

A SCHOOL and DETECTIVE TALE ^{IN THIS} ISSUE!

PLUCK

STAUNCH CHUMS
OF ST. JIM'S.

By CHARLES HAMILTON; and

HUNTED DOWN!

A TALE OF MARTIN STERN, DETECTIVE

1^d



A GLORIOUS FEED!

(See "Staunch Chums of St. Jim's," the Extra Long, Complete School Story, by Chas. Hamilton.)

STARTS NEXT WEEK! A New School Serial Story by Chas. Hamilton.

ONE
PENNY.

EVERY
SATURDAY.

[VOL. 5, No. 114, NEW SERIES.]

THE FIRST LONG, COMPLETE STORY.

Staunch Chums of St. Jim's

A Tale of

Arthur Augustus, Jack Blake,
and Figgins & Co.

By CHAS. HAMILTON.

CHAPTER I.

The Hunting of Figgins & Co.

"H E'S mad!" gasped Kerr.
"Mad as a hatter!" gurgled Fatty Wynn. "Hold him, somebody!"

Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn—generally known at St. Jim's as Figgins & Co.—were strolling along Rylcombe Lane, which led from the school to the village. It was not surprising that the "Co." entertained sudden doubts as to their leader's sanity, for all at once Figgins, without the slightest word of warning, seized his companions by their collars, and plunged with them through a gap in the frosty hedge.

Figgins's action was so sudden that neither of the "Co." had time to resist, and in a twinkling the three were through the hedge and rolling among the rusty weeds of a half-frozen ditch.

"Only just in time!" gasped Figgins.

"Mad!" repeated Kerr, with conviction. "Right off his rocker. You silly ass, you've nearly ricked my neck, and spoiled my trousers!"

"And my waistcoat!" complained Wynn. "There's two buttons gone off it. Sit on him, Kerr, while I punch his head!"

"Hold on!" said Figgins. "Don't play the goat now. Do you think I did it for fun, asses?"

"Well, what did you do it for?"

"Old Ratty is stalking us. I spotted him coming round the corner."

The Co. became serious at once. Mr. Ratcliff was master of the New House at St. Jim's, to which Figgins & Co. belonged. Mr. Ratcliff was not popular in his house. He was fussy and severe. Offences which Mr. Kidd of the School House would pass over lightly, were heavily visited by Mr. Ratcliff upon his boys.

And when we mention that Figgins & Co. were supposed at this identical moment to be labouring over an imposition in their study in the New House, their anxiety to avoid a meeting with their housemaster will be easily understood.

Kerr gave an expressive whistle.

"The Ratcliff beast! Are you sure?"

"Ass! Do you think I don't know his owl's face? And I believe he had spotted us. If he has, look out for squalls."

And Figgins, cautiously putting his head through the opening of the hedge, warily scanned the lane they had so abruptly left. A tall, thin gentleman was coming from the direction of the village, and the expression of his sour face showed that he had seen the trio before they disappeared through the hedge, in spite of Figgins's promptness in performing the vanishing-trick.

"Is he looking for us, Figg?" asked Wynn, as Figgins turned back again.

"Yes."

"My hat! Then we're in for it."

"Perhaps not." Figgins thought rapidly. "He could only have caught a glimpse of us, and we may dodge him yet. Look here, if we cut across this field, we can get into the garden behind the Rylcombe Arms, and cut through that into the village. Come on; no time for talk! Keep your nappers down, and sprint for it!"

There was nothing else to be done. The hedge was high, and if they could get across the field before the housemaster reached the gap they were saved. Keeping their heads low, the three juniors sprinted across the field, towards the row of leafless trees which marked the boundary of the long inn garden. A wide ditch, filled with water when the Ryle stream was high, had to be crossed on the further side. It was full up now, and the water lapped over the plank which crossed it by way of a bridge.

The
Second Long,
Complete Story,
entitled
HUNTED DOWN!
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"Look out—this will be slippery!" exclaimed Figgins. He was right. The plank was indeed slippery, but the three juniors, treading with extreme care, crossed it in safety and scrambled over the garden gate. Figgins lingered behind for a moment, but he quickly rejoined his comrades. From the safe side of the gate, keeping well out of sight, they looked back across the field. A tall, thin figure stood in the gap of the hedge.

"The Ratcliff bird, as large as life," said Kerr. "See! He's looking this way. He suspects where we are. Figgy, you ass, you've made matters worse by this move."

"Why, if he spots us now, he'll think we came here on purpose to come to the Rylcombe Arms to see that cad Joliffe and his set. That'll mean being taken up before the Head. Call yourself a blooming general?"

"Don't you worry your poor little brain, my son," said Figgins. "He won't catch us. He could only have caught a glimpse of us in the lane. And he won't spot us here."

"Let him come. He isn't across the plank yet. I noticed it was loose as I crossed it, and I stopped for a tick to——"

"To make it safer," said Figgins serenely. "Keep down here in the shrubbery. We want to see him negotiate that plank. It ought to be worth seeing."

public. It ought to be worth seeing." Keeping in cover, they watched the car speed off joyfully. Keeping in cover, Mr. Ratcliff was coming the thin figure of the housemaid. Mr. Ratcliff was coming directly towards the gate, but his expression was dubious now. He had certainly caught sight in the lane of three figures he had taken for those of Figgins & Co., and full of righteous wrath, he had set out to track them down. But he had been disappointed. He had been looking for completely the trio vanished. But he was not man to do things by halves, and he meant to investigate a little further.

He reached the flowing ditch, and looked doubtfully at the plank. Treading very gingerly, he commenced to cross it to the gate. He had taken three steps from the bank when the further end of the plank slid downwards, and the house-master plunged forward. He made a desperate effort to recover his balance, slipped from the plank, and splashed up to his knees into the water.

"Oh!"

The sudden shock made him gasp and flounder, and in a moment he was in the deepest part of the ditch, with the water flowing round his waist. He gasped and spluttered, and struggled back to the bank he had left, and clutched at the rusty reeds and weeds. He was a dragged object as he dragged himself out.

"Oh!" gasped Mr. Rateliff. "Ugh! Oh, ah, ugh!"
His trousers were soaked, his sleeves wet, his tall-hat sailing merrily towards the river. The juniors, hidden on the other side of the gate, remained still as mice.

"The silly ass!" whispered Figgins. "He'll catch cold if he stands there grumbling. Why don't he make a run for it?"

Apparently the same thought came into Mr. Ratcliff's mind. Nothing but sharp exercise could save his nether extremities from freezing. He turned away and started across the field at a good pace. His hunting of Figgins & Co. was over; if he had wished to continue it there was not a means of crossing the ditch. But he did not wish anything of the kind. He thought only of getting home and changing his clothes. The juniors hugged themselves with joy as they watched the hatless figure, with coat-tails flying, streaking across the field.

"This," said Figgins, "is what comes of trailing down innocent youths like a giddy blighound. Let us hope it will prove a warning to our misguided master. Come along." Figgins led the way through the inn garden. "The sooner we get out of this place the better."

The juniors had excellent reasons for not wanting to be seen in the garden of the Rylcoombe Arms. The inn was kept by a man of shady character, named Joliffe, against whom the Head of St. Jim's had solemnly warned all the boys. Joliffe was known to have induced some of the most reckless of the Upper Form boys at St. Jim's to visit his place, to initiate them into the mysteries of card-playing for money, betting on horses, and it had come to the knowledge of the Head

Any boy belonging to St. Jim's, found in the precincts of the Rylcombe Arms by master or prefect, was certain of being taken before the Head, and of being given cause to remember the occasion. Jolliffe and the Rylcombe Arms were strictly taboo.

There was a path beside the inn, leading out into the main street of Rylcombe, and it was by this that Figgins hoped to escape. But the luck of Figgins & Co. seemed to be out that day. Figgins suddenly whispered "Cave!" and

dragged his companions into the shelter of an outhouse. Coming down the path beside the inn was a well-known figure—that of a senior of the New House at St. Jim's.

"It's Sleath," whispered Figgins, peeping out cautiously. "I say, this is rotten! Fancy his coming on us like this!"

"Think he's after us?" asked Kerr. "Acting in collusion with the Ratcliff bird?"

"No." Figgins shook his head. "I believe he's here on a visit to Jolliffe. I've thought a lot of times he was one of the chaps that had dealings with that rotter. He's just the sort. But he'd be down on us if he found us here, all the same."

"He's not going in. Hallo! He's talking to somebody at the side door. Hark!"

Sleath's voice could be distinctly heard. He was not a dozen paces from the juniors.

"I must see Mr. Joliffe. Tell him it's most important. It's about the money."

"He can't see you now, sir," said a rougher voice. "He says you can give me what you've brought him."

"Then I'm afraid there'll be a row, sir. It's no good; he won't see you."

"But I will see him. Let me pass!"
Figgin, looking cautiously round the corner of the shed, saw Sleath, with a white, angry face, push his way in, in spite of the man's real or pretended resistance. They were still speaking, but their voices died away indistinguishably inside the house.

The three juniors darted away, and in a minute or less were in the High Street of Rylcombe. There they breathed more freely.

"Now for a sprint to St. Jim's!" exclaimed Figgins. "If we buck up we may still get there ahead of Ratty, and be nicely and patiently at work in our study when he arrives."

"Right ho!" said Kerr. "But, I say, Figgy, what price Sleath? It's as plain as anything that he's in the habit of visiting that cad Joliffe, isn't it?"

"Looks like it, and looks as if he owed the cad money, or something like that," answered Figgins. "Still, it's no business of ours. We can't interfere. Buck up!"

And Higgins & Co. set out upon a run to the school. They covered the ground very quickly, and when Fatty Wynn began to puff and pant, Higgins and Kerr took him by the arms, one on either side, and raced him along between them. They were still some distance from the school when they sighted the figure of the housemaster ahead. Mr. Ratcliff was not accustomed to violent exercise, and he had soon dropped into a walk.

"We shall have to go round him," said Figgins. "At the rate, he's going we shall do it easily enough."

And they did. They lost a quarter of a mile making a detour to escape the lynx eyes of Mr. Ratcliff, but when they reached the gates of St. Jim's the housemaster was not yet in sight. The three scamps hurried to the New House, and were speedily at work in their study.

Ten minutes later the door of that apartment opened, and Mr. Ratcliff looked sourly in. He saw three juniors hard at work, with ink fingers and set, serious faces, and they all looked up respectfully as they saw him. He gave them one long, searching glance, which they met with faces of the most perfect innocence, and turned away without saying a word.

And as soon as the door had closed, Figgins & Co chortled joyfully.

CHAPTER 2.

The Raiders

JACK BLAKE sat upon the table in No. 6 Study in the School House. He was wrapped in thought; a most unusual state for him. Herries was wrestling with a Latin exercise; Digby was engaged in the still more important business of roasting chestnuts. The latest addition to Study No. 6, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the swell of the School, was diligently polishing his eyeglass. It required it, Digby having, in a humorous moment, squirted a stream of ink over it.

Digby grunted as he rose from the fire with a beautiful crimson complexion. Jack Blake's preoccupation was so profound that even the tempting offer of roasted chestnuts did not arouse him. He remained in a brown study.

"What's the matter with the image?" queried Dig. "Wake up, ass! What have you got in your silly cocoanut?" Jack Blake waved his hand chidingly.

"Silence, caitiff! Don't worry your uncle when he's thinking things out. Hallo! Roasted chestnuts! That's where I come in."

"THE LYNCROFT GOLD HUNT,"
A Tale of Speed, the Twins, & Co.,
By H. Clarke Hook;

AND "AMBONE AHoy!"
A Tale of Cooking Scrubbs,
By Harry Belbin.

IN "PLUCK," 1st

Herries looked up from his work.

"Don't talk, you two, or I shall get into a tangle. Here, I say, fathead, what are you up to now?"

Jack Blake flicked his exercise to the floor.

"Perish all that giddy rot when there's business on hand," he said severely. "You can fag your poor little brain over that presently, and if you're good I'll help you. I've been thinking."

"Did it hurt? You shouldn't start these things suddenly."

"Don't you be funny, my son. The New House have been bucking up a good deal lately, and it's time we wired in and put them in their place. Now, this is the accepted time. We've got an opportunity we never had before."

"How's that?"

"Why, the housemaster over the way, our estimable Ratcliff, has managed to catch a cold, or a cold has managed to catch him, and he's keeping to his room for a bit. I had it from a New House kid. There's nothing the matter with him, you know; but he never goes in for exercise or any sports, and so the least little bit of a cold turns him into a giddy invalid. And by the same token, Monteith, their prefect, is away."

Herries and Digby both looked interested.

"I saw him go out on his machine with Webb of the New House," went on Blake. "Now do you grasp the situation? Do you fully realise the thushness of it? The housemaster is nursing himself in his room. The head prefect is off for some hours. The coast is clear. Once aboard the lugger and the girl is ours—I mean, now is the time to make Figgins & Co. sit up."

Herries looked doubtful.

"I say, Ratcliff and Monteith may be off guard, but there are plenty left to sail in if we start rowing the Rats in their own quarters," he said.

"Ass!" replied Blake politely. "We are going to pay a visit to Figgins & Co.'s quarters while they are not there. We are going to prepare a pleasant little surprise for them, like affectionate schoolfellows. We are going to make them hoot with joy!"

"I see," grinned Herries. "All right. I'm game, if you are. Have you thought out what we're going to do?"

"Of course I have. Two of us will be enough to do the trick. I'm going, of course. I want one volunteer."

"Here you are!" said Herries promptly.

"Here you are!" said Digby, like an echo.

"I should be—aw—happy to accompany you," said Arthur Augustus, looking up, and screwing his monocle into his eye. "I should weally take it as an honah."

"Oh, you wouldn't be any good!" said Herries.

"Oh, I don't know!" said Blake. "Give him a chance. He licked Kerr, you know; and he can't help being an ass—can you, D'Arcy?"

"I strongly object to such rude expressions—" "Rats! If you all want to come, toss up for it. That's the quickest way."

This was agreed to; and Herries produced a shilling, and chance decided in favour of D'Arcy. Herries and Digby growled and submitted.

The quadrangle was deep in the early winter dusk as Blake and his companion cautiously crossed it towards the New House. Three figures in running flannels glimmered for a moment in the gloom and vanished. Blake grinned. He recognised Figgins & Co. doing their usual evening sprint round the quad.

"Come on, D'Arcy!"

Luck and the winter dusk favoured them. They reached the corridor of the Fourth Form studies undiscovered, and Blake tried Figgins's door. It opened to his hand, and the School House juniors entered, and Blake closed it. It occupied but a moment to light the gas.



"Is this what you call playing the game," demanded Figgys of the surrounded Percy—"smearing chaps and spoiling their clothes with tar?" (See page 15.)

