

GRAND EXTRA LONG SCHOOL TALE.

PLUCK

The Reformation of Marmaduke.
By Chas. Hamilton.
Weaving the Web.
A Tale of Captain Frank Ferrett, Detective.

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THE WHOLE HALL WAS IN CONVULSIONS AS ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY SANG "GIVE ME BACK MY EIGHTEEN PENCE." (See page 16.)
NO. 129. VOL. 5. NEW SERIES.



[VOL. 5, No. 129, NEW SERIES.]

The First Long (School) Story.

'Complete' in this Issue.

THE REFORMATION OF MARMADUKE

A Tale of
Jack Blake,
Augustus,
Figgins & Co.

BY
CHAS.
HAMILTON.

CHAPTER I.

Brought Back to School.

"MARMADUKE!" It was Figgins who uttered the exclamation, in tones of amazement and dismay. He was looking out of the window of his study in the New House at St. Jim's, when he caught sight of two figures alighting from a hack that had just driven into the quad.

One was that of a portly, middle-aged gentleman in a silk hat and a really striking waistcoat, who was unknown to Figgins; but the other Figgins recognised instantly. Well he knew the weedy figure and pasty-complexioned, discontented face of Marmaduke Smythe.

"Marmaduke," repeated Figgins, staring from the window—"Marmaduke! He's come back!"

Fatty Wynn looked up from his Catullus, and Kerr ceased oiling his cricket-bat. They stared at Figgins.

"Marmaduke!"

They uttered the name simultaneously.

"Yes, the bounder's come back!" said Figgins, turning from the window. "What do you think of that, kids? There's a stout old merchant with him—his father, I suppose. And I really thought we were rid of the horrid bounder!"

"They'll stick him in this study again," said Kerr savagely—"that is, if he's come back for good."

"Perhaps the doctor won't have him," suggested Fatty Wynn hopefully.

"Oh, the Head's too easy-going for anything," said Figgins, in disgust; "and if the bounder's taken back into the school, you can bet your boots that Monteith will shove him in here. If they put him into the School House I wouldn't mind."

And the three stared at each other uncomfortably. It was indeed a serious matter. Marmaduke Smythe was decidedly the most hopeless "bounder" that had ever entered the ancient walls of St. Jim's.

He had had a lively time during his brief stay at the good old school, and finally, to escape the storm his own



snobbishness had aroused against him, he had appealed to his mamma to take him home.

Mrs. Smythe had descended upon St. Jim's to the rescue of her darling boy, and had whisked him off under the very eyes of the Head without ceremony.

And St. Jim's had congratulated itself upon being rid of him. For once School House and New House agreed. Both of

them had had enough of Marmaduke. For he had been placed in the School House to begin with, and Blake and his chums had had him in their study. After his transfer to the New House he had shared the quarters of Figgins & Co. When he departed the rivals of St. Jim's congratulated one another. And now he had come back!

"They've gone in," said Figgins, looking from the window again. "If they take him back, and put him in this study, I shall do something desperate. Oh, it's too rotten to think about. If you've done your prep., Fatty, let's get on with that rehearsal. The date of the concert is pretty close at hand now."

The New House juniors were planning a concert which was to knock the School House into a cocked hat, so to speak, and make Study No. 6 over the way green with envy. In the keen interest of the rehearsal Figgins & Co. forgot even Marmaduke.

But it was not only Figgins & Co. who were disconcerted by the reappearance of the youthful scion of the house of Smythe.

When the millionaire and his hopeful son stepped out of the back, Jack Blake and Herries were standing on the steps of the School House, and they spotted him at once.

"Hallo, there's that waster again!" said Blake, with a prolonged whistle. "His governor's brought him back. That's rough on Figgy."

Herries grinned.

"Figgins & Co. will be tearing their hair!" he exclaimed. "They thought it funny when we had that specimen in our quarters, but the funny side of it didn't appeal to them when he was transferred to their house. I wish them joy of him."

"But Jove!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, adjusting his eyeglasses, as he joined his chums, and surveying Marmaduke through it. "But Jove, dear-boys, there is that strange animal again! This is really too wotten!"

"Figgins & Co. had better educate him when they have him all to themselves, that's all," said Blake, "just as we did to you, Adolphus. You remember what a howling duffer you were when you first came to St. Jim's, don't you?"

"Oh, well, don't you know?" protested D'Arcy.

"Not that you're much better in some respects now," added Blake. "Still, we improved you. Marmaduke's a worse case, I admit; but there's no telling what Figgys might do if he set his little mind to it."

