh, good!"

"I wegard you as havin' acted wippingly, deah boy!" said Arthur Augustus. "It seems that I wasn't wight aftah all about that twamp, and you have prevented a shockin' miscarriage of justice. It is a vewy unfortunate endin' to an affiah of honah!"

Kildare walked away.

Arthur Augustus turned his eyeglass upon the juniors.

"You blessed ass!" said Jack Blake.

"Weally, Blake—"

"You fathead!" said Tom Merry.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"You jolly nearly got an innocent man sent to quod, with your blessed cleverness!" said Monty Lowther. "I suggest that the next time Gussy shows any signs of being clever, we take him out in the quad, and bump him!"

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Better bump him now," said Figgins.

"Weally, Figgay—"

"Good!" said Fatty Wynn. "After all the trouble he's given, I call upon Gussy either to be bumped or to stand a feed."

"Hear, hear!"

Arthur Augustus stood the feed!

THE END.

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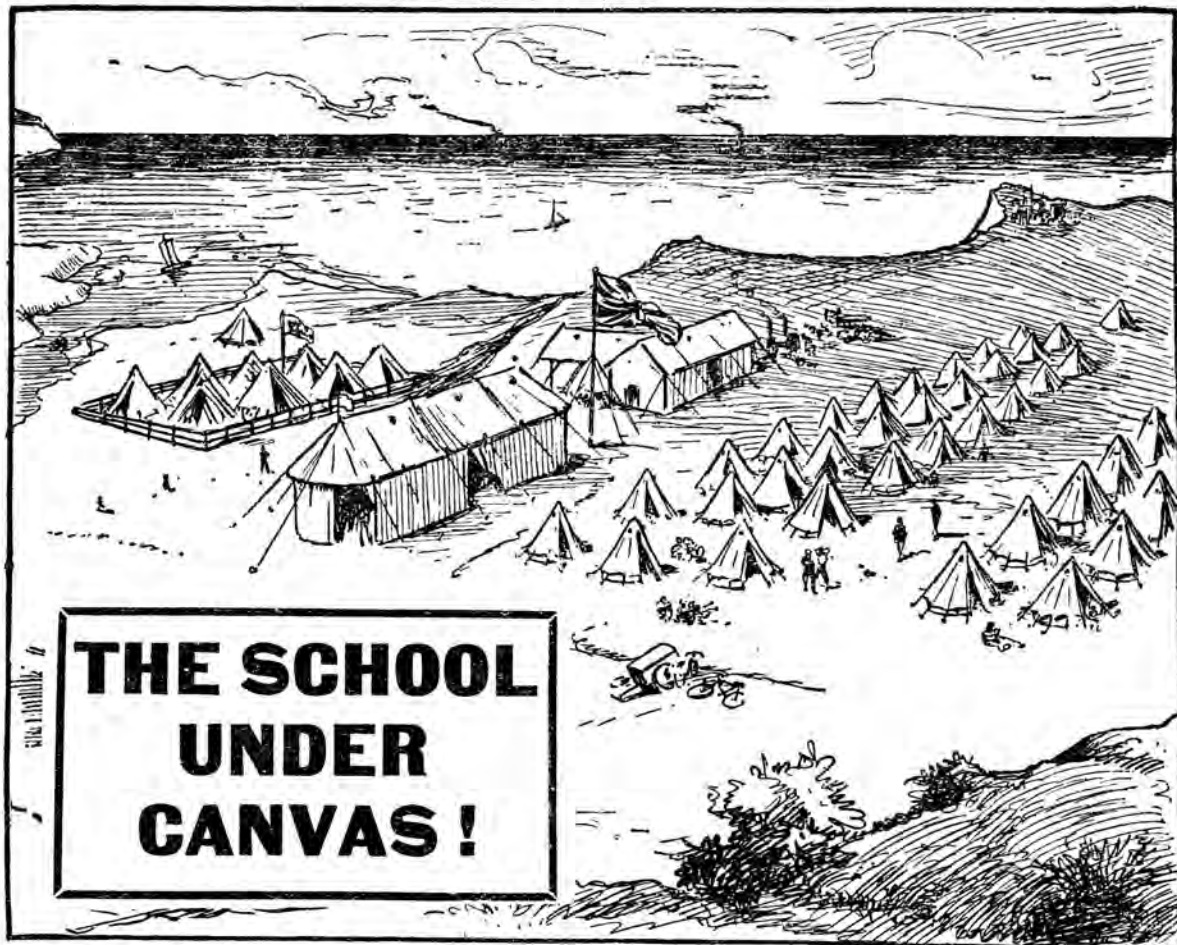
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By PROSPER HOWARD.

WHAT HAS HAPPENED SO FAR.

"The School will assemble in Big Hall at half-past six o'clock. An important announcement will be made.

"(Signed), E. MONK, Headmaster."

The appearance of the above brief notice on the school board is the first hint that the Rylecombe Grammar School receives of the great change in its circumstances that is pending—nothing less than the removal of the whole school into temporary quarters under canvas by the sea, on the Essex coast. Dr. Monk's formal announcement of this step is greeted with the greatest enthusiasm by the entire Grammar School, with the exception of Herr Hentzel, the unpopular German-master, who has, apparently, reasons of his own for objecting. Gordon Gay & Co., and Monk & Co., and indeed the entire Fourth, as the liveliest Form in the school, are particularly excited at the prospect of the change. Just at this time the ranks of the Fourth Form are reinforced by Gustave

Blanc—immediately christened Mont Blong—a new boy from across the Channel. Mont Blong, who attaches himself to Gordon Gay & Co., is a slim and elegant youth with a peculiar flow of English, but he quickly shows his worth by holding his own with Carker, the bully of the Fourth. Amidst excitement, the school embark into a special train, and are rapidly whirled away to the quiet country station near which the camp is situated. Gordon Gay & Co. and the rest of the Fourth Form scramble into one of the brakes waiting just outside the station just as the Fifth Form conveyance drives off under the guidance of Punter, of that Form. Mont Blong suggests a race, and Gordon Gay takes the ribbons, while the driver is quietly dropped into the road, and the brake sets off in pursuit of Punter's. There is a roar from the excited Fourth-Formers:

"Hurrah! We're off!"

(Now go on with the story.)

A Race to a Finish.

The brake rolled down the bumpy village street after the vehicle navigated by Punter. There was a shout from the station.

"Ach! Tat you stop mit yourself, before."