Blake looked round the room, and saw the various belongings of Figgins & Co. scattered about it in a state of delightful disorder. He shook his head solemnly.

"This is shocking untidiness," he said. "Don't you think so, Algernon?"

"I weally don't know why you call me Algernon," said Arthur Augustus; "and the woom is not more untidy than our study in the School House, is it?"

"That's got nothing to do with it. It's shockingly untidy, and I'm going to set it to rights before our dear schoolfellows return. Now, if I pour this bottle of ink into Figgys's football boots it will be an improvement, and it's bound to please him when he finds it there."

"Weally, I should not think—"

"Then here's their grub. Shocking little gluttons, ain't they?" said Blake, opening the door of the cupboard where Figgins & Co. kept their provisions. "These jam-tarts look all right, but a little red ink will improve their colour. They look better now, don't they?"

"Ha, ha! Figgins won't think so."

"There's no pleasing some people. Now, here's a bottle of syrup. If I pour that over the pigeon-pie it will give it a flavour. Now I'll empty the tea-canister on top of it. Ah, and here's some coffee; that may as well go on the heap. Now, that will do for the cupboard. Oh, won't Figgys be pleased?"

Arthur Augustus grinned, and joined in to help with the improvements in the quarters of Figgins & Co.

The amount of havoc the two juniors wrought in a very short space of time was really remarkable. They sorted things and they mixed things, and in ten minutes the room looked as if it had been subjected to a dozen spring-cleanings all rolled into one.

Blake surveyed the ruins with a pleased smile of satisfaction.

"Do you think Figgys will be pleased, Aubrey?" he demanded.

"He is sure to be, dear boy. But if they come in and find us here, and the study in this dreadful state, I don't think we shall be pleased," remarked Arthur Augustus.

"Perhaps you're right. A benefactor must always be prepared to meet with ingratitude. This is where we bunk."

And Blake turned out the gas, and they left the room.

"Oh, I say, I forgot!" muttered Blake. "We ought to

NEXT SATURDAY:

"THE LYNCHCROFT GOLD HUNT,"
A Tale of Spies, the Twins, & Co.,
By H. Clarke Hook;

AND

"AMBONE AMOY!"
A Tale of Cooky Serabbs,
By Harry Balch.

IN "PLUCK," 1d

leave something to let 'em know who's been, though I dare say they'd guess. Cut along, sonny! I'll join you."

D'Arcy, who never questioned Blake's orders, hurried on, while Blake turned back into the room he had just quitted. He lighted the gas, and dipping his finger in the ink, scrawled in huge letters upon a sheet of exercise-paper, "With the Compliments of Study No. 6." This friendly message he pinned up in a prominent position over the mantelpiece, where it could not fail to catch the eyes of Figgins & Co. when they returned.

Then he quitted the study and followed D'Arcy. The latter had already left the New House, and was streaking across the quad for home. Blake hurried down the stairs, and passed quickly along the second corridor towards the lower flight. The corridor was well lighted, and he was in full view of anyone who should come out of the study, so he hurried as fast as he could without noise. But fortune was against him, for he was only half-way through the corridor when he heard someone ascending the lower stairs. He halted in dismay.

It was too late to return, and to advance was to show himself to the enemy. If it was only a junior it would not matter, but it might be a prefect. Blake's thoughts moved quickly. He turned to the nearest study door. The fact that there was no light showing beneath it proved that it was unoccupied, and that was what he wanted. In a moment he was within the room, and had closed the door. There he waited with beating heart for the footsteps to pass. They came on, nearer and nearer, and, to his dismay, halted at the door.

He stood on the handle; the door opened before he had time to think. He stepped back into the study, and someone came in in the darkness and struck a match. In the flickering light Blake caught sight of the face of Lucas Sleath.

The New House censor was deadly pale, and his eyes had a haggard look, as if from constant worry and want of sleep.

Blake looked at him in amazement, forgetting for the moment his own position in wondering what was the matter with Sleath.

The senior caught sight of him at the same moment, and uttered a startled cry.

"What are you doing here?"

"Nothing," said Blake.

He stood watching Sleath warily as he lighted the gas. He knew that he had at least a licking to expect, and he did not mean to take it quietly if there was a chance to bolt.

Sleath was treasurer of the school clubs, and at his election to the post a short time before Blake had done everything in his power to defeat him and bring about the election of the rival candidate, Darrel, of the School House. The rivalry between the two houses at St. Jim's had been very keenly shown over that election, and the New House candidate had scraped in on a bare majority of one, that one being a new boy whom Figgins & Co. had brought up to the poll, after an unsuccessful attempt by the chums of the School House to carry him off to vote for their man.

Naturally, there was no love lost between Sleath and Jack Blake. And, besides, Sleath was the special chum of Monteith, the head prefect of the New House, who hated Blake, and was always glad of an opportunity of coming "down" upon him.

All things considered, Blake had taken about the worst possible step for himself in taking refuge in Sleath's study, and now he was looking out for trouble.

But, contrary to his expectations, the New House senior did not reach out at once for a cane and commence operations. In the light of the gas Sleath stood looking at him oddly, his face still ghastly white and strained.

"What were you doing here?" he repeated, in a strangely calm voice.

"Nothing. I dodged in because I heard you coming. I've been paying a visit to Figgy's study," replied Blake cheerfully.

"Do you mean to say that you have only just entered my room?"

"Yes."

"I did not see you in the corridor."

"I dodged in when I heard your tootsies upon the stairs." Blake was rather puzzled by this cross-examination. Sleath was not taking at all the line he had expected him to take. Was it possible that he was to get off the licking, after all? And what was the matter with Sleath? What made him so horribly white?

Sleath was still looking at him in the same quiet, strange way.

"I don't believe you," he said coldly. "You are the worst boy in the School House, Blake, and I believe you came here to play some trick upon me."

"Well, I didn't, and only a cad would doubt a fellow's word!"

Sleath flushed with anger.

"Very well. Whatever you came for, you're going to have a licking."

Blake watched him warily.

Sleath reached out to grasp him by the collar. In a flash Blake ducked under his arm and bolted for the door. But it was too late. Sleath swung round, and seized him before he could escape, and boxed his ears right and left.

"Oh, you beast!" gasped Blake.

And he hit out, too, with all his strength, and Sleath received one or two that made him gasp. He dragged Blake to the door and sent him spinning out into the corridor. Two or three study doors opened, and fellows looked out to see what the disturbance was about.

Blake picked himself up.

He was hurt and somewhat dazed, but he had his wits about him. In a twinkling he had bolted down the corridor, and was descending the stairs three or four at a time.

Fortunately, he met no one in his wild career, or there would certainly have been a catastrophe. He ran down the steps of the New House, and in a few minutes was safe in Study No. 6, in his own house.

"Hallo! You've been in the wars!" exclaimed Herries, as Blake burst into the study, his face flushed, his hair tousled, his collar hanging loose.

Blake sank back into a chair.

"Did Figgins & Co. get you?" asked Digby.

"No," gasped Blake; "it was that beast Sleath! I dodged into his study because I heard someone coming up-stairs, and it was the Sleath beast himself, and he spotted me there. It was lucky for Algernon he got clear. He was only just in time."

"Never mind," said Herries consolingly. "it's all in the day's work. And now tell us how you've fixed up Figgins's quarters. From Gussy's account, you have mixed things up a little."

"I left 'em our compliments," said Blake; "that's what I went back for. My hat, that tussle has made me warm."

He took out his handkerchief to mop his manly brow, as Digby put it. From the handkerchief a coin rolled, and fell clinking on the floor.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Herries. "Why, you image, you said you were stony this morning, and here you go chucking half-sovereigns about!"

Jack stared at him.

"Half-sovereigns? You're dreaming!"

Herries picked up the coin. A half-sovereign it was, sure enough, and Blake looked at it in amazement.

"I didn't know I had it," he declared; "and I'm blessed if I know where it's come from now. I never put money in that pocket. I say, Algernon, have you lost half-a-sovereign lately?"

Arthur Augustus shook his head. He was the only one in Study No. 6 with whom half-sovereigns were plentiful.

"Well, I suppose I must have overlooked it somehow," said Blake. "I don't quite understand it, though. But as we're in funds, kiddies, we'll go down to the tack-shop, and lay in a feed. We can't expend our wealth in a nobler cause."

And the half-sovereign was forthwith "blued" in a royal feast. Meanwhile, Figgins & Co. had returned to their study.

Figgins's feelings when he looked round the room and discovered its state were too deep for words. He had no doubt as to whose kind attentions he was indebted. The notice over the mantelpiece stared him in the face:

"With the compliments of Study No. 6."

Figgins & Co. looked at one another. They did not speak. Their feelings could not have been expressed in any known language. They set to work to clear up the litter, to disentangle their various properties, to put things right again as well as they could; but it was not within the bounds of possibility to separate jam from liquid blacking, red-ink from tar, or readle from pigeon-pie.

Figgins & Co. laboured not patiently, and as they laboured they breathed deep vows of vengeance upon the School House and all that dwelt therein. But neither the raiders nor the raided had any idea of what was to follow Jack Blake's incursion into the rival house.

CHAPTER 3:

The Missing Money.

SLEATH put his head out of the study door as Monteith and Webb came up the corridor. He was looking extremely disturbed.

"I say, Monty, stop a moment, will you?" he said.

"Certainly," said Monteith.

"You, too, Webb," said Sleath. "Come in here. Something beastly unpleasant has happened!"

The two New House seniors entered the room.

"Well, what's the rumour?" asked Webb, looking at Sleath in wonder. "You look as if you had seen a ghost!"

"I haven't seen a ghost. It's worse than that!"

"Well, what's happened, anyway?"

"Somebody's taken twelve pounds from my desk!"

A bombshell could not have startled his hearers more than those words. Monteith and Webb stared at him incredulously.

"You must be joking," said the latter. "FH swear there's no thief in the New House. You've mislaid the money somewhere."

"I'm not likely to mislay a sum of money like that," replied Sleath, "and you may be sure I've hunted high and low before I spoke about the matter."

There was a pause, a painful silence, and the three seniors looked at each other.

"It was the football subscriptions, of course," said Sleath, breaking the silence. "I had the money in an envelope in a drawer in my desk. When I came in I found the envelope lying on the desk, and was amazed, of course. I looked in the drawer, and the money was gone."

"There's no possibility of a mistake, I suppose?" said Monteith. "This is a frightful thing for the New House. The School House will make capital out of it if it gets out."

"It must get out!" exclaimed Webb decidedly. "We can't lose twelve pounds, I suppose. And besides, more than half the money was subscribed by School House chaps. The thing's bound to get out, of course."

"I haven't told you all," said Sleath. "I don't think the School House will do much crowing over the business."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that when I came in I found a School House boy in my room."

Monteith whistled.

"Who was it?"

"Jack Blake."

"Jack Blake! You found him here! What was he doing?"

A glitter shot into Monteith's steely eyes. At the mention of Blake's name he saw a chance at last of repaying his long grudge against the boy he hated.

"He couldn't explain. I thought he had come to play some trick, and chuckled him out. He seemed frightened at being found here, but I didn't attach importance to that at the time; but when I saw the envelope lying on the table, and the money gone—well, I wasn't long in putting two and two together."

"Certainly looks more than suspicious."

"Let's have it out plain," said Webb bluntly. "It's well known, Sleath, that there's no love lost between you and young Blake of the School House. Can you prove that you found him in your study? He might deny it."

Sleath smiled in a sour way.

"There won't be much difficulty about that, I think. A good many fellows must have heard me chuck him out."

"It's a bad business. You say you've hunted through your study for the money?"

"Every corner, for the sake of making sure."

"You ought never to have left a drawer unlocked with money in it."

"It's easy to preach after a thing's happened. There's no thief in the New House, and how was I to guess that Blake would come here?"

"How was he to know you had money here, if you come to that?" said Webb. "A School House kid can't know much about your arrangements here."

"Well, I suppose he knew that the treasurer of the clubs would be certain to have the football subscriptions in his room somewhere," said Sleath. "I don't know how long he had been here rummaging when I found him."

"Well, we'll have a look about the room, and make assurance doubly sure, before we accuse Blake or anybody else," said Webb.

"That's what I want you to do."

And the three seniors searched the study, turning out every corner in which there was the barest possibility of the money having been carelessly bestowed.

The hunt was fruitless. They were finishing the search, when Baker of the Sixth put his head in at the open door.

"Hallo! What are you grovelling about? Lost something?"

"Yes."

"Is this it?"

And Baker held up a half-sovereign.

"Where did you find it?" asked Sleath.

"Just picked it up in the corridor outside your door. It isn't mine, and I thought it might be yours."

"Blake must have dropped it when he bolted," said Sleath.

Baker stared at him.

"Hallo! What are you talking about? What's that about Blake?"

The state of affairs was explained to him. Baker drew a long breath.

"It looks fishy!" he exclaimed. "I say, the sooner something's done the better. If that kid has taken the money, we may be able to get it back before he has had time to find it anywhere. Let's go over to the School House and interview Kildare, and have the kid up for examination."

"That's a good idea!" said Monteith. "We'd better all go, and say nothing to anybody until we've had it out over in the School House."

This was agreed to, and the four New House seniors started at once. Baker and Webb walked together, and Monteith dropped a little behind with Sleath.

"I say, Sleath," he said, in a low voice, "this is all right, isn't it?"

"What do you mean by all right?"

"I mean, it is really just as you said. Blake really took the money."

Sleath stared at him.

"I don't see what you're driving at, Monty."

"Don't be an ass!" said Monteith irritably. "You hate Blake, and so do I. I'd be glad enough to get the cheeky imp kicked out of St. Jim's, and so would you; but a charge like this can't be made unless it's true. If this is a got-up job to get Blake into trouble, I don't want to have a hand in it. It's going altogether too far. That's what I mean."

"The thing is exactly as I have told you," replied Sleath steadily. "I understand what you mean, but there's nothing in it. The money has been taken, and I found Blake in my study. You know as much about the matter as I do now."

"Oh, all right. I only wanted to be satisfied on that point."

"Well, I hope you're satisfied now!" said Sleath tartly.

The four seniors entered the School House, and proceeded direct to Kildare's study. Eric Kildare was head of the School House, and captain of St. Jim's. He was the idol of his own house, and even the New House boys could not help respecting and liking him.

Kildare was at home, a couple of School House seniors being with him, having tea in his cosy study. His cheery voice bade the visitors enter, and the School House fellows looked in amazement at Monteith and his companions as they came in.

Kildare, Darrel, and Rushton rose to their feet. For a moment they thought that this invasion meant war. It was not so long since Kildare and Monteith had stood foot to foot, fist to fist, and the New House prefect had received the licking of his life. Although peace was patched up between them, on Monteith's side all the old rancour still subsisted, and the skipper of St. Jim's soon saw that the present visit was not a hostile one.