Meanwhile, the millionaire and Marmaduke were shown into the presence of Dr. Holmes. The doctor cast a very expressive glance at Marmaduke, who looked sulky.

"How do you do, Mr. Smythe? This is—er—er—un-expected pleasure!" the doctor remarked. "Pray take a seat."

The millionaire sat down. There was an expression of determination upon the round, red face of Samuel Smythe, millionaire.

"I've brought him back, you see," he remarked.

"Yes, I—er—"

"Marmy has been a great deal spoiled," explained Mr. Smythe. "He was his mother's pet, and I have always been too deeply engaged in business to notice much how things were going on. When I realised that the boy was being quite spoiled I asked you to take him in hand."

"Yes, but—"

"You did so," said the millionaire, "and I was glad of it, and grateful to you. But Marmy does not seem to have got on very well at St. James's."

"No," said the doctor, rather drily. "He certainly did not."

"Had too big an opinion of himself, eh?"

"H'm! Yes, something like that."

"I'm not surprised," said Mr. Smythe. "You see, the son of Samuel Smythe, of Mincing and Park Lane, naturally thinks no small beer of himself; and Marmy has been loaded to right and left."

"I—I suppose so."

"But, bless you, there's no nonsense about me," said Mr. Smythe. "I'm a business man, sir, and I know what's what. Ask anybody in the City, sir, if Samuel Smythe knows what's what, and they'll tell you that he does every time."

"But I really—"

"Marmy's mother is a tender soul, and very fond of Marmy," said Mr. Smythe. "No wonder she came down to fetch him away when he wired—"

"That was very wrong of him, and—"

"But when she brought him home, bless you, I said that it wouldn't do. I said that I'd given him into your charge, and there he should stay until the proper time for leaving St. James's Collegiate School. That's me."

"But under the circumstances—"

"So here we are," said Mr. Smythe cheerfully. "Here we are again, my dear sir. Here's Marmaduke, returned undamaged, to have his education proceeded with. I hand him over to you with every confidence."

"That is very kind of you, and I assure you that I fully appreciate the compliment, but—"

Mr. Smythe rose to his feet.

"And now, as I'm a busy man, and I dare say you are too, I'll be off!" he exclaimed.

"But I must explain that—"

"Good-bye, my dear sir, and thanks very much!"

"Pardon me," exclaimed the doctor, exasperated. "but since Mrs. Smythe took Master Smythe away, I consider—"

"You are right, sir—quite right; but my train leaves in fifteen minutes, and—"

"You will kindly take your son away with you, Mr. Smythe."

"Eh?" Mr. Smythe stared. "Eh?"

"Since the boy's mother decided to remove him from my care, I cannot—"

"Oh, that's all right," said the millionaire confidently.

"I've talked her over, and made her see reason."

"However—"

"If it is a question of fees—extra fees—"

"It is nothing of the kind, but it is impossible for my authority to be interfered with in any way whatever, and—"

"That's all over," declared the millionaire. "I have Mrs. Smythe's assurance on that point. I assure you that you may be quite easy upon that point. Now that I have had a serious talk with Mrs. Smythe, she is reassured, as anxious as I am for him to be taken back into my care. I am thinking of his future. This is the place to—"

the battle of life, and to take the nonsense out of him. My dear sir, you cannot refuse me."

"Well, well," said Dr. Holmes, mollified, "if you put it like that—"

"I do put it like that, sir!"

"I must warn you that if Master Smythe does not turn over a new leaf he will have a most uncomfortable time with the other boys."

"That's all right. He'll turn over a new leaf as soon as he finds that there's no help for it. Won't you, Marmy, old man?"

Marmy gave an unintelligible grunt.

"So good-bye, my dear sir!" exclaimed the millionaire. "I have twelve minutes to catch my train. Good-bye!"

And without giving the Head of St. Jim's time for another word the millionaire was gone. Marmaduke remained standing, with sullen, downcast face, before the puzzled doctor. There was silence for a few moments. The doctor broke it.

"Smythe!"

Marmaduke looked up scowlingly.

"I am afraid you have returned to this school against your will. Is that the case?"

"I didn't want to come back," growled Marmaduke.

"But you see now that it is your father's will, and that there is no help for it. Have you made up your mind to make the best of necessity?"

"I suppose I shall have to."

"Exactly; and you will do well to take it with as good a grace as possible. Make up your mind to it, and try to correct your faults, and there is no reason why you should not be happy here. All your offences during your previous stay at the school shall be forgotten, if you do not repeat them."