Gordon Gay chuckled.

"I'm a little deaf on that side of my head," he murmured.

"Sit tight, you fellows. This is the rocky road to Dublin, and no mistake! Hold on!"

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"THE STOLEN SCHOOLBOYS!"

is the title of the Modern Press-gang Story contained in our companion-paper, "THE MAGNET" Library. Now on Sale. Price One Penny.

"Dear me!" gasped Tadpole. "We are bumping very much! We are coming away without the baggage, Gay. My easel—"

"Blow your easel!"

"My colour-box—"

"Blow your colour-box!"

Really, my dear Gay—

Crack—crack—crack!

Carker came dashing out of the station. He waved his hand to the brake, and roared:

"Stop for me! I'm not going to walk it! Hold on!"

"I fancy you are going to walk it, though, unless you can catch us!" grinned Gordon Gay. "Here we go! Sit tight!"

It was necessary for the Fourth-Formers to sit tight. The horses were getting into a gallop, and the brake was rocking like a small ship on a big sea. The juniors clung on and yelled with delight. Gordon Gay was looking straight ahead of him. His only business at the present moment was to race the Fifth-Form brake to the camp, and that was what he was going to do.

Crack—crack—crack!

Clatter—clatter!

Bump!

Hurrah!

Punter of the Fifth looked round. The brake behind him was crowded with Fifth-Formers, and the Fifth, being seniors, and conscious of their great dignity as a senior Form, were not making so much noise as the Fourth. Some of them, in fact, did not at all relish Punter's adventure. They would have preferred being driven by a common or garden driver.

"Go easy, Puntty!" said Lacy. "Don't bump us into a lamp-post."

"Don't roll us into a ditch," said Tanner.

Punter sniffed.

"Those Fourth-Form kids are trying to race us!" he exclaimed.

"Well, let 'em!"

"Let 'em!" Punter did not sniff this time—he snorted. "Catch me! They're jolly well not going to beat us to the camp!"

"Look here, Punter—"

"Rats!"

Crack—crack—crack—ack—ack!

Punter cracked his whip frantically, and touched up the leader. The horses galloped, their hoofs ringing on the hard road. The brake swung from side to side, and the Fifth-Formers held on for their lives.

"Careful!" roared Lacy.

"I'm being careful, fathead!"

"You'll have us over in a minute!"

"Poof!"

"Look here, Punter—"

"Br-r-r-r!"

Crack—crack!

The brake jumped and bumped.

Lacy stood up. The lane the brake had turned into from the village street was narrow, and the Fourth Form were coming on fast behind. Lacy of the Fifth waved his hand excitedly to Gordon Gay & Co.

"Slow down!" he roared.

"Eh!"

"There's no room for you to pass us!"

"Oh, we'll find room!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Slow down!" yelled Lacy. "I'll lick you for this, Gordon Gay! You'll have an accident! You'll break your neck!"

"Well, it's my neck, isn't it, not yours?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Zat ve beat zem in ze race! Hurrah!" yelled Mont Blong.

Crack—crack—crack!

The second brake came thundering on. Punter whipped up his horses. Accident or not, he was not going to be beaten by the Fourth. The brake rushed on from the lane upon the stretch of open country extending to the sea. Far ahead there was a glimmer of white canvas against the blue of the sea.

"There's the camp!" yelled Wootton major. "Buck up, Gay, and we'll beat 'em!"

Crack—crack!

"Buck up, Punter!" shouted Tanner of the Fifth, entering into the spirit of the thing. "Go it! Make 'em move!"

Crack—crack—crack!

Bump—bump!

The ground was decidedly rough, and certainly not planned for chariot races. But the rival Forms did not care for that. Punter bent over his ribbons with gleaming eyes and set teeth. He was going to win that race, or know the reason why. Scarce a length behind the Fourth-Form brake came dashing on. There was ample room to pass now, and Gordon Gay swerved a little to pass the Fifth-Form brake.

Lacy stood up and shook a clenched fist at him.

"Stop, you young scoundrel—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Play up, Punter!"

Crack—crack—crack!

Gordon Gay drove on furiously. He handled his team wonderfully well, and he had a wrist of iron. It looked as if his team would get out of hand, but there was little danger

of that. The danger was that the brake would bump over bodily on the uneven ground, going at such a terrific pace. More than once two wheels were off the ground at a time. But the juniors did not mind. They waved hats and caps, and yelled with glee as they drew abreast of the Fifth-Form brake.

"We're beating 'em!" roared Frank Monk.

"Hurrah for the Fourth!"

"Buck up, Punter!" yelled the Fifth. And even Lacy joined in the cry. "Buck up!"

Punter was doing his best. As a matter of fact, Punter was not quite up to the task he had taken upon himself, and his horses were getting out of hand. But so long as they tore forward at top speed Punter did not mind.

Crack—crack—crack!

The Fourth-Form brake drew level. Gordon Gay waved his whip at Punter, and Punter snorted, and whipped his team. The horses snorted, too, and tore on. But the junior brake forged steadily ahead, and at last it gained a length.

The canvas camp was close at hand now, and the lines of tents glimmered in the June sunshine. Beyond were sandy flats and the sea.

"Look out, Gay!" muttered Wootton major. "You don't want to buff into the tents, old man."

"We've got to beat the Fifth!"

"But you don't want to wreck the giddy camp!"

"We've got to beat the Fifth!"

"Yes, but I say—"

"We've got to beat the Fifth!"

And Wootton gave it up.

Bump—bump—clatter! Crack—crack—crack!

"Hurrah!"

Right in among the tents Gordon Gay drove, and in front of the biggest of the marquees he drew his team to a halt in a masterly way. The big marquee, which was to be the school-room when the Grammarians were at work again, was of the most imposing dimensions. Gordon Gay's team halted before it, sweating and snorting. Gay turned in his seat to wave his hand triumphantly at the Fifth.

"Done you, Punter! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Hurrah for the Fourth!"

"Yes, razzer! Hurrah!"

"Hallo! Stop it, Punter! My hat! Oh!"

"Phew!"

"Great Scott!"

Crash!

Crash!

Punter would gladly have stopped. But he couldn't. Right into the big tent the frantic team dashed, and there was a terrific crash as canvas and tent-poles came down on the brake. In a moment three frantic horses were struggling in tangled and torn canvas, and the brake was on its side. And for some moments it rained Fifth-Formers.

In Camp.