"Hallo, you chaps!" he said, in his cordial, Irish way. "This is an unexpected pleasure. You are just in time for the brew."

"We've come on business!" said Monteith shortly.

"Do you mean the football? I suppose that can be settled at the next committee meeting. I don't see what can have turned up all of a sudden!" said Kildare, looking puzzled.

"It isn't the football. There's been a happening that means disaster for St. Jim's—or, at least, for the School House—if it isn't cleared up."

"I don't understand you."

The School House seniors remained standing. Webb, Baker, and Sleath looked extremely uncomfortable as they faced them. But Monteith was enjoying the situation. It was a keen triumph to him to have a weapon like this to use against his enemy.

"I'll explain. Sleath came into his study suddenly awhile ago, and found one of your juniors there. He couldn't explain his presence, and Sleath kicked him out. When he had gone Sleath discovered that the football subscriptions, amounting to twelve pounds, had been taken out of his drawer."

Kildare changed colour.

"You are accusing a School House boy of going to the New House to steal?"

"Yes."

"It's a thundering lie!" exclaimed Rushton hotly.

But the captain made him a sign to be silent. The lurking smile upon Monteith's sour face told him that the New House prefect had a strong case.

"Who is the junior in question?"

"Jack Blake."

"We might have guessed it," broke out Rushton again.

"We know how you hate him! And he's about the fast kid in the world to touch money not his own."

"It's a question of proofs," said Monteith, looking at Kildare, and taking no notice of Rushton. "Sleath will bear out what I have just told you. Personally, I know nothing of the matter, only that the money is gone. But Baker here picked up half-a-sovereign in the corridor, where Jack Blake was when Sleath kicked him out. The inference is

"THE LYNCHING OLD HUNT;"

A Tale of Spain, the Tyne, and On.

By H. Clarke Hook.

AND

"ANYONE AROUS!"

A Tale of Cooker's Kitchen.

By Harry Belton.

IN "PLUCK," I

NEXT SATURDAY:

that Blake dropped it there, unless Rushton likes to accuse Baker of being in a plot against your precious junior."

"We all take Baker's word," said Kildare.
"Which means that you wouldn't take mine or Sleath's. Very well; it's a question of proofs, as I have said. We came over here hoping to settle the matter as quietly as possible, and prevent a scandal. If you choose to meet us in a hostile spirit—"

"We don't. I will send for Blake at once, and question him before you."

Kildare went to his door and called to his flag, who was sent at once in quest of Jack Blake. In grim silence the group in the study awaited the arrival of the accused junior.

CHAPTER 4. Blake Accused.

"JUST one more, Dig?"

"No, thanks!"
"Some more ginger-pow, Herries?"
"Er—no; I'm afraid not."

"Arthur Algerton, old son, one more cream-puff?"
"Aw—no, deah boy!"

The chums of Study No. 6 were lounging in the school tuck-shop. They had spent the half-sovereign right royally, and had enjoyed their feast. But satiety had come at last, and, while there was still some small silver left, cream-puffs and tarts and lemonade and ginger-pow ceased to tempt them.

"This," said Blake dreamily, "is what I call happiness. I wonder where that half-sov. came from? I wish some more would come from the same place."

"Blake—Blake!"
"Hallo! What are you squeaking out my name for, young Higges?"

"Kildare wants you."
"Oh dear! What is it now? I suppose the Sleath beast has been complaining," said Blake. "I can't possibly stand a licking after that feed. I shan't go."

"Better," said Herries. "Explain how it is to Kildare, and get him to lay it on lightly."

"I suppose I shall have to go. It's rotten! Here, young Higges, come and have some tarts. I'm in funds to-day. I've had a windfall, and there's still some left. Was there anybody in Kildare's study with him?"

"Yes; some seniors from the New House."

"Was the Sleath pig one of them?"

"Yes, and Monteith."

"I'm in for it!" sighed Blake. "Why can't they let an innocent kid, who only wants to be 'appy, alone? Well, here goes!"

"I think I weally ought to come with you, deah boy," said D'Arcy. "I was with you in waiding the New House, don't you know?"

"You stay where you are. One licking is enough," said Blake.

And he betook himself to the study of St. Jim's skipper.

"Come in, Blake," said Kildare, quietly and seriously.

Blake looked in astonishment at the grave faces of the seniors. He could understand why Sleath had come over to complain, and Monteith, too, but the presence of Webb and Baker surprised him. What did they want there? And why were Kildare and his friends looking so solemn? It seemed a case of much ado about nothing with a vengeance.

"Well, here he is," said Monteith spitefully. "You had better question him, Kildare. He's more likely to tell you the truth."

"Yes, here I am," said Blake cheerfully. "Still the same polite kind of a pig, ain't you, Monteith—still got the same lovely manners?"

The New House prefect scowled. He had never been able to frighten Jack Blake with his black looks, and his failure in this respect annoyed him.

"This is a grave matter, Blake," said Kildare quietly. "Sleath has made a very serious accusation against you."

"All right," said Blake. "I know it means a licking; but, as Sleath pitched into me, I don't see what he came complaining to you for. Still, here I am, ready to be made a giddy martyr of. Which hand, and how many?"

"You don't understand. Sleath discovered you in his study."

"Yes, I was there, as large as life. There's no getting out of that," agreed Blake. "If I had known the ead was just coming in, you bet I wouldn't have gone into his old study! But we have to pay for these little errors in tactics, so I'm quite ready to take my gruel. Only lay it on lightly, because I've just been filling myself up to the chin in the tuck-shop, and I don't feel so fit as usual for a whacking."

The seniors looked at one another doubtfully. It was evident that Blake had not the slightest suspicion of the real

object of the New House seniors' visit, or else he was the most accomplished actor they had ever seen.

"He's putting this on," said Monteith angrily. "You may as well own up, Blake, and stop this fooling. You must know that you are found out!"

Blake looked bewildered.

"Of course I know I'm found out," he said. "Sleath found me in his study, and half a dozen of your fellows saw him sling me. I haven't denied it, have I? I suppose that's what you're here for? You haven't come about Eggy's study, have you? Eggy would never give me away, I know that."

"We have come about the money you stole from Sleath's study!"

Blake started back. For a moment he looked at the New House prefect in incredulous amazement.

"The money!" he repeated vaguely, dazedly. "What money?"

His startled glance went from face to face.

"You know well enough," said Monteith.

"You mean to say I took money from Sleath's study?" panted Blake, amazement giving place to indignation and anger.

"Yes."

"You liar—you beast—you ead!" The words came out in a torrent. "You rotten ead!"

Blake's eyes were blazing with rage; his usual coolness was gone, and for the moment his passionate indignation mastered him. Right at Monteith he dashed, his fists flying out wildly, and the prefect staggered back from the sudden and unexpected attack.

"You—you little hound!"

Blake's fists crashed into the prefect's face. Monteith, recovering himself, grasped him savagely, and drew back his clenched hand for a heavy blow. Kildare gripped him and slung him away, leaving Blake loose.

"Kildare, let me go! I—"

"Stand back, Monteith!" said the captain of St. Jim's savagely. "Stand back, or you'll have to reckon with me!"

"He has struck me—he—"

"Stand back!"

Kildare's eyes were blazing now. The prefect thought it better to obey. He let his hands drop to his sides, giving Blake a glance of poisonous hatred.

The boy's passion had passed now. He stood, white and shaken, with the tears struggling to his eyes, but keeping them back by a tremendous effort.

"You liar," he muttered—"you liar!"

"You must calm yourself, Blake," said Kildare. "If you are innocent, I understand how you must feel; but you must know that you should not strike a prefect."

"If I am innocent!" repeated Blake. "You don't mean to say that you believe a word of what that cowardly cre says?"

"Do you think I am going to stand that, Kildare?" broke out Monteith, white with rage.

"Hold your tongue. You've said enough against Blake, anyway."

Blake's eyes were fixed upon his captain.

"Kildare, you don't believe it?"

"By George, I don't!" cried the generous Irish lad. "No, I don't! It will be explained somehow. But you must not be so hasty, Blake. It is not really Monteith who is accusing you, but Sleath. Monteith has only taken it up as a prefect."

"There is a mistake somewhere," said Kildare, with a harassed look. "We must go into this. In the first place, Sleath, are you absolutely certain the money is missing?"

"Monteith, Webb, and I have thoroughly searched my study. Not that it was necessary, for I know I left the money in a certain drawer of my desk."

"Which was not locked?"

"There is no key to it."

"That was gross carelessness, in the first place."

"How was I to know any of your juniors would come burgling?"

Kildare's eyes glittered, but he did not reply to the remark. "Blake, you admit being in Sleath's study?"

"Of course I do. I was there."

"What were you doing there?"

"I skipped in because I heard Sleath coming upstairs. I didn't want to be caught. I didn't know it was Sleath's study till he came in. I just nipped into it because there wasn't any light under the door, so I thought it a safe place to bunk into."

"A likely story!" sneered Sleath.

"Did you explain that to Sleath at the time?"

"Yes. He asked me what I was doing there, and I told him."

"What were you doing in the New House?"

"We went to raid old Eggy's den."

"You were not alone?"

"D'Arcy was with me. He left first, though. I went back

to leave a message for Figgins. He got clear, and that was how Sleath caught me."

Kildare's brow grew more serious and clouded. Blake did not seem to realize it, but his having gone back, after his companion left the New House, told heavily against him. How was he to prove that he had not gone back, under colour of that excuse, to commit the theft in Sleath's study?

"Very cunningly put," sneered Monteith. "I don't suppose anybody here will take stock in such a yarn. It's pretty clear what he went back for."

"Then you deny, Blake, knowing anything at all about the money that is missing from Sleath's study?" asked Kildare.

"I didn't know any was missing till now."

"Baker picked up a half-sovereign outside Sleath's door, where you were turned out. Did you drop it there?"

"No, I hadn't a half-sovereign on me."

"You'll never get the truth out of him," said Monteith. "The question is, where is the money? If he is searched, and his belongings, it's pretty certain to come to light. And it ought to be done before he has time to hide it."

"Have you any objection to being searched, Blake."

"Not if you think I ought to be, Kildare," replied the junior promptly.

"That means that he hasn't the money on him now," said Monteith. "He's got it hidden away safely enough somewhere."

Blake's eyes flashed, but he controlled himself now. He understood that there was no time for violence. The matter had to be thrashed out.

"I don't see what's to be done," said Kildare, looking extremely worried. "Nobody can say he saw Blake take the money. His explanation of being in Sleath's study is perfectly reasonable. His presence in the New House is fully accounted for."

"Which means that you do not believe him guilty?"

"No, I cannot."

"Then you refuse to take the matter up?"

"How am I to take it up? If you choose to search Blake and his belongings, you are at liberty to do so. He has given his consent."

"Thank you: I am not a policeman. If you refuse to take the matter up, I shall take it to the doctor. You can make your choice."

"Very well. The matter will certainly have to go before the doctor, anyway: so the sooner you do so the better."

"Come along," said Monteith to his friends. "It's no good staying here. It's turned out as I might have expected. Kildare stands by a chap of his own house, even if he's a proved thief. Let's go to the Head."

And the New House seniors quitted the study. The School House lads looked at each other in grim dismay.

"Here's a pretty kettle of fish!" exclaimed Darrel. "The New House will make a song over this, and no mistake."

Kildare dropped his hand on Blake's shoulder.

"Blake, do you give me your word of honour that you are innocent, and know nothing about this matter?" he said earnestly.

"Yes," said Blake, looking him fearlessly in the eyes.

"I believe you," said Kildare, with a deep breath. "I don't understand it all. But there's something more than a mistake somewhere."

"Blake had better remain here," suggested Rusden.

"There will be a search, and we mustn't put it in Monteith's power to say he had time to make away with the money."

Kildare nodded.

"Yes: stay here, Blake. One of you fellows had better stay, too. I must go and see the Head. It's a beastly business."

And, with a darkly clouded brow, the captain of St. Jim's followed in the footsteps of Monteith to the study of the Head.

CHAPTER 5. Before the Doctor.

ST. JIM'S was amazed. The news spread over the school like lightning. The boys gathered in groups and talked of nothing else. Every other topic was banished in the all-absorbing interest of this. There was a thief in the school. And Blake was accused! Jack Blake accused of theft!

His chums received the news first with incredulity, and then with passionate indignation. The juniors of the School House mostly shared their feelings. There were a few exceptions. Percy Mellish, who had long yearned for the downfall of Blake, hoping thereby to rise to the leadership of the School House juniors in his place, hardly concealed his satisfaction. He had no doubt that Blake was guilty; not he. He took care, however, not to express this opinion within hitting distance of the chums of Study No. 6.

The New House juniors received the news with more mingled feelings. They were incredulous at first. But the fact that the accusation came from the New House disposed them to put faith in it. After all, Blake's tale was weak, and the money was certainly missing. Upon that point, at all events, there was no doubt.

Twelve pounds had vanished from Sleath's study, and as it could not have taken unto itself wings and flown away, someone must have taken it. The existence of a thief in the school, therefore, had to be admitted. The New House juniors had the choice of believing Blake guilty, or of attributing the crime to one of their own house.

That they were not likely to do. And so, ere long, there were few boys in the New House who did not believe that Blake had taken the football-money from Sleath's desk. But there were three important exceptions to the general rule. Figgins & Co. scouted the idea that Blake was a thief in the most scornful manner.

"It's all rot!" said Figgins. "Blake has made us sit up often enough, but we're not going to run him down on that account. He's no more a thief than I am."

And the Co. loyally chimed in.

"He's innocent!" said Kerr emphatically.

"Of course, he is," said Fatty Wynn. "It's simply not!"

"That's all very well," said Pratt, a New House junior, and a leader in the denunciation of Blake. "But if he didn't take the money, who did?"

This was a poser, and Figgins & Co. could not answer it.

"Perhaps you'll say that one of our house took it," said Pratt, pursuing his advantage. "Yah, cads! Can't you stand up for your own house?"

Whereupon Figgins, feeling his authority defied, promptly "biffed" him, and Pratt retired to wash a red-flowing nose under the bath-room tap. But, although silenced, he was not convinced, and his followers remained of his opinion.

Figgins & Co. were alone in the New House in upholding the innocence of Blake. And even Figgins was a little staggered by the subsequent developments of the case. It was all very well to assert that Blake was innocent, but it could not be denied that matters looked very black against the unfortunate junior.

After Monteith had laid his complaint before the doctor, Blake was sent for. He came into the principal's study very pale, but with his head erect. The doctor gave him a searching look, but was compelled to acknowledge that he could detect no signs of guilt in the boy's face.

