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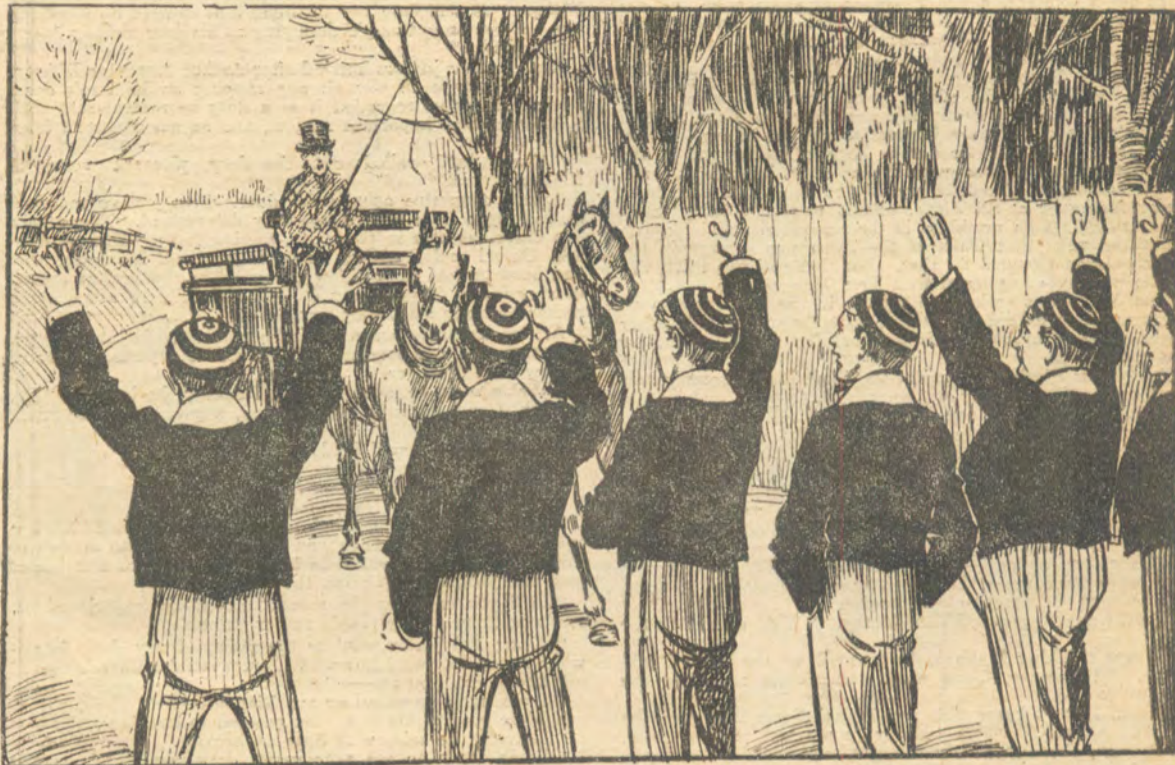


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By MARTIN CLIFFORD.



Figgins & Co. spread themselves across the road, and waved their hands to the driver of the brake. "Stop! Halt! Stand and deliver!" The driver pulled in his horses. "What's the matter?" he demanded. (See Chapter 9.)

CHAPTER 1. Not a Good Idea!

CUTTS!"
"Yaas."
"Cutts of the Fifth!"
"Yaas, wathah!"
"Oh, rotten!"

The Terrible Three—Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther—made that last remark together in lugubrious tones. They were evidently of one opinion on the matter. And Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, who had been imparting the information, nodded his head in a manner as lugubrious as the tones of the three Shell fellows.

"Yaas, I wegard it as wathah wotten, myself," he said. "But it's a fact, deah boys. I had it fwom Dawwel of the Sixth."

"And Darrel had it from Kildare, I suppose?" growled Tom Merry. "I've always said that old Kildare was the best captain St. Jim's could possibly have. Blessed if I'm not beginning to alter my opinion."

"What on earth made him pick on Cutts of the Fifth?" demanded Monty Lowther.

"Well, Cutts is a good playah," Arthur Augustus D'Arcy remarked. "I suppose that has somethin' to do with it."

"He's on rotten terms with us!" grunted Manners.

"I suppose Kildare must have left that out of consideration," said Arthur Augustus, in a thoughtful sort of way.

The Terrible Three looked at him suspiciously. But Arthur Augustus was not pulling their leg. He was quite serious.

"The twouble is," pursued D'Arcy, "that Cutts is on wotten terms with us, too, in Study No. 6. He doesn't like Blake or Hewies or Dig. He doesn't even like me." And Arthur Augustus shook his head gravely over that astounding fact.

"Cutts?" said Tom Merry, in an exasperated tone. "Cutts, of all people. I know he's a good footballer when he likes. I dare say he can captain an eleven, especially a scratch eleven like this. But—"

"But there won't be a look-in for us!" said Lowther.

"Not an earthly!"

"Not a ghostly!"

Next Wednesday:

"EARNING HIS LIVING!" AND "SECRET SERVICE!"

"Yaas; it's too bad," said Arthur Augustus. "I'm goin' to tell the othah chaps. I was thinkin' that we might wemonstwater with Kildare. Aftah all, you know, these seniahs are wathah asses. If I pointed it out to Kildare in a tactful sort of way—"

"He'd boot you out of his study," said Lowther. "I should wefuse to be booted out of his study," said Arthur Augustus, with a great deal of dignity. "I wepeat that I think a wemonstwater addressed to Kildare would be the pwopah capah under the peculiah cires. of the case."

The Terrible Three exchanged doubtful looks. Kildare of the Sixth, head prefect of the School House, and captain of St. Jim's, was really not likely to take advice from juniors in the Fourth and the Shell. And yet it was such an important matter that Tom Merry & Co. felt that they could not let it rest where it was.

The importance of the matter could not indeed be overestimated, in the opinions of the juniors at least.

The St. Jim's First Eleven, captained by Kildare, was to meet the Isthmians, a great famous amateur team, on the following Wednesday. Naturally, such a meeting caused Kildare a great deal of thought and anxiety, and he was working hard to have his eleven in top-notch order. On this Saturday the First Eleven were to play a match on Big Side against the Rest of the school, a trial match to prove their form. The match between the First Eleven and the Rest of St. Jim's was of immense interest to all the fellows. Every fellow who played footer had a hope of being put in the School team, for it was certain that some juniors, at least, would be played. Tom Merry of the Shell was the finest junior footballer at St. Jim's, and it was as a thing taken for granted that he would be in the scratch eleven.

But the news that Cutts of the Fifth was to captain the scratch eleven changed all that. For Cutts of the Fifth was on the worst possible terms with Tom Merry & Co.

Tom Merry was entitled to a place in the scratch team on his form. But he did not believe that Cutts was sufficiently a sportsman to overcome his personal feeling in the matter and put him in.

The chance of playing against the First Eleven came rarely to a junior. Tom Merry was very keen to play, and he had counted on getting his cap for that match.

"I asked Dawwel who was goin' to be skippah of the sewatch team," said Arthur Augustus dolefully. "You see, I was goin' to offah him my services as centah-forward."

"Go hon!" murmured Lowther.

"Yaas. When he said it was to be Cutts, you could have knocked me down with a hammah—you could weally, you know."

"I say, you chaps"—Jack Blake of the Fourth came up with an excited face—"have you heard? Cutts of the Fifth is to skipper the scratch eleven to-day."

"Just heard!" growled Tom Merry. "That does us in the eye!"

"I was thinking I should be wanted on the wing," said Blake. "Of course, Cutts won't put me in, not after the rubs we've had."

"Well, I don't know that you Fourth-Form kids could be played, anyway," Tom Merry remarked thoughtfully. "After all, the scratch eleven's got to meet the First, you know."

Jack Blake glared.

"You ass! They'll have to play some juniors if they're to make up an eleven at all, and where will they get 'em if not in the Fourth?"

"In the Shell!" said Tom Merry sweetly.

"Oh, rats!"

"Yaas, wathah; wats!" said Arthur Augustus severely. "I was goin' to offah to play centah-forward for the sewatch team—"

"Something ought to be done!" growled Manners. "I'm surprised at Kildare. After the way we rolled up and voted for him when he was elected skipper, too!"

"Yaas; it's weally wotten. If you fellows will back me up I'll go to Kildare at once, and point out to him that he is

makin' a mistake," said Arthur Augustus. "He's in his studdy now with some of the Sixth."

"Think he will listen to you, fathead?" grunted Blake.

"I wefuse to be called a fathead, Blake, and I twast that, as a sensible chap, he will listen to me," said Arthur Augustus. "I am accustomed to bein' listened to with respect."

"Br-r-r-r!"

"Well, I am goin', anyway, and you fellows can back me up or not as you like," said D'Arcy. And he turned in the direction of Kildare's study.

The other fellows exchanged glances.

"Well, I don't see why we shouldn't tell Kildare what we think," said Tom Merry. "It can't do any harm. Blessed if I know why he's selected Cutts of the Fifth to skipper the scratch team. If he'd asked me—"

"But he didn't," grinned Lowther. "Most unaccountable oversight on his part, but he didn't!"

"Let's tell him what we think of Cutts, anyway," said Blake. "It will ease our feelings, if it doesn't do anything else. Come on! Gussy's thumping at his door already."

"Right-ho!"

And the four juniors hurried after Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. That elegant youth was already rapping on Kildare's door. Arthur Augustus regarded it as a duty to remonstrate with Kildare on this important subject, and he never shrank from doing a duty.

"Come in!" called out the deep, pleasant voice of Kildare.

Arthur Augustus opened the door. Five juniors marched in, looking a little flushed but very determined. There were five Sixth-Formers in the study, talking footer—Kildare himself, Darrel and Rushden, and Langton and Monteith, who was head prefect of the New House. The five seniors looked in surprise at Tom Merry & Co., and Kildare asked them rather abruptly what they wanted.

Arthur Augustus screwed his famous monocle into his eye, and bestowed a glance upon Kildare that expressed more of sorrow than of anger.

"We've come to speak to you, Kildare," he began. "Or, wathah, I have come to speak to you, wepwesentin' the othah chaps."

"Cut it short!" said Kildare crisply.

"Weally, Kildare—"

"You see—" began Tom Merry.

"It's like this—" explained Blake.

"Pway leave it to me, deah boys! I can explain to Kildare evah so much bettah than you can. In a delicate mattah of this kind it is much safah to leave the talkin' to a fellah of tact and judgment. Undah the cires—"

"Will you come to the point?" asked the captain of St. Jim's politely. "My time's rather valuable."

"Yaas; I'm just comin' to the point. Pway don't intew-wupt me again, you fellows. We are wastin' Kildare's time."

"Look here, you ass—"

"I wefuse to be called an ass, Mannahs—"

Kildare rose to his feet. He pointed to the door.

"Travel!" he said, with Spartan brevity.

"Pway listen to me a moment, deah boy. It's weally awfilly important. It's about the sewatch match this aftahnoon, you know."

"Kick them out!" suggested Monteith.

Arthur Augustus turned his eyeglass upon the New House prefect.

"Weally, Monteith—"

"Will you get done?" Kildare exclaimed impatiently.

"Yaas, wathah! About the sewatch match this aftahnoon. I heah that you have appointed Cutts of the Fifth skippah of the sewatch eleven."

"Yes," said Kildare, with a nod.

"That's the point. We are not satisfied with Cutts. We considah—"

"You are—not—satisfied?" said Kildare, in measured tones, looking at the swell of the Fourth as if he would eat him. "You are not satisfied?"

"Pwecisely, deah boy. I want to point out to you that a vewy much bettah choice could have been made, and I am willin' to give you the benefit of my advice on the subject. I am willin' to place my expewience entirely at your service."

"Oh, you ass!" murmured Tom Merry.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

Kildare looked over the juniors with a frowning brow. Then a twinkle came into his eyes, and he made a sign to the other Sixth-Formers.

"You all say the same?" he asked pleasantly.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Yes, Kildare."

"You see, Cutts is a rank outsider—"

"We don't like Cutts—"

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(See column 2, page 26 of this issue.)

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The ball whizzed in from Darrel, and was fisted out—then Kangaroo made a spring. His head met the ball, and in it went again. The goalie stumbled as he clutched it—but the ball grazed his finger-tips. "Goal!" roared the crowd. "Bravo, Cornstalk!" (See Chapter 15.)

"We could suggest—"

The juniors were all speaking at once. Kildare did not wait for them to finish.

"So you're all agreed? You all think you can run these things better than I can, and you have been kind enough to come here and tell me so. My dear kids, kindness is wasted on me—especially that sort of kindness. As you all say the same, you'll all get the same answer. Chuck them out!"

"Oh, bai Jove!"

"I say—"

"Look here—"

"Yaroooh!"

"Leggo! Ow!"

Five yelling and struggling juniors were seized at the same moment by five grinning Sixth-Formers. Five forms went whizzing through the study doorway one after another. Five separate bumps sounded loudly in the passage, and five separate and distinct yells echoed the length of the School House.

Then Kildare's door slammed.

Five rumpled and tumbled youths sat up on the linoleum and blinked at one another in a rather uncertain way.

"Gwooh! Gweat Scott!" groaned Arthur Augustus. "My twousahs are frightfully dustay! Ow! I wegard Kildare as a wank beast! Ow!"

And he staggered to his feet and dusted his beautiful trousers with an equally beautiful handkerchief.

The other fellows scrambled up, and they bestowed deadly looks upon Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Oh, you ass!" said Jack Blako. "Did you say your trousers were dusty?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Then we'll make them dustier. It was your idea—ow!—to go and play the giddy ox in Kildare's study—ow! Bump him!"

"Bai Jove, you wottahs! Oh—oh—ow! Help!"

Bump!

And Tom Merry & Co. walked away somewhat consoled, leaving Arthur Augustus gasping on the floor.

CHAPTER 2.

Many Callers on Cutts.

GERALD CUTTS of the Fifth was in his study, and never had Cutts's study seen so many visitors as now. Cutts, black sheep as he was, was popular in a certain way, and he had plenty of friends. But never had he seemed so popular as now.

Fellows came to his study as if attracted there by some magnetic force.

Footballing fellows did not, as a rule, like Cutts very much. He was a fine player when he took the trouble. But he had other occupations he valued above footer, such as little games of nap and backing "gee-gees," strictly under the rose, of course. But now, curious to relate, all the fellows who came pressing their company upon Gerald Cutts were footballing fellows.

A crowd of them were juniors, too, and juniors did not

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like the dandy of the Fifth; but on this special occasion they were able to overcome their dislike.

For Cutts was skipper of the scratch eleven that afternoon, and the scratch eleven was to play St. Jim's First, and to play St. Jim's First was a great and tremendous honour.

Cutts had to make up the scratch eleven, and probably Kildare knew what he was about when he assigned the task to Cutts. Kildare wanted to test the First Eleven, to give it the hardest trial possible before it met the Isthmians. And Cutts could be depended on for that. Cutts was not in the First Eleven himself, and one of the dearest wishes of his heart was to beat the First Eleven in that trial match. There was no doubt at all that Cutts would put every other consideration aside, and pick out the strongest possible team from the rest of St. Jim's to beat the First Eleven—and that was exactly what Kildare wanted.

Cutts was conning over a list now in his study, while eager visitors came and went. To eager applications for places in the eleven he replied with a curt shake of the head.

His own chums, Gilmore and Jones major of the Fifth, had approached him with great doubt. Cutts had selected Jones major, but Gilmore was dismissed, grumbling. It wasn't a question of chumminess, Cutts explained, but of raising a team that would beat the First Eleven, if beaten they could be by hook or by crook.

Tap!

Cutts grinned as a twentieth tap came at his door, and looked up. The door opened, and three Fourth-Formers came in. They were Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn, the famous Co. of the New House.

Their relations with Cutts were a little strained, but they had put on their politest smiles with the intention of letting bygones be bygones on an occasion like this.

"Hallo! What do you want?" said Cutts crisply.

"Just looked in to see you, Cutts," said Figgins affably. "Jolly nice weather we're having for this time of the year, don't you think so?"

"Haven't noticed it."

"Well, it's not so cold as it might be," said Figgins, with an air of great and careful consideration, "and it's not raining. It might be raining, you know, Cutts, but it isn't."

"Have you come here to talk to me about the weather?" asked Cutts. "If you have, I'd like to point out that dinner's in twenty minutes, and I've got some things to do."

"Ahem! I hear you are skipper of the Rest of St. Jim's this afternoon—"

"Well?"

"Do you want three really good players?" asked Figgins, coming out with it at last.

"I want ten besides myself," said Cutts.

"Well, there are three here—"

"Where?" asked Cutts.

"Standing in front of you," said Figgins. "Where are you going to get a goalie to beat Fatty Wynn? Or a winger to beat Kerr? Or an inside-right to beat me, for that matter, though I say it as shouldn't. You won't find 'em in the Fifth, I can tell you that. And as for the Sixth, Kildare's got the pick of them in the First Eleven."

Cutts nodded.

"I'm playing one Sixth-Former—Lucas of the Sixth," he said; "three of the Fifth besides myself—Jones major, Trevelyan, and Cook."

"Then you'll want six juniors!" Figgins exclaimed joyfully.

"Exactly."

"You can't do better than the Fourth Form—"

"I'm thinking of the Shell," said Cutts.

"Oh, don't!" said Figgins. "The Shell are a little older than us, but they don't play footer as we do, really!"

"Not a bit of it," said Kerr.

"Can't hold a candle to us," said Fatty Wynn.

"Just say you'll put us three in, anyway," urged Figgins. "We'll promise you to give the First Eleven a really high old time."

"I want Fatty Wynn to keep goal," said Cutts. "I've watched him, and he's first-class. You can keep goal this afternoon, Wynn."

Fatty Wynn almost gasped. He had wanted it, of course, but he had never expected it. There had been bad trouble between him and Cutts in the summer. He had found that Cutts of the Fifth was "selling out" in an important cricket match, and, in duty bound, he had warned Kildare.

Cutts had escaped from the scrape, and Fatty Wynn's story was supposed to be some mistake. But Fatty Wynn knew, and Cutts knew that he knew. Fatty Wynn had never dreamed that Cutts would be sportsman enough to forget that old bitter trouble and put him into his team. His opinion of Cutts improved from that moment.

"I—I say, you're a sport, Cutts, and no mistake!" said Fatty impulsively. "I'm sorry for some of the things I've said about you now."

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"Shurrup, you ass!" murmured the cautious Kerr.

But Cutts only grinned.

"Never mind that," he said. "You can say what you like about me, so long as you keep the leather out of the goal this afternoon. I'm set on beating the First Eleven, if only to show them that they're not the salt of the earth."

And the tightening of Cutts's lips as he spoke showed that he was in deadly earnest there. Kildare had selected him to captain the scratch eleven, but he did not choose to put him in the first team to meet the Isthmians. But if the scratch team, with Cutts at its head, beat the First Eleven, it would be a pretty good proof that Gerald Cutts was quite good enough to meet the Isthmians, whether he got his cap for the match or not.

"We're with you there all the way," said Figgins. "I'd like to take the Sixth down a peg or two like anything. Do you want me to play forward?"

"Yes. I've got you down as inside-right."

"Hurrah!"

"And what price me?" asked Kerr.

"Nothing at all."

"Oh, you ought to put Kerr in!" said Figgins. "As a winger—"

"You can tell Redfern, of the Fourth, I want him," said Cutts. "I'm putting Redfern in. I want him to play half."

Figgins nodded with satisfaction.

"Well, he's a New House chap," he remarked. "That gives our House three, Kerr. We can't grumble at that."

"Oh, all serene!" said Kerr. "I'll come and cheer, anyway. I suppose Cutts can't play the whole giddy Fourth!"

"I think you're a sport, Cutts," said Fatty Wynn.

"Thanks!" said Cutts imperturbably. "Now, clear off!"

And the New House juniors cleared off, very well satisfied. They met four Fourth-Formers in the passage—School House fellows. They were Jack Blake, Herries, Digby, and Reilly—heading for Cutts's study.

Figgins & Co. grinned at them gleefully, and the School House fellows looked rather threatening.

"Sure, and they've been touting to Cutts for places in the team, intirely!" Reilly exclaimed.

"Well, Cutts would have too much sense to play New House bouncers," Blake remarked comfortably. "He knows all the real football talent is in the School House!"

"Rats!" said Figgins & Co., with great unanimity.

"You don't mean to say he's putting any of you in?" demanded Herries. "My hat! He might as well put in my dog Towser!"

"Sure, and I—" began Reilly.

"Three," said Figgins, with great satisfaction. "Fatty and Redfern and your humble servant. We're going to beat the Sixth, if we can!"

"Beat your great-grandmother!" snorted Blake. "I really thought Cutts had more sense than that! He might stand up for his own House, too!"

"Well, he knows where to come for good footballers," Kerr explained.

"Look here, you New House fathead—"

"Oh, chuck them out!" exclaimed Digby. "I'm fed-up with New House nerve! Chuck them out!"

"Yah!" was the defiant reply of Figgins & Co.

"Rush the rotters!" howled Blake.

The "rotters" were rushed, and there was a scrambling combat on the stairs, and Figgins & Co. went through the doorway of the School House in a somewhat dishevelled state.

Then Blake and his companions made their way again to Cutts's study. They heard a familiar voice as they approached the open doorway.

"Weally, Cutts—"

Blake chuckled.

"It's Gussy—talking like a Dutch uncle to Cutts! Hark!"