"Oh!"

"Ow!"

"Yaroo!"

"Help!"

"Grooh!"

From the tangled canvas flapping over the upset brake came wild yells.

Punter emerged from the wreck, looking very shaken, and one after another the Fifth-Formers crawled out. Gordon Gay & Co. rushed to the rescue. They dragged the flapping canvas away; they helped the Fifth-Formers out; they secured the struggling horses. Most of the Fifth were shaken up, and some of them were bruised, but their chief injury was in their temper. They were furious. Five or six clenched fists were shaken at once in the surprised face of Punter.

"It ain't my fault!" gasped Punter breathlessly. "We jolly near beat 'em!"

"You jolly near broke all our necks!" howled Lacy.

"Oh, blow your necks!" said Punter contemptuously.

"You can't expect me to think of little things like that. We were racing the Fourth."

"Ass!"

"Fathead!"

"Chump!"

"Oh, go and eat coke!" said Punter crossly. "If you want to rag somebody, rag Gay. It was like his cheek to race the Fifth."

Gordon Gay grinned.

"Well, we beat you," he said. "But you had a splendid finish. I never thought of winding up like that, I admit."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You'd better get that tent up again, instead of jawing," remarked Wootton major. "I shouldn't be surprised if the Head is quite ratty when he sees what you've done."

Punter & Co. looked in dismay at the tent. A whole side had been torn out of it, and the damage was great. The

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Fifth-Formers certainly could not have repaired it to save their lives. It had to be left as it was.

Gordon Gay & Co., much elated by their victory, left the Fifth to think out the problem of the tent for themselves, and spread over the camp to examine their new quarters.

They were delighted with all they saw.

The huge marquee was evidently to be the school-room, and there was room enough in it for all the Grammarians, at a pinch. But in fine weather some of the classes were to be held in the open air. There were two mess tents, one for the masters, and a very large one for the boys. And there were lines upon lines of sleeping tents, all ready, too.

The juniors looked into dozens of them, and found all prepared for their reception. Potty Benson, of the Fourth, grinned with delight as he saw the preparations in the mess tent.

A crowd of waiters there were preparing the evening meal. It was evident that the Grammarians' inner wants had been well provided for.

The juniors came back from their tour of inspection to find Dr. Monk regarding the damage to the marquee with a very serious expression upon his kind old face.

"What is the cause of this?" he demanded.

"I think there was a collision, sir," said Gordon Gay demurely.

Dr. Monk looked at him sternly.

"You drove the Fourth Form brake, Gay?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then it is your fault."

"We didn't biff into the tent, sir," said Gordon Gay. "I brought my team here all serene—ahem!—I mean quite safely."

"Then who did this damage?"

"I think the Fifth Form brake ran into the tent, sir," said Punter diffidently.

"Dear me! Where was the driver?"

"I think he was left behind in the village, sir."

"That was very careless of him," said the Head, frowning.

"Ahem! I—I think he hadn't any choice about the matter, sir," said Punter. "I—I don't think the driver is to blame, sir."

"I suppose you mean that you took his place, Punter?"

"Well, yes, sir."

"And you drove the brake into the tent?"

"Well, no, sir; I—I'd left off driving by that time. The horses seemed to want to go there, somehow, sir," said Punter; "I can't quite account for it. I'm a jolly good driver, sir—much better than the man you get with a brake—and it was really for—the sake of the general safety that I drove at all, sir. But the horses seemed to—to have a sort of attraction for that tent, sir."

"You have been very reckless, Punter."

"It can't be called wreckless driving, anyway," murmured Lane.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Silence!" said the Head. "This is a serious matter. I should punish you, Punter, but I do not wish to mar the day of our arrival here with punishments, if it can be avoided. I shall, therefore, say nothing more about the matter; but you must not let anything of this kind occur again."

"Thank you, sir," said Punter; "I won't!" He could safely make that promise, for the circumstances were certainly not likely to arise again.

Ta-ra-ra-tara!

It was Corporal Cutts' bugle, calling the Grammarians to their evening meal. The old school-porter of Rylcombe stood outside the mess-tent, blowing away with a purple face.

The Grammarians, the juniors especially, were quite ready for that call, and they trooped off cheerfully to the mess-tent. Many of the fellows had brought supplies of provisions with them, in case of accidents, but there had been no time to get at the baggage yet. But very generous fare had been provided, and the juniors sat down at the long tables with great satisfaction. Gordon Gay & Co., as they sat down to supper, could see the wide waters of the German Ocean gleaming through the opening of the big tent. Far out at sea a white sail glanced in the sunset.

"Looks like a blow to-night," Gordon Gay remarked, as he noted a rim of heavy clouds rolling up from the grey of the sea. "We're going to have a wind."

"Good for us if the tents get blown over," growled Carker.

"It is all in ze day's play, as you say in ze English proverb," said Mont Blong cheerily. "Ve get used to it in time."

"We'll have a jolly good feed in our tent when we get the things unpacked," said Gordon Gay. "But this isn't so bad, to go on with. Pass the jam!"

"That's my jam!" growled Carker. "I brought that pot along with me in my bag. You let that jam alone."

"Now, Carker, don't be ungrateful," urged Gordon Gay. "After the way we looked after you in the train, you might be decent."

Carker glared.

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"Hand that jam back, you rotter!" he said.

Gordon Gay jerked the jam-pot from the table, and turned his back on Carker. The bully of the Fourth jumped up, and came running round the table. Gordon Gay cheerfully emptied half a bottle of Worcestershire sauce into the jam-pot, keeping Wootton major between him and Carker as he did so. He dropped the sauce-bottle under the table before Carker reached him. Carker came up threateningly.

"Give me my jam, you rotter!"

Gordon Gay handed it to him peacefully.

"Certainly, Carker!"

Carker grasped the jam-pot, and retreated to his own side of the table with it. He planted the jar on the table close to him, and ladled the jam out with a spoon. He prepared to enjoy himself under the envious eyes of the other fellows. But the other fellows did not seem envious. They were grinning.

Carker had a suspicion that what he did not eat of that jam would not survive till his next meal. He determined to finish it. He conveyed it to his mouth in large spoonfuls—or, at all events, that was his intention. As a matter of fact, he did not get further than the first spoonful.

The juniors watched the spoonful disappear into his mouth with fascinated eyes. They wondered what would happen next. They soon knew.