"You know what you are accused of, Blake?" he said quietly.

"Yes, sir."

"You deny it?"

"Absolutely."

"You adhere to the statements you have made to Kildare?"

"Yes, sir; because they are true."

"The matter must be thoroughly sifted," said the doctor. "I need not say that if I am satisfied of your guilt, you will be expelled from the school."

"I should deserve it if I were a thief, sir."

"Very good: If you are innocent you have nothing to fear, for I shall certainly thresh out the truth. Kildare, bring the juniors who share Blake's study here."

Herries, Digby, and D'Arcy were soon brought in. They gave Blake encouraging looks, and the tears started to the boy's eyes as he read their unwavering faith and loyalty in their faces.

"Herries, you have shared Study No. 6 with Blake ever since he came to the college. Have you ever had any reason to doubt his honour?"

"No, sir. He's all right, and the best chum a chap ever had."

"Do you others say the same?"

"Rather—I mean yes, sir," said Digby. "Of course, sir."

"And you, D'Arcy?"

"I believe him to be a really honourable fellow," said D'Arcy. "He has been very good to me ever since I came, and I suspect him highly."

"You have, I believe, an unusual amount of pocket-money for a boy of your age, D'Arcy?"

"My kind aunts send me tips sometimes, sir. My Aunt Adeline—"

"Have you frequently sums of money in your possession?"

"No, sir; never more than a fiver or a tennah."

"Five or ten pounds is an excessively large sum for a junior to possess," said the doctor severely. "Have you ever missed any money since you have been in Blake's study, D'Arcy?"

"Never, sir!"

"You are absolutely certain upon that point?"

"Quite certain, Doctor Holmes."

The Head drew a deep breath of relief.

"You will all understand," he said, "that this is a point in favour of Blake. If he were a thief, it would be much easier to take something belonging to D'Arcy, and much safer. Why should he go across to the New House, running a thousand risks, when, if he had made up his mind to steal, there was plunder under his very eyes?"

Herries gave D'Arcy a surreptitious dig in the ribs, and Digby with difficulty refrained from giving the doctor a cheer on the spot. The point was well taken, and Kildare's face brightened up wonderfully.

"But the money is gone, sir," said Monteith.

Certainly, and circumstantial evidence is against Blake. I merely wished to elicit such points as were in his favour. I have another question to put to you, Herries. I believe you would be likely to know if Blake had a sudden accession of pocket-money, if he spent more than usual at any time."

"Oh, yes, sir. We have a common fund in Study No. 6."

"Since Blake's visit to the New House, have you noticed him to be in possession of more money than usual?"

"Herries was about to say "No," when he suddenly stopped. With his mouth half-open, and his face flushing red, he looked the picture of mental discomfort. His embarrassment, of course, did not escape a single eye in the room.

"Come, speak out!" said the doctor sharply.

Herries gave Blake a helpless glance. Blake bit his lip. He knew what Herries was thinking of—that unlucky half-sovereign which had just been expended in the school tuck-shop.

"It was nothing, sir," stammered Herries. "There was a half-sovereign—"

"Please be more explicit."

"I mean Blake had a half-sovereign, but it was his own, and—"

"Was it, to your knowledge, in his possession before he went to the New House?"

"N-no, sir."

"Or to your knowledge, or yours, Digby, D'Arcy?"

"N-no, sir."

"Where did you get that half-sovereign, Blake?"

"I found it in my pocket, sir."

Blake made the answer bravely, but even as he spoke he could not help realising how absurd such an answer must sound, and he flushed uncomfortably. Monteith openly sneered, and Kildare looked uneasy. The doctor's brows set in a frown of portentous severity.

"You found it in your pocket?" he repeated, as if hardly able to believe his ears.

"Yes, sir," said Blake desperately. "I didn't know it was there. I pulled out my handkerchief and it rolled upon the floor. Herries saw it."

"Yes, I did!" exclaimed Herries, glad to be able to bear witness to something. "I saw it, sir! He flicked it out with his handkerchief, and it rolled on the floor. I picked it up, and saw that it was a half-sov.—I mean a half-sovereign."

Poor Herries did not see yet that he was making the case worse instead of better. The doctor's face was beginning to set like iron.

"So Blake flicked the coin out by accident, Herries?"

"Yes, sir; quite by accident!" said Herries eagerly.

Monteith, who saw what the Head was driving at, grinned.

"And then he explained that he found it in his pocket?"

"He said he didn't know where it had come from. Didn't you, Blake? He didn't know he had a half-sov. left. We were all surprised to see it, sir."

"No doubt," said the doctor drily. "And now, Blake, do you still maintain that you don't know how that coin came to be in your pocket?"

"Yes, sir. I must have shoved it in there absent-mindedly some time when I was in funds, I suppose, and forgotten all about it. You see, I never keep money in that pocket, and that accounts for my not finding it."

"You keep your handkerchief in that pocket? Yes! And you have put it in and taken it out a good many times, I presume, since the last time you were in funds. Yet you never chanced to flick the half-sovereign out till just after your visit to the New House, when a certain sum of gold was missing?"

Blake was silent.

He knew how terribly this must tell against him.

Herries, with the best intentions in the world, had borne blacker evidence against him than any of his avowed enemies.

Herries was realising it, too, and he was looking utterly miserable. D'Arcy and Dig were dumbfounded by this new turn of events.

"Please tell me, Sleath, the exact coins missing from your desk," said the doctor.

"A five-pound note, six sovereigns, and two half-sovereigns, sir," replied Sleath.

"And you still deny knowing anything of the missing money, Blake?"

"Yes, sir."

"And you have no better account to give of the half-sovereign?"

"I have told the truth, sir."

"I am afraid you have stated a physical impossibility," said Dr. Holmes drily. "How long is it since you were in funds, as you put it?"

"A couple of weeks, sir."

"Then you wish us to believe that the coin was in your pocket for a fortnight without coming to light, although you must have taken out and replaced your handkerchief scores of times?"

Blake's eyes sank to the floor.

Put into these words, his explanation did indeed seem simply impossible, and he realised it. But how, then, had the half-sovereign come into his pocket? He had given the only possible explanation, and the doctor judged it impossible! There was only one conclusion to be drawn. He was guilty!

For one dizzy moment Blake wondered whether he was guilty—whether in some inexplicable lapse of consciousness he had indeed taken the money from Sleath's study.

There was a painful silence in the room.

Blake raised his eyes. He looked round him almost wildly. Kildare avoided his glance.

Upon Monteith's cold, hard face was something like a look of pity. Pity from the head professor of the New House—his bitter enemy! The vague thought of a plot against him crumbled away in Blake's mind as he caught the prefect's expression. Monteith could feel a gleam of pity for him—because he believed him guilty, and knew that he would be expelled from St. Jim's!

But there was comfort in one direction. There were three faces that still told of faith and firm belief—three staunch chums who would stick to him through thick and thin. Herries, Digby, and D'Arcy, impervious to logic, caring only for the evidence of their own true, warm hearts, wavered not for a moment in their loyalty.

The doctor's voice broke the silence, which had become oppressive. The voice of the Head of St. Jim's seemed to have taken a new, icy tone.

The facts, then, are these, as I have gathered them. You will correct me if I am wrong, Blake. You went to the New House with D'Arcy. You let him leave alone, while you went back, with an excuse which may or may not have been true. Sleath found you in his study. Immediately after you were gone he missed the money. A half-sovereign was picked up where you had been ejected from the study. Later, you are found with another half-sovereign in your possession. It is revealed by accident, and the explanation you give is absolutely inadmissible. Have you anything more to say?"

Blake shook his head.

"What's the good of my saying anything?" he said brokenly. "You believe me guilty. I can only repeat that I'm innocent, and you won't believe me. I've only got my word to give you."

"Can you expect your word to be taken against an overwhelming mass of evidence?"

"I don't know. I'd take a fellow's word, unless I knew him to be a liar. I can't understand it all. But I am innocent."

"I wish I could believe you," said the doctor wistfully.

"You have hitherto borne an excellent character in the house, Blake. I wish I could believe you. But it is impossible."

There was a terrible pause.

"If you choose to confess, Blake, and to restore the money, I will deal with you as gently as I can," said the doctor.

"You must," of course, leave St. Jim's. But in view of the good records you have borne up till now, I will allow you to leave quietly, without a public expulsion, if you make what amends are in your power."

"If you mean returning the money, sir, I cannot, because I did not take it. I suppose you will expel me if you think I am guilty, but I am not. I know I can't explain all the circumstances, but I am innocent."

"He's innocent!" burst out Herries. "Oh, sir—"

"Silence, Herries!"

"I can't be silent, sir! He's innocent, and I know it. So does Dig; don't you, Dig?"

"Of course I do," said Dig, half crying. "He's as innocent as I am. It's all rot. As if he'd take the dirty money."

"It's a rotten shame," said D'Arcy, with a catch in his voice. "He never took the money, sir. I am certain that he never did."

"Your faith in this wretched boy does you credit, my lads," said the doctor, much moved. "I only wish I could believe that he deserved it."

Kildare made a step forward. The Head looked at him inquiringly.



Mr. Ratcliff was disappointed, for as he entered the study he saw three juniors hard at work, with inky fingers and set, serious faces. (See page 16.)

"Have you anything to say in Blake's favour, Kildare?" asked the doctor.

"Only this, sir, that he's the last boy in the school I should have suspected of being a thief. I know things look black against him. But there's a chance—a slight chance, and—and would it be too much to ask, sir, to ask you to suspend judgment for a few days, and let Blake remain until—until the matter is cleared up a bit? The money may be found—it ought to be found—and I can't help thinking that there may be a horrible mistake somewhere."

Kildare spoke with deep earnestness, and the doctor was evidently impressed. He glanced at the captain, and then at Blake, and hesitated.

"But do you not see, Kildare, that it will be a very painful position for Blake himself?" he asked. "It is useless to attempt to hush the matter up. Blake will be pointed at as a thief by the boys."

"Let him decide for himself, sir."

"Very well, Blake, what do you say?"

"Oh, let me stay, sir!" exclaimed the boy eagerly. "I'm certain that something will turn up to prove my innocence, sir. If the money was really stolen we may be able to find out who took it, and—"

The doctor coughed.

"That will do. For the present, then, your sentence is suspended, while every effort will be made to discover the missing money. I presume you have the number of the missing note, Sleath?"

"Unfortunately, no, sir. I never foresaw anything of this kind, of course."

"It cannot be helped. The money must be found. You may go now. Kildare and Monteith will come with me, and

Taggles will search Blake's belongings in our presence. Then, if the money is not found, I must consider the next step. You may go."

The New House seniors returned to their quarters. They carried away a firm conviction of Blake's guilt. Blake, looking white and utterly depressed, was taken away by his chums. And then the search commenced for the missing money.

CHAPTER 6.

Flagging to the Fore.

A CROWD of School House boys were waiting to see Blake come out of the Head's study. They had been freely discussing the question of his guilt or his innocence. The facts were as yet very imperfectly known. It was certain that money was missing from Sleath's study, that Blake had been discovered in the room under suspicious circumstances, and that he was up before the doctor. So much was known to all the school. And opinion was as yet very much divided.

When Blake came out with Herries, Dig, and D'Arcy, every eye was bent upon him at once. His pale, harassed looks were at once commented upon. There was a rush of eager questioners, but Blake took no notice of them. He walked straight on, and his chums elbowed away the inquirers. Straight to Study No. 6 they went, leaving a feeling of disappointment behind them. And Percy Mellish, when he traced in Blake's looks and in his silence the signs of conscious guilt, found many listeners.

From a distance many inquisitive juniors watched the search that was immediately made. Taggles, the school

NEXT SATURDAY:

"THE ALPHABETIC GOLD HUNT,"
A Tale of Specie, Sin, Twine, & Co.,
By H. Clarke Stock.

AND

"KIDNAP ANY!"
A Tale of Ostrich Scratches,
By Harry Helthin.

"IN PLOUGH,"

porter, made it, accompanied by the doctor, by Kildare, and by the head prefect of the New House.

Study No. 6 was first examined, but in that famous apartment no trace of the missing money was found. For the sake of making assurance doubly sure, even the property of all the chums was searched, but with no result. A five-pound note was certainly found in a drawer in D'Arcy's inkstand, but Arthur Augustus explained that it was his own, and offered to refer the doctor to his "governor," who would be able to identify the note by its number.

From Study No. 6 the searchers proceeded to the Fourth Form dormitory, without result. All Blake's belongings were subjected to a keen search, which missed nothing. But no trace of the missing money could be found.

"He's shoved it in an awfully safe place," said Percy Mellish to his cronies. "What we want is a detective, you know, to shadow him and all that, and discover where he has hidden it. That's what we want."

Percy Mellish had followed the search carefully. There were few happenings in the School House that escaped Percy. As he had no conscientious scruples about listening at doors or peeping through keyholes, he generally kept himself well posted.

"There was a liver found in the study," he went on. "I heard D'Arcy explain to the Head that his governor had sent it to him. That's all my eye."

"What, don't you believe it?" said Walsh.

"Not much. D'Arcy was shielding Blake, that's all."

"Then you think he's guilty, and they're trying to screen him?"

"I know he's guilty. I—"

Percy Mellish broke off with a yell.

A grip of iron was placed upon his collar, and a set of bony knuckles were ground into the back of his neck.

He swung round furiously, half throttled, and to his amazement saw that it was Figgins, the chief of the New House juniors, who had seized him.

Figgins was looking wrathful.

"So you think he's guilty, do you, you little beast?" said Figgins.

"Yes; but I— What are you doing here, you New House cad? You've no right in our house. Kick 'em out, chaps!"

The Co., who were, of course, with their leader, clenched their fists to stand by Figgins, but it was not necessary. The School House boys showed no disposition to rally to the call of the injured Percy.

"Kick him out yourself," said Walsh. "We'll see fair play."

But that did not suit Percy. He would as soon have tackled a wild bull as Figgins, who could have wiped up the ground with him in next to no time.

"Lemme alone, you beast," he said sulkily. "What's it got to do with you, anyway? Get out of our house."

"You were going to kick me out just now," said Figgins.

"I'm waiting for you to start."

Percy jerked his collar free.

"What do you want here, anyway?" he snarled. "If Mr. Kidd catches you you'll get into a row, I can tell you."

"We've come to see Blake," replied Figgins. "As for you, Mellish, if you were worth looking I'd waste five minutes on you, but you ain't. Come on, chaps."

And Figgins & Co. marched off to Study No. 6, leaving the School House boys considerably astonished, and wondering what the object of their visit might be.

Blake and his chums were in the study.

They were about the most miserable group that had ever gathered together within the ancient walls of St. Jim's.