"Undah the cires, Cutts, I must wefuse to take 'No' for an answah!" Arthur Augustus's tone was very firm.

"You will observe, Cutts—" Arthur Augustus looked round through his eyeglass as Blake & Co. came in. "You fellows, pway twy to make Cutts see weason. He is actually pwoposin' to leave me out of the sewatch eleven."

CHAPTER 3.

Cutts's Eleven.

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY spoke more in sorrow than in anger.

He was evidently much moved by the apparent blindness of Cutts, in weakening his team by leaving out such a brilliant player.

Cutts pointed to the door with his pencil.

"Buzz off!" he said curtly. "Time's short!"

"All the more reason why I should make you undah-stand," said Arthur Augustus. "I am willin' to play ootah-forward."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I should, howevah, be quite willin' to take up anothah posish, if desiahed. I am weally pretty good at any posish. on the footah-field, exceptin' goal—"

"Are you good at walking out of a study?" asked Cutts, with interest. "If you're not, I'm pretty good at slinging out silly chumps!"

"Yes; shut up, Gussy—"

"I decline to shut up! Now, Cutts, you must weally see that I've got to play in the scowatch eleven. Don't you want to beat the First?"

"Yes; that's why I leave you out!"

"Oh, weally—"

"Clear off!" said Cutts impatiently.

"You see, deah boys, I was quite wight to wemonstwat with Kildare for makin' Cutts skippah of the scowatch eleven," said Arthur Augustus. "I cannot wegard him as a sportsman, and he is bent on muckin' things up—"

Cutts rose to his feet.

"I give you two seconds to clear out!" he said ominously.

Arthur Augustus turned a glittering eyeglass upon him.

"I wese to wemain in your studay anothah moment, Cutts!" he said, with a great deal of dignity.

And he marched out of Cutts's study with his aristocratic nose very high in the air.

"What do you want?" asked Cutts, glancing at Blake & Co., as he sat down again.

"Just looked in to see how the scratch eleven's getting on," said Blake pleasantly. "I hope you don't remember any old rubs at a time like this, Cutts?"

"I never forget anything, rubs or not," said Cutts quietly.

"But if you kids were any use to me I'd put you in. I want you for a forward, Blake. The others can go and eat coke!"

"Oh, look here—" said Herries.

"Come off!" growled Digby.

"Faith, and sure I—"

"Cheese it!" said Cutts. "I've got your name down on my list, Blake. Now, get out, all of you. If you see Tom Merry and Noble, you can tell them I want them."

"For the team?" asked Blake.

"Yes."

"Good egg!"

And the Fourth-Formers left the study. They found the Terrible Three in the hall, and Noble—otherwise known as Kangaroo—was with them. So was Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. The last-named was holding forth upon the subject of Cutts, the iniquity of Cutts, and the crass stupidity of Cutts.

"It's weally remarkable what an ass a fellow can be," said Arthur Augustus, with a wise shake of the head. "In othah mattahs, Cutts seems quite sensible—quite sane! But he has left me out of the eleven!"

"You don't say so!" ejaculated Monty Lowther.

"Yaas; it's a fact!"

"But what for?" asked Lowther, with an air of deep and solemn thought. "What can possibly be Cutts's motive for leaving you out, Gussy?"

"He's an ass, deah boy!"

"Oh, I know!" exclaimed Lowther, as if struck by a sudden idea. "It's because he wants to beat the other team!"

"What!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"That's it!" said Lowther, with conviction.

"You—you uttah ass!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, while Tom Merry and Manners howled with laughter. "If you are pullin' my leg, Lowthah, you wottah—"

"Two of you chaps wanted," said Blake, as he joined them.

"Good egg! Which two?" asked Kangaroo.

"You and Tommy."

Tom Merry whistled.

"You don't mean to say that Cutts is going to play me?"

"He says so."

"Well, my hat! He's a better sportsman than I ever took him for! Of course, I ought to be in the team; but—"

"So ought all of us!" grinned Lowther. "Did Cutts mention me, Blake?"

"No; he didn't."

"Or me?" asked Manners persuasively.

"Not a bit!"

"Some mistake here!" said Monty Lowther, with a shake of the head. "We'd better go and see Cutts about it."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Terrible Three and Kangaroo made their way to Cutts's study. They found a crowd of juniors in it—

Kerruish, Ray, Hammond, Bates, Smith minor, Gore, Levison, and several more—all undertaking to point out to Cutts at the same moment their fitness for places in the scratch team. Cutts had jammed his fingers desperately in his ears.

"Clear off!" he shouted. "If you don't buzz off out of my study, I'll take a ruler to you!"

"But, you see, Cutts—"

"I want to explain—"

"As centre-half—"

"In goal, I'm really—"

"Right-wing or left-wing, all the same, I—"

"Hallo, have we dropped into Bedlam by mistake?" asked Kangaroo, with a chuckle. "I hope you are enjoying yourself, Cutts?"

Cutts snorted, and jumped up. He picked up a big ebony ruler, and started towards the claimants for places in the scratch eleven. He did not waste any more words upon them, but lunged and whacked with the ruler, and with yells and groans the claimants were driven out into the passage. There they halted for a few moments to give a deep, deep groan for Cutts, of the Fifth, and then they went their way grumbling.

"I hear you want us, Cutts," Monty Lowther remarked, when the discontented claimants had been driven forth.

"Then you heard wrong!" snapped Cutts. "I want Merry and Noble."

"Hear, hear!" said Kangaroo.

"This is jolly decent of you, Cutts!" said Tom Merry. "I'll play for you with pleasure! I hardly thought—"

"But you'd better think over it twice," urged Manners. "I'm quite willing—"

"But I'm not!" said Cutts. "Get out. The eleven's made up now, and I don't want any more jaw. Buzz off!"

"But you see—"

"It's like this—" began Manners, in a tone of patient explanation.

Gerald Cutts picked up the ruler again, and the Shell fellows hurriedly left. Ten minutes later there was a list on the board for all St. Jim's to read—and then the eager footballers ceased thronging to Cutts's study, and the weary were at rest. The list ran:

Wynn; Jones major, Lucas; Redfern, Noble, Trevelyan; Figgins, Cook, Cutts, Merry, Blake.

"Jolly good team!" was the verdict of every fellow who found his name there. But the other fellows were not quite so sure upon that point.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, indeed, was afflicted with very deep and searching doubts.

"I'm afraid that team won't have much chance against the First Eleven, deah boys!" he said, with a solemn shake of the head.

"Of course it won't, ass!" said Blake. "We don't expect to beat the pick of the top Forms. We're going to give them a tussle, and make 'em work, though!"

"Yaas, but if I were in the team—"

"Then it would be a walk-over for Kildare!" suggested Lowther.

"Weally, you ass—"

"There goes the dinner-bell!" said Blake. "It's rotten you're not in the team, Gussy; but, after all, you can come and watch me, and cheer!"

That handsome prospect did not seem to console Arthur Augustus very much. Not that his own disappointment worried him very much; he was thinking of the fate of the team unaided by his great powers. But the members of the eleven went in to dinner quite cheerfully, evidently taking a more rosy view of the situation than Arthur Augustus did.

CHAPTER 4.

The Trial Match.

LONG before the time fixed for the kick-off the St. Jim's fellows were gathering round the Big Side ground.

Everybody wanted to see what sort of a "show" the scratch eleven would put up against the mighty men of the First Team.

Kildare's eleven was first-class, there was no doubt about that. Kildare himself, and Darrel, Rushden, and Langton, were the pick of the School House seniors. Monteith and Webb and Baker were the best the New House could provide. These were all in the Sixth. There were also North and Gray of the Sixth, and two Fifth-Formers—Lefevre and Buzzard. From Kildare's point of view the senior team could hardly be improved. Cutts, certainly, might have been put in, but Kildare had his own reasons for leaving him out. He had not really believed that old story of Cutts having tried to sell the Wallaby match—yet somehow it stuck in his memory.

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And he more than suspected some of Cutts's secret practices—betting, smoking, and other vices.

Between the black sheep of the Fifth, and big, simple-minded Kildare, there could be little in common. If the team had really needed Cutts, Kildare would have played him; but he was glad that the Fifth-Former was not really needed. Cutts would do excellently well as skipper for the scratch eleven in the trial match, and that was good enough for Cutts.

Some of the juniors, certainly, could have suggested improvements in the First Eleven. A few juniors in it would have been an improvement, from their point of view. But on that subject they did not expect the captain of the school to see eye to eye with them.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy came down to the ground with a very serious expression on his noble face. He had his misgivings—very natural under the circumstances. When Cutts came down, D'Arcy hinted to him that it was not yet too late to do the sensible thing—but Cutts only grinned and walked on.

Cutts had certainly shown great skill in selecting the scratch team. Fatty Wynn, though only a Fourth-Former, was a giant in goal, and there were few shots that he could not stop. And the junior forwards, though at a natural disadvantage in opposing seniors, were picked for their speed and resource. Cutts had watched junior football at St. Jim's, and he had a keen eye for a fellow's form. He was not without hope of beating the First Eleven, and such a triumph over Kildare would have been great joy to him.

Cutts and his team were the first in the field, and they pointed about a footer, amid encouraging remarks from the crowd thickening about the ropes. There was a rumour among the fellows that a member of the Isthmian team, whom the First were to play next Wednesday, was coming to see the trial match. He was a relation of Cutts of the Fifth, and he played outside-right for the Isthmians. Levison of the Fourth, who knew everything—having a marvellous ear for keyholes—knew all about Cutts's relation. He was the best winger in the Isthmian team, and his name was Spencer Dodd. So when a somewhat tall, good-looking fellow in a handsome overcoat and a soft hat came towards the footer-field, the fellows who observed him knew that it was the Isthmian winger.

"Hallo, Spen!" Cutts called out, as he spotted him. "This way!"

Dodd walked carelessly towards the footballers.

Cutts immediately went up in the estimation of the fellows at this evidence that he had a cousin in the famous Isthmian team.

Tom Merry & Co. regarded Dodd with interest.

He looked a well-built "limber" fellow, and was two or three and twenty years of age, but there was an expression on his face Tom Merry did not quite like.

It occurred to Tom that Dodd was, in all probability, of the same kidney as his cousin Gerald Cutts; there were signs in his face that hinted only too plainly of the "black sheep."

If Tom could have heard the talk between the cousins when they drew aside from the other fellows to chat, his impression would have been confirmed.

Dodd cast an amused glance over the scratch eleven. The difference in size between Lucas of the Sixth, and Blake of the Fourth naturally struck him at once.

"What sort of a team is this you're playing—eh?" he asked.

"Scratch eleven," explained Cutts. "It's really a test for the First Eleven before they meet your lot."

"You're playing the long and the short of it—eh?"

"I've picked out the best I could find. Of course, Kildare has all the best players of the Upper Forms in the First Eleven."

"Who's the fat kid?" asked Dodd, with a grin.

"Wynn of the Fourth; he's a good goalie. Don't sniff too soon," said Cutts, a little nettled. "Wait till you've seen my team play."

"That's what I've come over for," said Spencer. "I want particularly to see your First Eleven play. I'm very keen on seeing their form."

Cutts grinned.

"Are you looking for a licking next Wednesday?" he asked.

Dodd laughed.

"If we get a licking next Wednesday, Gerald, it means more than a licking for me. I've found some fellows at Abbotsford who've been asses enough to put their money on St. Jim's."

"Oh, said Cutts curiously. "You're making a book on the match?"

"Always do when I get a chance. I didn't expect to book anything on this schoolboy match, but it seems that there are people who fancy that the school here can beat the Isthmians. As they were ready to back their fancy, I was ready to give them their head, you may be sure. Of course, it's under the rose; Cartright, our skipper, is down heavy on betting. But I offered three to one on us against all takers—and there were a good many takers, by Jove! I stand to win a cool two hundred when we beat the school next Wednesday!"

"And if you don't beat the school—"

Dodd laughed again at the idea.

"Oh, we shall beat a schoolboy team, of course!"

"But if you don't—"

Dodd shrugged his shoulders.

"Oh, if we don't I'm six hundred out—and a deuce of a squeeze it would be to raise the money, too. But, of course, there's no chance of that."

"Don't be too sure of that," said Cutts drily. "Kildare and his men are hot stuff, I can warn you of that!"

"Not quite up to the Isthmians, I fancy!" grinned Dodd.

"You'll see. You can watch their form to-day."

"That's what I've come for. I was beginning to wonder whether I mightn't have gone a bit too deep," Dodd confessed. "Of course, I shall hedge, if I think there's the remotest chance of St. Jim's beating the Isthmians. We haven't had our usual luck in our last few matches, and our men are not at the top of their form. But a fellow can always hedge."

Kildare and his men had come down to the ground. Cutts introduced Spencer Dodd to the captain of St. Jim's; and Kildare shook hands warmly enough with the Isthmian winger. Dodd looked with a keen eye over the St. Jim's First, and his look grew more serious. He could see at a glance that they were a first-rate team.

"By Jove, they look a good lot!" he confessed to Cutts. "But they won't have much chance of showing their real form against a ragged lot like your scratch team."

"You'll see," said Cutts.

And Spencer Dodd did see.

The Varsity man's supercilious judgment of them had not escaped the eyes of the scratch team, and they resented it.

"We'll show that johnnie that we can play footer," Figgins murmured to Tom Merry, "and, to speak the truth, if he's a fair specimen of the Isthmians, I don't think much of them!"

"Look at his fingers—yellow with cigarettes!" said Blake. Tom Merry nodded.

"I hope our First will beat them next Wednesday," said Kangaroo, "and I hope we'll beat our First to-day—what?"

"What-ho!" said the juniors heartily.

Kildare and Cutts tossed for the choice of ends, and Cutts gave Kildare the wind to kick off against.

The ropes round the ground were packed as the ball was kicked off. Nearly all St. Jim's had crowded there to see the trial match, and to watch how a team composed more than half of juniors would figure against the great men of the First.

Weight and size naturally told. Kildare and the forwards led off with a sharp attack, and in a few minutes they were besieging the scratch goal. But Fatty Wynn was there. Fatty, plump and smiling as ever, was very much on the alert. Monty Lowther remarked that there wasn't much room for the ball to pass him, between the sticks, anyway; but that was an exaggeration.

Once Darrcl, and twice Kildare, sent in the ball, but each time a Welsh foot or fist was quite ready for it, and Fatty Wynn saved, amid roars of applause from the onlookers.

Then Jones major cleared, and the scratch forwards captured the ball, and took it up the field.

Figgins, on the outside, had the ball right along the touch-line, and he sent it in to Cook of the Fifth as he was tackled, Cook centred to Cutts, and Cutts passed it on to Tom Merry at inside-right. Tom Merry raced it on, and centred back to Cutts at the psychological moment; and Cutts drove it in, beating Langton of the Sixth in goal.

There was a roar of delight from the crowd.

"Goal!"

"Hurrah!"

Cutts's face glowed.

The scratch eleven had scored the first goal, and scored it by sheer good play, and not by luck. And Cutts grinned at Spencer Dodd, standing before the pavilion, as the teams lined up again. The Isthmian's winger's face wore an expression of surprise, mingled with uneasiness. The play on both sides was of a far higher calibre than he had deemed possible, and his expression showed it.

And he stood with his hands thrust deep into the pockets of his overcoat, a wrinkle deepening between his brows, as he

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watched the further progress of the game; and if anyone had taken the trouble to observe him, it would have been evident that Spencer Dodd's reflections were not wholly pleasant ones. Perhaps he was thinking of the two hundred pounds he would win if the Isthmians beat St. Jim's on the following Wednesday; but he looked as if he were thinking of the six hundred he would lose if they didn't!

CHAPTER 5.

Spencer Dodd is not Pleased.

KILDARE and his men worked very hard after that. They did not mean to give the scratch eleven the satisfaction of a second goal if they could help it.

The First Eleven were, of course, far and away the better team, and it was only by a run of luck that Cutts could have hoped to pull off such a match.

And it soon became clear that such a run of luck was not to be looked for by the scratch eleven.

Kildare & Co. were putting their best foot foremost. They piled into the game, and for a time fairly swept the scratchers before them.

But for the Herculean efforts of Fatty Wynn in goal, the score would have jumped up in favour of the First Eleven at an alarming rate.

But the fat Fourth-Former was on his mettle.

Loud cheers from the crowd greeted every brilliant save, and Fatty Wynn's face glowed with triumph and perspiration.

Kildare got the ball through at last, and the score was level; and a little later Darrel put it in with a long shot from the field. Fatty Wynn could not perform miracles, and the First Eleven undoubtedly had their shooting-boots on.

The first half ended with Kildare two to one.

The play had been hard; and both sides were glad of the brief rest, when Mr. Railton, who was refereeing, blew his whistle for the halt.

But though the First were getting decidedly the best of it, the scratch eleven were giving them plenty to do, and distinguishing themselves greatly. The real object of the match, which was to test the combination and powers of the First Eleven, was being attained.

That was all Kildare wanted; but it was not all Cutts wanted, and in the second half he exerted himself to do more.

More than once Cutts & Co. made a fierce attack on goal; but Langton was not to be caught napping a second time. Langton of the Sixth had lately shown great powers as a goal-keeper; and he was at his best now. Twice he saved from good shots from Cutts that really ought to have materialised, and once again there was a narrow escape when Tom Merry sent in the ball. The crowd gave Tom Merry a cheer in recognition of his effort, which would have beaten many a goalie.

"Bai Jove, they're playin' up!" Arthur Augustus D'Arcy remarked to Lowther. "The scratch eleven will be licked; but they are really doin' wathah well."

"Look at the Isthmian chap!" murmured Kerr. "He doesn't seem to be enjoying the giddy show, does he?"

The juniors glanced towards Spencer Dodd.

The Isthmian winger did not notice them. The crease between his brows had grown deeper and more marked, and he was biting his lip.

Certainly he did not appear to enjoy the exciting sight of a really good football-match, and those who noticed it thought they could understand the reason.

Reilly of the Fourth chuckled joyously and dug Arthur Augustus in the ribs.

"Sure, he's thinking that Kildare will beat him next Wednesday!" he ejaculated.

"Ow! Pway don't puncture me, deah boy. But I think you're quite wight," Arthur Augustus remarked. "I weally think he is beginnin' to have his doubts. And he looked vewy swankay when he saw the team first."

"There goes old Figgy!" shouted Kerr.

Figgy was away on a splendid run. He sent the ball in to Cutts, who was the only forward up to receive a pass, and Cutts beat the backs and ran in and kicked. But again Langton was equal to the occasion. He fisted the ball out, and Rushden cleared, and the game swayed away again into the scratch team's half.

Kildare made a hot attack now, and Cutts's men had to fall back and defend. Cutts packed his goal, and the defence was so good that the crowd cheered again and again. But Kildare was not to be denied, and again the ball came through, and Fatty Wynn missed it by a hair's-breadth.

"Goal!"

"Thwee to one!" said Arthur Augustus, with a shake of the head. "Without bein' conceited, deah boys, I weally considah that the score would have been wathah diffewent if I had been in Cutts's team."

"What-ho!" agreed Monty Lowther. "Ten to one, you mean."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, you as—"

"Look at old Fatty!" said Kerr enthusiastically. "They're at him again; he's a giddy marvel!"

"Bai Jove, yaas! Huwway!"

"Well saved!"

"Bravo, Fatty!"

Fatty Wynn was doing wonders in goal. The attack of the First Eleven was quite overwhelming now, and shot came in thick and fast; but Fatty Wynn saved them all, and the net was not reached. And when the game swayed again to midfield, the goal was still intact.

Thunderous cheers rent the air, as Fatty Wynn mopped his perspiring brow.

"Hurray!"

"Good old Fatty!"

Manners looked at his watch.

"Ten minutes to go," he remarked. "Well, if Kildare only beats Cutts by three goals to one; the scratch team's done jolly well."

"Go it, ye cripples!"

"On the ball!"

"Play up, deah boys! Wun for it!"

The dear boys were playing up as hard as they knew how. The scratch eleven were fairly penned up in their own half now. Langton, in goal at the other end, had nothing to do but to stamp to and fro, and thump his chest to keep himself warm. But Fatty Wynn was kept very busy.

The pill came in again, close on time; and the First Eleven counted four to one. A few minutes later the whistle rang out.

"Four to one!" said Monty Lowther. "Well, that's not bad for Cutts's lot, considering. The First didn't expect them to take a goal at all, I fancy."

The players came off the field, breathing hard. Kildare tapped Cutts on the shoulder in a friendly way.

"Well played!" he said.

Cutts nodded shortly. He was not feeling pleased at his defeat, though he could have had no reasonable hope of winning such a disproportioned match. When he had changed, the Fifth-Former sought out Spencer Dodd.

He found the Isthmian winger walking to and fro outside the pavilion, with his hands still thrust deep into his overcoat pockets. The wrinkle was still in his brow, and it seemed deeper than ever.

"Well, what do you think of St. Jim's form?" asked Cutts, with a grin.

Dodd bit his lip.

"It's a surprise to me," he said abruptly.

"I fancied it would be," said Cutts, with a grin. "I don't say Kildare will beat the Isthmians next Wednesday, but I do say that he has a jolly good chance of doing it. Unless you're in your top form, you'll have to be jolly careful."

"You're not playing for them next Wednesday?" asked Dodd.

Cutts shook his head.

"This is a surprise to me," Dodd said, again. "A big surprise. We really only took on the match at all because we had a vacant date. We've always licked public school teams that had the cheek to meet us. But St. Jim's is a bit out of the common. That chap—Kildare, is that his name?—is a wonderful skipper. He makes them go like clockwork. The goalie is first chop, too. I hadn't the faintest idea that we were going to meet a team of this class, or—or—" He paused.