Carker gave a gurgling gasp, and jumped up from the table, spitting and spluttering furiously. Mr. Adams, the Form-master, at the head of the table, half rose to his feet in surprise and anger.

"Carker!" he thundered. "How dare you!"

"Groo! Groorooop!"

"Carker! You disgusting boy! How dare you over-eat yourself and act in that revolting manner at a public table!"

"Groo-oo-oo!"

"Carker! Stop that immediately!"

"Grooh! Ugh! Oh! Grooh!" Carker spluttered violently.

"This—is this simply outrageous!" gasped Mr. Adams.

"Carker—"

"Ow! Groo! There's something wrong with the jam, sir," roared Carker. "Ow! It's got a taste— Yaroo!"

"I'm pip-pip-poisoned! Yow-wop!"

"If there is something wrong with the jam, throw it away; but do not make those revolting noises, Carker," said Mr. Adams sternly. "If you do not sit down quietly, immediately, I shall cane you."

And Carker sat down, spluttering into his handkerchief. The juniors grinned, and Carker glared at them furiously. He understood.

"You—you rotter!" he muttered. "You did something to that jam!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You—you villain—"

"Carker, I have already told you to be silent," said Mr. Adams. "If you utter another word I shall cane you."

And Carker did not utter another word.

The supper finished, the juniors trooped out. The sun was almost gone in the west, over the low range of hills inland, and there was darkness on the sea. A strong wind was blowing from the waters, and it whistled among the tents, and the juniors smacked their lips at the salty flavour of it.

"Ripping!" said Gordon Gay.

"Get to bed, you young bounders!" said Hake, the prefect, "and mind, no striking matches, or anything of that sort, or you'll hear from me! I've got the numbers of your tents here. Buzz off!"

The juniors went to their quarters. Gordon Gay, the two Woottons, Mont Blong, and Tadpole had No. 10 to themselves. The next tent was occupied by the Old Co. and Potty Benson, and Carker & Co. were in another.

Gordon Gay & Co. were ready for bed after that eventful day, and as they had to make their beds themselves, there was still some little time before they were settled. Hake, the prefect, assisted them with a little bullying. Gordon Gay breathed a sigh of contentment as he drew the blankets over him.

"It's colder here than at Rylcombe," he remarked. "By Jove, I can hear the sea! It's ripping to be here! I fancy we are going to have a good time."

"We are—we is!" said Wootton major sleepily. "Good-night!"

"We'll get up a cricket match with the Netherby Abbey chaps, too," said Gordon Gay. "That will be all right, eh?"

"Yes—goo'-night!"

"Sleepy ass!" said Gordon Gay. "Are you coming down to bathe early, Wootton?"

"Snore!"

"You coming down to the sea early, Jack?"

"Groooo!"

"I say, Mont Blong—"

"Snore!"

"Tadpole, old man—"

Snore!
Gordon Gay grunted.
"Sleepy fatheads!" he said. "I suppose I may as well go to sleep myself. Good-night!"

Snore!
And Gordon Gay closed his eyes, and in a couple of minutes he was fast asleep himself. Corporal Cutts had blown "Lights Out!" but the tired juniors did not even hear. The sounds of the camp died away. Seniors and juniors, masters and boys, slept the sleep of the just under canvas.

It was a change for the Grammarians; but the healthy sleep of youth made them unconscious of it. They slept as soundly in their camp beds as in the old dormitory at Rylcombe. Darkness settled deeply over land and sea, and the wind from the wide waters came stronger and ever stronger on the shore. From the depths of the night came the dull booming of the waves upon the shingle.

Gordon Gay stirred in his sleep. He was usually a very sound sleeper, but something made him uneasy now. Perhaps it was the wind that was now howling round the

"Grooh! Wharrer marrer?"

"Get up! Look out!"

"My hat!"

Crash!

Gordon Gay tore himself loose and jumped up. For an instant he caught a glimpse of clear starlight, and the wind lashed his face; and he realised that the tent was going. Then came a terrific tearing and flapping, a crash, and the tent was down; and five struggling juniors were buried underneath it.

"Ow!"

"Yaroo!"

"Help!"

"Oh!"

A Mistake in the Dark.

"Oh!"

"Ah!"

"Help!"

Gordon Gay struggled under the tangling canvas.

Wootton major and minor and Tadpole and Mont Blong



There was a terrific tearing and flapping, a crash, and the tent was down; and five struggling juniors were buried beneath it. "Ow! Help!" came muffled cries from under the canvas. "Ciel! I perish viz myself!"

tent, and jerking at the canvas fastenings. It was a clear night, and the high wind drove the clouds in fleecy masses landward, and left the stars gleaming upon the sea and the shore. Gordon Gay stirred again, and his eyes opened.

The canvas was flapping in the wind, and the tent straining at its fastenings. But the fastenings held good, and Gordon Gay, after listening for a few moments, turned over and went to sleep again. He dreamed of the Grammar School at Rylcombe, and of St. Jim's, and fancied in his slumber that he was fighting over again one of his many rows with Tom Merry & Co. He was on his back, and Fatty Wynn was sitting on his chest, and he was struggling—and struggling—and suddenly he awoke! There was a roar in his ears, and something was indeed on his chest, pinning him down, and he wondered whether he was dreaming or awake.

"Gerroff!" he murmured. "You ass! Gerroff!"

Then he started into broad wakefulness.

A flap of canvas was over his face, and he pushed at it frantically to push it off. From the darkness a voice shouted to him, and he recognised the voice of Wootton major.

"Gay! Wake up!"

were struggling, too. A foot caught Gordon Gay under the chin, and he gave a yell. Then his own elbow crashed upon somebody's nose, and there was another yell.

"Yaroo!"

Gay struggled out of the wreck, and jumped to his feet, breathless and gasping. There were stars in the sky, and a crescent of moon glimmering over the hills to the east. A stiff breeze blew from the sea, and it whistled through Gordon Gay's pyjamas and made him shiver.

He looked round, expecting to see the whole camp blown down, but the rest of the tents were standing the strain. Only the tent tenanted by the Cornstalk Co. had suffered. Wootton major dragged himself out of the wreck, and Tadpole followed, and then Jack Wootton. A figure was still wallowing under the canvas, and muffled cries for help in mixed tongues could be heard.

"A moi! A moi! Zat you help me! I am suffocate—I die! I perish viz myself! It is zat you sall help me! A moi! Ciel! Mes amis, a moi!"