The situation seemed hopeless; the sentence of expulsion was suspended, but unless the truth came to light soon, Blake had to go, with a stigma upon his name which would last all his life. And how was the truth to be discovered? Try as they would, the chums could think of no way of penetrating the mystery. They were fogged, bewildered, almost overwhelmed.

Blake started from a painful reverie as a timid knock came at the door.

"Sheer off, whoever you are!" growled Herries, thinking it was some inquisitive questioner returning to the attack.

"We don't want any visitors!"

But, in spite of this discourteous response, the door opened, and Figgins & Co. came hesitatingly into the study.

Herries and Digby sprang to their feet, their fists clenching convulsively. A thought, unjust, but not unnatural, had sprung into their minds at once.

"You've come to—to—"

Figgins shook his head hastily.

"Pax!" he exclaimed. "We ain't on the war-path; and if you think we'd crow over a thing like this, even if we believed it—"

"Sorry!" said Herries, sitting down again.

"And we don't believe it!" said Figgins earnestly. "That's what we've come over for, to tell you so, Blake. Most of our house have made up their silly minds that you are guilty; but some of your own fellows are saying the same, too. But we know you didn't take the money. We know it, don't we, chaps?"

"We do!" said Kerr and Wynn, in a breath.

"We're going to back you up," continued Figgins.

"We've gone for each other often enough, and there's been hard knocks on both sides, but we don't bear malice, any of us, I hope; and in a thing like this we stand by you. We know you didn't take the money, and we back you up, Blake."

There were tears in Jack Blake's eyes now, though he was far from being one of the crying kind. His own chums had proved staunch in the hour of trial, but he had never expected this eager faith and loyalty from his rivals of the New House.

"You're jolly good about it, Figgys," he said, in a low voice. "I can't say much, but you'll understand how I feel what you've said. Of course, I am innocent. It's a horrible mistake somewhere, though I can't make it out."

"There's more than a mistake," said Figgins. "Somebody has been telling lies. Somebody has taken the money, and managed to fix it on you."

"But, I say," remarked Herries, "you know what that amounts to, Figgys. If you admit that Blake's innocent, it's as good as accusing one of your own house."

Figgins nodded.

"I know that, Herries; but I believe that Blake is innocent, all the same. Whether it was one of our own house or not, we're going to discover the thief."

"You are?"

"Yes. We've talked it over between ourselves, and we're going to set to work. You lot do the same. If the real thief's in the New House, we'll find him. If he's in the School House, you'll spot the cad. I know it's most likely that he's on our side. I know it will be a come-down for us to admit that we have a thief in the New House; but we're going to get at the truth, and clear Blake."

"You're a Briton, Figgys, and no mistake!" exclaimed Herries, deeply touched by the devotion of Figgys. "I hope you'll succeed."

"We will!" said Figgins determinedly. "We've already got a clue. I won't tell you what it is, because it concerns one of our fellows, and it may be nothing, after all. But we're going to follow it up like a giddy Sherlock Holmes. But look here, Blake; just you tell us all you can about the matter, so that we shall be posted."

Willingly enough Jack Blake told all he knew. Figgins & Co. listened attentively, and were soon in possession of all the facts. Figgys's face was a study as he listened to the story of the unfortunate half-sovereign.

"Now, look here, Blake," he said, "after what has happened, do you still think the half-sov. was one of your own, which you had put in your pocket and forgotten?"

"I thought so at first," said Jack. "I couldn't think anything else when I found it there, could I? But now—well, if it was possible for anybody to have put the coin in my pocket, I should think someone had done it."

"And only the thief could have had any motive for doing it?"

"Yes, to throw suspicion upon me. But, then, only a School House chap could have got at my jacket when I wasn't wearing it, and—"

"But what about when you were wearing it?"

"Well, I don't see how anybody could put a half-sovereign in my pocket without my knowing it," said Blake, looking at Figgins in surprise.

"Suppose he had hold of you at the time—slinging you out of his study, for instance?" said Figgins slowly.

The chums of Study No. 6 gave a simultaneous jump, and looked at each other and at Figgins.

"Do you mean to say—" began Herries.

"I don't mean to say anything," said Figgins obstinately.

"I simply asked a question. Would it be possible for a chap, under those circumstances, to slip the coin into your breast-pocket, Blake?"

"Why, of course, it would be easy enough if he wanted to."

"All right, then. That's all I want to know. We'll be off now. Mind, not a word to anybody about what I've said."

"Of course not. We'll be mum as oysters."

"What I mean is, we don't want the rotter to know we're hunting him, or he'll be on his guard, and make it harder for us," said Figgins. "Well, so-long, and keep your pecker up!"

And Figgins & Co. quitted Study No. 6. They left hope behind them.

CHAPTER 7

The Programme.

FIGGINS & CO. went straight to their own quarters after the interview. Their study still showed signs of the raid of Blake and D'Arcy, in spite of the efforts of the Co. to put things straight again; but they did not think of that now. For the time the ancient hostility between the two houses was suspended, so far as the leaders of the rivalry were concerned. There was more serious business in hand.

Figgins sat on the table, his long legs gracefully resting on a chair. The brow of Figgins was heavy with thought. The Co. stood with their hands in their pockets waiting for him to speak.

"I never thought," said Figgins at last, "that we should ever start in business as giddy detectives for the purpose of proving one of our own house-fellows a thief; but you never know your luck. We've got to do it. We know Blake's innocent, and we couldn't let an innocent chap be expelled."

"Right-ho!" assented Kerr. "Besides, half the fun would be gone if Blake went. We should walk all over the School House. There wouldn't be any excitement in that."

"My idea exactly," said Fatty Wynn. "The rest of them sin't up to our mark. It's Blake who keeps things alive."

"Blake's got to be cleared," went on Figgins, with a nod of assent to these remarks, "and it can only be done by hunting out the real rascal. He's in our house."

"It's rotten, but I'm afraid it's true."

"Let's look at the facts. Sleath loses twelve pounds. If it was Baker, or Webb, or even Monteth, we could take his word for it. But do we trust Sleath?"

"Not much."

"We saw him yesterday," went on Figgins, "at the Rylcombe Arms. We know that he went there to see Joliffe the landlord. The man he was speaking to asked him if he had brought something, which could only have meant money. Now, all St. Jim's knows that some of our fellows have had dealings with Joliffe, card-playing and betting at the Rylcombe Arms. The Head specially warned us against Joliffe as a dangerous character. We know he's tried to get some of our fellows who think themselves knowing to go down to the inn to gamble and smoke. I've had an idea for a long time that Sleath was one of them. Where does he get his pasty complexion? Not through study, I'll bet on that. Then you all know how he's cracked at football; and I've heard that he's been spotted sneaking out of bounds at night, though Monteth takes no notice of it."

The Co. nodded in agreement.

"Now," said Figgins, "it's pretty plain that Sleath has been playing the giddy goat at the Rylcombe Arms, and has lost money there—don't you think so?—and that Joliffe has been pestering him for it, and perhaps frightening him."

"Looks like it," said Kerr.

"And in that case, suppose he used the football funds to pay Joliffe, and couldn't make the money up again?"

The Co. looked at each other.

"You see," went on Figgins, with an acumen worthy of a legal luminary, "the whole case against Blake rests upon what Sleath says. Nobody saw the money taken. Sleath found that it was gone. Why, he might have had it in his pocket all the time. Blake was in his study, and Sleath found him there. That was his opportunity. If he took the money and couldn't replace it, of course he would have to pretend that it was stolen by somebody. Poor old Blake, by going into his study, gave him a chance of fixing it upon him."

"My hat, Figgys, you are really working it out well! But suppose Blake hadn't gone into his study at all?"

"Then, if my theory"—Figgins lingered a little on this word with relish—"if my theory is correct, Sleath would have found somebody else to fix it upon. He would have had to fix it on one of our house. He would have selected his fag, probably—that's you, Fatty."

Wynn turned pale.

"Oh, I say, Figgys."

"Yes, he would," persisted Figgys, "and some of the money would have been found in your locker, or in your football boots, or tied up in the tail of your shirt, or something, and you would have been expelled."

Fatty Wynn shuddered.

"He's—he's a dangerous beast if you're right, Figgys!"

"He ought to be in a convict prison!"

"Well, that's how I figure it out," said Figgins. "If I'm wrong, I'm wrong; but if I'm right, we haven't very far to look for the thief. Sleath shang Blake out of his room."

"Of course, they struggled a bit. What could be easier than for Sleath to shove the half-sovereign into Blake's outside breast-pocket? Of course, Blake wasn't looking for anything of the kind, and wouldn't notice it. As for the half-

sovereign, that was picked up in the corridor, of course Sleath shoved it there to be picked up."

"The whole thing rests with Sleath," remarked Kerr. "You've worked it out well, Figgys. But if we hadn't happened to know that Sleath was in debt to that cad Joliffe—"

"But we did happen to know it," replied Figgins. "That's where we've got a pull over the others, and can figure things out. If the doctor knew it he would jolly soon alter his mind. Of course, we can't tell him; we've got no proof. Before we say anything we have got to find proof."

The Co. looked extremely doubtful.

"I don't see how that's to be done, Figgys," said Wynn, shaking his head.

"That's because you haven't the brains, my son," replied his leader serenely. "Thank your lucky stars that you have a captain who can think for you, and save your poor little brain fagging itself. Now, the first thing a real detective does is to fix on a person to be suspected. We've done that, haven't we?"

"Yes, we suspect Sleath."

"Exactly. And now all we've got to do is to bring it home to him. We know Joliffe was worrying him for money, don't we? At least, we think so, and that's sufficient. Now if we find out that he paid Joliffe, we shall want to know where he found the money, and we shall be able to find it out."

"How?"

"By shadowing him. Of course, I don't say that's a nice occupation; but detectives do it, and when it's a question of clearing an innocent chap of a charge like this—why, we must do what we can. We must find out for certain if he's paid Joliffe. That's the first step. That's the programme, my sons."

"We'll do it!" exclaimed Kerr. "If he's really the kind of brute you think, Figgys, the sooner we get him kicked out of the school the better."

And so Figgins & Co. set to work to follow up their clue, with what success we shall presently see.

CHAPTER 8

Unpleasant for Percy.

THE doctor had said that Blake would find it very unpleasant to remain at St. Jim's while the proofs against him were so strong. The Head was right. Blake was not long in finding out the unpleasantness of his position.

The New House, with the honourable exception of Figgins & Co., believed him guilty. They were not slow in letting him know it. In his own house he could depend only on his own immediate friends to stand by him.

The evidence was strong enough to convince the majority. Percy Mellish put the matter in a nutshell. Somebody had taken the money. All the evidence was against Blake. Were they to discard the evidence, and to believe that somebody else, against whom there was no evidence, was the thief? Mellish declared that that would be absurd, and the majority of the School House agreed with him.

Kildare had firmly believed in Blake at first, but even he had been staggered by the apparent proofs of guilt, and did not know what to believe.

Naturally enough, the New House juniors did not let the matter rest. For some time—in fact, ever since Blake had come to the school—the School House had held the ascendancy over its rival, and had some right to style itself the cock house at St. Jim's. It was mainly due to the leadership of Blake, and the New House were quite aware of it.

And now it was proved that Blake was a thief—a fellow who wasn't fit to be spoken to—a cad who ought to be expelled from the school! The chief of the School House juniors, who had so often discomfited them, was a rotter, a cad, a rank outsider!

No wonder the New House felt righteously indignant, and the School House did not know what to say, and could only save their faces by disclaiming their old leader.

At a single step Blake had fallen from his high estate. One day he was junior captain of his house; the next he was an outcast, and boys who had trembled at his frown now calmly turned their backs upon him in public.

"What we want," said Percy Mellish to a mass meeting in the junior common-room, "is a new chief. I never quite liked Blake—"

"He was always too cocky," said Walsh.

"And, now he's proved to be a thief, none of us, of course, can speak to him again. I shan't, for one."

"Wonder if he'll survive it? said a would-be humorist.

"Oh, you shut up!" said Percy crossly. "We shall have to send him to Coventry, or the New House rotters will say we've all tarred with the same brush. We want a new leader. I vote that we hold an election."

"That's a jolly good idea," said Walsh. "Old Herries used to be our chief before that boulder Blake came. Let's go and ask him."

Percy gave him a withering glance.

"Study No. 6 are barred," he said. "They all stand by Blake. If they're going to stick to him, we can't have anything to do with them."

"That's so," said a dozen voices.

"There's fellows as good as they are in the house," said Percy, looking round. "Now, we're nearly all here. Why can't we elect one of ourselves?"

"Jolly good idea!"

"I think we ought to give Study No. 6 a chance," said Walsh obstinately. "If they like to kick out Blake, we'll speak to them. Herries was all right in his time."

"Rats! He was never any good."

"More good than you would be, Mellish. I can see your little game."

"What little game?" blustered Percy.

"You want to be leader. Jolly good leader you would make, when you let Figgins knock you about! If the chaps elect you, I shall change into the New House."

"Oh, shut up!" said Percy. "We'll give Study No. 6 a chance if all the chaps think so. Hands up for giving them a chance."

A considerable number of hands went up in the air.

"Very well," said Percy sulkily. "Some of us had better go to their room and see them, and ask them what they mean to do."

"We'll form a giddy deputation," said Walsh. "You can be the head, Mellish, as you're so blooming ambitious to distinguish yourself!"

Percy did not exactly like the idea, but he could not very well refuse, and so he gave a reluctant consent, and marched at the head of a number of the juniors to Study No. 6. He opened the door without the formality of knocking first, and the juniors swarmed into the room, considerably to the astonishment of the inmates.

"Hallo!" said Blake. "What do you kids want?"

"Come to pass a vote of confidence in Study No. 6?" asked Digby.

"Not much," said Percy. "We've come to talk plainly in plain English. Now, it's been proved that Blake is a thief."

Blake jumped up.

"What's that, Mellish?"

Percy retreated hurriedly. Blake was looking dangerous.

"Look here, Blake, if you're the thief, this is a dreadful deal, and there's nothing to do with you. It's these other fellows we have come to speak to."

"You said something about me, though," said Blake politely. "May I ask you to repeat it, if you're not afraid to?"

"I said you were a thief," said Percy, very pale, but feeling that he could not surrender utterly. "So you are. All the school knows it!"

"Very good," said Blake quietly. "Now, I want to assure all you fellows, first of all that I am not a thief, and that I know nothing whatever about the money that was missing from Sleath's study. That said, the matter's ended. You can believe what you like, of course. But anybody who expresses such a belief in my presence will have a fight on his hands. That's a plain warning."

"I suppose you won't lick us all, will you, Blake?" said Walsh sarcastically. "Get on with the washing, Mellish; or shall I be spokesman? You don't seem to do it very well."