"Or you wouldn't have laid two hundred quid against St. Jim's?" Cutts finished for him, with a chuckle.

"Exactly!" said Dodd.

"Still time to hedge?" suggested Cutts.

Dodd's face lengthened.

"I'm not so sure of that. The men I've taken bets with were dead sure; they jumped at the chance. They knew more than I did. I don't know whether I shall be able to get anything the other way, now I think of it. Of course, they're local men, and they knew!—I hadn't an idea, but now I know!"

"Knowledge often comes late—too late to be useful!" Cutts remarked.

Dodd made a restless gesture.

"Will you walk a bit of the way back to Abbotsford with me?" he asked. "There are some things I want to say."

Cutts looked at him very curiously.

"I was going to ask you to have tea with me in my study," he said.

"Come with me instead; we can get something at the hotel at Wayland, and a hundred up afterwards," said Dodd.

"I'm your man!"

And the cousins walked out of the school gates together.

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CHAPTER 6.
Keeping it Dark!

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY paused in the passage and extracted a notebook from his pocket, and felt in another pocket for a pencil. He had stopped directly in the way of the Terrible Three. It was just after lessons on Monday.

"Well, what's the little game?" Tom Merry inquired. "I'm looking for subs," explained Arthur Augustus. "Bai Jove! What did I do with that pencil?"

"Subs?" said Monty Lowther. "What sort of subs? Sub-editors, submarines, or—?"

"Subscriptions, you duffah!"

"Getting up a testimonial?" asked Manners.

"No; my ideah is a bwake."

"A which?"

"A bwake. I think we can't do bettah than have a bwake."

"But what are you going to break?" asked Lowther.

"I did not say I was goin' to bwake anythin', Lowthah. I suppose you have not forgotten that the First Eleven are meetin' the Isthmians at Abbotsford on Wednesday?" said Arthur Augustus. "I'm goin', of course. I suppose nearly everybody's goin'. My ideah is to have a bwake. Undah-stand now?"

"Good egg!" said Monty Lowther heartily. "You're going to stand a brake for a party to go in. I call that generous!"

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Very generous indeed, and just like Gussy!" said Manners. "We'll come!"

"Look here, Mannahs—"

"I accept the kind invitation with pleasure," said Tom Merry. "Put my name down, Gussy; and I'll drive the brake if you like. This is really good of you!"

"You uttah asses!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "I am not standin' the bwake. I'm waisin' subscriptions to pay for it!"

"Oh!" said the Terrible Three.

"My ideah is to have a bwake to cawwy the whole partay of us," explained Arthur Augustus. "It's a jolly long way to Abbotsford, and the waylay fare is wathah high; and goin' in a bwake will be wathah in style, don't you think? We can cwam about twentay chaps into it, so it won't come vewy expensive for anybody. It will make the New House boundahs look wathah gween when we start. They won't have a bwake!"

"They may make a break after our brake," suggested Monty Lowther.

"Pway don't make idiotic puns, Lowthah, deah boy. We are goin' to keep this ideah dark, of course, and Figgins & Co. won't know we've got a bwake till it wolls up on Wednesday aftahnoon to take us to Abbotsford. Then we shall woll off in gweat style, and leave them gnashin' their teeth, you know!"

"Good egg!"

"So pway hand ovah your subscriptions, deah boys."

"How much?"

"As much as you like. No limit," said Arthur Augustus. "I don't know what the bwake will cost, you see. I shall have to ask the man at the livewy-stables. He knows!"

"That's the way to get the job done cheaply, I suppose?" said Manners.

"Wats! It stands to weason that the man there knows the pwice bettah than I do. Evey fellow can contwibute all he can afford, and we shall have enough to pay for the bwake. If there is any left ovah, it will be spent in vefreshments at Abbotsford. I'm puttin' down the names of all subswibers, with the amounts."

"How many, so far?"

"Blake, one shilling; Digby, sixpence; Hewwies, fourpence; Weilly, twopence; Kangy, one shilling; Dane, ninepence; Glyn, one-and-six; Wally, one penny."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I do not see anythin' to laugh at, deah boys. Evey fellow contwibutes accordin' to his means, of course."

"Well, here's my little bit," said Monty Lowther; and he produced a threepenny-piece. "I'll have threepenn'orth of the brake!"

"Vewy well. And you, Tom Mewwy?"

"A bob!" said Tom.

"And here's a tanner!" said Manners.

"Thank you, deah boys!"

"But suppose you don't raise enough to pay for the brake?" Tom Merry suggested. "At that rate, you won't have more than enough to pay for the two hind wheels!"

"Oh, that's all wight! I shall have a fivah fwom my patch in the mornin'—it's due," said Arthur Augustus cheerfully. "If there isn't enough, I can make up the

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diffewence. But I dare say some of the fellows will shell out bettah than this. I'm puttin' down ten shillin's myself!"

Monty Lowther slapped him on the back.

"Gussy, you are a good little ass! But—"

"Ow, pway don't wumple my jacket, Lowthah! Pway excuse me, deah boys; I must get in some more subswip-tions!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus walked away in a hurry. The Terrible Three grinned. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's method of raising a subscription to pay for the brake on Wednesday was decidedly original. The probability seemed that everybody would have a very cheap ride with the exception of Arthur Augustus himself.

Levison of the Fourth tapped the swell of St. Jim's on the shoulder as he came out of the School House. D'Arcy glanced at him, and drew a little away. He did not like Levison of the Fourth.

"I hear you're having a brake over to Abbotsford on Wednesday," Levison remarked, affecting not to notice D'Arcy's involuntary gesture.

"Yaas, Levison."

"Raising subs to pay for it—ch?"

"Yaas."

"Put me down, then."

Arthur Augustus hesitated.

"The fact is, Levison," he said, "the bwake will only hold a certain numbah of chaps, and I want them all to be my own fwienids. I am sdowwy to leave you out if you want to come; but aftah that dirtay twick you played on my fwienid Hammond the othah day, I cannot wegard you with fwienidly feelin's!"

"Oh, that's ancient history!" said Levison. "And it was only a lark, you know. Can't help taking a rise out of the Cockney!"

"I did not wegard it as a lark—I wegarded it as a dirtay twick! I am sowwy you cannot come in the bwake, Levison!"

And Arthur Augustus walked on. Levison regarded him with frowning brows as he went.

The good nature of the swell of St. Jim's was almost boundless; but there was a limit, and Levison had reached that limit. His attempt to sow dissension between Arthur Augustus D'Arcy and Hammond, the Cockney schoolboy, could not be forgotten or forgiven. And Levison, who had intended to contribute twopence for his portion of the subscription, was evidently "left."

"Rotten!" growled Levison; and he strode away sulkily.

Figgins & Co. were in the quadrangle, chatting, and a sudden idea came into Levison's mind. He sauntered up to them and nodded.

"You fellows going in the brake?" he asked.

"What brake?" asked Figgins.

"Oh, didn't you know?"

"No. What is it?"

"The brake on Wednesday, going to Abbotsford," explained Levison. "Oh, I'm sorry I spoke! I suppose they're keeping it dark, now that I come to think of it. Don't mention that I've said anything."

And Levison walked off.

Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn exchanged glances. Figgins chuckled.

"So the School House bounders are having a brake on Wednesday," he remarked. "We were thinking of getting over to Abbotsford on our bikes. I'd rather go in a brake!"

"Will the funds run to it?" asked Fatty Wynn doubtfully. "Don't forget that we shall want a good bit of lunch at Abbotsford."

"Blow the funds!" said Figgins. "I've an idea of getting a brake cheap, and doing the School House bounders in the eye at the same time!"

"Oh!" said Fatty, beginning to understand. "Hear, hear! If it can be done—"

"Mum's the word!" grinned Figgins. "Here comes Gussy!"

Arthur Augustus was crossing the quadrangle towards the tuckshop, in search of fresh subscribers. He was conning over his notebook as he came along, and did not see the New House trio till he had almost walked into them.

"Hallo!" said Figgins affably, as D'Arcy stopped with an ejaculation. "Doing your Latin verbs, Gussy?"

"No, I am not doin' Latin verbs, Figgins!"

"Poetry for the 'Weekly,' I suppose?" suggested Kerr.

"Nothin' of the sort!"

"Lines to a lady in a tobacconist's?" suggested Fatty Wynn.

Arthur Augustus turned pink.

"Weally, Wynn, you fat duffah—"

"Raising a subscription, perhaps?" asked Figgins, with a glance towards the notebook.



"Clear off!" shouted Cutts, picking up a big ebony ruler, and starting towards the claimants for places in the scratch eleven. He lunged and whacked with the ruler, and with yells and groans the claimants were driven out into the passage. (See Chapter 5.)

Arthur Augustus promptly closed it.

"I am afraid I cannot gratify your curiosity, dear boys," he said. "This is a wathah pwivate mattah!"

"Keeping secrets from your kind uncles, Gussy!" said Figgins, wagging a reproachful forefinger at the swell of the School House.

"Wats!"

"Don't you want to put our names down?" asked Kerr.

Arthur Augustus shook his head.

"No New House wastahs admitted," he explained. "This is entirely a School House ideah—and I'm not goin' to tell you anythin' about it."

"A deadly secret—eh?"

"Yaas—it will be a secwet till Wednesday."

"Why Wednesday?" asked Figgins innocently.

Arthur Augustus grinned.

"You'll know—when the time comes!" he replied. "I'm not goin' to tell you anythin' more. I'm keepin' it vewy dark about the bwake, of course."

And Arthur Augustus walked on, chuckling. Figgins & Co. were chuckling, too. Arthur Augustus's way of "keeping it dark" tickled them.

CHAPTER 7.

The Only Way.

"WILL you show me to my cousin's quarters, kid?"

Tom Merry was coming down the steps of the School House, when Spencer Dodd spoke to him. Tom stopped at once.

Dodd had just come in, and a good many eyes had followed him across the quadrangle. The Isthmian winger was naturally an object of great interest to the St. Jim's fellows.

"Certainly—with pleasure, Mr. Dodd!" said Tom Merry.

"This way!"

"Thanks!"

Spencer Dodd followed Tom Merry into the School House and to the Fifth-Form passage.

"Cutts is having tea in his study, I think," said Tom Merry. "You'll find him there, anyway!"

"Right-ho!"

Dodd tapped at the study door, and Tom Merry went his way.

"Come in!" called out Cutts of the Fifth.

Dodd entered.

Cutts was at the tea-table with Gilmore and Jones major of the Fifth. Spencer Dodd nodded to them genially.

"Hallo!" said Cutts. "You've come to tea—eh? Here's a chair."

"I want to have a chat with you, Gerald—after tea will do," said Dodd, as he sat down.

They talked football over tea—but Dodd's manner was a little absent. After tea, Jones major and Gilmore exchanged glances, and took their leave. They could see that Dodd wanted to be alone with Cutts.

"Well, what is it, Spen?" asked Cutts, when the door had closed after the two Fifth-Formers.

Dodd glanced round the study.

"I suppose we can't be heard here," he said.

"No, that's all right!"

"I'm in a fearful hole, Gerald," said Dodd, sinking his voice, although Cutts had assured him that they could not be overheard.

"Sorry!" said Cutts. "It's that book you've made on the match, I suppose?"

"Yes. I've been trying to hedge."

"And what luck?"

"None."

Cutts grinned.

"As a matter of fact, old man, you were a bit of a duffer," he said. "St. Jim's First is a powerful team—far and away ahead of the average public school eleven—and Kildare is a skipper in a thousand. They'd have a good chance against the Isthmians any time; and just now, when your team has been playing off colour for a month past, my opinion is that Kildare has the better chance. I wouldn't accept six to one—and if you wanted to extend your bets a little, I'd put four to one on the school myself."

Dodd made a long face.

"That's not what I want," he said dolefully. "As a matter of fact, I've really been taken in. The men who made the bets with me knew where the chances lay—and I didn't. I took it for granted that a team like the Isthmians would whip a schoolboy eleven out of its boots!"

"Tain't safe to take things for granted, when you're laying good money on them," said Cutts sagely.

"I'm finding that out," said Dodd. "The question is—what's going to be done? I stand to win two hundred if we win. That isn't what I care about so much—as that I stand to lose six hundred if we lose. I shall be broke to the wide. I'm in low water now, and that two hundred was going to set me on my feet. But—"

"So bad as that?"

"If I have to shell out six hundred, I'm done. I shall have to get out of the Isthmian club."

"Phew!"

"I can't meet it, as a matter of fact!" Dodd gnawed his lips restlessly. "I've come to you about it, Gerald!"

Cutts raised his eyebrows.

"To me! What can I do?"

"I gave you a hint on Saturday."

Cutts laughed.

"You suggested that I might get into the school eleven," he said.

"Well, couldn't you? Your form's good enough."

"I might, if I pushed for it."

"Well, then," said Dodd eagerly, "after all, we've always been friends, Gerald, and blood's thicker than water. And if you helped me out of this scrape, I'd stand you a clear fifty out of what I raked in."

"I'd like the fifty right enough—I could do with it—but—it's impossible!"

"But you could—"

Cutts shook his head.

"I couldn't risk it. There was something of the kind before—a cricket match in the summer. A junior got hold of a yarn that I was going to sell the match—Kildare didn't believe it, and I played all the same—and I played so badly—ahem!—it gave a certain amount of colour to the suspicion. If Kildare put me into the First Eleven this time, and I did badly, there would be trouble—they haven't forgotten yet the story of the Wallaby match. I'd do anything I could, Spen, but I can't afford to risk being out by the school."

"I suppose not," said Dodd restlessly. "I didn't know you'd been in anything of the kind before, of course. Then it's all up!"

"The Isthmians may win?" suggested Cutts.

"About even chances, I think, from what I've seen of Kildare's lot," said Dodd. "But I don't want even chances. I thought I was betting on a dead cert., and that the men who laid their money against the Isthmians were simply chucking it away. Besides, I shall be off colour myself. I can't play my best with such a worry on my mind—ruin depending on the result of the match."

"I suppose not."

"And if I'm a bit rocky it may make all the difference with the two teams so equally matched," said Dodd.

Cutts's face was very thoughtful.

"Goodness knows I'd do anything I could," he said, after a pause. "I'd like to see Kildare licked, if only for leaving me out of the team. I had a lecture from him the other day, too, because he saw cigarette-ends in my fender. He's our head prefect, you know, and keeps an eye on us. I had to yarn that some fag must have been smoking in my study; but I know he didn't believe me, though he let it go at that. He'd report me to the Head as soon as look at me if he found me out for certain. I dislike him as much as I can anybody, and I'd give a great deal to do him in the eye over the Isthmian match. But I couldn't do anything inside

the team. If I played for St. Jim's I should have to play my best. But outside the team—" He paused.

Dodd's face lighted up.

"Could you work it, Gerald? Look here, I'll make it halves. You shall have a clear hundred out of my winnings if the Isthmians pull off the match."

"Good enough," said Cutts. "I'm entitled to that if I work it for you!"

"Done!" said Spencer Dodd.

"It won't be easy," said Cutts, pursing his lips, "and there isn't much time to work in. Day after to-morrow the match takes place. It may cost money, too."

Dodd grinned ruefully.

"There isn't much money going," he remarked. "But I could raise ten quid or so if you wanted something for expenses!"

"We'll see what's wanted," said Cutts. "If you like, I'll take the matter in hand. Of course, there's only one way."

"Blessed if I can see any way myself," said Dodd, "unless you can get some fellow in the team to let the ball through. What about their goalies?"

Cutts laughed.

"Langton would hit out at once if I suggested anything of that kind to him. No good thinking of tampering with the team. That's impossible."

"Then I don't see any way."

"There's only one way, as I said. Kildare has picked out the eleven best players in the school. If he had to fall back on his reserves, the team wouldn't be up to full strength. If some of them were crooked—"

"Crooked!" said Dodd, with a startled look.

"Yes; or missing on the day of the match!" said Cutts coolly.

Spencer Dodd drew a deep breath.

"By George, you're a cool hand, Gerald!"

"Then I dare say the team would go right down before the Isthmians," said Cutts coolly, "especially if anything happened to them at Abbotsford. That's a good distance from here, you see, and Kildare would have to depend on the reserves he had with him—and if they were out of the way somehow—or anybody from St. Jim's who happened to be on the ground. Even a few changes in the team at the last moment might make all the difference."

"I say, Gerald, that's risky."

"A hundred quids can't be won without some risk; but I shall be jolly careful, you may be sure," said Cutts tranquilly. "Even if anything should come out, you can be jolly certain that nothing will come out about me. I shall be careful of that. I don't answer for success, either; but I'll say this—that I'll do my level best."

Dodd rose to his feet.

"Do your best, Gerald—you can't do more than that."

And after Spencer Dodd was gone, Cutts sat for a long time in his study, with cigarette after cigarette between his lips—thinking it out. And when he had finished thinking it out, he strolled away to the Sixth Form passage, and looked into Knox's study, and remained for some time in confabulation with Knox, of the Sixth.

After that, he walked over to the New House, and called on Sefton, of the Sixth, and there was another confabulation.

The black sheep of St. Jim's had taken counsel together, and if Kildare had only known it, his prospects were not now nearly so bright for a victory at Abbotsford over the famous Isthmians.

CHAPTER 8.

Cutts Declines.

"LET'S have a look at the First!"

Tom Merry made the suggestion.

Morning lessons were over on Tuesday, and the Terrible Three would, as a rule, have gone down to footer practice. But interest in the great Isthmian match overshadowed all other interests now. Instead of going down to Little Side, the chums of the Shell strolled over to Big Side to watch the seniors at practice.

Kildare did not overwork his men—he was too good a skipper to risk making them "stale." But he kept them well at it. The First Eleven were all over the field now, passing and shooting, and several other fellows were at practice with them.

"Hallo, there's Knox!" said Monty Lowther. "He doesn't often honour the footer-ground with his giddy presence."

"I hear that he asked for a place in the eleven against the Isthmians," remarked Manners. "Kildare wasn't taking any."

"I should jolly well think not!" said Tom Merry. "Knox would be about as good as Skimpole, of the Shell!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"He's playing up now," said Lowther. "He's got a good speed on him, too. He's trying to stop Monteith."

Monteith was executing a run up the field with the ball, and Knox had rushed to stop him. Monteith was grinning as he ran; he had no doubt whatever of being able to beat Knox, who was not a keen footballer by any means. But Monteith's grin died away suddenly, as Knox rushed in and tripped him up.

There was a shout from all the fellows looking on at the practice play.

"Foul!"

The play stopped at once.

Monteith had fallen heavily to the ground, and he did not rise. Kildare was at his side in an instant.

"Monteith, are you hurt?" he exclaimed anxiously.

"Oh, my ankle!"

"Let's look at it!"

Kildare dropped anxiously on his knees to examine the New House prefect's hurt. Time had been when these two had been rivals, and on the worst of terms, but that was over. Now they were pulling together very cordially, with only one object in view—getting together a team that could beat the Isthmians. The thought of Monteith getting "crooked" sent a chill of dismay to Kildare's breast.

His face grew darker and graver as he looked at the injured ankle.

"It was a rotten foul trip," said Monteith faintly.

"I know it was," said Kildare savagely. "I saw it. What did you do it for, Knox, you fool?"

Knox's face was crimson.

"I—I'm sorry!" he stammered. "I—I acted without thinking! Of course, I never meant to foul Monteith."

The New House prefect groaned.

"You jolly well did it!"

"I'm sorry!"

"I can't understand you, Knox," said Kildare bitterly. "It was as foul a trip as I've ever seen! If we were playing a match, I should think you did it on purpose; there would be nothing else to think. But I suppose you couldn't have done it on purpose in practice play—unless you're dotty!"

"I've said I'm sorry," said Knox, muttering.

"Your sorrow won't mend Monteith's ankle!"

"I—I hope it's not serious."

"It is serious."

"It feels serious enough!" groaned Monteith. "You'll have to help me up, Kildare. I can't stand."

"Lean on me, old chap!"

Monteith staggered up, leaning heavily on Kildare's strong shoulder. The glances of all the senior eleven turned on Knox, and their looks were very dark. They supposed that Knox had lost his temper—never good—and tripped up the New House prefect without thinking; but it was a foul trip, and their looks showed what they thought of it.

The chief anxiety was whether Monteith was crooked.

As he limped off the footer-field, leaning heavily on Kildare, there was a feeling of dismay and doubt.

Monteith played outside-left for the First Eleven, and he was a brilliant winger. There was no man outside the team who could replace him anything like so well. If he could not play on the morrow, it meant a distinct weakness in the team.

Knox slunk off the field, glad to escape from the angry and scornful eyes of the other fellows.

There was a hiss as the School House senior passed the group of juniors who had been looking on at the practice.

Knox looked round fiercely.

"You cheeky cubs!" he exclaimed.

"Yah! Go home!" howled Jack Blake. "Foul! You're a disgrace to the House!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"You ought to be ragged!" yelled Monty Lowther.

Knox made a stride towards them, but the juniors drew together, and looked dangerous, and he changed his mind, and walked away towards the School House, followed by another loud and prolonged hiss.

"Looks bad for the First Eleven!" Tom Merry said, with a shake of the head. "Looks to me as if Knox laid himself out to do that—if one could think that he was really rotter enough to crook a fellow on purpose!"

"Bat Jove, that would be awfully wotten! He can't want us to lose the match to-morrow, deah boy."