"Poor old Mont Blong!" gasped Gordon Gay. "Lend a hand to yank him out."

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"THE LIMIT!"

Next Thursday's Amusing Long, Complete School Tale of Tom Merry.

& Co. at St. Jim's.

"THE LIMIT!"

"Zat you help me!"

"We're coming, Mont Blong!"

Gordon Gay & Co. dragged up the tangled canvas and cords, and a pair of thin legs came into view. Gay seized one of them, and Wootton major the other. They dragged, and the person of Gustave Blanc came into view, yelling.

"Ow! You bang my head! Mon ami, you bang my pauvre tete! Zat you are gentle viz me! Helas! 'Elp!"

"Here you are, safe and sound," said Gordon Gay, letting go the French junior's leg. "You're all right, Monty."

"Ciel!"

Mont Blong rolled over and sat up. He gasped for breath, and blinked dazedly at the English boys.

"Vat is it zat have happen?" he panted. "I zink zat ze sky he have fall, is it not?"

Gordon Gay chuckled.

"No; it's only the tent."

"Jolly queer that only this tent should come down!" growled Wootton major. "What silly dummy was it put it up?"

"What rotter fetched it down, you mean?" said Gordon Gay. "Somebody's been japing us."

"By Jove!"

"Look here!"

Gordon Gay showed a loose end of cord. It had been cut clean with a knife.

"My hat! It's a jape!"

"Monkey, of course."

"Or Carker," said Jack Wootton.

"More likely Carker."

Gordon Gay looked round in the dimness. The stars were gleaming overhead, and out on the sea there was a silvery shimmer. But among the tents in the schoolboy camp it was very dim. The Cornstalk junior looked very grim. He thought that the practical joker who had brought the tent down was very likely lurking close at hand to enjoy his little joke. If Gordon Gay had been within hitting distance of him, he would have ceased to enjoy it very much.

"Where is the blessed japer?" growled Wootton major.

"I want to punch him."

Gay held up his hand.

"Quiet! Hark!"

The juniors listened.

From among the tents came the sound of a footstep.

Someone was coming down the lane left between the lines of tents, from the direction of the village, but close at hand.

Gordon Gay's eyes gleamed.

"It's the giddy joker! He's coming to see if the tent's down," he muttered.

"Good egg!" murmured Jack Wootton.

"Follow me—and quiet!"

"What-ho!"

Gordon Gay crept in the direction of the footsteps, and crouched by the side of a tent which the unseen comer would have to pass if he kept on. The other juniors crouched behind him.

"He'll pass here in a minute, and we'll nab him!" murmured Gordon Gay. "We'll teach him to cut our tent down!"

The juniors chuckled softly.

"But I say, Gay—" murmured Tadpole.

"Quiet, you ass!"

"Yes, but—"

"Shut up!"

"But somebody else might—"

"Cheese it!"

"Suppose it should be somebody else!" persisted Tadpole.

"You see—"

"Who else is likely to be wandering about the camp in the middle of the night?" said Gordon Gay in a fierce whisper. "Shut up, you ass!"

"I'd rather argue the point—"

"Jump on him if he says another word, Jack!"

"Right-ho!" murmured Wootton major.

Tadpole did not say another word.

The footsteps were coming closer now.

The newcomer, whoever he was, was walking quietly and stealthily, and that made the juniors all the more certain that he was the practical joker who had caused the destruction of their sleeping quarters.

Gay gathered himself for a spring. The juniors held their breath, not to give the alarm to their intended victim.

Closer—closer—and a dim form loomed up past the tent. The juniors sprang, and the dim form went heavily to the ground, with Gordon Gay & Co. sprawling over it.

There was a stifled exclamation as the newcomer sprawled under the weight of the Grammarian juniors.

"Got him!" said Gordon Gay grimly.

"Hurray!"

"Now then, you japing ass—"

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"Now then, you giddy joker—"

"Mein Gott!"

It was an exclamation in German, and it startled the juniors. Involuntarily they relaxed their grasp upon the stranger they had so roughly handled. For a moment they thought it was the German master they had seized. But the voice was not that of Herr Otto Hentzel.

"Great Scott! Who—"

"Mein Gott! Ach!"

"It's not Herr Hentzel."

"But it's a giddy German."

"Burglar, very likely."

The stranger was rolled over on his back, and Gordon Gay planted a knee on his chest, pinning him down.

"Now then, you rascal, who are you, and what do you mean by letting our tent down on us—eh?"

"Ach!"

"Zat you stop ze grunt of ze pig, and answer ze question," said Mont Blong. "Ciel! Zat I see ze face of him!"

The French junior groped in the pocket of his pyjama jacket, and took out a little electric torch, which he turned on. A beam of white light fell upon the face of the prisoner, and revealed a set of dark, Teutonic features, and a pair of little, piggy, light blue eyes that were gleaming with rage and fright.

"Mon Dieu! Zat is a Sherman, zen!"

"It's a German, right enough, and it's not Herr Hentzel," said Gordon Gay. "We don't allow any Germans here except those born in the menagerie. What are you doing here, you bounder?"

"Ach!"

"Answer me!"

"Ach!"

"He's only got one record," grinned Wootton major. "He can't say anything else. I don't believe this is the chap who cut the tent down, Gay."

"What's he doing here, then?"

"I zink zat he is a rascal," said Mont Blong. "Zat we make him explain. I do not like ze look of his chivvy."

"Ach, tat you let me ged up!" grunted the German.

"What are you doing here?"

"Mind your own pizness!"

"He's a burglar," said Gordon Gay. "Some rotter come along for what he can pick up in the camp. He's no right here. We'll tie him up and take him to the Head in the morning."

"Good egg!"

"Ach, you led me go!" gasped the German. "I come here to see my friend, ain't it?"

"Who's your friend?"

"Herr Hentzel."

"Rats!" said Gordon Gay decisively. "You've just heard us use that name, that's all. You wouldn't come to visit Herr Hentzel in the middle of the night."

"Ach, I tells you— Ach, tat is my friend Hentzel! Otto, here to me!"

Herr Hentzel, fully dressed, came striding through the gloom towards the group, and his dark face was flushed with rage.

A Strange Surprise!

"Release tat man—release him at vunce!"

Herr Hentzel ground out the words between his teeth. But Gordon Gay did not obey immediately. He looked up, inquiringly at the German master, with his knee still planted firmly upon the chest of the fallen German.