"This is what we've come here to say," went on Percy hastily. "If you fellows stick to Blake you will be cut by the whole house. We want a new leader, and we're willing to take you on, Herries."

"Thank you for nothing!" said Herries.

"But you'll have to drop Jack Blake."

"Rats!"

"Do you refuse?"

"Yes, ass!"

"And you, Digby?"

"I don't want to be a leader of a gang of silly idiots, thank you," replied Digby, with great courtesy.

"You see how it is, chaps," said Percy, turning to his followers. "We've given them a chance, and they won't take it. After this, Study No. 6 is barred!"

"If you've finished your chatter you may as well clear," said Herries. "This is our study, and we don't want it turned into a lunatic asylum."

"You'll sing to a different tune when you're in Coventry," said Percy threateningly.

"Oh, go and eat coke—or thistles; they're nearer your mark!"

"If you make a thing like that your chief," said Dig, "why you jolly well deserve what you'll get. Take it away and bury it!"

"Come on, chaps," said Percy. "We don't want to stay in a blooming thieves' den, and— Oh! Lemme go, you beast!"

Herries had interrupted him by a sudden grip. Percy was no match for the indignant junior. In a moment he was floored, and Herries was pinning him down with a knee on his chest.

The deputation made a movement, but Blake, Dig, and D'Arcy at once closed up, and they thought better of it.

"You had your warning, Percy dear," said Herries, "and still you have put your foot in it. What was the term you applied to this respectable apartment?"

"Lemme gerrup!"

"No, that wasn't it. Try again."

"Lemme gerrup!"

"Dig, you'll find a bottle of red ink in my desk. Bring it here. Take the cork out."

Digby promptly obeyed.

"Now, Mellish, are you going to take back the expression you used, and apologise handsomely?"

"No, I ain't."

"Pour it over his dial, Dig!"

Percy struggled frantically. A thin, steady stream of red ink descended upon his nose from the bottle held by the grinning Digby and spread in streamlets all over his face. Some of it went into his mouth, and some over his collar and tie, some into his hair. He gurgled and struggled fiercely, but Herries kept him pinned down on the study floor. "Let him get up!" exclaimed Walsh, pushing forward.

Blake promptly collared the rescuer and ran him out of the study. D'Arcy backed him up. Walsh went reeling into the corridor; and then Blake started on the deputation. He could hit hard when he was in earnest. The study was soon cleared, and Blake, with a flushed face, but otherwise quite cool, remained on guard at the door.

"Going to apologise?" asked Herries sweetly, taking no notice of the commotion round him, for he knew he could depend on Blake.

"No—ugh!—yes!"

"Go ahead, then. Stop a minute, Dig."

"Better let him have the rest," said Dig. "There isn't much more."

"No; stop a minute, and give him a chance."

"You beasts!" gasped Percy. "You brutes! Lemme get up!"

"You haven't apologised yet. Are you sorry?"

"No—yes."

"That sounds rather contradictory. Give him a little more, Dig."

Digby emptied the bottle. Percy gurgled and yelled.

"Now, are you sorry, Mellish, or shall Dig start on a fresh bottle?"

"I'm sorry."

"Are you awfully sorry?"

"N-n—yes!"

"Are you awfully, fearfully sorry?"

"Yes."

"Very good. I thought I should be able to bring you to a state of proper repentance. You had better keep off the grass in the future. The way of the transgressor is ink. Now, out, while you've got the chance!"

He allowed Percy to rise. The unfortunate aspirant to chiefship was a shocking sight. His face was a beautiful crimson, and his collar was streaked with red, and his hair was matted with the streaks of ink. He caught sight of his face in a glass, and gave a howl as he rushed from the study, and his own fickle followers greeted him with a roar of laughter which was far from being grateful or comforting.

"I say, you do look stunning," Percy grinned Walsh.

"Here, look out where you're running to. There's Latham!"

The warning came too late. Percy, whose only idea was to get the horrible mess off his face and hair, was dashing along the corridor to the stairs to get to a bath-room. Mr. Latham, the master of the Fourth, met him face to face.

Mr. Latham was a gentleman afflicted with short sight, and he wore a large pair of spectacles, which, however, did not make his vision at all normal. He caught sight of Percy, and started back in horror.

"Boy, what has happened? How came you in that dreadful state?"

"I—I—I—"

Percy stammered. He could not "sneak" without incurring the wrath of every junior in the house, and he could not explain.

"Dear me, how terribly you must be injured! Come with me at once, my poor lad. Lean on my arm. How did it happen? Don't speak if you do not feel strong enough."

"I—I—I—"

"Dear me, he must be suffering intensely when he can only express himself in inarticulate monosyllables!" murmured Mr. Latham. "What a quantity of blood! He is simply

franchised with it. The wound must be a terrible one. Come some, my dear lad!"

"Yes, yes!" said Mr. Latham soothingly. "Come, along!" And he hurried Percy to his room, willy-nilly, and made him sit down, and rang for a maid, and ordered hot water. The maid stared at Percy, and giggled as she left the room.

"Dear me," said Mr. Latham, "what a heartless girl! Are you suffering very great pain, my poor boy? As soon as I have washed the wound—"

"There is no wound," broke out Percy.

"No wound! Then where does this vast quantity of blood proceed from?"

"It is not blood."

"What! What do you mean?"

"It's red ink."

"Red ink!" repeated Mr. Latham faintly. "You dare to tell me that it is red ink; that you have deliberately deceived me and played a foolish trick upon your Form master?"

"I didn't mean to—"

"Yes, I perceive now, upon examination, that it is indeed red ink, as you say. Thank you, Mary, I shall not require the warm water. It is all a mistake. Melish, how dare you deceive me in this inexcusable manner?"

"I didn't—I—"

"Why did you not explain at once?"

"You didn't give me a chance."

"This is mere subterfuge. If there is anything I specially detect in a boy it is subterfuge. I have upon many occasions detected you in prevarication. Now you have played a most absurd trick and caused me much needless anxiety."

"I—"

"Nec a word. You cannot escape your just punishment by further prevarication," said Mr. Latham severely. He took down a cane from the wall. "Hold out your hand, sir!"

"But—"

"Hold out your hand!" thundered Mr. Latham.

Percy reluctantly obeyed. The incensed Form master gave him six cuts, three on each hand, and Percy, who never could bear pain, was almost doubled up with anguish.

"Now go, and let that be a lesson to you never to play a ridiculous trick again," said Mr. Latham sternly; and Percy went, with feelings too deep for mere words.

CHAPTER 9. On the Track.

ELEVEN strokes had sounded from the clock tower at St. Jim's. The vast pile of the school buildings was hushed in silence.

From one or two study windows lights still gleamed, but the greater part of the inmates of St. Jim's were wrapped in slumber.

In the School House, seniors and juniors alike were sleeping the sleep of the just. But in the New House there were wakeful eyes.

Just as the stroke of eleven died away there was a faint sound in the rear of the New House as a window was softly opened, and a dim form dropped lightly to the ground outside. The form stood for a moment, still, the head bent to listen, and then hurried away into the gloom. The sash of the window was left raised about an inch.

A couple of minutes later the sash was cautiously raised from within.

A head was thrust out, and a keen pair of eyes peered into the gloomy night.

"It's all right," said the voice of Figgins. "He's gone."

The head of Fatty Wynn appeared beside his at the window.

"It was Sleath," murmured Wynn.

"Yes, him right enough. We saw him come out of his study, and that was enough. It's Lucas Sleath, and he's gone to see the crew at the Rylcombe Arms."

"Same old game."

"Now," said Figgys, "the question is, where do we come in? We could fasten the window, and keep him out all night, and so show him up. But though that would prove that he was a giddy goat, and get him into an awful row, it wouldn't prove enough for us. I'm going after him, Fatty."

"He'll half kill you if he finds you."

"I shan't let him find me. We've started playing the giddy detective, and we've got to follow it up. I'm going after him, and you'll have to remain up to let me in, in case of accidents. It's no good two going."

"All right. Then you'd better buzz off before he disappears."

"Well, I know pretty well where he's going to in case I miss him, but I shall spot him in the lane all right."

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And Figgins crawled out on the sill, hung there by his hands, and dropped lightly to the ground. Wynn closed the window, so that it appeared as Sleath had left it. Figgy started off in the gloom, and quickly vanished from his chums' sight. He heard a scraping sound ahead of him, and knew what it meant. He came in sight of Sleath as the latter crossed the top of a wall and disappeared on the other side.

Figgins waited for a minute or two to give him time to get clear, and then climbed the wall.

He dropped on the other side into Rylcombe Lane, and caught a glimpse of the senior passing in the circle of light cast by a roadside lamp.

Sleath was hurrying towards Rylcombe.

Taking great care to keep his pursuit concealed from his quarry, Figgins hung on the track of the senior, keeping him always in sight or hearing. Sleath evidently had not the slightest suspicion that he might be followed from the school, for he did not once glance behind. Doubtless he was too accustomed to these nightly expeditions to have any uneasiness about discovery.

A light gleamed ahead; it came from a window of the Rylcombe Arms. Sleath turned into the lane beside the inn and strode on through the dark like one who well knew the way. Figgins drew a deep breath and followed him. The shadower stopped as he heard the sound of voices ahead.

"Come in, sir. Mr. Joliffe's in the back room; he's waiting for you."

Sleath muttered something in reply, and a door closed. Figgins went quietly forward. From a back window the light streamed out into the inn garden. There was no blind to the window, only common muslin curtains, and Figgins, standing in the dark outside, could easily see through them into the room. His eyes gleamed as he looked in.

Mr. Joliffe, the landlord of the Rylcombe Arms, was seated in an easy-chair before the fire. Figgins knew him by sight. He was a fat, red-faced man, with a square jaw, a low forehead, and an indescribably knowing and cunning expression of face. He had a pipe in his mouth and a glass of brandy-and-water at his elbow. Sleath had just come into the room, and Figgins saw him clearly. The New House senior was looking very white and worried.

Sleath had a struggle with his conscience. They were talking near the window and the window was cracked, the two speakers so near him that if he chose he would have no difficulty in overhearing what they were saying. The idea of playing the eavesdropper was naturally revolting to a decent, honourable lad. His cheeks burned at the thought of listening. But on the other hand, this was probably his only chance of discovering the truth. He might now learn something of the true story of the missing money, and the chance would never recur. Upon his action now probably depended the proof of Blake's innocence! It was a painful position for poor Figgy, and he remained in dubious uncertainty for a long time, and meanwhile he heard all that was said within.

"Yes, the 'orse will win," were the first words he heard. Mr. Joliffe was speaking. "I'm quite willing to put anything on 'im for you, Mr. Sleath. Only I shall want to see the colour of your money. And afore there's any more transactions between us, there's the rest of that old matter to be wiped out."

"Yes, you said so in your note."

"I said so, and I meant it."

"But if Blue Cloud is certain to win, I shall get in enough over that to wipe out the old debt and have something in hand," said Sleath eagerly.

Joliffe grinned.

"Yes, if you've got the spondulicks to put up."

"I haven't anything at present; but you know you can trust me."

Joliffe interrupted him with a rude laugh.

"Trust you! Yes, that's likely! I've had enough o' that. Why, did you stult up afore I threatened to go up to the doctor about it? You know you didn't."

"I had had such bad luck, you know, Joliffe," said Sleath appealingly. "You ought to make allowances, you know. And I did let you have ten pounds."

"Yes, arter I had hunted and drove you till I was sick of the whole business," said Mr. Joliffe snappishly. "No more o' that for me. If you wants to back your fancy, put up your money like a gentleman. As a gentleman myself, I expects to be treated as one."

Of course—of course, only I sha'n't have any more tin till next term. I daren't ask my father for any more, and—I can't raise it. If you'll put something on Blue Cloud for me, I shall win, and pay you off, and—"

"No good. Pay up's the word. You give me ten pound off twenty-five. What's the good of that to me? I've been

hard hit myself lately, and I've got to pay up. I want the money."

"If Blue Cloud—"

"Bother Blue Cloud! Have you got the money?"

"No."

"You won't pay me?"

"I can't."

"So you said afore, but you managed to raise ten quid," said Mr. Joliffe significantly. "I dessay you can raise some more, rather than 'ave me go up to the school."

Sleath was deadly white.

"You wouldn't do that, Joliffe, after what you promised. You said that if I managed the ten pounds, you would give me time, and—"

"I reckon a judge would give you time, if I opened my mouth wide," said Mr. Joliffe, with a grin. "You're in pretty deep this time, young gentleman. You swear and vow that you can't raise a sovereign even, and then you stult up ten quid."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that you'll get into trouble if you don't let me 'ave the other fifteen pretty sharp," replied Mr. Joliffe, with a leer. "Where did you get that money from?"

"I—I borrowed it."

"Then borrow some more."

"I can't. It's impossible. Oh," panted Sleath, "what a fool—what an utter fool I was to ever have any dealings with you!"

"I'm all right if you treat me like a gentleman. When I lose I pay up, don't I? When you lose, why don't you do the same?"

"I shall have some more money next term. I'd pay you every penny if I could. I will pay you next term. Don't be so hard on me, Joliffe. After all, you haven't done so badly out of me, have you?"

Mr. Joliffe looked sulky, and replaced his pipe in his mouth.

"You'll give me till next term, Joliffe?"

"I'll give you," said Mr. Joliffe deliberately, "till next Saturday."

"Joliffe, I—I—"

"If I don't 'ave my money then, look out for squalls."

"But—but—"

"And I may as well mention as I've kept that five-pound note. I've got it still. I ain't parted with it. I ain't got to in a hurry. 'Allo! Wot's the matter with you?"

Sleath staggered and caught at the table for support.

His eyes were fixed upon the landlord in a wild stare.

"Why have you kept it?" he muttered hoarsely.

"I thought it might be useful," grinned Joliffe, "and it appears I was right. Am I to 'ave my money on Saturday?"

"It's impossible. There's no way I can get it."

"Get it where you got the last."

"I can't. You don't understand."

"Oh, yes, I do. I understand. You can get it if you like. Anyway, if you don't bring me at least ten on Saturday, look out. I'm in earnest, I am. You'll look pretty queer when I go up to the school and ask the doctor if he knows the number of that 'ere note."

"You wouldn't—you wouldn't do that!"

"Wouldn't I? Just you wait and see, my young gentleman. I'll teach you!"

Sleath, with a face like chalk, turned hopelessly to the door.

"I'll do my best," he said wretchedly. Figgins had remained at the cracked window as if fascinated. Very little of the foregoing conversation had escaped him. With a feeling of guilt, yet of satisfaction at the discovery he had made, he stepped away from the window.

He hurried into the street, and when Sleath came out a minute or two later, Figgins was already well on the road to St. Jim's. As fast as he could go he sprinted towards the school, and he reached it a long way ahead of the senior.