"That would be rather thick," agreed Figgins. "Even Knox couldn't want a thing like that. And he can't expect to get Monteith's place—Kildare wouldn't put him in at any price. It was just beastly bad temper, I think."

"The rotter! I suppose that was it. But suppose Monteith is crooked?"

"One of the reserves will have to be put in then."

"They're not anywhere near Monteith's form."

"That would be rotten luck! Let's ask Kildare how he is."

The juniors waited for Kildare, who had gone into the New House with Monteith. They were as anxious about the matter as Kildare himself could be. They took the Isthmian match very much to heart, and there were few fellows there who wouldn't have given half a term's pocket-money to see St. Jim's victorious in the great match.

Kildare came out of the New House with a gloomy brow. His look was a plain enough verdict.

"Is it bad, Kildare?" asked Tom Merry.

The captain of St. Jim's nodded shortly.

"Very bad!"

"Monteith crooked for to-morrow?" asked Figgins breathlessly.

"Crooked for a week to come!" said Kildare.

"Oh, rotten!"

"Bai Jove!"

Kildare walked on, with a frowning brow. The juniors exchanged glances of dismay.

"What rotten luck!" growled Blake. "That's a chance in our favour gone. Monteith was a first-class winger—I'll say that, though he was a New House chap."

"Because he was a New House chap, you mean!" said Figgins warmly. "We play footer over on our side, you know!"

"Bow-wow!" said Blake.

"Look here, fathead—"

"Oh, cheese it!" said Monty Lowther. "No good having House rags now. Let's go and give Knox a groan!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

And they went and gave Knox, of the Sixth, a deep and most terrific groan under his study window, which relieved their feelings a little, and had the additional advantage of showing Knox, of the Sixth, what they thought of him.

After dinner, Kildare joined Cutts of the Fifth as they came out of the dining-room. The captain of St. Jim's had been thinking the matter over, and made up his mind.

"You've heard about Monteith, Cutts?" he said abruptly.

"Yes," said Cutts. "Very unlucky of Knox, wasn't it? He seems very cut-up about it."

Kildare frowned.

"Confound Knox! It was his beastly temper made him foul Monteith like that; and it wasn't even a match—simply practice play—"

"I don't think he meant—"

"Well, never mind Knox now. Monteith's crippled for some days; he won't be able to more than limp to-morrow. Would you care to play on the wing in his place?"

Cutts was silent.

Any other fellows at St. Jim's who had been asked that question would have replied "What-ho!" or "Yes, rather!" like a shot. But Gerald Cutts didn't. He assumed a very thoughtful expression.

Kildare looked at him in surprise as he did not answer.

"Don't you care to?" he exclaimed.

"Well, unless you specially want me, I'd rather keep out," said Cutts, with an air of great frankness.

"Why?"

"I don't feel up to the form of the Isthmians, for one thing," said Cutts. "The match is above my weight."

"I suppose I am a judge of that."

"Yes; but if I don't feel equal to it, I shouldn't turn out equal to it, you know," said Cutts. "Besides, to be quite plain, Knox is known to be a pal of mine, and if I took Monteith's place, there wouldn't be wanting a good many whispers that Knox had crooked him on purpose—or was put up to it by me."

Kildare coloured uncomfortably. As a matter of fact, that had already been whispered, and he knew it. Cutts grinned as he caught the expression on the face of the captain of St. Jim's.

"You see!" he said.

"I'm willing to put you in the team!" said Kildare.

Cutts shook his head.

"I'm awfully honoured, of course, but I'd rather not."

"Just as you like, of course," said Kildare stiffly. And he walked away without another word, and he did not mention the matter to Cutts again.

A cynical smile was on Cutts's lips as the captain of St. Jim's strode away. The thought in his mind was, that he had made all safe now. Whatever happened, how could anyone suspect Cutts of plotting against the success of St. Jim's, when he had refused a place in the eleven which had been offered to him? In the eleven, he could have

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found many ways of playing into the opponents' hands—but Cutts of the Fifth knew a trick worth two of that, as a matter of fact. He had already planned a safer method of gaining his ends, and he did not intend to take the risk of being suspected as a traitor in the field.

CHAPTER 9.

Figgys Capture.

THE next day there was great excitement in the school. The Isthmian match occupied all thoughts, to the exclusion of most other matters, as the masters found in the Form-rooms that morning.

Lines fell pretty thickly upon enthusiastic youths who persisted in discussing football in whispers, instead of devoting their whole and sole attention to Julius Caesar or Todhunter, as the case might be.

But lines did not worry the St. Jim's fellows that morning.

The Isthmian match was to be played in the afternoon, and if the First Eleven beat the Isthmians, St. Jim's would be covered with glory.

That thrilling thought was sufficient to compensate for any number of lines.

Abbotsford, where the match was to be played, was at a considerable distance from St. Jim's, and a great many fellows were unable to go; but among them were not included our friends Tom Merry & Co. of the School House, nor Figgins & Co. of the New House.

Those cheerful youths would have gone to see the match if it had been at twice the distance, and though the skies had been falling.

The School House juniors, indeed, had a prospect of a very comfortable transit to and from the match-ground at Abbotsford. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had made the arrangements for the brake.

Whether the amount subscribed by the School House juniors would pay for the hire of the brake was a question, but Arthur Augustus did not trouble to answer it just then. He simply gave the order for the brake by telephone, and the order was responded to with promptness and politeness. D'Arcy was known at the livery-stable in Rylcombe, and they were only too anxious to oblige the son of Lord Eastwood.

"It's all wight about the bwake," said Arthur Augustus to his chums after lessons that morning. "It's comin' immediately affah dinnah."

"The First Eleven are going by train," said Blake. "It's a gorgeous day for a drive in a brake, though. We shall have the best of it."

"And we shall get there quite as soon as the eleven, by entin' across country," said Arthur Augustus.

"I suppose Figgins & Co. are going?" Tom Merry remarked. "The rotters would try to raid our brake if they knew it was coming."

"We'll stop all that," said Blake. "We'll be at the gates to meet it when it arrives."

"Yeaas, the lot of us," said Arthur Augustus. "Figgins & Co. might twy to wush it, the same as they did mytwap the other day, you know. You can't be too careful. It would be feahful to get left on an occasion like this."

Figgins & Co., of course, had dinner in the New House. Immediately after that meal, Figgins & Co. came out of their House—quite an army of them. Figgins and Kerr and Wynn, Redfern and Owen and Lawrence, Thompson and Pratt and Diggs, and several more, all walked down to the gates together. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, looking out of the doorway of the School House, watched them go, and smiled.

"They're goin' oval to Abbotsford by twain, I suppose," he remarked, "or on Shanks's pony. If they walk they'll miss the first half, at least."

But Figgins & Co. had no intention of walking to Abbotsford.

They went down the lane towards Rylcombe, and instead of striking through the wood on the footpath to Abbotsford, they halted in the lane near the cross-roads.

There they waited.

They were halfway to the village, and far out of sight of St. Jim's.

They were under the leafless trees beside the road, and kept their eyes open in the direction of the village.

"We can't miss it," Figgins remarked. "There's only one way for a brake to get to St. Jim's from Rylcombe—and that's this road."

"The only way!" grinned Kerr.

"And it can't be long now," Redfern remarked. "By Jove! There it comes!"

"Good egg!"

In the distance, the big-brake, with two horses, could be seen moving out of the end of the village street past the Green Man.

It came bowling gaily along the lane.

"What about the driver?" asked Lawrence. "Are we going to take him?"

Figgins shook his head.

"No; I can drive a team of horses. A pair is all right for me."

"We don't want to get our necks broken, you know," Thompson of the Shell remarked.

Figgins snorted.

"Yours wouldn't be much loss," he replied, with great politeness. "But I tell you I can drive a pair."

"But the driver—"

"I don't suppose he'd drive for us. Besides, we want to send him with a message to Gussy. We don't want those unfortunate School House kids to be waiting all the afternoon for a blessed brake that's gone to Abbotsford."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Must be considerate, even to a giddy enemy," said Figgins generously. "Besides, I can drive first rate. And I like driving."

"Well, I wouldn't mind driving, if we came to that," said Owen.

"But we sha'n't come to that," said Figgins. "I'm driver to this party, and that's settled. Now, get out into the road and stop him."

The brake was close at hand now. Figgins & Co. spread themselves across the lane, and waved their hands to the driver.

"Halt!"

"Stop!"

"Stand and deliver!"

The driver of the brake had no choice about stopping. He would have run over half a dozen of the New House juniors if he hadn't.

He pulled the horses in, looking puzzled.

"What's the matter?" he asked, as the brake clattered to a halt.

Figgins made a sign to his followers, and half a dozen of them seized the horses' heads.

The driver could not have driven on them if he had wanted to.

"It's all right," said Figgins. "We've come to meet you, to save you the trouble of driving all the way to St. Jim's. That's all."

"But—"

"No buts. You just hand the brake over to us here."

"But you're not the young gentleman who ordered it," said the driver. "I have orders to hand it over to Master D'Arcy."

"Those orders are cancelled," explained Figgins.

"But who cancelled them, sir?"

"I do—now."

And the crowd of New House fellows grinned.

The driver took a tighter grip upon his reins. Six or seven fellows had clambered into the brake now.

"I must take this brake on to the school, young gentlemen."

"Impossible!"

"Rats!"

"Get down!"

"You're to hand it over to us," Figgins explained. "You can walk on to the school—a little exercise will do you good. Tell Master D'Arcy that we've borrowed his brake, and give him our kind regards—the kind regards of Figgins & Co."

"But I can't—"

"Yes, you can. Look here, we're going to have this brake. You can step down, or we shall chuck you down. Savvy?"

"But—"

"Collar him," said Figgins. "It's all right, driver—this is only one of our little games, and D'Arcy will understand. He won't blame you. Get down!"

"I'm not going to get down," said the driver belligerently. "I'm in charge of this here brake, and I'm going to 'and it over to Master D'Arcy, and to no one else—"

"Your mistake!" said Figgins. "Pitch him down."

Half a dozen pairs of hands were laid upon the driver. He realised that it was useless to struggle, and he was lifted out of his seat and dropped into the road.

"I protest against this," he said. "I shall have to report to Master D'Arcy exactly wot's appened."

Figgins chuckled.

"That's exactly what we want you to do," he said. "Walk on to St. Jim's. Tell Master D'Arcy we're sorry for him, you know, but we really couldn't stop, as we were in a hurry to get to Abbotsford. Don't forget to give him the kind regards of Figgins & Co.; and you may mention that the New House is cock-house of St. Jim's. So-long! Tumble in, you kids; all aboard!"

And the grinning juniors crowded into the brake, and

Figgins led the horses round, and then mounted to the driver's seat. The unfortunate driver stood looking on helplessly.

Figgins cracked his whip, and the brake rolled off; and the dispossessed driver started to walk the rest of the distance to the school, in a state of great astonishment and dismay.

CHAPTER 10.

Full Speed Ahead!

KILDARE and the First Eleven had started, in great spirits.

Monteith, who was limping painfully that day, had remained behind, too badly crocked even to go with the team to look on at the match.

Kildare had put in Locke, of the Fifth, as outside-left in place of the New House prefect; and although the change was for the worse; Locke was a good and reliable player, and Kildare hoped for the best.

The team were in great form, and very hopeful.

Every member was determined to play the game of his life, in the effort to beat the famous Isthmians.

Excepting for the crocking of Monteith, Kildare had had great good luck with his team, and he knew that it was the finest eleven he had ever led to conflict on the Soccer ground.

He had wished to have Cutts in the place of the crocked winger; and yet, somehow, he was glad that Cutts had declined. It was very unlike Kildare to be distrustful or suspicious; but he could not quite trust Cutts. He had been acting against his instinctive distrust when he asked Cutts to play; and the Fifth-Former's refusal was a relief to him to some extent.

Two reserves accompanied the team—Lascelles and Byrne, of the Sixth. A good many fellows had left St. Jim's on foot or on bikes to follow the eleven.

Tom Merry & Co. were waiting outside the school gates for their brake. It was past the time when the brake should have arrived, and it was not in sight yet.

Arthur Augustus was growing a little uneasy.

"It's wathah wotten, the bwake bein' late," he said. "I told them specially on the telephone not to be late."

"Blow them!" growled Blake. "We shall miss the kick-off if we don't get started. If it doesn't come soon I shall buzz off to the railway-station."

"It can't be long now," said Tom Merry, looking at his watch. "If Figgys was about anywhere, I should think it was some blessed New House trick. But they're gone."

"They've been gone half an hour," said Wally—D'Arcy minor, of the Third.

"Hallo! Here comes somebody."

"Bai Jove! That's a man from the livewy-stables—I know him! Haven't you brought the bwake along, Johnson?" exclaimed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

It was the driver. He shook his head.

"I'm sorry, sir. I was half-way 'ere, when I was surrounded by a lot of young fellows, and they 'ave collared the brake, sir!"

"What!" yelled the School House juniors.

"I couldn't stop 'em, sir—there was fifteen or sixteen of 'em," said the driver apologetically. "I thought I'd come and tell you, sir, afore goin' to the police."

"Oh, wreat Scott!"

"Figgins, of course."

"The rotters!"

"The wasters!"

"Dished!"

"Done!"

"Do you know who they were, dwivah?" asked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, trying to calm himself. "Did they send any message?"

"Yessir! Kind regards from Figgins & Co. was wot they said."

The School House juniors exchanged sickly looks.

"The uttah wottahs!" murmured Arthur Augustus. "They must have got on to it somehow. I don't know how—I kept it awfully dark."

Blake grunted.

"Yes; we know how you keep things dark, you ass—"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Well, we're done," said Tom Merry glumly. "Figgins & Co. have got the brake—and we've lost the train for Abbotsford."

"Oh, cwumbs!"

"Rotten!"

"We shall have to bike it," said Kangaroo. "No good crying over spilt milk. Let's get the bikes out and scorch for it."

Tom Merry's eyes gleamed.

"By Jove—there's a chance! We may be able to head them off before they get to Abbotsford. The brake will have to follow the road—but we can get along the Wayland-bridle-

path on the bikes. We may head them off if we bike like steam."

"Bai Jove! Yaas!"

"Sure, and we'll thry!" exclaimed Reilly.

"Buck up!"

"Wot about the brake, sir?" said the driver. "Wot am I to do?"

"That's all wight—blow the bwake—do nothing! Come on, deah boys!"

There was a hurried rush for the bicycle-shed. The juniors dragged out their machines, and rushed them into the road and mounted.

As Tom Merry had said, there was just a chance of heading off the brake—if they rode like the wind.

The brake, loaded with fifteen or sixteen juniors, would not, of course, make the same speed as scorching cyclists; and though Figgins had a long start, there was a short cut open to cyclists which was closed to vehicles.

There was a chance yet—and the School House fellows jumped at it.

Even the Isthmian match was of less importance, in the eyes of the juniors, than beating Figgins & Co., and recovering the captured brake.

Strung out along the road, according to their speed and pedalling powers, the School House juniors raced away.

There were twenty-five of them in all. Shell fellows and Fourth and Third-Formers, enough, as Blake remarked, to eat Figgins & Co., if they came to close quarters with them.

Ahead of the party went Blake and Tom Merry and Kangaroo, making the biggest speed.

But close behind them came Herries and Dig and D'Arcy, and Reilly and Lowther and Manners, and further on came Ray and Kerruish and Vavasour, and the rest were strung out behind at various distances.

Faster and faster they rode.

It was a keen, cold winter's afternoon—sunny and sharp and dry—excellent weather for a hard r.d.

The ground fairly flew under the flashing wheels.

They turned into the Wayland-bridle-path, and rode on fast over fallen leaves, under the bare branches of trees, ringing their bells to warn pedestrians to get aside in time.

But the-bridle-path was lonely enough, and they had it to themselves most of the way.

The-bridle-path cut off many miles of the distance, and when at last they came out on the white high-road beyond Wayland, there was a good chance that they were ahead of the brake.

Tom Merry paused, and looked up and down the long, white road, but he could not see a sign of the brake in either direction.

A pedlar was resting and smoking a black pipe on a stile a little further on, and Tom Merry rode up to him for information.

"Have you seen a brako pass this way, going towards Abbotsford?" he asked.

"No, sir."

"Been here long?"

"'Bout an hour."

"Oh, thanks!"

Tom Merry rejoined his comrades, his eyes dancing. If the brake had not passed during the last hour, certainly it had not passed at all.

"We've got 'em," said Tom gleefully. "They haven't passed. I thought we should cut them off from Abbotsford, and we've done it."

"Hurrah!"

"Bwavo!"

"Get off the bikes, and get them out of sight," said Tom quickly. "If they spot us, they may turn down a side road and give us a stern chase."

"Yaas, wathah!"

The juniors had had plenty of experience as Boy Scouts, and they were not long in getting into cover.

The bikes were stacked behind a hedge, and the School House crowd ensconced themselves in the hedges and trees on either side of the road.

The last stragglers of the cyclist party had arrived now, and they joined in the ambush, and the School House army lay very low—waiting.

They had not long to wait.

The last straggler had scarcely settled in his place in cover, when Tom Merry, looking cautiously through a gap in the hedge, spotted the brake in the distance.

"Here she comes!"

"Oh, good!"

"Keep in cover!"

Figgins was driving, and the horses were coming along at a spanking rate. The brake behind Figgins was crowded with New House juniors, chatting and laughing, and evidently thinking of anything but an ambush on the road ahead.

"Collar the horses when I give the signal!" chuckled Tom.

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Merry. "Jump at their heads and collar them! Figgy will have to stop."

They waited anxiously.

The brake came up, and there was a sudden whistle from Tom Merry, and the next moment the road in front of the brake was black with juniors.

Figgins uttered a startled exclamation.

"Halt!" roared Tom Merry.

He was hanging on to the bit of the horse the next moment.

Almost before Figgins & Co. knew what was happening, the brake was dragged to a halt, and the School House fellows were clambering into it on all sides.

CHAPTER 11.

Turning the Tables.

"BUCK up!" roared Figgins.
"Sock it into 'em!" yelled Blake.
"Buck up, New House!"

"Hurrah!"

"Give the beggars socks!"

"Pile in, deah boys!"

There was a terrific struggle in the halted brake.

The New House juniors, outnumbered as they were, had the advantage of position, and they put up a great fight.

Figgins had made a desperate effort to drive on, but, with half a dozen fellows clinging to the horses' heads, that was difficult. And some of the assailants had rolled big stones before the wheels of the brake to keep it halted. The brake could not move.

The matter had to be fought out, and the School House party had big odds on their side. But Figgins & Co. did their best.

The pedlar on the stile, and two or three passers, stopped to stare at the extraordinary sight of a crowd of schoolboys struggling for the possession of the brake.

But the St. Jim's fellows did not heed them.

They fought desperately for the mastery.

There was a loud bump in the road as Figgins was dragged from his seat by two or three pairs of hands, and dropped out of the brake.

Kerr and Wynn soon joined him in the road, and Redfern and Lawrence followed. And a number of School House juniors sat upon them, while their hands were tied with pocket-handkerchiefs, or boot-laces, or neckties, or whatever came to hand.

And when the leaders of the New House were once secured, the rank and file had little chance against the overwhelming odds of the School House.

The brake was cleared at last, the last of the defenders being pitched out into the road.

Then there was a yell of triumph:

"School House wins!"

"Hurrah!"

"Who's cock-house at St. Jim's?"

"School House! School House!"

"Hurrah!"

"Ow! You beasts!"

gasped Figgins. "Let my hands loose, and I'll wipe up the road with the whole giddy crowd of you!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Not just now, Figgy."

"This is where you get it in the neck!"

"Yaas, wathah, Figgy!"

Tom Merry & Co. had won a complete victory. The New House party was beaten and scattered, and the leaders were helpless prisoners in the hands of the victors.

Figgins & Co. simply writhed with rage.

They had succeeded so completely in carrying off the

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School House brake that it was especially exasperating to have the tables turned upon them like this.

"Well, we've got the giddy brake again," said Blake breathlessly. "Now, what shall we do with these blessed burglars? Chuck them into the ditch?"

"That would spoil their clobber, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy thoughtfully. "I believe in tweatin' a chap's clobber with respect."

"A wash would do them good," grinned Lowther. "They look rather dusty."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"George Figgins," said Tom Merry solemnly, "have you anything to say why sentence should not be passed on you?"

"Gerroff my chest!" gasped Figgins.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"That's not a reason. Have you anything—"

"Go and eat coke!"

Tom Merry laughed.

"Figgy, old man, you're beaten to the wide! If you like to make it pax, and confess that the School House is cock-house, we'll give you a free ride in the brake as far as Abbotsford."

"Yaas; that's a weally good offah."

Figgins panted.

"I'll see you hanged first!"

"Weally, Figgy, you know—"

"New House is cock-house! Go and eat coke!"

"I say, we must be getting on, or we shall be late for the match!" said Kangaroo. "Let's leave those bounders to meditate on their sins. Come on! There's none too much room in the brake for all of us."

"Yaas; that's so! Tumble in!"

"What about the bikes?" said Herries. "There's no room for them in the brake."

Tom Merry considered.

"No time to take 'em anywhere. I'll tell you what! We'll lend 'em to the New House bounders, or they'll be stranded. We don't want them to miss the match."

"No feah!"

"You hear, Figgy? We'll lend you a bike apiece."

"Well, that's decent of you!" said Figgins, brightening up. "You wouldn't have got that brake off us if you hadn't been twenty-five to sixteen."

"Wats!"