"Do you know the man, sir?" asked Gordon Gay.

"I know him. Release him. I order you!"

"A friend of yours, sir?" asked Wootton major.

"Ach, ja, ja! I tell you to release him!"

"Very well, sir," said Gay, rising, though in a leisurely way. "Somebody has cut our tent down, sir, and we thought it was this chap. We didn't know you were receiving visitors after midnight, sir."

"Do not be insolent, Gay. Franz, mein friend, I hope you are not hurt." Herr Hentzel helped the fallen man to his feet. "They shall be punished for dis."

"It is not matter." The German gasped for breath. "I do not vish tat you make a fuss for me, Otto. I am all right."

"They have not hurt you?"

"No."

The German master made a gesture to the boys.

"Go back to bed at once."

"Yes, sir. Our tent's down, though—"

"Go into some other tent, den, or put it up. Franz, mein friend, come mit me."

The two Germans moved off towards Herr Hentzel's tent.

The juniors were left looking at one another.

"That's jolly queer," said Gordon Gay, under his breath.

"What-ho!" said Wootton major. "It's a queer time for

"THE STOLEN SCHOOLBOYS!" is the title of the Modern Press-gang Story contained in our companion paper, "THE MAGNET" Library. Now on Sale. Price One Penny.

old Hentzel to have visitors. There is something fishy about this."

"Well, where are we going to sleep?" growled Jack Wootton. "We can't get that blessed tent up again now. Shall we turn Monkey & Co. out of theirs?"

"They might object," grinned Gay. "Let's give Carker a look in."

"Good."

The juniors crept quietly towards Carker's tent. In the darkness they did not observe for the moment that Mont Blong had left them.

Gordon Gay put his head close to the opening of Carker's tent and listened. There was the sound of a chuckle within, and then Carker's voice.

"They haven't come here after all, Craven."

Craven, of the Fourth, replied:

"I thought they would guess, though."

"Oh, rats! They'd put it down to Monkey."

"We didn't put it down to Monkey, though," said Gordon Gay, inserting his head into the tent. "We guessed it was you, Carker."

There was a sharp exclamation from the interior of the tent.

"Who's that?"

"Gordon Gay!"

"What do you want?" growled Carker.

"We want you!" grinned Gordon Gay, groping his way towards Carker's voice. "We're going to have your quarters, as you've busted up ours."

"Ow!" roared Carker, as Gordon Gay collared him in the darkness of the tent. "Yow! Leggo! Help!"

"Get out, Gay!" growled Craven. "We don't know anything about it—yow!" Wootton major's grasp was upon him.

"Help!" roared Carker.

"You're coming out!" gasped Gordon Gay.

"Yank them out!" shouted Jack Wootton.

"Here, stop that row, you fellows!" exclaimed Potty Benson, sitting up in bed. "What are you waking a fellow up for? I'm sleepy."

"Yes, shut up!" said Daly. "Faith, and somebody's trod on me foot! Ow!"

"Help!" yelled Carker.

"Shut up, you cad!" muttered Gordon Gay, as he struggled with the bully of the Fourth. "You'll have the prefects here."

"I want 'em here!" gasped Carker. "Get out of my tent!"

Gay wrenched him towards the opening. They crashed into the canvas, and it burst out under the weight, and they rolled upon the ground outside. A lantern gleamed upon them, and the angry face of Delamere, the captain of the school, looked down upon them. Delamere was half dressed, and he had a bicycle lantern in his hand, and he was evidently in a very bad temper at being awakened by the disturbance.

"What's the row here?" he roared.

"Gay came into my tent," gasped Carker. "I couldn't help it."

"Let him alone, Gay. What did you go into his tent for?"

"Mine's down. Somebody cut it down."

"I don't know anything about it!" howled Carker.

"Did you see Carker do it, Gay?"

"How could I see him when I was asleep?" demanded the Cornstalk.

"Don't be cheeky, you young cub. Take a hundred lines for making a disturbance, and go back to bed at once."

"Look here, I want Carker's bed."

"I'll cane you if you say another word."

"Oh, I say, Delamere—"

The captain of the school made a reach at Gordon Gay, and the Cornstalk promptly dodged.

"If there's any more of this row, I'll come back with a cane!" growled Delamere. "Carker, go back to bed. If you enter his tent again, Gordon Gay, I'll report you to the Head in the morning."

And Delamere tramped angrily away. Carker, with a derisive grin at the Cornstalk, went into the tent again. Gordon Gay's eyes gleamed.

"The rotten cad, to call a prefect here!" he growled. "We can't go into the tent again, you chaps. And we can't get ours up again in this wind."

"Rotten!" growled Wootton major.

"It is c-c-cold," said Tadpole, through his chattering teeth. "I really think we had better dress ourselves, my dear fellows. We shall c-c-catch c-cold."

It was very good counsel. The Grammarians dragged their clothes out of the wreck of the tent, and dressed. Then they noticed the absence of Gustave Blanc.

"Where's that giddy Froggy got to?" asked Gordon Gay.

"Blessed if I know."

"Monty Blong! Monty! Mont Blong!"

But Mont Blong did not answer to his name.

"He's sneaked away somewhere to sleep, I suppose," said Gordon Gay. "Phew! The wind's cold! We'd better roll ourselves up in the canvas to sleep."

Jack Wootton chuckled.

"Then Carker had better do the same," he said.

"Ha, ha, ha! Good wheezes."

Gordon Gay crept round to the windward side of Carker's tent. He groped for the tent pegs, and his keen pocket-knife whipped through the cords.

"Look out!" he chuckled.

A gust of wind caught the canvas and whirled it over. The tent collapsed, and there were wild and muffled cries from within.

"Ow!"

"Yow!"

"Help!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Cornstalk Co. rolled themselves up in their canvas contentedly. It was some time before the yells from Carker's tent died away.

Gordon Gay's comrades soon fell asleep, but the Cornstalk remained awake. He was wondering what had become of Mont Blong. It was nearly an hour later when the French junior returned.

He returned very quietly, and Gay saw that he was dressed. A glimmer of starlight showed upon his face, and Gay started as he saw it, so stern and serious and earnest was it. It was the face of Mont Blong, and yet not his face, so strangely altered was its expression.

"Mont Blong!" Gay ejaculated involuntarily, starting up. The French junior recoiled.

"Gay, is that you? I did not know you were awake."