Marmaduke was sullenly silent.

"I hope," said the doctor, raising his voice a little, "that you will be sensible enough to take my advice, and act upon it; otherwise your life here will certainly not be a happy one. You may go. You will take up the same quarters as before."

Marmaduke walked sullenly out of the room. The doctor's brow darkened, and he was strongly inclined to call the boy back and start his education with a caning there and then; but he refrained.

"It is more from the boys than the masters that he will learn his lesson," the Head murmured to himself. "Neither do I wish to be hard upon a boy whose faults are rather from his training than from the heart. I will give him every chance."

And Marmaduke, not knowing what a narrow escape he had had, made his way to the New House, and presented himself at his old quarters, the study occupied by Figgins & Co.

CHAPTER 2.

A Study Rehearsal.

MARMADUKE opened the door, and looked into the study in amazement. The voice of Figgins came to his ears. Figgins was standing in an imposing attitude, with a portentous frown upon his face.

"Heat me those irons hot, and look thou standish—"

"Standest!" interjected Kerr.

"Right-ho!" said Figgins. "Your writing is so beastly!"

"And look thou standest within the—the attic—"

"Arras!"

"It looks more like 'attic,'" said Figgins, examining his written copy. "Are you sure it ain't 'attic'? He might be standing in an attic."

"Silly ass! It's 'arras,' I tell you!"

"Oh, I don't mind. I'll say 'arras' if you like, though I can't help thinking that attic would be just as good, if not better," said Figgins obstinately. "However, here goes:

"Heat me those irons hot,

And look thou standest within the arras.

When I strike my foot upon the bosom of the ground, Buzz forth—"

"Stop! It's 'rush forth!'"

"All right. Anything for a quiet life. 'Rush forth,' then."

"And bind the boy whom you will find with me

Fast to the chair."

"That's all right. Now you come on, Fatty. You're the



"There's a bulldog after me. Open the door," screamed Marmaduke. "Say please, pretty," said Figgins through the door. "P-p-p-please—p-pretty," whimpered Marmaduke. (See page 6.)

giddy executioner. You ought to have the hot irons to burn out the kid's eyes, but the tongs will do. Now start."

"I hope your warrant will bear out the deed, Figgy."

"Don't say 'Figgy.' Say, 'I hope your warrant will bear out the deed,' you silly cuckoo!"

"All right. I hope your warrant will bear out the deed, you silly cuckoo."

Kerr tore his hair; but before he could lecture Fatty Wynn, Figgins had started again.

"Uncleanly scruples," he exclaimed, darting a fiery look at Fatty. "Fear not, you. Hook it."

"I say, that's not right!" exclaimed Fatty.

"Yes, it is."

"Tain't!" said Kerr. "It's 'Look to it.'"

"Hook it! sounds better, and more up to date."

"Look here, did you write this giddy thing, or did Spookshave—I mean Shakespeare?" Kerr demanded, getting excited.

Figgins waved his hand soothingly.

"Don't get ratty! I'll say anything you like. Here goes!"

"Get on, then!"

And Figgins started declaiming again:

"Uncleanly scruples. Fear not, you. Look to it. Young lad, come forth."

"All right," said Marmaduke, who thought the last remark was addressed to him, "I'm coming."

And he walked into the study. In the deep interest of the

rehearsal of the recitation the leading lights of the New House Amateur Dramatic Society, had not noticed him.

Now the rehearsal came to a sudden stop, and the trio stared at Marmaduke.

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

"The Head sent me here," said Marmaduke sullenly. "I didn't want to come."

Figgins growled.

"So you're to come back into this study again?"

"Yes, I suppose I am. Dr. Holmes sent me here, I tell you."

"Well, don't make yourself a nuisance, or you'll get slain! Stick yourself somewhere, and don't interrupt the rehearsal."

"The what?"

"The rehearsal, fathead! We're rehearsing a scene from 'King John,' to bring off at the concert the New House is going to give. You'll have to be let into the secret as you're here; but, mind you, not a word of it over the way in the School House. We're going to take them by surprise, and knock them silly, when the giddy thing comes off."

Marmaduke sat down, still with a sullen brow. During his previous stay at St. Jim's he had learned something of the keen rivalry between the two houses there, and he understood.

"Now, get on, Kerr!" said Figgins.

Kerr, whose father was an actor, and whose keenest ambition was to follow in the paternal footsteps, was stage-manager to the New House Amateur Dramatic Society, and he was in official charge of the rehearsals. In this scene

"HERR SPECS,"

A Tale (School) of Spies, the Twins & Co. By H. Clarke Hook.