"Oh, we should have licked you anyway!" said Tom airily.

"Try again with even numbers!" bawled Redfern.

"No time," grinned Tom Merry. "But we'll leave you a bike apiece—on condition, of course, that you make it pax for the day. No more ambushes."

Figgins nodded.

"That's understood," he said. "It's pax."

"You all say the same?"

"Yes; pax!" growled the defeated party.

"All serene. Leave them a bike each, you chaps, and stick the others on the brake somewhere. We can't leave 'em here."

And that was done.

Figgins & Co., very dusty and dishevelled, remained behind as the brake rolled on, laden with grinning and triumphant School House juniors. But they had the bicycles, and that was some comfort.

They would not have to miss seeing the match after all, as would certainly have happened if they had been stranded there on foot. For which Figgins & Co. were duly grateful.

Tom Merry and his followers were in great spirits as they rolled on in the brake, Jack Blake driving. Arthur Augustus had offered to take charge of the horses, as the best driver

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Gran



Monteith's grin died away, as Knox rushed in and tripped him up. There was a shout from all the fellows looking on. "Foul!" Monteith fell heavily to the ground, and did not move! (See Chapter 7.)

in the party, an offer that Blake declined, with a snort. As Arthur Augustus had ordered the brake, he might have been supposed to possess some claim to drive; but Blake did not seem to see it in that light. At all events, Blake drove, and he took the brake along at a spanking rate.

It was a long journey to Abbotsford, and the brake had to keep up a good speed to get there in time for the match.

But it was an enjoyable drive—all the more enjoyable because the New House juniors had been defeated in the struggle for the brake.

Abbotsford came in sight at last, and Blake drove in the direction of the Ramblers' Football Ground, which was placed at the service of the Isthmians for that afternoon's match.

"It's time for the kick-off," said Tom Merry, consulting his watch.

"Bai Jove! We shall be late!"

"Not started yet," said Kangaroo, standing upon the seat, whence he could see over the palings of the football ground.

"No sign of them yet."

"Then they're late starting," said Tom Merry. "All the better for us. Hallo, here comes Figgins on my bike!"

Figgins came whizzing up to the gate of the Ramblers' ground as the brake halted.

"Started?" he called out.

"Not yet."

"Good luck!"

"Bai Jove! I wondah what's delayed them?" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Surely Kildare can't have been late on the ground?"

"Not likely."

"We'll see soon," said Monty Lowther. "I suppose Gussy

is going to stay out here and look after the brake, as he ordered it?"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy turned his eyeglass upon the humorist of the Shell, with a withering look.

"I shall certainly not do anythin' of the kind, Lowther, you ass!"

"We can get a man to mind it!" said Tom Merry, laughing. "Clear off, you chaps! They may be kicking off any minute now!"

And, a man having been found to mind the brake, the School House juniors trooped into the football enclosure.

CHAPTER 12.

Cutts Does His Best!

AND why was the kick-off late?

It was very seldom that Kildare of St. Jim's was late in arriving upon a footer-ground; he was punctuality itself as a rule.

But misfortune was dogging the steps of the St. Jim's First Eleven.

The crocking of Monteith had been the first piece of ill-luck. And, as Shakespeare has remarked, when sorrows come they come not single spies, but in battalions.

The First Eleven had taken the local train at Rylcombe for Wayland Junction, where they had to change for Abbotsford.

They had a quarter of an hour to wait at the junction for their train, which was an express, and was to land them at Abbotsford twenty minutes before the time fixed for the kick-off.

The eleven players, two reserves, and two or three other

fellows who were with them, spread about the platform to kill the quarter of an hour. Gerald Cutts of the Fifth was among them. Although he had declined a place in the First Eleven, Cutts had declared that he wouldn't miss the match for anything, and he had come with Kildare's party.

A quarter of an hour at a station like Wayland was a horrible bore, as Cutts remarked, and the other fellows agreed with him.

Kildare, who was talking footer with Darrel and Rushden, happened to look round as Cutts and four or five of the team were sauntering away towards the exit.

"Where are you fellows off to?" called out Kildare.

"Oh, only going for a stroll round!" said Cutts. "No good sticking here for a quarter of an hour!"

"Don't be late for the train, then!"

"That's all right; we shall only be outside the station," said Baker.

"All right!"

And Cutts and his companions strolled off the platform, and left the station and went into the street.

"Awful hole to be hung up in, this place!" said Cutts, yawning. "How are we going to get through fifteen minutes?"

"It's only thirteen minutes now," said Buzzard of the Fifth, looking at his watch.

Cutts laughed.

"Let's have a run round the town in a taxi-cab," he suggested. "It will fill up the time."

"Waste of money," said Baker.

"Oh, I'm standing treat!"

"Well, I don't mind."

"May as well do that as anything," assented Buzzard. "Must be ripping to be rolling in filthy lucre like you, Cutts!"

"Well, yes, it is rather convenient," agreed Cutts.

Wayland town had been waking up very much of late, and, among other modern improvements, as well as a first-class hotel and a picture palace and an Empire, Wayland was the proud possessor of two taxi-cabs. Both the taxis were outside the station now, and the driver of one of them was already coming towards Cutts.

He was a squat individual, with a face bleared by strong drink, and he was an old acquaintance of Gerald Cutts. More than once he had driven the blackguard of the Fifth home to St. Jim's at a late hour, after a "night out," and had helped him over the school wall when the hour of midnight was chiming out from the clock-tower.

"Keb, sir?" he said.

"Yes," said Cutts. "Pile in, you chaps!"

"Rather a close fit for the lot of us," said Webb.

"Oh, that's alright, sir!" said the driver. "That's alright!"

"Oh, there's heaps of room!" said Cutts. "Give us a run round at top speed, driver, and get us back to the station in twelve minutes!"

"Yessir!"

"Better say ten minutes to make sure," said the cautious Baker. "We don't want to run any risks with the Abbotsford train, Cutts. There isn't another for an hour, and if we lost the train we should be dished!"

The Fifth-Former nodded.

"Right-ho!" he said. "Ten minutes, driver!"

"Yessir!"

The footballers crowded into the taxi. Besides Cutts, there were Baker, Webb, Buzzard, and Gray. The driver put his vehicle in motion and started.

"Right up the road, and a good speed," Cutts directed. "Turn back at half-time, and then there won't be any doubt of getting back in time for the train!"

"Yessir!"

The cab buzzed away down the High Street of Wayland, and out into the high-road beyond.

It was an enjoyable enough drive, on a fine, sunny afternoon, and all the fellows with Cutts agreed that it was very decent of the dandy of the Fifth to "stand" them that treat to kill time while waiting for the train.

The taxi dashed on, faster and faster as soon as they were outside the town.

The long, white road stretched before them, lined with leafless trees.

"By Jove, this is ripping!" said Webb.

"Mustn't be late, though," said Baker, taking out his watch after a time. "By Jove! We've overdone it, Cutts!"

Cutts consulted his watch.

"What do you make it, Baker?"

"A quarter to two."

"Train goes at one-fifty," said Cutts. "That's ten to two. We've got five minutes to get back. That's ample!"

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"Well, tell him to turn round," said Baker.

"Right you are!"

Cutts was very leisurely in his movements, and all the time the taxi was speeding on at a rate that would have caused interference, if there had been a policeman to observe it on the lonely country road. They were now more than three miles out of Wayland, and in the heart of the country.

Cutts tapped on the glass, but the driver did not seem to hear. Cutts tapped again and again.

"What's the matter with the man?" he muttered. "He seems to be deaf."

"Hang it all, this won't do!" exclaimed Baker, in alarm. "The silly idiot—he will make us lose the train! I'll jolly well make him hear!"

He knocked on the glass savagely, and the driver glanced round.

"Stop!" roared Baker.

The taxi slackened down at last.

"What is it, sir?" asked the driver, looking round at the door which Cutts had opened.

"Get back!" said Cutts. "Sharp's the word!"

"You've only three minutes left to catch the train!" exclaimed Baker angrily. "If you lose it, there will be a row!"

"We can't catch it in the time!" exclaimed Buzzard. "Great Scott! What will Kildare say?"

"We must catch it," said Baker desperately. "Driver, a half-quid over if you catch it! Drive like thunder!"

"Yessir!"

The cab swung round, and raced back in the direction of Wayland town.

The driver was certainly putting on speed now, and he was doing the very best of which his engine was capable.

There was not much risk in doing that, for a much more powerful motor could not possibly have reached the station in time for the train.

"I say, Kildare will be frightfully wild about this!" said Buzzard nervously.

Cutts looked very contrite.

"I'm sorry," he said. "I never thought——"

"Trains are sometimes late at Wayland," said Gray hopefully.

"Not the expresses," said Baker.

"By Jove, no!"

"Oh, it's rotten!" Kildare will be as mad as a hatter!"

"Naturally," said Webb. "I shall be as mad as a hatter, too, if we miss the train. We were silly asses to come out in this rotten taxi at all!"

"Silly chumps!" agreed Cutts.

"We must do it!" growled Baker. "We're fairly flying. Hallo! Did any of you see what was on that milestone?"

"One mile to Wayland," said Gray.

"Another mile! My hat!"

"Dished!" groaned Buzzard. "It's turned ten to two now!"

"I think your ticker's a bit fast," said Cutts.

"It's right by the clock in Wayland Station."

"Then we're dished!"

"What rotten luck!"

"Faster!" yelled Baker, hammering on the glass.

"He can't go faster," said Cutts. "He'd get pulled up now if a bobby saw him!"

"He's slackening!" growled Baker.

"Must slacken, now we're getting into the town. Dash it all, Baker, even if we've lost the train, we don't want a fatality!" said Cutts.

"Lost the train! I suppose we have!"

"Oh, rotten!"

The taxi snorted into Wayland. The hour was striking from the town church.

"Two o'clock!" said Baker, with a groan.

"Two! May as well crawl as race now!" said Buzzard. "We're done! What on earth will Kildare do now?"

And the footballers looked at one another in utter dismay.

They had lost the train, and there was no other for an hour. And that meant that they were out of the Isthmian match—four of the players of the First Eleven—out of the Isthmian match!

Utter dismay was in the faces of the footballers at last, when the taxi-cab drew up outside the station. They did not observe the curious glance that passed between Cutts, of the Fifth, and the taxi-driver, and had not the least suspicion that Cutts paid the man a sovereign in addition to his fare registered on the taximeter. Not the slightest suspicion entered their minds that they had been deliberately "done" by the astute rascal of the Fifth.

CHAPTER 13.

Hard Cheese.

KILDARE'S handsome face grew anxious as the time for the train drew near, and Cutts and his companions had not returned to the station.

"Whether Cutts came back or not did not matter; but four members of the team were with him, and whether they came back or not mattered very much.

"Only a minute to the train now!" Darrel remarked uneasily. "Where can those asses have got to?"

"I'll take a look outside," said Rushden.

He hurried out of the station.

The express was coming in now. It had stopped by the platform when Rushden came hurrying back, with a dismayed face.

"Where are they?" exclaimed Kildare.

The Sixth-Former shook his head.

"They're not in sight."

"Not in sight!" Kildare gritted his teeth. "The silly fools! Then they've lost the train!"

"The awful asses!" said Lefevre, of the Fifth. "That's what I say—silly asses!"

Kildare hesitated, hardly knowing what to do.

To go on, leaving four members of his team behind, was not pleasant. But to wait for them was impossible.

There was not another train for an hour, and that meant that the match would have to be abandoned. An hour later in starting would leave too little daylight for the match to be played at all at that season of the year.

"Great Scott!" said Darrel. "What are we going to do, Kildare?"

Kildare set his lips.

"We must go on!" he said.

"Without them?"

"We must—as they're not here. I'll talk to them pretty

but they were not of the stuff to make up the First Eleven. As a last resource, Kildare would have to play a couple of them, but it meant giving the match away. With the team up to its full strength, they had only even chances of beating the Isthmians.

"Cutts would have been useful," said Darrel, after a pause.

Kildare nodded.

"I wonder——" he said slowly.

"Well?"

"I suppose a good many of the juniors will be over there to see the match," the captain of St. Jim's said slowly.

"If Tom Merry were there——"

"By Jove!" said Darrel, his face brightening up. "If Merry were there, you could put him in. He's only a junior, but he's hot stuff. I've watched him play."

"And Figgins, of the Fourth," said Rushden.

"And Wynn, if we wanted a goalkeeper," said Lefevre. "That's what I say—young Wynn is a top-notch goalkeeper!"

"We've got Langton," said Kildare. "I wish Langton had been lost instead of one of the others. Excuse me, Lang, old chap!"

Langton smiled.

"I understand," he said. "You could replace me. Fatty Wynn is splendid in goal, though he's only a junior. But we're not sure Wynn will be there."

"Oh, he'll be there, with the rest of the gang!" said Lascelles, with a laugh. "Those young rascals won't miss the match!"

"I hope they'll be there," said Kildare.

"Then you'll play some juniors?"

"If they're there—certainly!"

Darrel nodded.

"I think you can't do better," he said. "Size and age don't count for everything. We had the best of the Sixth

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plainly afterwards," said the captain of St. Jim's savagely. "Get in!"

"Stand clear there!" sang out the guard.

There was no time for delay.

Kildare and his companions crowded into the train, and the doors were slammed. There was still no sign of the missing footballers.

The express ran out of the station. Kildare kept his eyes on the platform till it was out of sight—still no sign of the four fellows.

The captain of St. Jim's settled back into his seat with a darkly frowning brow.

It was a heavy and unexpected blow—a piece of ill-luck that could not have been guarded against, and was quite crushing.

The two right-wingers of the team, the right-half, and the left-back, were gone; and Kildare had two reserves to fill four places!

No wonder his face was dark and grim.

"There will be a good many fellows on the ground, you know," Langton remarked comfortingly.

"Most of them will get there after the kick-off," said Kildare. "It's a long way."

"True."

"And we've got the pick of the Upper Forms," said the captain of St. Jim's. "Oh, this is too rotten! Who'd have thought of such a thing? Fancy four fellows not having the sense to get back in time to catch the train. Where on earth can they have gone to? Not that that matters now. I'd make Cutts play, only he's gone with them. It's too rotten!"

"What's going to be done, then?" asked Langton.

Kildare reflected.

"I can put Lascelles in at back, and Bryne at half," he said. "That leaves us without inside or outside-right."

There was a grim silence.

There were two or three seniors accompanying the party,

and the Fifth in the team and the reserves. As a matter of absolute fact, I don't think the team would be any the worse for two or three of the Shell or Fourth in it—juniors like Merry and Figgins."

"That's what I was thinking. I hope they'll be there."

Kildare's face was dark and thoughtful during the journey to Abbotsford.

The blow that had fallen upon him in the loss of four members of his team, was almost crushing, and even if he resorted to the desperate resource of playing juniors to fill up the vacancies, he was not sure of finding the juniors he wanted on the footer-ground at Abbotsford.

He could only wait and hope.

The express dashed along, and the leafless countryside raced past the train; but it seemed slow to the anxious captain of St. Jim's.

Abbotsford at last!

The express came to a halt, and the St. Jim's footballers swarmed out of the train, and took their bags and made for the exit.

Spencer Dodd was on the platform, and he greeted Kildare with a handshake.

"I thought I'd come and meet you, and trot with you to the ground," he remarked.

"Good of you!" said Kildare.

"But isn't my cousin with you?" asked Dodd, looking round. "I understood Gerald to say that he was coming along with the team, to see the match."

"He lost the connection at Wayland," said Kildare.

"Lucky it wasn't a member of your team lost it, at all events," remarked Dodd, with a smile.

"The worst of it is, that four members of the team went off with him, and lost the train," said Kildare.

"Well, that was rotten luck!"

And Spencer Dodd looked quite concerned, though there was a peculiar gleam in his narrow eyes that belied the expression on his face.

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They left the station together.

"But, of course, you've got reserves with you?" the Isthmian remarked.

"Only two," said Kildare. "Of course, we never expected to want any."

"But you won't play men short?"

"There are some fellows here who can play at a pinch; but I hope to find some of our fellows on the ground," said Kildare.

"Good players—eh?"

"Yes."

Spencer Dodd smiled.

"Pity you didn't bring them along as reserves," he remarked.

"I am thinking of the juniors," said Kildare. "If they're on the ground, there are two or three of our juniors who are very good stuff."

The Isthmian whistled.

"You're thinking of playing juniors against the Isthmians?" he ejaculated.

"Not from choice; but I must play eleven."

"Yes, yes; of course! It's hard lines." But Spencer Dodd's eyes were dancing. "I'm sure, I wish you luck, my dear fellow!"

"Hallo! What's that row?" exclaimed Kildare, looking round.

A big, hulking man in a spotted neckerchief had lurched into Langton, in a deliberately aggressive manner, and as the Sixth-Former pushed him off, the rough burst into a torrent of abuse. Langton clenched his fists angrily, but Kildare called out to him:

"No rows now, Langton!"

Langton choked back his wrath.

"All right, Kildare; I won't touch him!"

"But I'll touch you, you young 'ound!" roared the ruffian. "I'll teach you to push a honest, 'ard-workin' man off the pavement!"

He rushed at Langton, and the Sixth-Former had no choice but to put up his hands. In a moment they had closed and were struggling furiously.

Kildare ran back anxiously.

"Separate them!" he exclaimed. "Bump that scoundrel hard!"

"Yes, rather!"

The two combatants came to the ground with a heavy bump, the ruffian on top. Langton uttered a cry of agony.

"Drag him off!" shouted Kildare.

Many hands seized the ruffian, and he was whirled off Langton, and sent spinning into the road. He picked himself up and fled, and vanished round the nearest corner, while the St. Jim's fellows gathered anxiously round Langton.

"What's the matter, Lang, old chap?" asked Kildare breathlessly. "Don't say you're hurt."

Langton groaned.

"My ankle! That villain kicked me on the ankle! Oh, oh! I—I believe it's sprained!"

"Oh, crumbs!" said Lefevre. "What luck!"

Langton tried to rise, but fell back with a groan. His foot hung uselessly; he could not move it—and the effort cost him fearful pain.

Kildare ground his teeth.

It was ill-luck upon ill-luck—misfortune piled upon misfortune. Langton was crocked—he could not even leave the spot without assistance, let alone keep goal for the St. Jim's team in twenty minutes' time. Kildare felt for Langton's suffering, but he was thinking still more of the prospects of the team.

"Oh, this is too much!" he exclaimed, in utter exasperation.

"That villain has crocked me on purpose," groaned Langton. "I suppose he was drunk! I've never seen the man before that I know of."

Some of the footballers looked round vengefully; but the ruffian had vanished from sight.

"Well, this is bad luck!" said Spencer Dodd. "This chap in your team?"

"Our goalkeeper," said Kildare heavily.

"I must say I'm sorry! What a rotten thing to happen! I say, you'd better call a cab and have him taken to a doctor at once. A thing like that wants seeing to."

"Yes, yes—that's so."

Kildare signed to a cabman outside the station, and the vehicle came up.

"You fellows get on to the ground, and I'll join you as soon as I've seen Langton all right," he said.

"Right-ho, Kildare!"

Kildare helped Langton into the cab, and entered with him. The rest of the team went on with Spencer Dodd to the Ramblers' ground. Arrived there, they waited anxiously for Kildare.

The captain of St. Jim's was ten minutes after them. He

was greeted warmly and sympathetically by Cartright, the Isthmian's captain, when he arrived.

"I hear you've had bad luck," said Cartright, who had heard what had happened, from the other fellows. "How's your man?"

"Crocked," said Kildare, as cheerfully as he could—which was not very cheerful. "He's got to be taken back to St. Jim's in charge of an attendant."

"Beastly luck!" said Cartright.

"Yes, you're right."

"I hear that some of your men have been left behind, through losing a train or something, too," the Isthmian captain remarked. "You seem to have had bad luck all the way. Can you play the match?"

"Yes, we shall play all right."

"Good!"

"It's time for the kick-off," suggested Spencer Dodd, looking at his watch.

Cartright glanced doubtfully at Kildare.

"You fellows ready?" he asked.

"The fact is, if you don't mind giving us a bit of grace," said Kildare. "I want to get some St. Jim's chaps to fill the vacancies, of course, and they haven't arrived on the ground yet. I fancy they won't be long."

Cartright nodded cordially.

"Quite so!" he said. "Take as long as you like, of course—so long, that is, as we have time enough left for the match before dark. No good starting if we can't play it out to a finish."

"That's all right. Say a quarter of an hour, then," said Kildare. "By that time I'll have made up the team to play—one way or another."

"Good!"

And that was how the kick-off came to be late—and the ball was not yet in play when Tom Merry & Co.—followed by Figgins & Co. on the bicycles—arrived on the ground to see the great Isthmian match.

CHAPTER 14.

Three in Luck!

TOM MERRY & Co. came swarming in at the gates of the Ramblers' enclosure.

The brake-load of juniors had arrived in great spirits, and as fresh as paint.

The New House fellows were close behind them, and they were puffing a little, and looked considerably dusty, after the hard cycle ride.

Not all the New House cyclists had come in yet; but Figgins & Co. and Redfern and Owen and Lawrence, had arrived, and they came into the enclosure with the School House fellows. Rags and rows were over for the day now; in the presence of the enemy, so to speak, School House and New House were as one. They were willing to forget their own rivalry, and join in loud cheers for the St. Jim's First Eleven, which represented both Houses at the old School.

"Queer thing they haven't kicked off!" said Tom Merry. "It's nearly ten minutes past the time. Hasn't the team got in yet?"