Fatty Wynn was still wakeful and watching. He opened the window immediately Figgins appeared, and the junior scrambled in.

"What success?" whispered Wynn eagerly.

"Al," replied Figgins. "Let's get to the dormitory now. We'll talk it over to-morrow."

And the two hurried to their sleeping-quarters. The rest of the dormitory were in slumber. The absence of the chums had not been discovered. Quickly enough Figgins and Wynn were in bed.

But it was a long time before Figgins slept. He lay thinking over what he had discovered, and a dozen plans for turning it to the advantage of Jack Blake flitted through his brain; and when at last he fell asleep, Figgy's plans were pretty well mapped out.

CHAPTER 10.
Battled Ambition.

MATTERS were going from bad to worse in the School House. Percy Mellich's bid for the leadership of the School House juniors had ended in disaster, but Blake's position remained unchanged. He was cut by the whole house, with the exception of the chums of Study No. 6; and when it became quite clear that the chums had no intention of casting back out, they were sent to Cocoroty, too.

The whole school had made up its mind that Blake was guilty. In the days that elapsed since the theft nothing had transpired to change the complexion of affairs. The money had not been found, and no facts had come to light either to clear Blake or to direct suspicion upon anyone else.

The doctor had given Kildare his word, and could not go back upon it, and Blake had a chance yet of clearing himself if he was innocent; but it certainly seemed that if the truth was not out yet it never would be out.

Blake was noted in the school for his nerve and coolness, which seldom failed him under any test; but he had never experienced a situation like this before.

To meet with averted looks or glances of scorn and contempt was new to him, and although his pluck did not fail him, the trial told heavily upon the brave lad.

For the first few days Study No. 6 had more fights upon their hands than they had had in the whole of the previous term; but they could not fight the whole house, or keep on at it for ever, and so things gradually settled down into quietness, and Study No. 6 accepted their exclusion from the society of the rest of the house with patience.

Blake felt the trouble, which was brought upon him by his chums more than his own. They kept up an appearance of cheerful carelessness, which, however, did not deceive Blake. Their loyalty to their chum was made to cost them dear in every way.

And the School House juniors, who had concurred in thus detroning their old leader, were made to realise that the loss of him was a serious one. For now that Study No. 6 kept as themselves, the juniors felt the want of a leader, and there was no one to adequately supply Blake's place. In the skirmishes with the New House the School House began to get the worst of it.

The New House were never tired of pursuing their advantage. They watched the School House "sneever" kids—"Pee-wee" and "Wormwood Scrubs"; they made an elaborate pretence of buttoning up their pockets whenever a School House boy came by, and they made desperate and solicitous inquiries as to whether any property had been missed lately.

The School House were wild, but they could not put a stop to their rivals' jeers; and the ceaseless chaff of the New House made them, of course, all the more bitter against Blake; and when Percy Mellich suggested that a round-robin should be sent to the doctor, asking him to expel Blake at once, he found many sympathetic hearers.

Percy had not yet given up the idea of leading the School House juniors. The taunts of the New House were so exasperating that there was certain to be an outbreak before long, and Blake's mantle would certainly fall upon the shoulders of anyone who could gain a victory over the enemy; and Percy, though his repugnance to any kind of rough play was strong, was determined to make a bid for the giddy eminence.

The expected "row" came the day after Figgy's visit to the Rylcombe Arms. Morning school was over, and the quadrangle was a mass of noise and life. Pratt and some more of the School House juniors were punting a football about, when they came into collision with a School House group. Pratt raised a shout of mock alarm:

"Look out! They'll pinch our footer if we don't look out!"

"Beware of pickpockets!" yelled the New House juniors.

"Oh, go for 'em! We've had enough of this!" said Walsh, in a white-hot of rage, and he hurled himself upon Pratt, and they rolled in the muddy quadrangle.

Instantly the row became general. Reinforcements for both sides hurried up, and black eyes, red noses, and thick ears were distributed on all sides with remarkable rapidity.

But now more than ever the School House missed the cool head—and the strong arm of Jack Blake and the sturdy chums of Study No. 6.

They were swept back by the New House, and Figgins & Co. coming upon the scene just then, and joining in the fray without asking why or wherefore, the retreat of the School House was speedily changed into a rout.

It was then that Percy Mellich rose to the occasion. Taggles had recently been at work on the bicycle-shed, and a pair half full of tar was standing where he had left it.

To seize the tar-brush, plunge it deep into the sticky mass, and then rush into the fray was the work of a moment for Percy.

"Come on with the School House!" shouted Figgins excitedly. "Go for 'em! Ooch! Ah! Gr-ri!"

The tar-brush was planted full in the unfortunate Figgy's face, and he staggered back, half choked, half blinded, and wholly hors de combat.

"Oh! Ah! Ooch!" Percy rushed on, brandishing his terrible weapon. The New House juniors fell back before him. King Arthur's sword Excalibur did not cause such dismay to the foe as did that tar-brush. Kerr received a dab in the face, and Wynn was put on the head, and they retired hurriedly from the combat.

The School House, with a cheer and a roar of laughter, rushed on, backing up Percy, and the New House were swept back.

The New House juniors hurriedly retired to their own house. There, they felt that the foe dared not follow them, for fear of masters and prefects; but the pride of victory had mounted to Percy's head, and he rushed after them recklessly.

He was going to show his house fellows that he was quite up to Blake's mark as a leader, if not a bit above it; and so he chased the retreating juniors to the steps of the New House and into the deep porch, and there he met his Waterloo.

For the sight of a master's head poked angrily out of a window had caused the School House to fall back hurriedly, and the over-bold Percy was alone with the enemy.

He was surrounded and seized on all sides, and Figgins wrenched the tar-brush away from him. Percy struggled, and would have yelled to attract a prefect to the spot, but Figgins dabbed the tar-brush into his mouth. Percy choked and gurgled, and the yell remained unuttered.

A dozen or more of the New House boys were smeared with tar, and they were all feeling extremely vengeful. They trooped into the junior common-room, and bore Percy in their midst. They closed the door, and locked it in case a troublesome prefect should come inquiring what the noise was about; and then they turned their attention to Percy.

"Is this what you call playing the game," demanded Figgy, "smearing chaps and spoiling their clothes with tar."

"Lemme alone!"

"Wait a bit. What's the sauce for the geese is sauce for the geese."

Sandow Anecdotes

THE LION FIGHT.

One of Sandow's most thrilling adventures was his fight with a lion in San Francisco. A menagerie was in the city, and the proprietor had advertised a fight to the death between a lion and a bear, but the performance was forbidden by the police on the grounds of cruelty.

This gave Sandow an idea, and he expressed his willingness to meet the king of beasts, unarmed, provided mittens were placed on the lion's feet to prevent him using his claws, and a muzzle was placed over his head. The combat would then be between brute strength and human strength, for Sandow would carry no weapon; and the lion's natural weapons—teeth and claws—would not help him.

The engagement was made, and "A Lion Fight with Sandow" advertised extensively through the city and district. Sandow decided to have a "rehearsal" beforehand, and after much difficulty the lion was muzzled and muzzled, and allowed to enter a huge cage, seventy feet across.

Sandow entered the cage, unarmed, and stripped to the waist, whilst the lion crouched down ready to spring. Just as he sprang towards him, Sandow stepped on one side and caught the lion round the throat with his left arm, and round the middle with his right, lifted him in the air, and tossed him to the floor. The lion roared with rage, and rushed at Sandow, who got a good grip around his body, and a tremendous struggle ensued. The lion reared and tore, but Sandow had him as in a vice, and he could not get away until Sandow flung him off.

Sandow was advised to leave the cage, as the lion was in a tremendous rage, but Sandow intended trying one more feat before leaving.

Moving away from the lion, Sandow turned his back on the animal, to try and induce him to jump upon him. The lion sprang right on Sandow's back. Sandow threw up his arms, gripped his head, and shot the animal clean over his own head to the ground.

The lion-tamer rushed into the cage firing two revolvers to keep the animal off; and Sandow left the cage torn and bleeding, but satisfied with the "rehearsal."

Our next anecdote will deal with the fight which was given in public the following day, but in the meantime any reader can obtain a free copy of "Sandow's Way to Strength" by writing to No. 1, Sandow Hall, Victoria Embankment, London, W.C. This booklet tells how Sandow obtained his great strength, and how readers may easily obtain splendid muscular development and robust health.

gander. There isn't much tar left on the brush, but what there is you're welcome to."

Percy struggled desperately. "He shall have what's left on the brush, and we'll make it up with soot!" The grinning juniors held Percy in a deadly grip. He could not escape. Figgins rubbed the brush well over his face and hands. By dint of squeezing, the brush was made to yield up really a goodly quantity of tar. Percy was soon transformed into a Hottentot of the deepest dye.

Then Figgins groped up the chimney with the brush, and brought it out again thick with soot, and recommenced. Percy gasped and begged for mercy, but Figgy, with his own face smeared, was not likely to give quarter.

"There!" he said, when he had finished. "I think that will do. It will be a lesson to you, I hope, and put you up to a wrinkle about tarring people's dials. Chuck him out!"

The door was opened. Willing hands assisted Percy to depart, willing feet helped him out of the New House, and he sprawled in the quadrangle. He picked himself up and streaked for his own house, and a yell of laughter greeted him.

"My hat!" exclaimed Walsh. "What is it? The wild man from Borneo?"

"No; it's Umslopogaas."

"It's a Christy Minstrel."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The unfortunate Percy escaped from the chaff of the juniors, and went off to clean himself, in a fearful temper. He realised that he had made his last bid for the leadership of the house, and had failed. One who seeks command cannot afford to make himself look absurd, and Percy cut the most ridiculous figure the School House had seen for a long time.

It was days before the last traces of the tar were removed from his face, and longer still before the Fourth Form allowed him to forget his misadventure.

CHAPTER 11.

Laying the Snare.

"HALLO, Figgy!"

"I want to speak to you, chaps."

"Go ahead, old son!"

Study No. 6 were taking their solitary exercise in the gymnasium. One unpleasant effect of the Coventry was that the chums were barred from the junior football practice, and this was what hit them hardest of all. They supplied the place of the beloved footer as well as they could by extra time in the gymnasium.

They were so employed some time after the "row" in the quadrangle, when Figgins came up to them. Figgy's face bore traces of the tar Percy had splashed there, and where it was not black it was red from scrubbing. This rather detracted from its solemnity. Figgy was looking very serious. The chums looked eagerly at Figgins.

"Have you found anything out?" asked Blake.

"Yes."

"Good old Figgy! You ought to be a giddy detective!"

"I don't want to say anything at present," said Figgy.

"I haven't any proof yet, you understand; but I think I have the whole story clear enough."

"Just one question. Do you know who the real thief is?"

"Yes."

"For certain?"

"Yes."

"My hat! And it's only a question of obtaining proof?"

"That's all."

"And you think you can do it?"

"I hope so."

Blake thumped him on the back.

"But I want help," said Figgy. "I can't explain exactly now, but I want you to trust me, and I think it will come out all right. Now, young D'Arcy is always rolling in money. Have you got a ten-pound note, young Algeron?"

"I have two fivers," said Arthur Augustus.

"Will you lend them to me—not to spend, you know, but for a certain purpose? You shall have them back safe and sound. There's a slight risk of losing them, though."

"I don't mind," said D'Arcy. "If it would clear Blake, I'd gladly give a tennah, or a pony!"

"That's all right, then. First, though, I want you to take down the number of the notes. You chaps will witness that he does it."

"That's easy enough," said Blake. "But I'm blessed if I can see what you're driving at, old Figgy."

"Never mind that," said Figgins mysteriously. "You'll

see soon enough, if the wheeze works, and I think it will. Let's have the notes."

It did not take Arthur Augustus long to fetch them, and Figgy went back to the New House with the two fivers in his possession, leaving the chums of Study No. 6 in a state of considerable astonishment.

"It's all serene," said Figgy, when he rejoined the Co. Aubrey stumped up like a little man. "Here are the notes, and the numbers are down all right in Nos. 6 Study. Chaps, this little game is going to be a howling success."

"You think you'll be able to manage Kildare all right?"

"What-ho! He'd jump at a chance of clearing Blake."

"I suppose so. Figgy, old son, you're a genius!" said Keff admiringly. "They can talk about Sherlock Holmes. Why, he ain't in the same street with you, Figgy."

"Well," said Figgy modestly, "I don't want to blow my own trumpet, but I really think I have worked this thing out pretty well. Mind, you've got to back me up, and don't you give the game away."

"No fear!"

It was Saturday evening. Sleath was sitting alone in his study. He had avoided his friends a good deal of late, and Monteith had noticed how worried he looked, and asked him about it. Sleath had given short replies, and a suspicion had deepened in the prefect's mind that the accusation against Blake had been trumped up by the treasurer of the clubs. He did not say anything of that, however, to anyone. Whether Blake was guilty or not, Monteith was content that he should be expelled, and if he had known anything for certain, he would have hesitated to show up his own friend.

Sleath was thinking, as he sat there, of the hour when he had to face Jolliffe, and tell him that he could give him nothing. He looked up savagely as his lag came into the room.

"I say, Sleath," began Fatty Wynn.

"Get out!"

"But—"

"I don't want you. I shan't want you any more to-night. Clear!"

"But I want to ask you"—Sleath rose threateningly to his feet—"if you can change ten pounds in notes, Sleath," went on Fatty glibly.

Sleath stared at him.

"What do you mean? Have you ten pounds?"

"Figgy has. It was his birthday yesterday, you know."

This statement was strictly true, though the inference Sleath drew from it was not quite correct.

"Figgins has ten pounds?" said Sleath, with a strange gleam in his eyes.

"Yes. Can you change the notes?"

"No. Do you think I keep a bank in my study?"

"Well, you're treasurer of the clubs, and—"

"Blake has collared all the tin, as you know," replied Sleath. "There will be a subscription to make it up, but it hasn't been done yet. The fellows still think the money must all turn up."

"All right. I suppose Figgy had better go to the doctor."

"Wait a minute," said Sleath; "he can't go to the doctor to-night. It's too late. I could, I dare say, get the notes changed for him in the morning."

"All right; that will do for Figgy. The tuck-shop's closed now."

"Mind you tell him to put the notes in a safe place," said Sleath. "You know that money has a way of vanishing. Does Blake know anything about it?"

"Oh, yes; he knows!"

"Well, if Figgins doesn't take care, then, his ten pounds will follow the football money," said Sleath. "You'd better warn him."

"Oh, that's all right," said Fatty Wynn. "He's taking care of the money. It isn't in his desk, you know. When we go to bed we're going to shove it under the loose board in the corner of the study."

"Yes; I dare say it will be safe there."