Gay almost collapsed in his amazement. He stared blankly at the French junior. For all trace of Mont Blong's peculiar accent had disappeared, and he had spoken in perfect English!

The surprise was so great that Gordon Gay could only stare at the French junior. Mont Blong understood, and in the starlight a deep, red flush came over his face.

"I not zink zat you awake!" he muttered. "My shum—"

"Oh, chuck it!" said Gordon Gay, recovering his voice. "You can jolly well speak good English if you want to."

"My dear shum—"

"Chuck it, I say! Where have you been?"

"I walk round ze camp—"

"What else?"

"Nozzing else, my shum."

"How did you learn to speak English all of a sudden?" Gordon Gay asked sarcastically. "Good-night! I'm going to sleep."

And he rolled himself up in the canvas and did not speak again; and Gustave Blanc did not speak either.

Morning dawned on shore and sea.

The "Reveille," from Corporal Cutts's bugle, rang over the camp, and the Grammarians turned out of their tents.

They turned out with keen appetites for breakfast—keener than of old—though they had not been at all feeble at home at Rylcombe. They did full justice to their breakfast.

The school were called together to prayers as usual, in the big marquee, instead of in the chapel of the Grammar School; and then they had a run upon the shore before morning lessons. The sea was a little rough from the breeze overnight, but they were allowed to bathe, and they plunged into the water with great satisfaction.

The juniors especially were in the highest of spirits; but, strangely enough, Gordon Gay was quiet and very thoughtful. He was thinking of the strange incident of the previous night.

That Mont Blong had been taking the Grammarians in to some extent, and was not exactly what he seemed to be—what he pretended to be—seemed clear enough.

In a moment of surprise he had spoken perfectly good English. For what reason was he playing a queer part? Gordon Gay remembered the discovery of disguises in his box by Carker. Mont Blong had explained them by a story of amateur theatricals, and Gay, who was a keen and enthusiastic amateur actor himself, had fully believed him.

Now a doubt crept into his mind. There was something he did not understand about the French junior—something mysterious.

(There will be another long instalment of this splendid serial story in next Thursday's issue of "The Gem" Library, which will also contain a grand complete story of Tom Merry and Co., by Martin Clifford, entitled "The Limit." Order a copy in advance. Price One Penny.)

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 231.

"THE LIMIT!" Next Thursday's Amusing Long, Complete School Tale of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's. "THE LIMIT!"

OUR SPECIAL WEEKLY FEATURE



For Next Thursday.

"THE LIMIT!"

is the expressive, if terse, title of Martin Clifford's latest story of the famous juniors of St. Jim's, which will appear in next Thursday's All-School-Story "Gem" Library. What they regard as nothing short of a calamity comes upon the luckless Jack Blake & Co. and their chums of the Fourth Form, and for several days the lives of the dismayed juniors are made a burden to them, to the huge delight of the whole of the rest of St. Jim's. When it comes to the heroes of the "Fighting Fourth" being conducted out for a walk two by two on a half-holiday by their kind teacher, in full view of the overjoyed school, all agree that

"THE LIMIT!"

has been reached, and only the tactful intervention of the headmaster prevents serious trouble.

OUR SPLENDID NEW SCHOOL SERIAL.

packed as it is with excitement and amusing adventure, will possess an extra-special interest next week, and events will be found to march with great quickness and vim in

"THE SCHOOL UNDER CANVAS"

next Thursday. Readers are once again urged to make a special point of ordering their copy of the grand old

ALL-SCHOOL-STORY "GEM" LIBRARY

well in advance.

Replies in Brief.

"Enthusiastic" (Devon).—Your friend is quite correct in his statement. It is possible in some places to obtain "The Gem" and "The Magnet" Libraries on the day before their advertised publishing day.

T. Osborne (Birmingham).—I have made a note of the suggestion contained in your letter. I cannot supply you with the list of stories you ask for, but if you will send a list of the back numbers you require I will insert them in the proper column in due course.

P. H. H. (Cardiff).—Thank you for your letter. Buck Finn is still at St. Jim's, and will soon be "dug up" again, as you term it.

A. T. Johnson (Johannesburg, S. Africa).—You are quite right in your argument with your chum. A professional sportsman is one who makes sport his means of living, whereas an amateur sportsman is one who joins in sport merely for the recreation and the exercise that can be obtained from it.

R. Schonenberg (S. Lambeth).—If you mean a six months' holiday in Australia, I am afraid you will find it rather expensive. Besides the fare, which is £16 third class (£48 second class) there are the ordinary expenses connected with a holiday.

A. W. Piper (Marble Arch, W.).—Thank you for your letter. I will consider the suggestion it contained.

C. C. W. (Southend-on-Sea).—In reply to the queries contained in your letter, I must tell you that the best way for you to develop your chest and upper limbs, if there are no public gymnasiums in your town, will be for you to go in for as many branches of outdoor sport as your time will allow of. As you live near the sea, you have every opportunity for such sports as swimming and rowing, which are both specially beneficial to the parts of the body you mention. If at night before retiring you have a ten-minute deep-breathing exercise by an open window, your chest should soon become strong and fully developed, while rowing and swimming will soon develop your upper limbs.

Miss W. Wright (Bradford).—I am sorry I am not able to answer your question, but I cannot locate the word you mention. Are you sure you have got it correctly?

Back Numbers Offered and Wanted.

C. Powell, 2, Mount Pleasant Villas, Wadhurst, Sussex, wishes to obtain early numbers of "The Gem" and "The Magnet."

G. A. Perry, 11, Beaconsfield Road, Knowle, Bristol, wishes to dispose of 30 back numbers of "The Magnet" at 1s. 6d. (including carriage).

C. Gillett, 15, George Street, Hedon, Hull, has 36 numbers of "The Gem" and "The Magnet" to dispose of at 1s. 6d.

A. L. Warsop, 92, Liverpool Road, Cadishead, Manchester, wishes to obtain Nos. 203-4 of "The Gem."

T. C. Owen, Bayston Hill, near Shrewsbury, has Nos. 120-220 of "The Gem" and "The Magnet" to dispose of at half-price.

Hints for Cage-Bird Owners.

Everyone who keeps cage-birds should possess at least rudimentary knowledge of the proper way to keep the pets in health and comfort; but in many cases it is nothing short of marvellous that the feathered songsters survive at all the treatment that is meted out to them by some amateur bird-fanciers.

The housing and feeding of the bird are the chief problems, and we will deal with them in turn.