"It's got in," said Figgins. "There's old Kildare, over there by the pavilion, talking to Cutts's cousin."

"Yaas, bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "They're heah—but they seem to be waitin' for somethin'."

"For us, perhaps!" suggested Monty Lowther solemnly. "Perhaps they don't feel quite up to playing, without the encouragement of our noble presence."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Hallo! Here comes old Darrel!"

"Hallo, Darrel, what are you waiting for?"

Darrel, of the Sixth came up to the group of juniors, with relief in his face. He had spotted them the moment they entered the enclosure.

"Tom Merry here?" he asked. "And Wynn and Noble?"

"Here we are!" said Tom Merry.

"Large as life," said Fatty Wynn.

"Or a little larger," remarked Monty Lowther, with a glance at Fatty Wynn's extremely ample proportions.

"What's wanted?" asked Kangaroo.

"You three are," said Darrel. "Kildare wants to speak to you."

"Right-ho!"

"Have you got any footer fogs with you. I suppose not!" said Darrel.

"No," said Tom Merry, in surprise; "we came over here to watch. You don't mean to say—"

"Come along," said Darrel shortly. "Follow me."

"Lead on, Macduff!" said Kangaroo.

And the three juniors followed Darrel, considerably surprised, and wondering what Kildare could possibly want with them.

They left their comrades in a state of considerable surprise, too.

"Anything happened to the team, I wonder?" said Figgins. "I don't see all the fellows over there. Some of the New House players are not in sight—Gray and Webb and Baker—and Buzzard of the Fifth isn't there, either."

"Queer!" said Jack Blake. "But they can't want those kids to play."

"Langton's not there, either," said Kerr.

"Bai Jove! But if they want weewuits, they would have asked me," said Arthur Augustus, with a shake of the head. "I should have been quite willin' to play for the First Eleven."

"Go hon!" remarked Lowther.

"If they want a goalie, they can't beat Fatty Wynn," Kerr observed. "He's really as good as Langton, you know, only the Sixth can't see it, because he's in the Fourth Form."

"Just so," agreed Figgins; "that's a fact."

"But Kildare can't be going to play juniors—"

"Something seems to have happened—"

"We shall see soon," remarked Herries.

And they did see soon.

Tom Merry and Kangaroo and Fatty Wynn followed Darrel through the crowd, and joined Kildare outside the pavilion. Kildare looked them over quickly.

"You kids feeling fit?" he asked.

"Fit as fiddles," said Tom Merry. "What's wanted?"

"We've had some bad luck—Langton got into a row with a rough, and he's crooked. I want Wynn to keep goal," said Kildare.

Fatty Wynn jumped.

"Keep goal—for the First Eleven!" he exclaimed, his round eyes dancing. The satisfaction and enthusiasm in his fat face brought a smile to Kildare's harassed face.

"Yes, Wynn," he said. "You feel fit?"

"What-ho!" said Fatty Wynn emphatically.

"And we want you two chaps in the right wing," said Kildare. "You must do your best for St. Jim's. We left four fellows behind at Wayland Junction—they lost the train. I've put in my two reserves—and I want you two."

Tom Merry and the Cornstalk exchanged glances of satisfaction.

"You'd like to play?" asked Kildare.

"Like to!" echoed Kangaroo. "Well, rather!"

"You bet!" said Tom Merry.

"About your things—I've seen to that—there are some things belonging to the Ramblers juniors' club here, and you can have them," said Kildare. "They are not quite our colours—but as it happens the shirts are red, same as ours—and it doesn't matter much, anyway. I've got only one word to say to you—play up your hardest for St. Jim's, and don't let this match be a frost if you can help it. Keep your heads, and forget that you're playing the Isthmians—and play as if you were playing the Grammar School or Greyfriars."

"Right-ho, Kildare!"

"Now get in and change."

The three juniors joyfully obeyed. They were sorry for the ill-luck that had befallen Kildare's team, on that occasion which the captain of St. Jim's had looked forward to with such keenness. But they could not be expected not to be joyful at the prospect of playing for the First Eleven—and against such a team as the Isthmians. It was the chance of a lifetime, as Tom Merry truly said—and the three juniors meant to make the most of it. If the Isthmians beat St. Jim's it would not be their fault.

And when they came out of the pavilion, clad in the garb of the Junior Ramblers, lent for the occasion, which fitted them pretty well—when they came out into the field with the St. Jim's team—then their comrades understood what they had been wanted for. Blake, who was the first to spot them, gave a wild yell.

"There they are!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Playing for the First!" yelled Figgins. "Good old Fatty!"

"Bai Jove! But what I can't undahstand is, why Kildare didn't ask me!" remarked Augustus, with a puzzled look.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I see nothin' whatever to cackle at, Lowthah. I am vewy much surprised indeed!"

And Arthur Augustus remained very much surprised.

CHAPTER 15.

The Great Match.

THERE was a grin from the Isthmians when the three juniors came into the field along with Kildare's team.

That Kildare could seriously intend to play a Fourth-Former and two Shell fellows against such mighty men as the Isthmians seemed incredible.

Kildare, indeed, had a gnawing doubt in his heart as to the wisdom of the step he had taken.

But there was, in fact, nothing else to be done. He was hard pressed; and he had to take whatever resource he could. And in the trial game the Saturday before, these three juniors had proved their quality. Kildare had noted keenly enough how difficult it was to get past Fatty Wynn in goal—more than one of his own best shots had been beaten by the Welsh junior. And he had noted the quality of Tom Merry, and of Noble, the Cornstalk, for a long time past. If he had not been hard pressed he would not have thought of playing the juniors against the Isthmians, but under the circumstances, he played them, and felt that he was entitled still to hope.

He had misgivings, of course, and the rest of the team had still more misgivings. Only Darrel fully agreed with Kildare that it was the best thing to do under the circumstances. Most of the team thought it would have been better to play fellows from the Fifth or Sixth irrespective of their form. "Kids" were no good against the Isthmians. But no one criticised Kildare's decision.

The smiles on the faces of the Isthmians were good-natured enough—excepting in the case of the winger Dodd. Spencer Dodd's lip curled satirically. He had wondered what Kildare would do when his team was decimated by the cunning of Gerald Cutts. He had expected that the captain of St. Jim's would call in seniors who happened to arrive on the ground to fill up the vacancies, and, of course, such a scratch team would not have stood the slightest chance against the famous Isthmians. But that he would play juniors was too amazing.

Dodd almost laughed outright. His two hundred pounds was safe—and already he almost regretted having promised the half of it to Cutts for success. Fifty pounds would have been enough—after all, Cutts's task had not been so very difficult, and he seemed to have run very little risk; at all events, it seemed that he was not in the slightest degree upset.

Kildare, annoyed and exasperated as he was by the series of misfortunes to his team, did not suspect foul play—above all, he did not dream of foul play on the part of a St. Jim's fellow.

"Jolly easy hundred for Gerald!" Dodd muttered to himself. "And only a hundred for me! By Jove, if we weren't already on the field, I'd double the bets all round!"

But it was too late for that; the two captains were already tossing for choice of ends.

Kildare won the toss, and gave the Isthmian team a keen breeze to kick off against.

The ball rolled, and the play started.

From the manner of the Isthmian team, it was only too evident that they expected to carry all before them quite easily, and looked upon the match as already won.

But such was not the impression of the spectators.

The Ramblers' enclosure was well filled; all the cheap seats were taken, as well as half the places in the grand-stand. The Isthmians were famous enough to draw a crowd wherever they played; and there was a great deal of local interest in the St. Jim's eleven.

Local football enthusiasts often came to St. Jim's ground to watch the senior matches, and they knew the form of Kildare's men. And so, in spite of the fact that Kildare had been forced to make so many changes in his team at the last moment, most of the spectators looked for a hard tussle, if not a win for the school.

And the Isthmians soon discovered that, at all events, the match was not to be anything in the nature of a walk-over.

Their first fast rush brought them through the St. Jim's defence, and within easy distance of goal; and Cartright and Dodd brought the leather through, and sent it in.

But a fat fist was ready for the leather, and it came buzzing out, only to meet Spencer Dodd's head and whiz in again—then to meet a ready foot, and to clear right out to the halves.

Lefevre of the Fifth pounced on it there, and sent it past midfield, and the game rushed away into the Isthmians' half.

Figgins and his friends gave a terrific roar in recognition of Fatty Wynn's first exploit.

"Well saved!"

"Bravo, Fatty!"

"Good old Porpoise!"

Fatty Wynn grinned with satisfaction. At least, he had shown Kildare, and the Isthmians, too, that a Fourth-Former was of some use in goal.

And Cartright, the Isthmian skipper, opened his eyes a little.

"Hot stuff, that young oyster!" he muttered. "That was a good save. Very hot stuff indeed!"

There was a long tussle in midfield, and the ball went into touch several times. St. Jim's held well together, and at last the forwards had a chance. It was Tom Merry, at

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outside-right, who captured the ball on the run, and the other forwards broke away in line, and they swept up in great style. Tom Merry was charged over by a big Isthmian back, who sent him flying by sheer size and weight, but before he went down he had sent the ball in to Kangaroo—and Kangaroo centred to Kildare.

Kildare was tempted to try for goal, but he was too well marked, and he sent the ball to inside-left, and Darrel rushed in and drove it home almost before the Isthmian defence knew that Kildare had parted with it. The goalkeeper was beaten to the wide—the ball lodged in the net, and there was a roar from the crowd, a gasp from the Isthmians.

"Goal!"

"Hurrah!"

"Good old St. Jim's!" roared Jack Blake, tossing his cap into the air, without caring whether it ever came down again. "Bravo! Bravo! Well kicked, Darrel!"

"Goal, goal, goal!"

Cartwright looked surprised; Spencer Dodd for a moment clicked his teeth, and a savage gleam came into his eyes. Were all his calculations wrong after all? Had this schoolboy team, "mucked up" as it had been, a chance after all? He felt glad at that moment that he had not had time to double his bets.

The goalie tossed the ball out, looking a little blue, and the teams walked back to the centre of the field.

Kildare's face was glowing now.

"Not hurt, kid?" he asked kindly, as Tom Merry panted a little for breath.

Tom shook his head cheerfully.

"Not a bit, Kildare—only a bit shaken! That back was a bit heavy, and he walloped me right over!"

Kildare smiled.

"It was a ripping pass," he said, "and you did as well, Noble. It was a stroke of luck that you two kids were here!"

That was all; but it was enough to translate the two juniors into the seventh heaven of delight. Praise from Kildare, who never wasted words, was praise indeed, and at that moment the two Shell fellows felt that they could have conquered worlds, and walked over whole teams of Isthmians.

When the ball was kicked off again, there was a perceptible hardening in the Isthmian team. They were not taking the match lightly now. They realised that they had all their work cut out to beat St. Jim's schoolboys as they were.

For some time now the attacking was all done by the Isthmians, and they left St. Jim's no time for anything but defence. But the defence was sound and good, and the ball did not get through. When the attack swept up to goal, Fatty Wynn was ready. Never had the fat Fourth-Former seemed in such splendid form. He was all eyes and hands and feet. No matter what kind of shot came in, or whence it came, the fat goalkeeper was ready for it, and he put "paid" to every attempt.

There were loud cheers from the delighted St. Jim's fellows round the ground. More and more St. Jim's fellows, seniors and juniors, were arriving every minute now, and, astonished as they were to see the fat Fourth-Former in Langton's place in goal, they were delighted at his performances there.

It was not till close upon half-time that Fatty Wynn was beaten at last. Cartwright succeeded in putting the ball in. Fatty Wynn missing it by a fraction of a second. But there was no disgrace in being beaten by so famous a goal-getter as the skipper of the Isthmians.

When the referee blew his whistle for half-time, the score was level—goal to goal—and both sides were breathing hard after a gruelling game.

Figgins was chortling with joy.

"Good old Fatty!" he said, for the fiftieth time. "Bet you Langton wouldn't have done better than that in goal!"

"Wathah not!" agreed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "And Tom Mewwy and Kangy are doin' remarkably well in the front line. I weally considah that Kildare would have acted vewy wisely in playin' some more juniors, instead of his seniah weserves!"

"Yes, rather," said Blake heartily. "We were all ready, weren't we?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And I've no doubt Gussy would have been willing to captain the team if Kildare had felt a really good man was necessary," Monty Lowther remarked.

"Weally, Lowthah, you ass—"

"Hallo! Here come the lost sheep!" said Kerr, as Cutts, accompanied by the missing members of the eleven entered the enclosure.

Baker and Webb, Gray and Buzzard were looking very blue. Cutts was not looking concerned. The missing members of the team had turned up too late, of course, to play. The first half was now over, and the second about to begin. But they had been anxious to see what was happening at Abbots-

ford. They had come on as soon as they could get a train; and as they came in the teams were taking the field for the second half.

"They're playing all the same," said Buzzard despondently. "Of course, they've no chance. Kildare had two reserves with him. Yes, they're there! Who else can he be playing? Why, my only hat, what are those kids doing in the field?"

"Great Scott!" exclaimed Webb. "One, two, three—there's Tom Merry and the Australian chap and the fat bouncer, Wynn! They can't be in the team!"

"They are. Look at them lining up with the rest."

"Kildare must be off his rocker!" exclaimed Webb excitedly. "Playing juniors against the Isthmians! Oh, crumbs!"

"It was a case of Hobson's choice, I suppose," remarked Cutts of the Fifth. "He had to play whom he could as you weren't here, you fellows. Langton seems to be missing, too. I wonder where he is?"

"May have missed the train, same as we did," Gray remarked. "But playing juniors. I wonder what the score's like?"

"Ten to none, I expect," said Webb.

"Oh, rotten!"

"Here, Blake, how's the score?" shouted Webb, catching sight of Jack Blake in the crowd.

"One to one!" shouted back Blake.

"What! Rot! Equal score? Rats!"

"Fact!"

"Oh, my hat! Yes, there it is up. Level score!" gasped Webb. "My only grandmother's pink bonnet! It doesn't seem to matter much about our losing the train."

Cutts's face had changed.

"Level score!" he muttered. "Why, it's impossible! It can't be! Kildare's been driven to playing kids in the Shell and the Fourth against a team like the Isthmians! I tell you they can't have scored!"

"But they have!" chortled Webb. "Oh, good luck! Good egg! Oh, ripping! After all, that fat bouncer, Wynn, is a splendid goalie. I've watched him! And those two kids in the front line are hot stuff."

Cutts bit his underlip hard.

"Level score!" he muttered again. "Why, at this rate, St. Jim's may win, after all!"

"What-ho! Isn't it gorgeous?"

Cutts checked the savage words that rose to his lips. He did not think it gorgeous at all. The fine play of the juniors seemed likely to upset his whole scheme, and bring it to nothing. He had paid out good money to make that scheme a success, as well as taking a great deal of trouble and running a considerable amount of risk. It was too late now for any further scheming. He could only stand there and look on, and hope for the best, or, rather, the worst. He wondered what Spencer Dodd was thinking of at that moment. If St. Jim's won Cutts would lose his promised "whack" in the winger's winnings; but Dodd would be brought to the verge of ruin. And it was evident that St. Jim's had, at least, equal chances now.

"Play up, St. Jim's!" roared the crowd, as the ball rolled from Kildare's foot. "Play up!"

The second half was starting. There were a couple of hundred St. Jim's fellows on the scene by this time, and they burst into a roar as the School Eleven piled in, the forwards bringing the ball up the field with a fine rush.

"Go it! On the ball!"

CHAPTER 16.

The Winning Team.

" N the ball!" St. Jim's were on the ball in great style.

Though the wind was against them now, they brought the ball right up the field from the kick-off, and there was a sharp attack upon the goal. And though the attack was repulsed it showed the form that the Saints were in. They were dangerous all the time, and not the least dangerous were the junior members of the team. What Tom Merry and Kangaroo lacked in age and size and weight they made up in pace, in quickness, in resource. And Tom came very near scoring from a long shot from the wing, finding himself ahead with no one to take a pass, and having to shoot. The ball glanced from a goalpost and was cleared; but it was a narrow thing, and the crowd gave Tom Merry a cheer.

There was no doubt that the spectators were getting good value for their admission money, if value could be given in hard and fast and spirited play.

The teams never slacked. They were going all the time. Spencer Dodd especially was playing up at the top of his form. He was really a fine winger, but he excelled himself in this match. No one but his cousin—Gerald Cutts—knew how much he had at stake.

And yet, at intervals, the thought of what was at stake came upon Spencer Dodd with numbing force, and seemed to paralyse him.

More than once, after brilliant play, he seemed to fumble with the ball, and to muff easy chances; and then he would throw himself into the game again with renewed and brilliant vigour. He was first-class, but by fits and starts. If the Isthmians lost that match the winger was ruined, and when that crushing thought came into his mind it numbed him. He drove it from his mind, but it would return.

Thirty minutes of the second half had ticked away without a goal to either side, though the play was fast, and escapes had been narrow at either end.

"Fifteen minutes to go!" said Figgins, with a glance at his watch. "Well, we're holding them, at any rate."

"They won't get past Fatty!" said Kerr confidently. "Fatty's simply a miracle to-day! My opinion is that it was a stroke of luck Langton's getting crocked."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"By Jove! I almost think so!" exclaimed Redfern. "Look at that!" He clapped his hands wildly. "Bravo, Fatty—bravo!"

"Well saved!" roared the crowd. "Good man!"

"They won't beat him, by ginger!" chuckled Blake jubilantly. "My hat! Why don't they take another goal? Buck up, St. Jim's!"

"Yaas; if I were there—"

"Buck up! On the ball! My hat! They're getting through!"

"Shoot! Shoot, you beggar—shoot!"

The juniors were yelling with excitement now. The St. Jim's forwards were pressing hard in an attack on goal. The ball whizzed in from Darrel, and was fisted out, and then inside-right made a spring.

And then Fatty Wynn was ready for them—all hands and feet and eyes!

Cartwright drove the ball in—a good shot—but Fatty Wynn booted it out to Rushden at back, and Rushden sent it whizzing right away to the half-way line.

The field swayed after the ball, and there was a struggle again in midfield. Then St. Jim's had to fall back in defence as the Isthmians came grimly on again. Sooner or later that determined attack must have told. But it was very close upon time now.

"Two minutes to go!" grinned Figgins.

"Bai Jove, they'll nevaah do it!"

"Touch and go if they do!" said Redfern. "But they won't—they won't! Hang it, they sha'n't!"

Excitement was at fever heat now. The attack was hot and hard, and the Isthmians had only a couple of minutes left. A victory for them was out of the question now. But could they make it a draw?

Cutts of the Fifth gritted his teeth hard. He hoped, but he did not think so! The Isthmians would never get through!

Yes—there they were—right up to goal again—and the ball was going in! Cutts caught his breath, and so did five hundred other keen spectators! Was it to be the equalising goal right on the stroke of time?

No—for Fatty Wynn's fat fist snatched the ball as it came in, and out it went again, and as it dropped, there came a shrill, sharp blast upon the whistle.

Phoop!

It was time!

The match was over!

St. Jim's First had beaten the famous Isthmians by two goals to one!

The crowd roared and swayed and cheered. The Saints present seemed like lunatics, as they yelled and yelled and roared, and threw up their caps, and waved their hands

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Kangaroo's head met the oncoming ball, and in it went again, like a pip from an orange.

It went in like a flash of lightning, and the goalie stumbled as he clutched at it, and the ball grazed the tips of his outstretched fingers.

Blake gave an almost hysterical shriek.

"It's in—in—in! Kangy's done it! Goal! Goal! GOAL!"

"Goal!" roared the crowd.

"Bai Jove! Goal! Wippin'! Huwway!"

"Bravo, Cornstalk!"

Hats and caps were waved frantically in the air, and there was a hurricane of hand-clapping.

Kangaroo had done it—done it, indeed!

The Cornstalk junior had headed the ball right into the net, and St. Jim's were two up! Two to one! A goal ahead of the Isthmians—the famous Isthmians!

The roar from two hundred St. Jim's throats was deafening, and the rest of the crowd were cheering wildly.

"Goal! Goal!"

"Bravo, kid!"

"Eight minutes to go," chuckled Figgins. "They won't equalise in eight minutes, bet you Gussy's Sunday topper! Fatty won't let them through."

"Wathah not?"

"Play up, St. Jim's!"

"My hat! They're going it, though," Manners remarked. "They mean business!"

The Isthmians did indeed look as if they meant business. Never had they made a more determined attack than the one they made now upon the St. Jim's defences.

But Kildare & Co. made their defence sound.

They disputed every foot of ground, and it was only after a long and desperate struggle that the Isthmians succeeded in getting the leather anywhere near the goal.

wildly. Cutts strode away with a pale face, and with his hands thrust deep into his pockets. But no one cared what Cutts looked like. They raved and roared with glee.

"St. Jim's wins! Hurray!"

"Bravo, bravo, bravo!"

And as the breathless players came off the field, they were cheered again and again; and Figgins and his friends made a sudden irruption, and caught Fatty Wynn, and raised him shoulder high, and bore him off to the dressing-room in gleeful triumph.

Fatty had not won the match, but he had saved it. But for Fatty, the Isthmians would have equalised, more than equalised. Kangaroo and Tom Merry thumped Fatty Wynn on the back in ecstasy; and they had to endure many enthusiastic thumps themselves.

The Isthmians took their defeat good-humouredly enough, with one exception. That exception, of course, was Spencer Dodd.