"I'll tell Figgy he can bring the notes to you in the morning, then," said Fatty. "Don't you want me to toast your cheese, Sleath?"

"No."

"Nor to make you any coffee?"

"No, no. Good-night!"

"Good-night, Sleath!"

And Fatty Wynn quitted the senior's study. Fatty Wynn was a member of the New House Amateur Dramatic Society, and he greatly fancied himself as an actor, but he was really surprised at the way in which he had carried out Figgins's instructions.

Sleath remained alone. He did not sit down, but began to pace the room restlessly, his face very pale, and his eyes burning. Disturbing thoughts were working in his brain; thoughts which seemed to bring him a strange mingling of



Sleath staggered and caught at the table for support. His eyes were fixed upon the landlord in a wild stare. "Why have you kept it?" he muttered hoarsely.

relief and terror. For a long time he paced the room, and he was still restlessly moving when the clock struck from the tower, and he started.

It was time for him to see the Fourth to their dormitory, that duty being his for the week. He left his study, trying to compose his face. The juniors trooped up to bed; Figgins & Co. with the rest. Sleath saw that they were all in; and turned out the light. The door closed, the usual chatter died away, and the boys one by one dropped asleep. But there was one who did not allow slumber to creep upon him. It was Figgins.

As soon as he was sure that the others slept, Figgy rose, quietly dressed himself, and slipped out of the dormitory. The Upper Form boys were not yet gone to bed, but they were in their studies or the common-room, and the corridors were deserted. Figgins easily left the house unobserved, and hurried through the darkness of the quadrangle to the School House. Straight to Kildare's room he went. "He had noted the light in the window, and knew that the captain of St. Jim's was there. Kildare stared at him in amazement.

"Figgins! What does this mean? What are you doing out of your house at this hour?"

Figgins closed the door.

"Hush!" he said mysteriously. "Hush!"

Kildare looked still more astounded.

"Are you mad, Figgins?"

"No. I'm on the track."

"On the—the what?"

"The track of the giddy criminal."

Kildare reached out for a cane.

"I give you two seconds to explain yourself, Figgins."

"Don't be hasty! Don't you want Blake to be cleared?"

Kildare dropped the cane.

"What! Do you mean that you have discovered something?"

"Yes."

"Then why haven't you gone to your own prefect?" asked Kildare sharply.

"Because I'm not at all sure he'd take the matter up properly. You see, Monteith is a chum-of the chap who boned the tin."

"Figgins! You have no right to suppose—"

"Look here, Kildare, I've come to you as captain of the school. Blow Monteith! You know he hates Blake, and can't be depended on."

"Very well," said Kildare, who knew that well enough. "Tell me what you have discovered."

He listened with amazement mingled with incredulity as Figgins unfolded his tale.

"Can all this be true?" he exclaimed, looking dumb-foundedly at Figgins.

"Every word."

"But it is useless to tell it to me. Even if it is true, the way you learned it throws too much discredit upon it. I don't say I exactly blame you, under the circumstances, but

you cannot expect the evidence of a secret listener to be accepted."

Figgis flushed painfully.

"I don't," he said shortly. "I shouldn't have told you a word if I hadn't got proof to back it up, Kildare. I've got more to tell you. I've laid a trap, and caught the giddy criminal in it. That's why I'm here."

"I don't understand. What have you done?"

"Sleath had to get ten pounds for that shark-to-night or be shown up. If you find him making for the Rycombe Arms with ten pounds in his pocket, which can be proved to be stolen, will that convince you, you doubting Thomas?"

"It would convince anybody, but—"

"Then come with me. I tell you Sleath knows there's ten pounds under the loose board in my study, and he's certain to take it. He'll get up to some trick to throw the blame on somebody else if we give him time. But we're not going to. Come with me, and if we see a light come in my study window, it will prove to you I'm right. Then we shall only have to wait and nab him."

Kildare rose, and put on his coat and cap.

"I will come, Figgis. I think you are in earnest, and for Blake's sake I can leave no chance untried of discovering the truth."

"Come on, then!"

Kildare turned out his light, and quitted the School House with Figgis. As they passed under the elms, a light gleamed from a previously dark window in the New House. Figgis clutched Kildare's arm and pointed excitedly.

"My window," he muttered; "my study window! What do you think now?"

Kildare looked steadily at the light. It glimmered there for about a minute, and then disappeared. Figgis's grip tightened upon his arm.

"What do you think now, Kildare?"

"I think," replied the captain quietly, "that you are right, Figgis. I shall call Mr. Kidd; it will be better to have the evidence of a master when the matter comes out. Wait here for me."

CHAPTER 12.

Jack Blake Is Cleared.

ELEVEN strokes had boomed out from the tower. From the dark wall abutting upon Rycombe Lane a dim figure dropped lightly and turned towards Rycombe.

It was **LESLIE SLEATH**. He set out at a rapid stride along the lane, but before he had taken half a dozen steps he halted with a gasp of dismay and terror.

Three figures had suddenly detached themselves from the gloom directly in his path. And, in spite of the darkness, he recognised them. Mr. Kidd, the master of the School House, Kildare, and Figgis! What did it mean?

"Sleath, where are you going?"

The thought of flight had crossed the wretched youth's mind, but it passed away as he heard the housemaster speak his name, and knew that he was recognised.

"I—I—," he stammered.

"You were going to the Rycombe Arms?"

"I—no—I certainly not."

"Where were you going?"

"Only for a—a walk. I have a headache, and—"

"That will do. If that explanation proves to be correct, you have nothing to fear. Come!"

"Where?"

"To the doctor."

"The doctor!" gasped Sleath. "Why? If you think I have broken bounds for a bad purpose, which I deny, you can report me to my own housemaster."

"This is a matter too serious to be dealt with by a housemaster, and concerns one of the School House boys, too. In short, Sleath, I have reason to believe that you were going to see that ruffian Joliffe, to take money to him."

Sleath seemed turned to stone.

"Money not your own," went on Mr. Kidd sternly. "Can you deny it?"

"Yes—yes; I deny it. It is false!"

"You are willing to be searched?"

"Searched! No. I will never submit to such an insult."

"You will either be searched in my room, Sleath, or in the doctor's."

"I will not submit. I—"

"Why should you not submit if you are innocent?"

"It is an insult, and—"

"If you are unjustly suspected, apologies will not be wanting," said Mr. Kidd drily; "but, as a matter of fact, your manner makes it impossible to doubt your guilt. Come."

Sleath, whose only idea now was to get rid of the incriminating notes in his breast-pocket, turned to fly.

But Kildare was on the look-out for such a move, and so

was Figgis, and in a moment he was struggling in their grasp.

His resistance was brief.

With his arms held by the two, he was marched along behind Mr. Kidd, who opened a wicket with his key and entered the walls of St. Jim's.

Right across the quad the culprit was marched, a grip on either arm, so that he could neither attempt to escape nor to destroy the notes.

The last doubt Mr. Kidd or Kildare might have entertained as to the accuracy of Figgis's information had, of course, vanished now.

Sleath was trembling violently, and white as death. He cast hunted looks to right and left like a captured wild animal.

As they entered the house he broke down utterly.

"Let me go!" he whispered, in a dry, husky voice. "For mercy's sake don't take me to the doctor! I—I own up!"

The housemaster looked at his white, anguished face almost compassionately.

"I am sorry for you, Sleath. But the truth must come out publicly. You forget that an innocent boy bears the suspicion of having committed the crime of which you were guilty. You must go to the doctor."

Sleath groaned, and made no further demur. He knew that all was up now, and he ceased to struggle with his fate.

The doctor was in his study, busy with the preparation of examination papers. His deep, quiet voice bade them enter.

The Head of St. Jim's was not given to expressing surprise easily, but he certainly looked astounded now as he stared at his unexpected visitors.

"Mr. Kidd! Kildare! What can this possibly mean?"

"It means, Dr. Holmes," said the housemaster gravely, "that Blake's innocence is proved, and that the real thief stands before you."

"Sleath!" The Head laid down his pen, and stared at the white and trembling culprit. "Sleath! Is it possible?"

"Unfortunately, it is only too true. Owing to certain information supplied by Figgis, concerning Sleath's dealings with Joliffe at the Rycombe Arms, Kildare and I stopped this wretched boy to-night on the way to the inn. I had reason to suspect him of having upon his person two banknotes stolen from Figgis's study. He admits his guilt."

"You have the banknotes in question, Sleath?" asked the doctor sternly.

Sleath made a sign of assent; he could not speak.

"Give them to me."

With a trembling hand Sleath took a pocket-book from his breast, and opened it. He passed two crisp, rustling, five-pound notes to the Head.

"Are these your notes, Figgis?"

"Yes, sir."

"Where did you obtain such a sum of money?"

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"I borrowed it of D'Arcy, sir, to lay a trap for that rotter. I knew he was the thief, and I wanted to clear Blake."

"How did you know he was the thief?"

"Because he paid Joliffe ten pounds at the time of the robbery, when he had no money of his own. Joliffe suspected that he had stolen it, and kept the five-pound note so as to hold it over Sleath's head as a threat."

Sleath stared at Figgins in amazement.

He had not the faintest idea of whence the junior derived his information.

"Is that correct, Sleath?"

"Yes," groaned the wretched Sleath. "I—I was driven to it. He won the money from me, he fleeced me, and then he threatened to come to you and get me expelled if I didn't pay him. I—I used the football money to keep him quiet, and—then—"

"And then," said the Head severely, "you saved yourself by throwing the blame upon a wholly innocent lad; an action infinitely more wicked than the theft."

"The idea came into my head when I found him in my study," muttered Sleath. "If he hadn't been there I should have thought of it."

"No," exclaimed Figgins indignantly. "Then you'd have fixed it on some kid of our own house, on Fatty Wynn most likely. You could have shoved a half-sovereign into his pocket as easily as into Blake's."

"Silence, Figgins!" Sleath. "I do not know how to express my detestation of the enormity of which you have been guilty. Theft itself is one of the basest of all petty crimes, but to blast the character of an innocent lad— But I will say no more. You will leave the college to-morrow morning. You are expelled from St. Jim's, sir, and I shall take care that your father is acquainted with the full particulars of the matter. You are a disgrace to the school. Go!"

And Sleath walked unsteadily out of the study.

CHAPTER 13. Light at Last.

ST. JIM'S received a shock when it awoke the next morning.

For on the notice-board in each house was a paper in the doctor's handwriting, round which eager crowds gathered.

The information it imparted was thrilling.

But for the well-known writing of the Head, there would have been a suspicion that it was a practical joke.

But there was no doubting Dr. Holmes's own hand.

The notice was brief, but very significant.

It ran as follows:

"The truth concerning the theft from the New House of St. Jim's has now fortunately been discovered.

"The money was not taken by the junior hitherto unjustly suspected, but by Lucas Sleath, the treasurer of the college clubs, himself.

"Sleath has confessed, and is expelled from the school."

And the signature of the Head followed.

The news buzzed from one end of St. Jim's to the other. Blake, when he came down, observed the crowd in the hall, but did not join it. He was getting into the habit now of keeping to himself.

He was astonished when, as soon as he was perceived, a number of juniors made a rush for him and surrounded him in wild excitement.

He clenched his fists, ready for war, but he quickly perceived that the demonstration was not a hostile one.

"It's all right, Blake!" cried Walsh, slapping him on the shoulder.

"What's all right?"

"You're not a thief."

"What?"

"I mean, we know you're not. The truth's out."

Blake's heart gave a bound.

"What are you jabbering about?" he asked.

"Sleath's the thief! He took the money; he's confessed!"

"Sleath!"

"Yes. Here it is on the board, in the doctor's fist! Look!"

"Read it yourself!" chorussed the juniors.

Blake was dragged to the notice-board. There, sure enough, was the doctor's statement of his innocence in black and white.

His chums had already heard the news, and they were soon in the crowd. They slapped him on the back till he gasped for breath.

"Hurrah!" cried Herries, and the crowd echoed his shout, waking echoes in the School House very unusual on a Sunday morning. "Hip, hip, hurrah!"

Kildare came out of his room.

He came towards Blake with his hand outstretched, and gave him a hearty grip.

"I felt all along that you were innocent, though I admit I was staggered at one time," he said. "I'm glad the truth is out, Blake. The whole house owes you an apology, and I make mine now. I'm sorry I ever doubted your honour for a moment."

"Thank you, Kildare."

"We all apologise," exclaimed Walsh, "don't we, chaps? We're sorry, Blake. I suppose we've made asses of ourselves, and may as well own up."

"That's all right," said Blake. "You are asses, you know, and couldn't be expected to act otherwise. I hope you'll have more sense another time, but I have my doubts. Come on, chaps. Are you all here? We're going to see Figgins & Co. I don't know how they've done it, but they've worked the oracle somehow, I'm certain of that."

And Study No. 6 sallied forth from the School House arm-in-arm, across the quadrangle, to the New House.

Figgins & Co. were expecting the visit. There was a blush of conscious merit upon the classic features of the great Figgins, and the Co. looked as if they fancied themselves a good deal that morning.

"How did you do it, Figg?" asked Blake, gripping hard the hand of his old enemy and his best friend. "How on earth did you do it?"

And Figg modestly related his adventures as an amateur detective.

"My hat!" said Herries. "You ought to have a medal, Figg!"

"Figg, old son, you're a giddy marvel!" said Blake. "I don't know how to thank you, so I won't try. You'll understand. But after this I'll never go for you again, never."

"Oh, what rot!" exclaimed Figgins, in alarm. "Why, all the fun would be gone if the School House stopped rowing the New House. This needn't make any difference."

"But—"

"Look here, we're going to make the New House cook-house at St. Jim's, and make you bouncers sit up," said Figgins. "There's no reason why we shouldn't be jolly good friends, and rivals at the same time. We're going to knock spots off you soon."

"Are you?" said Blake, looking warlike. "You'll find us at home when you start. Still, what you say is a jolly good idea."

"May I—aw—make a suggestion?" drawled D'Arcy. "Suppose we make it pay for a couple of days, and to-morrow I will blow one of the fuses at the tuck-shop, and we'll have a big feast to celebrate the great occasion. We'll invite all the juniors of both houses, and have a high old time, dear boys. And after that we'll go on the war-path again."

"Adolphus," said Figgins, "you are not half the silly ass you look. There's a lot of solid hosh sense in your suggestion, Aubrey. And we'll adopt it, Algernon. What do you chaps say?"

"Passed unanimously!" exclaimed Blake.

Passed unanimously Arthur Augustus's suggestion certainly was. The feast came off in the Fourth Form room in the School House, and was a huge success. The rivals of St. Jim's buried the hatchet for the time, and all was peace and harmony. It was a glorious occasion, and long remembered, and the day afterwards the School House and the New House were on the war-path again, as of old.

THE END.

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