Contrary to general belief, the style of cage used is of very great importance. The worst sort of cage is a round one, which, hung up in the window, as it often is, will prove a veritable death-trap to poor Dicky, by reason of the fact that he is exposed to draughts from every direction. A small cage is cruel, and becomes a mere prison for the unfortunate songster. The right sort of cage is a large square one, roomy enough for the bird to stretch his wings and enjoy a certain amount of freedom. The back of the cage should be closed up, leaving three sides open; Dicky is thus shielded from dangerous draughts.

It is most essential that the cage throughout, including the perches, should be kept scrupulously clean, while the floor should be kept covered with clean sand. It is a pitiful sight indeed to see a pretty song-bird confined in a dirty cage, and such treatment is sheer cruelty.

Now for the second problem—Dicky's food.

The great rule is to vary the bird's diet occasionally, and not to give too much food at a time. Birdseed as sold in mixed packets should not be given regularly and continuously; a change of diet is absolutely necessary to keep the bird in good health. A little hempseed may be given occasionally as a change from the ordinary birdseed—but only a little, as too much will be fatal. A little dry greenstuff may also be given from time to time, provided that it is fresh and sound. Mawseed given to your bird occasionally will be found of benefit to it; but here, again, care must be taken not to give too much of the food. Sweet fruits should never be given to your pet, as they will do him a great deal of harm.

Too much of any sort of food should never be given to a cage-bird, and if he is seen playing about with his seed in a casual sort of way the seedbox should immediately be removed from the cage.

Plenty of water should always be provided for Dicky, and he should be encouraged to take frequent baths by the provision of a suitable vessel of clean water. His drinking-water, too, should never be allowed to become dirty, but should be changed as often as it may become fouled.

Occasionally door and windows should be closed, and your pet should be allowed to leave the confinement of his cage and fly about the room, to exercise his wings. He is sure to exhibit every sign of enjoying these little excursions.

A clean, roomy cage, a varied and plentiful—but not too liberal—diet, and clean water to drink and for the bath, will go far towards ensuring a long and healthy life for a pet cage-bird.

THE EDITOR.

This picture appears on the cover of this week's issue of our companion paper, "The Magnet" Library, which contains a magnificent, exciting, long, complete school tale of the Chums of Greyfriars, by Frank Richards, and a grand instalment of Sidney Drew's thrilling adventure serial, "Twice Round the Globe." Buy "The Magnet" Library. Now on Sale. Price One Penny.

The Magnet 1^d

Library

A Companion Paper to
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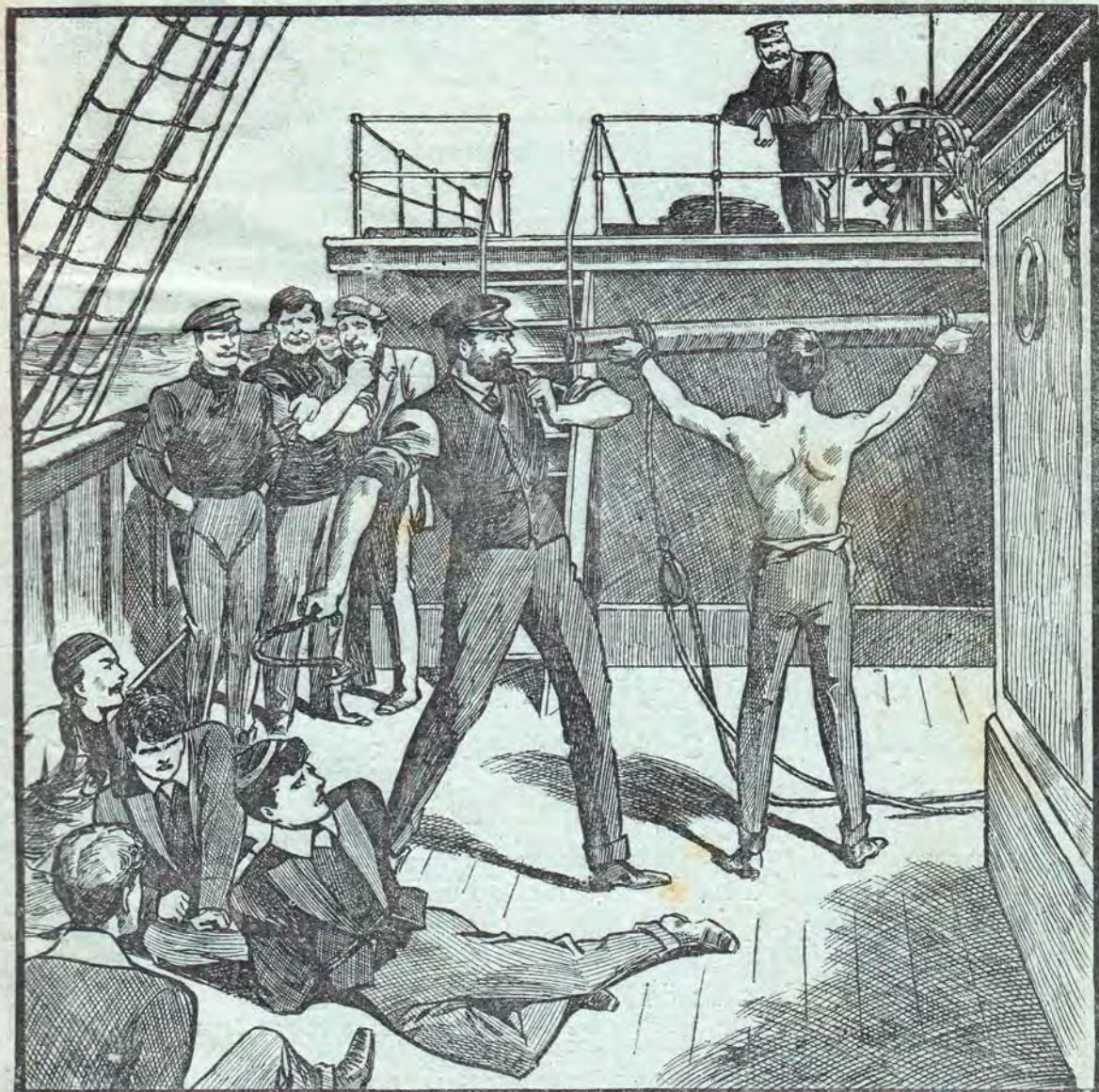
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