Dodd's face was white as chalk, and he reeled as he walked off the field. All his scheming had come to nought, and he had to face the ruin he had brought upon himself. He had debased the great game by turning it into a sporting speculation, and he had reaped the punishment he deserved. He had to meet debts that he could not meet; he had to fly—and there was no time to waste—and to leave disgrace and obloquy behind him.

That was the punishment of his foul play, and it was well-deserved. The Isthmian team were well rid of their winger.

But of all that the St. Jim's fellows knew nothing—at present, at all events. All they knew was that St. Jim's had won, after a series of strokes of ill-luck which would have been a sufficient excuse for the most crushing defeat. They had won—they had beaten the famous Isthmians after a fair and hard fight, and St. Jim's were frantic with delight.

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is the principal character in one of the complete stories contained in

CHUCKLES, ½d.

Tom Merry and Kangaroo and Fatty Wynn changed their clothes, and came out amid a crowd of joyous juniors.

"Bai Joye, you know!" Arthur Augustus D'Arcy remarked. "I couldn't have done bettah than that myself, you know."

"No, I don't think you could!" agreed Tom Merry, laughing. "Fatty, old man, you're coming home in the brake with us—Figgins and Kerr too. Some of the chaps can take the bikes instead. We'll stop and lay in a supply of tuck en route. If ever a goalkeeper deserved to be fed-up to the chin, you do!"

"Now you're talking!" Fatty Wynn said emphatically. "And the crowded brake stopped outside a refreshment establishment, and Monty Lowther nudged Arthur Augustus."

"Your move!" he remarked. "The rest of the subscription is to be spent on tuck, I understand, after paying for the brake."

"Yaas, but I find that the subscription is only half enough to pay for the bwake, accordin' to the amount they're chargin' me," said Arthur Augustus. "Undah the cires., there won't be any left ovah."

"Oh, that's not good enough!" said Lowther, with a decided shake of the head. "You were in charge of the sub-

scription, and, of course, it was up to you to see that it was large enough for all needs."

"Quite so!" said Blake.

"Yes, rather!"

"So it's up to you, Gussy!" said a dozen voices.

Arthur Augustus grinned.

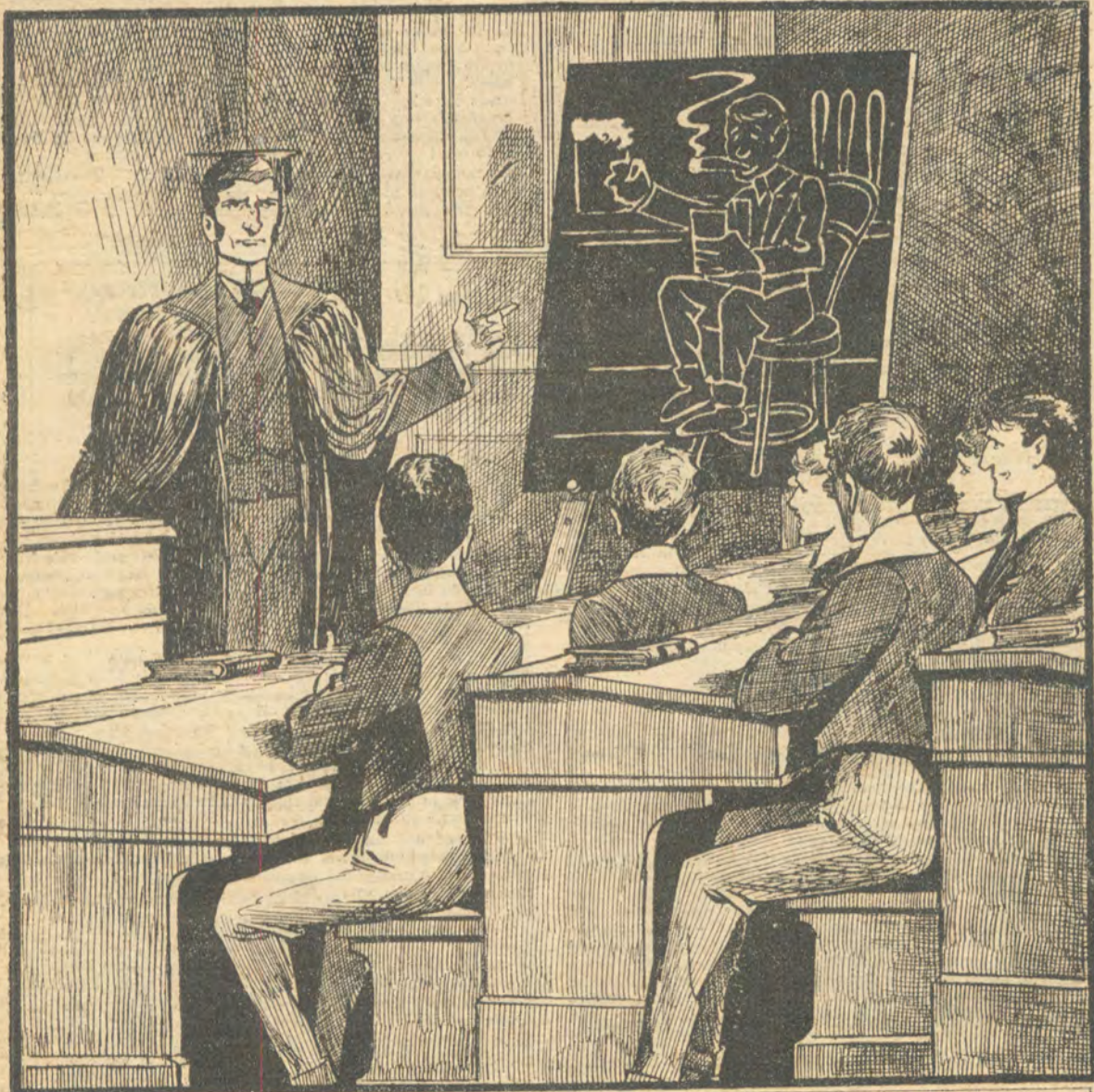
"The subscription has petahed out," he said. "But I have a fivah in my pocket that I had fworm my patah this mornin'. And I'd be willin' to blue it fworm start to finish to stand Fatty a feed afiah the cweditable way ho kept goal."

And Arthur Augustus nobly "blewed" a very considerable portion of his fiver to provide a feed on the return journey.

And when the footballers arrived home at St. Jim's an ovation awaited them, and the old quad. rang with cheering over the result of the great match; and, with the single exception of Cutts of the Fifth, there was not a fellow at St. Jim's that night who was not rejoicing.

THE END.

(Another splendid, long, complete tale of TOM MERRY & CO. next week, entitled "EARNING HIS LIVING!" by Martin Clifford. Order your Copy in Advance, and don't forget to order "CHUCKLES!" at the same time.)



"What does this mean?" demanded the Remove master sternly. (An incident from "The Right Sort!" the grand, long, complete tale of Harry Wharton & Co. of Greysfriars, which is contained in this week's issue of "THE MAGNET" Library. Now on sale. Price One Penny.)

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NOTE!

The author has, for obvious reasons, to conceal his real identity under the pen-name of Agent "No. 55." Concerning his position, I am allowed to say no more than this: that if his real name were revealed it would cause something like consternation in Diplomatic and Secret Service circles.

THE EDITOR.

THE FIRST INSTALMENTS.

Jerry Osborne, a young Britisher taking a holiday in Berlin, goes to the assistance of a man who has been knocked down by a motor-car in the street in

THE GERMAN CAPITAL.

To his surprise he recognises in the injured man his employer, Mr. Muller, the head of the London office in which Jerry works. After the accident Mr. Muller's brain seems to be affected; he has lost his memory, and mutters continually. As

THE INJURED MAN'S ONLY FRIEND

in Berlin, Jerry is asked by the German police to accompany him home to England. The lad therefore takes charge of his employer. He is surprised to note how much attention his charge attracts during the train journey to the frontier.

At Flushing Jerry is attacked by several Germans, and in the scuffle Mr. Muller is knocked down. The blow restores him to his full senses, and Jerry is amazed to see him rush off with his aggressors to catch the steamer, which Jerry himself just misses. He is pondering over the strange turn events have taken, when a stranger introduces himself. He is an English airman and inventor, named Max Elton, and Jerry finally accompanies him to his lonely house on the marshes about seventy miles from Flushing. Subsequently Jerry makes a compact of friendship with Elton, who believes himself to be in danger from secret emissaries of the German Government. Jerry discovers the reality of the danger when, on returning suddenly to the house one day, he finds it in the hands of Muller and his friends. The lad tells the Germans that Elton is away, and with that they bundle him on board a motor-boat, which is bound for the Hook. He eludes his captors, however, and contrives to warn Elton, with the result that Muller and his friends get a warm reception when they return to the attack. The raiders are beaten off, leaving one of their number—a sullen fellow named Hendricks—in the hands of Elton and Jerry.

The man is handed over to the police authorities and charged with burglary. Muller's next move is to send Jerry

with a large portmanteau, the contents of which the latter believes to be delicate machinery—to the large aeroplane works at Roslea. But fortunately Max Elton appears on the scene, and becomes suspicious. He applies his ear to the bag, and announces that it contains infernal-machines. These are carefully placed in water. Thus Muller's hope of blowing the great works to atoms is frustrated. Although Jerry and Elton give chase to Muller in a motor, they lose him. Max Elton announces his intention of asking Sir David Went, the head of the works, all he knows of Muller.

(Now continue this splendid story.)

Jerry's Astounding Discovery!

"They don't let any kind of stranger into Roslea who takes a fancy to look around," observed Max Elton thoughtfully, as they made their way to the great works. "Didn't you tell me Muller said he had an appointment?"

"Yes; he gave me a letter with his name. It was on the strength of it I was admitted," answered Jerry.

"You wouldn't have got into a German concern of the same kind so easily, I'll wager, Jerry. But that's our happy-go-lucky English way. No wonder most of our secrets are so well-known to foreigners."

"But we'll be more careful in the future, now that we know just what are the Germans' intentions. That slip of paper Muller left behind at your house is now explained."

"It is, and thank Heaven the explanation hasn't been more emphatically made known to us. All those other towns on the list shall be warned. We've no time to lose, either. But what a story to publish to Europe—to the world—of the methods of Germany! For it's as plain as a pikestaff that Muller isn't doing this on his own. If the Kaiser doesn't know himself his ministers do. Oh, the shame of it, Jerry, the dastardly treachery! Wholesale murder, and worse, sanctioned by the government of a supposed civilised country. And this in time of peace! It's shameful! The world has never heard the like before!"

"Why not publish it?" cried Jerry.

"Because, my dear lad, as yet we have no proof. You

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know, I know, that it is so; but until we can lay hands upon Muller nothing can be said. But our Government shall learn the truth. Thank goodness there are one or two intelligent men among them, and they shall believe what you and I have to tell them. Just as soon as we've finished here we'll go up together, Jerry, and make them understand. And then we'll hunt down this Muller and his gang of scoundrels. Didn't think, old man, when you picked up that chap in Unter den Linden that you'd stumbled on something quite so big as it has proved, eh?"

"I didn't," admitted Jerry.

"Neither did I guess of what importance was the chap I saw come running down to the quay at the Hook, shaking his fist at the steamer as she backed away. That wasn't chance brought us together that night, old man; more than that." The grave, stern expression Jerry had seen before came into Elton's eyes. "It was providence, and I take it as a sign that old England isn't going under in the struggle with Germany, and her blatant aggression. We'll pull through all right, though it may be I won't live to see it."

The words were scarcely out of Elton's mouth when Jerry, who at that moment had turned his head to look behind, uttered a shout of horror. Coming down the slight incline they had descended, driven at headlong speed, was a huge motor-car, and at the wheel was a man in a green uniform that Jerry at once recognised. The car was the very one in which Muller and he had travelled from London, and in the tonneau behind sat a man, cap pulled down over his face, goggles and bearded.

"For Heaven's sake look out, Elton!" Jerry shouted wildly, for it appeared as though nothing on earth could prevent the oncoming monster from crashing into and demolishing the car, a ten-year-old De Dion model, which Elton had hired in North Walsham. To run them down seemed the former's intention, for no warning hoot did the green-coated chauffeur give. In the middle of the road he held on, travelling sixty miles an hour, and making no attempt to change his mad course.

And, irony of Fate! The approach of the monster was soundless, for Jerry had noted the absolutely silent running earlier—it was fitted with an effective silencer which Muller had told him was Max Elton's own invention.

But something beside the fear of impending disaster had caused Jerry's loud yell. In such circumstances, though the eye may not obtain a wholly comprehensive view of all that lies within the range of vision, some things, even unimportant details, it will mark with astounding clearness and accuracy. And in this case it was the man behind.

Jerry had no doubt. The man was the ancient owner of the Ford that Elton had commandeered.

And that elderly motorist was Muller himself!

How Muller Scored.

That the two individuals should be identical seemed ridiculous, but Jerry knew it was so. But one glance he had, yet that told him the truth. But how the disguise had been effected, how Muller and the big car came to be together again and in their position, Jerry had no time, even if the inclination had been there, to ask himself. A fraction of time only and Elton's wonderful skill as a motorist lay between them and a horrible death.

Could that death be avoided? And even in that supreme moment Jerry had faith in his comrade.

Yet the avoidance seemed outside the realms of probability. The road was narrow, though not so much that the two cars could not have passed abreast. But fifty yards ahead the road narrowed, crossing a small stone bridge across a very wide and deep ditch, fringed with thick banks of reeds. Moreover, just at this point the road was raised fully ten feet above the level of the grassland, three-foot walls of mortar-set flints running alongside.

A more desperate spot for a motor accident all Norfolk could not have furnished.

Gripping hard at the side of the car, Jerry waited for what was coming, holding his breath, his eyes glued to the bridge. If the inevitable collision took place there, death was assured.

Elton flung one glance behind, and, bending forward, coiled his fingers about the wheel rim. He may or may not have seen what Jerry saw, but he had realised the intention of the car behind. The De Dion was light; before the onrush of the monster pursuing it would be swept aside, smashed into fragments, and themselves shot forward like stones from a sling, or crushed into shapeless caricatures of humanity.

Perhaps Elton did know, some instinct warning him that the car behind was the man who had undertaken to kill him, and was willing to risk his own life if that might be accomplished.

To pull up was impossible—useless. To hope to outdistance the pursuer absurd. To avoid the crash hopeless.

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All he could do was to take the De Dion as close in to the near flint wall as was possible, and trust to Providence. And this he did.

If there were fear in the man, his face showed no sign of it. His expression was tense, resolute—that of the racing motorist who realises danger ahead, danger inevitable, but to be mitigated perhaps by luck and nerve.

Jerry muttered a prayer.

Barely ten seconds had passed since Jerry's glimpse of the German spy, though in those ten seconds the young man felt he lived ten years. Then came the shock as the demon chauffeur behind smote his victim. The end of the bridge was no more than half a dozen car lengths beyond.

If he cried out at the moment of impact Jerry could never remember. All at once he felt himself lifted in the air, as though on wings, with which he had been suddenly furnished; he had a blurred, confused impression of smudgy green, pale grey, bright scarlet passing across his vision, and then he entered into the blackness of terrible night, knowing nothing more. Of receiving any kind of physical shock he had not the faintest consciousness.

At one instant he had felt himself moving; at the next he had simply ceased to exist.

As abruptly as life had left Jerry Osborne, so it returned. He didn't know he was alive. His brain seemed without consciousness. Opening his eyes, he stared vacantly upward, but seeing nothing. Presently he became aware that he was looking at the sky. Then he had the queer feeling that his legs and feet were wet—why, didn't trouble him. He hadn't the faintest notion where he was, nor did he want to know. He was satisfied to look at the sky.

He began to feel as though he had fallen asleep, slept a million or so years, waked in a strange bed, and had a strong disinclination to get up.

But the feeling did not last long. A sudden thrill seemed to run through his nerves, life and power came back to him, and he worked himself upright. This operation wasn't so easy as it should have been, until he realised that he had been lying with his feet and legs in water.

He looked about him curiously. He had been lying amid reeds, his legs lower than his head, but there did not appear to be the slightest thing the matter with him.

He was standing by a ditch, near by crossed by a stone bridge; beyond was a sloping grass bank. He couldn't make things out at all.

And then recollection came back to him with a rush, and he started to run forward, up the bank, climbed over a wall, and found himself in the road. It was strewn with splintered wood and fragments of glass. Propped upon the right-hand wall, against which it had fallen, tearing down several yards, lay what was left of the De Dion car. It didn't look worth the labour of carrying away. But one wheel remained to it. A second, intact, lay in the middle of the road at the bridge end; a third, every spoke smashed, was reclining against the other wall; the fourth was not to be seen.

Nor was Max Elton.

With a run Jerry was by the car, under which he peered, fearing to find Elton's mangled body. It was not there. He flung himself over the wall again, slipping down the grass slope. No sign of his friend. Here and there Jerry ran, and twenty feet from the slope, lying amid bunches of long, coarse grass, he came upon Max. He was lying on one side, as though peacefully sleeping, his face serene, though spattered with blood from a long cut across the forehead, from which the red fluid was still trickling. His hands still grasped the rim of the wheel, torn from the steering-post.

"May Heaven take vengeance on the fiends!" exclaimed Jerry.

He dropped by Elton's side, to be roused by a warning hoot of a motor-horn. Unsteadily he got to his feet, to see a car slowly nearing the further side of the bridge. His first thought was that Muller had returned to see the success of his murderous work, and for an instant Jerry hoped it was so. He felt in him the strength of ten men, and badly would it have gone with the spy had he arrived.

But the car was not Muller's. A clean-shaved young man, wearing a silk hat, was driving. He pulled up beyond the bridge, and there Jerry joined him.

"Bit of a smash—eh?" the new-comer said cheerfully, looking about. "What's happened?"

"Car ran into ours—"

"Looks like it!" And the man chuckled. "Anyone hurt?"

"Come here at once!" cried Jerry. "I think my friend is dead! We must take him to a doctor! Where is one? We will put him in your car."

"No need, young man," said the other, as he followed Jerry over the wall. "I am a doctor!"

"You are! Oh, thank Heaven!" the young man cried joyfully.

The other's calmness irritated him. He had taken a stupid

dislike to his self-satisfied, consequential manner; but he was a doctor, and Jerry could have hugged him.

"How did it happen?" asked the doctor, kneeling beside Elton.

Jerry would have liked to see the doctor less matter-of-fact in his manner—more sympathetic in his examination of Max. He would also have been a good deal surprised, and much less satisfied, had he known the medical man's qualifications. Dr. Williton—for so he informed Jerry was his name—was a young man but three months from the hospital, and, having taken his degree, had come down to Norfolk, where a relative was in practice, to gain experience.

"A car coming down behind ours at a fast pace ran into us," he answered Dr. Williton's question.

"And, of course, it wasn't your fault—eh? When was it the accident occurred, young fellow?"

But this was more than Jerry—none too well pleased at being addressed as "young fellow"—could tell him. He wasn't sure whether the collision had occurred an hour or three hours earlier. The question caused him to look at his watch, but he found it had stopped.

"I can't say," he replied.

As a matter of cold fact, the precise time that he had been lying unconscious on the marge of the ditch was two and a half minutes. Having smashed up Elton's car, it had been Muller's intention to return, find out just what had been the result of the collision, and, if necessary, complete his murderous work. He had not anticipated such would be necessary, but he meant taking no risks. To leave alive one who might hereafter prove troublesome did not appeal to the German, who had all his countryman's love of doing things thoroughly.

But his villainous intention had been frustrated by seeing another car coming towards him—that of Dr. Williton—whereupon the big car had been stopped, turned about, and gone back north again. He was satisfied that neither Max

Elton dead? He couldn't realise it—couldn't believe it. With whitening face he stared at the somewhat vacuous-looking Williton. His head began to swim; he felt as though he were suffocating. And then he found words.

"You say he is—is not alive!" he shouted.

"Dead as a doornail!" was the unfeeling rejoinder.

And for a full half-minute Jerry glared at him, as though he would have fallen on him with his fists.

"I don't believe it!" he cried.

The doctor shrugged his narrow shoulders. And then something in Jerry's horror-filled eyes must have touched him.

"He's dead, I'm sorry to say," he said more gently.

"Awful shock, and all that, I know; but grief can't bring a man alive again. You were a friend of his?"

"Yes."

"What is his name?"

"Max Elton," Jerry said stupidly, looking down upon the pale, impassive, bloodstained face. And tears were creeping into his eyes.

"What! Elton, the flying chan?" cried Dr. Williton, betraying considerable interest. "The inventor—the record-holder?"

Jerry nodded absently.

"Well, I'm sorry for him, and for you, too, poor fellow," said Williton, his callousness vanished. "Give me a hand, and we'll carry the body to Stalham; that's the nearest village. I was going to Walsham, but that doesn't matter."

Between them, they carried the long, limp form up the bank into the road, laying it with reverent gentleness on the back seat of the car, and covering it with a rug.

Jerry felt as though everything worth having had gone out of life. He had quite forgotten Muller. Back to his memory with cruel clearness came the last words he had heard Max Elton utter,

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Elton nor Jerry Osborne was alive. It seemed impossible that men could survive what had happened to them.

Williton received Jerry's answer with some astonishment.

"You don't know when the accident happened?" he repeated. "Then you did not witness it?"

"Yes, I did."

"Well, young fellow, when the police take this job in hand you'll have to—"

But Jerry interrupted him impatiently. What he wanted to know was the extent of Elton's hurt. Williton had unfastened shirt and collar, felt the body over, and examined the gash on the forehead. He turned in surprise when Jerry inquired if his friend were seriously hurt.

"Oh, no, of course not!" he answered sarcastically. "A fellow does not get hurt—oh, no, not at all!—when he's chucked out of a car going at a high rate of speed, get thrown twenty feet or so, and have a ten-foot drop and more! I suppose you think you wouldn't be hurt, young fellow, if handled the same way?"

"I was thrown out, too—down by the ditch yonder!" cried Jerry.

"So you were in the car, then?" asked Williton curiously.

"Yes."

"And chucked over the wall down to the ditch?"

"Yes."

"And yet you're not hurt a bit. Odd, that. And, though you've been through it all, you don't know when it happened?"

"I was insensible—for how long I don't know. But what about my friend?"

"What about him?" Dr. Williton repeated contemptuously. "Why, I should have thought even a born fool wouldn't have needed to ask that question! Use your own eyes! You don't need to be a doctor to know when a man's dead or not!"

For ten seconds Jerry was dumb with horror. Max

"We'll pull through all right, though maybe I won't live to see it," Elton had said.

Well, the end, whatever it was, he would not see.

Jerry's Mission.

Going at a snail's pace, the car at last reached the little town of Stalham, where Elton's body would temporarily be disposed. Jerry's first act was to seek the post-office, and sent a wire announcing the awful fatality to Roslea. Then he accompanied Dr. Williton on the task of notifying the proper authorities. The local policeman, having heard the account, informed Jerry he would have to remain.

But Jerry shook his head. He could not do that. He must leave immediately.

"You may want to, but you won't!" the constable told him. "There's the inquest, an' you'll have to give evidence. You don't go from here!"

But Jerry gave no heed to him. He had work to do—Elton's work—and he meant doing it. In his pocket was Elton's letter, but a few days old, in which were his instructions: "If anything happens to me, go at once to the Foreign Secretary, and hand him the papers, of which I am enclosing you a copy"—the papers containing details of all that Elton had learned of the German secret operations in the Zuyder Zee.

"Go at once," had been Elton's words, and Jerry was going to obey. Greater honour and respect to the dead man he could not pay than by carrying out the instructions he had given him.

Ignoring the officer's warning, down to the railway-station he went, to learn that the next train to London, via Norwich, left in half an hour's time. Fortunately he found himself with sufficient money to pay for his ticket.

It was the longest, saddest, dreariest railway journey Jerry had taken in all his life. Max Elton filled his mind, and out of his long communing with himself arose an inflexible determination. His mission accomplished, the British

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Government put on their guard against the secret schemes of the Teuton enemy—and surely credit would be given to his revelation! It was Elton's work, though it came by other than Elton's hands. He would devote himself wholly and solely to the tracking down and handing over to justice of Müller, the most dastardly murderer the world had ever seen.

And while Jerry sat thus making up his mind, there was being despatched from a small Norfolk town a harmless-looking telegram, addressed "Zophel, Post Office, Berlin." That simple seeming message, when translated from the code in which it was written, informed the Chief of the German Secret Intelligence Department that the sender had succeeded in his design—had kept his promise, for the one man in England whom Germany really feared was lying a corpse.

And when General Zophel read the telegram, a satisfied smile curved his thick lips. He went off forthwith to the private residence of the Kriegminister, and on the way purchased for himself, and smoked, an expensive cigar. Krug was a good man—a man of his word.

Leaving the train at Liverpool Street, Jerry went along the platform to the roadway with its line of waiting taxicabs. In spite of the lateness of the hour, he had no doubt that the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Sir Edmund Black, when acquainted with his caller's credentials, would see him. He hoped so, anyway, with Elton's name for password.

Preoccupied, Jerry had not the faintest notion that his movements were of interest to any among the shifting crowd of travellers and friends streaming along the platform. But the sharp eyes of a man who had been leaning against one of the brick pillars had fallen upon him two seconds after his foot left the carriage step, and they had not shifted.

He was a short man, thickly-built, with herculean shoulders and short neck. He was dressed in a dark overcoat, with a cap pulled down well over his face. Jerry's appearance was a complete surprise to him; but immediately upon the recognition the man's hidden eyes filled with a strange glare, and, without a second's hesitation, he abandoned whatever business had brought him to the station, and followed Jerry along the platform.

"Downing Street—quickly!" said Jerry addressing the driver of the first cab he reached.

"First one in the rank, sir," the man said, pointing onward.

The short man had passed Jerry, and was abreast of a taxi apparently no different to the rest awaiting hire, the over-coated driver waiting at the door. Between him and the short man an almost imperceptible sign passed and a nod of the head in Jerry's direction. The driver had overheard the words of the man Jerry had accosted, and at once he swung briskly round and approached the young man.

"Here y'are, sir!" he cried.

"All right. Downing Street—Foreign Office!" rejoined Jerry, lowering his voice. "And make haste!"

And mechanically he stepped into the cab. Unseen by him, the obliging chauffeur exchanged a word with the short, stout man as he hurried round to crank up.

Getting clear, he travelled slowly along the roadway, to be scrutinised by, and exchange a word with, the railway policeman standing within the dark arch. But he did not increase his pace, although the way was clear and the thronged and brilliantly-lighted thoroughfare of Liverpool Street was but twenty feet ahead.

Jerry, chafing at the delay, forgetting the speaking-tube, pulled down the right-hand window to put out his head and impatiently urge the man to hurry.

At the same instant the left door-handle noiselessly turned, and a man stepped in. The policeman, his attention occupied elsewhere, noticed nothing, and the cab was in the shadow of the arch; so quietly and neatly was the business carried out that the man was within the cab and the door closed behind him before Jerry was aware of what had taken place. And then the cab came to a standstill.

But only for an instant. Jerry, drawing back and shutting up the window, suddenly became aware of the presence of his companion. For a moment he stared blankly, and then something familiar about the man's appearance struck him.

"Hen—"

The cry was not completed. A big hand shot out and hooked around Jerry's neck, and he was tumbled forward; another with a handkerchief in the palm was clapped upon his mouth, and he was silenced. Then the cab shot forward, to take the corner smartly and run into Liverpool Street at a quick pace.

Hendricks had secured his prisoner with ridiculous ease and without arousing the slightest suspicion.

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J. Simpkin, 145, Atlantic Avenue, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada, wishes to correspond with girl readers, age 13-15.

W. Minton, 4, Prospect Street, Newtown, Sydney, New South Wales, Australia, wishes to correspond with girl readers.

C. Thomas, Esbank Iron Works, Lithgow, New South Wales, Australia, wishes to correspond with a girl reader, age 16-18.

T. Banfield, 103, Seaview Road, New Brighton, Christchurch, New Zealand, wishes to correspond with a girl reader interested in stamps and postcards, and living in England, Ireland, or Scotland, age 15-17.

A. G. Gilham, care of Mr. Hugh Barron, Brantford Post Office, Ontario, Canada, wishes to correspond with a girl reader living in or near London, age 19-20.

G. Collins, John Street, Horsham, Victoria, Australia, wishes to correspond with a reader living in the British Empire or America.

Miss Doris Comer, Temuka, South Canterbury, New Zealand, wishes to correspond with boy readers above the age of 19 living in the Colonies.

L. Devenish, 133, South Terrace, Fremantle, Western Australia, wishes to correspond with readers living in the British Isles interested in stamps, age 15-16.

E. Evans, 134, Palmerston Street, Perth, Western Australia, wishes to correspond with readers, especially those who are interested in the wine and spirit business, age 19-23.

T. R. Spencer, 68, Fawkner Street, St. Kilda, Melbourne, Australia, wishes to correspond with a girl reader, age 17-18.

A. W. W. Robinson, 167, Upper Nelson Street, Auckland, New Zealand, wishes to correspond with a girl reader living in Ealing (Middlesex), age 16-17. G. Robinson, of the same address, wishes to correspond with a girl reader living in India.

R. Griffin, 21, Sebastopol Street, Caulfield, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia, wishes to correspond with readers in Scotland or England, age 15-16.

Miss J. Denton, 183, Johnson Street, Fitzroy, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia, wishes to correspond with an English boy reader, age 16.

The Editor specially requests Colonial Readers to kindly bring the Free Correspondence Exchange to the notice of their friends.

ORDER TO-DAY!

A Cash Prize for Every Contributor to this Page.



Our Weekly Prize Page.

LOOK OUT FOR YOUR WINNING STORYETTE!

THE LANGUAGE OF FLOWERS

Some men were telling dog stories after a day's shooting. After some time, when the tales had got very "tall," one little man, who had not taken part in the tale-telling, said:

"I have got a dog that makes all yours seem fools. I generally feed him myself, but one day, when we had company, the poor beast slipped my mind. We went for a stroll in the garden after dinner, and here the dog followed us. Suddenly he sprang on to a bed of flowers, and, taking one in his mouth, laid it at my feet. It was a forget-me-not!"

Nobody told any more dog stories.—Sent in by A. Melluish, Southwark.

WHY HE HAD A BEARD.

Clean-shaven Cabby (to bearded cabby): "I once had a beard like yours, but when I found it made me look so ugly I cut it off."

Bearded Cabby: "I once had a face like yours, but when I found I couldn't cut it off I grew a beard."—Sent in by Miss M. Smith, Coatham.

WHAT HE EXPECTED.

Husband (at 11.30): "Well, good-night, you fellows! I am going home to a vegetarian supper."

"Vegetarian supper—eh?" said one of the company. "What do you mean by that?"

"Well," exclaimed the married one, "my wife said that if I was not home by ten o'clock she would give me beans."—Sent in by A. W. Henton, Leamington Spa.

P.C. PAT.

Pat was on duty, when he heard a crash of falling glass. Rushing down a side street, from whence the sound had come, he was just in time to catch the culprit, a small boy.

"Window broken outside," he wrote in his notebook; and exclaimed seriously, "Broken inside, too! That's bad!"—Sent in by Miss A. Share, Birmingham.

UNDOUBTEDLY!

It was, of course, an Irish paper that was responsible for the following advertisement:

"For sale, baker's business; good trade; large oven; present owner been in it for seven years; good reasons for leaving."—Sent in by L. Hauxwell, Wakefield.

ONE FOR PAT!

Irishman (to 'bus conductor): "How far is it from St. Paul's Cathedral to Charing Cross?"

Conductor: "About ten minutes' ride."

Irishman: "Thankee! An' how far is it from Charing Cross to St. Paul's Cathedral?"

Conductor: "Didn't I tell you how far it was from St. Paul's to Charing Cross? Do you suppose it is any further the other way round?"

Irishman: "Sure, an' I don't know. But I do know that it's a great deal farther from New Year's Day to Christmas Day than it is from Christmas to New Year's Day!"—Sent in by Miss D. E. Rofey, Birmingham.

HIS PECULIARITY.

"You must find that impediment in your speech rather inconvenient at times, Mr. Biggs?"

"Oh, n-no! Everybody has his little peculiarity. Stammering is m-m-mine. What's yours?"

"I am not aware that I have any."

"D-d-do y-y-you stir x-x-your tea with y-y-your right h-h-hand?"

"Yes, of course."

"W-w-well, that's your peculiarity. M-m-most people use a t-t-teaspoon."—Sent in by Miss J. Bryce, Kilmarnock.

UNCLE REMUS.

"Uncle Remus!" roared Colonel Brown, who had been roused by a suspicious noise in the poultry-house. "Is that you there, you black thief?"

"No, sah," humbly returned a frightened voice. "Dis am me cousin dat look so much like me!"—Sent in by A. Welsh, Liverpool.

DID HE GET IT?

An Englishman and an Irishman, who, being hungry after a long tramp, and seeing a pie reposing on a window-sill just beyond reach, procured some boxes on which to stand.

But they could not get sufficient, and although the Englishman mounted the boxes, he could not quite reach.

"I want one more!" he called out. "Run and find one, Pat!"

"No need, begorra!" shouted Pat. "I know what to do!"

And he pulled out the bottom box.—Sent in by C. H. Costa, Twickenham.

WOULD NOT MATTER.

A man went up to the foreman of some large works and asked him for a job.

"I'm afraid there is no work for you," said the foreman.

"Oh, that doesn't matter," replied the applicant calmly. "The little I should do wouldn't make much difference."—Sent in by W. Stratford, Chelmsford.

TOOK TOO LONG.

One morning the mistress had told Mary to fill up the pepper-castor. On returning half an hour later she was surprised to find that the servant was still filling the castor, and although she had been at the job for such a time, the castor was only half full.

"Haven't you filled it yet, Mary?" asked the mistress.

"No, mum," sighed the servant. "I've had such an awful time getting the pepper through these holes!"—Sent in by C. B. Bellamy, Leytonstone.

A USEFUL PRESENT.

The baby's swallowed the threepenny-bit you gave him to play with!" wailed the little girl. "What ever shall I do?"

"Oh, let him keep it," drawled her elder brother. "It's his birthday to-morrow, and I should have given him something, anyhow."—Sent in by George Rogers, Sandon, near Chelmsford.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 310.

MONEY PRIZES OFFERED!

Readers are invited to send **ON A POSTCARD** Storyettes or Short, Interesting Paragraphs for this page. For every contribution used the senders will receive a Money Prize.

ALL POSTCARDS MUST BE ADDRESSED The Editor, "The Gem" Library, Gough House, Gough Square, Fleet Street, London, E.C.

THIS OFFER IS OPEN TO READERS IN ALL PARTS OF THE WORLD.

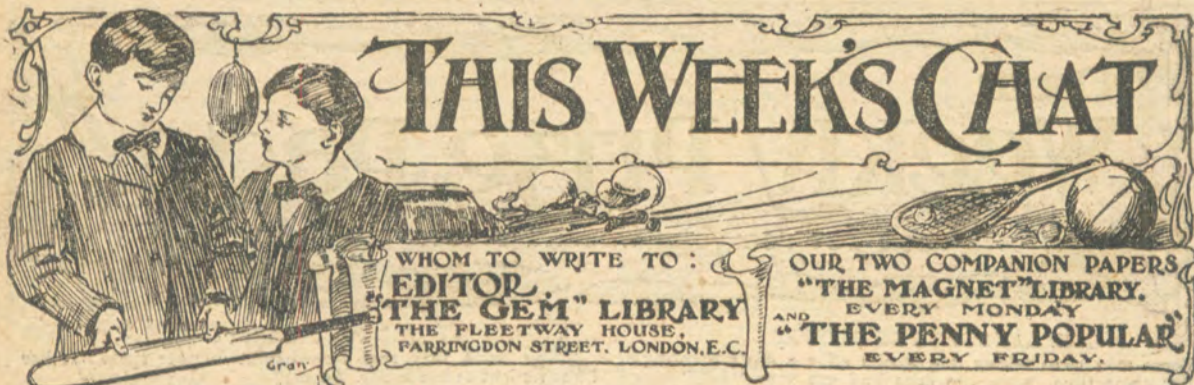
No correspondence can be entered into with regard to this Competition, and all contributions enclosed in letters, or sent in otherwise than on postcards, will be disregarded.

FERRERS LOCKE, DETECTIVE

is the principal character in one of the complete stories contained in

CHUCKLES, 1st

OUR SPECIAL WEEKLY FEATURE —



For Next Wednesday.

"EARNING HIS LIVING!"
By Martin Clifford.

In this grand, long, complete school story, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the swell of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's, makes a great resolution. He determines to earn some money by working out of school hours, and show the world in general and his noble father in particular, that he is quite able to hold his own in the struggle for existence that is always going on outside the walls of the old school. Arthur Augustus has the highest possible opinion of his own capabilities when he sets out upon his new career. His experiences, however, amusing as they are to others, tend to dishearten D'Arcy himself somewhat, and in the end he is forced to the conclusion that his talents hardly lie in the direction of

"EARNING HIS LIVING!"**THE EVENT OF THE WEEK.**

The event of this week, without a shadow of doubt, is the appearance of No. 1 of our Grand New Coloured Companion Paper,

"CHUCKLES!"

On Saturday thousands and thousands of my old chums, and thousands and thousands of new friends, I hope, had the pleasure of meeting.

BREEZY BEN AND DISMAL DUTCHY—

two of the quaintest mirth-makers ever known—for the first time. These two characters would make even a stone image smile, and form a perfect set-off to the magnificent stories which are a special feature of our new companion paper. Frank Richards, whose popularity was never so high as it is at present, contributes a magnificent, complete, school story of Harry Wharton & Co. of Greyfriars and Trumper & Co. of Courtfield Council School, entitled:

"THE FOUNDER OF THE FEAST."

The author's never-failing humour and inimitable style has full play in this grand schoolboy yarn. Then in

"FIGHTER AND FOOTBALLER"

ever-popular Arthur S. Hardy invests his hero, Jim Lancaster, with that fascinating, manly personality which is the type of true British boyhood. No one can help following Jim Lancaster's varying fortunes with absorbing interest, and for a real, rousing tale of football and the boxing-ring it would be hard to surpass Mr. Hardy's latest and best effort. Another extra-special "good thing," which I am relying on to create quite a sensation, is the series of wonderful stories beginning in "Chuckles!" No. 1, in which are related for the first time the fascinating adventures of

FERRERS LOCKE, DETECTIVE.

This famous investigator's name will be familiar to all readers of "The Gem" Library, and he has more than

once proved himself a good friend to Tom Merry & Co. of St. Jim's College.

"THE STOLEN DOCUMENT"

is the title of the first of this grand series of complete stories, and the narrative of this extraordinary case will prove as vividly interesting and "holding" as the most ardent lover of detective stories could desire. Unfortunately, I have not nearly enough space here to detail all the other manifold attractions which No. 1 of "Chuckles!" contains, but from among numerous items of special interest, and a host of really funny jokes and pictures, I must single out for special mention the

"CHUCKLES" GRAND COLOURED CINEMA,
"CHEERY CHAT," BY MR. CHUCKLES,
and a

GRAND COMPETITION,

in which is offered no less than

£10 IN CASH PRIZES.

In addition to this—which I venture to say is the finest programme ever offered by any paper for the sum of one halfpenny—the first number of "Chuckles!" contains a grand

FREE GIFT

for every reader—something which everyone will be able to appreciate and enjoy. The nature of this Free Gift must remain a secret, in order that you may all have a

PLEASANT SURPRISE

when you open your copies of "Chuckles!" With this surprise gift I will ask you all to celebrate the first issue of your own companion paper—

"CHUCKLES!"

Now on Sale Everywhere.

Price One Halfpenny.

SPECIAL WORD OF THANKS!

Owing to our having to go to press unusually early in advance on account of the Christmas holidays, this is the first opportunity I have had of thanking all my numerous chums who so kindly sent me Christmas greetings, in the form of Christmas cards, letters, or picture-postcards. All such kindly messages were heartily welcomed and deeply appreciated, coming as they did from every different corner of the world. It being, of course, quite impossible for me to acknowledge each greeting personally by post, I will ask all my loyal chums to accept my very best thanks for their kindly thought for their Editor at the festive season.

(Owing to great pressure on our space, the "Household Pets" article has been crowded out, and will appear next week.)

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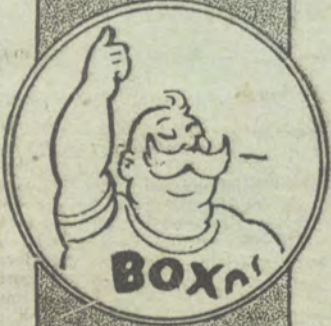
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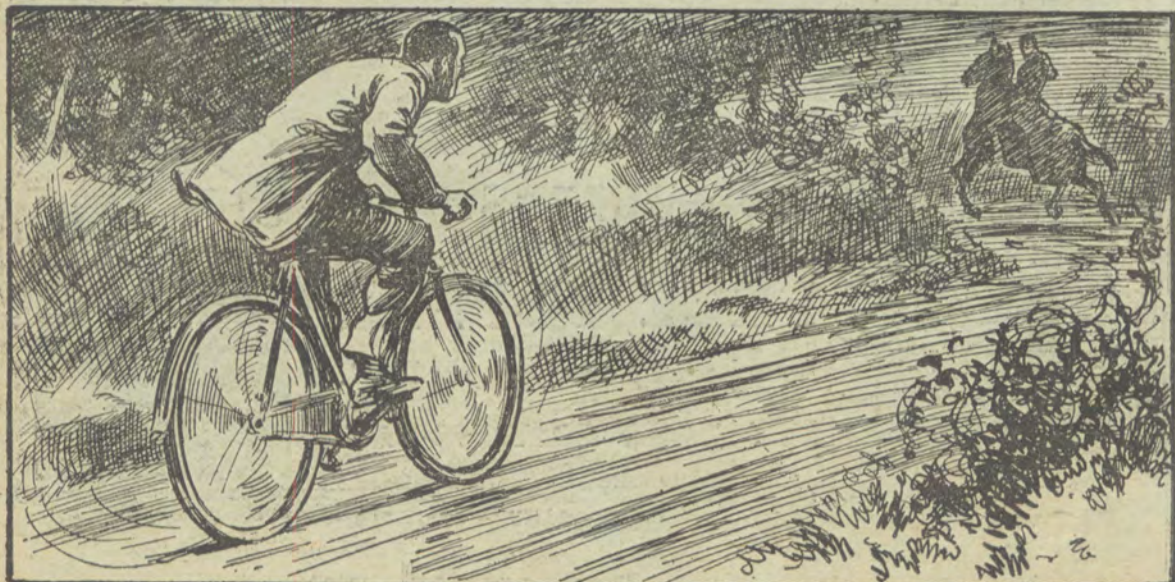
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