"DARIN & CO."

A Story of John Smith, Detective. By Mark Darin.

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from Shakespeare's play of "King John" he was taking the part of Prince Arthur, the boy prisoner, whose eyes were to be burned out by Hubert and his ruffians, at the order of the tyrant.

"Young lad, come forth," repeated Figgins. "I have to say with you."

Kerr nodded.

"Good-morrow, Hubert."

"Good-morning, little prince."

"Silly ass! Do you think Hubert said 'Good-morning'?" exclaimed Kerr. "Why can't you say 'Good-morrow'?"

"All right; that was a slip. 'Good-morrow, little prince.'"

"As little prince," said Kerr tragically. "Having so great a title to be more prince. As may be. You are sad."

"Methinks I have been jollier," said Figgins.

"Ass! Make it 'merrier.'"

"Right-ho! 'Methinks I have been merrier.'"

"Good! Now I go on:

"Mercy upon us!

Methinks nobody should be sad but I.

Yet I remember when I was in France—"

"Oh, rats!" exclaimed Figgy. "You don't want to drag that in. A chap would think nobody had ever had a week in Boulogne before by the way you trot that out, Kerr. I wish your pater had taken you to Margate instead last vac.—I do, really."

"It's in the book!" yelled Kerr. "It's Prince Arthur says that."

"Rats! There weren't any Dover-to-Boulogne trips in those days."

"I tell you it is. Look for yourself."

"Oh, all right; you're manager!"

"Pity you couldn't think of that before."

"Yet I remember when I was in France,

Young gentlemen would be as sad as night,

Only from wantonness. By my halidome,

So I were out of prison and kept sheep,

I would be as merry as the day is long."

"I've cut the rest. We can't be too long-winded, or they'll throw things at us," explained Kerr. "Now I go on: 'Is it my fault that I was Geoffrey's son?'"

"Not a bit of it!—I mean, 'no, indeed, 'tis not,'" said Figgins hastily.

"And I would to Heaven I were your son," said Kerr, "so—"

"Oh, draw it mild! Is that in the book?"

"Of course it is. Shut up, and don't interrupt. 'And I would to Heaven I were your son, so you would love me, Hubert.'"

Figgins referred to his copy.

"Do I go on here?"

"Yes; you're Hubert, ain't you?"

"Right. 'If he talks to me with his innocent sprats

"What?"

"His innocent sprats, he will awake my mercy—"

"It can't be 'sprats'!" exclaimed Kerr. "Let me look at it. It's 'prate,' fathead!"

"I thought it sounded funny," confessed Figgins.

"If he talks to me with his innocent prate,

He will awake my mercy, which lies dead."

Therefore I will be sudden, and scratch—"

"Ass! It's 'despatch.'"

"Well, why can't you write like a Christian? 'I will be sudden, and despatch. Come forth.'"

"Look here," exclaimed Fatty Wynn, "where do I come in? It seems to me that you and Figgy have got the whole show to yourselves, Kerr."

"You're the executioner, ain't you?"

"I don't see why I couldn't make one of the speeches, anyhow," said Wynn obstinately.

"There are some things for you to say. If you want to be manager, I'll resign. Besides, you've got 'The Boy Stood on the Burning Deck' all to yourself when the concert comes off. Don't be a hog!"

"Oh, all right," said Fatty, pacified. "But, I say, this rehearsing makes me hungry. Let's have a feed, and go on again presently."

"You two chaps make me tired," said Kerr. "Let's have a rest, for goodness' sake."

So the rehearsal was adjourned, and tea was discussed. Marmaduke had missed tea, and he was hungry. He looked on with an envious eye as the chums of the New House

spread out their good things. Figgins caught his expression.

"I say, kid, you can join us," he said. "Wire in!"

Marmaduke hesitated. Like many boys of a sulky disposition, he was averse from meeting friendly advances, as if he were afraid of being deprived of an excuse for sulking.

However, he was hungry, and Figgins's hospitality was boundless. So Marmaduke joined the feasters, and, under the genial influence of hot tea and cake and muffins, he unbent. Figgins was in funds, as it happened, and the spread was of an unusually plentiful description.

Figgins thought things over. If Marmaduke was to be a fixture in the study, it was wisest to make the best of him. Figgins had heard that wild beasts could be tamed by kindness, and he thought the same genial influence might take effect upon Marmaduke.

"You say the Head sent you here, Smythe?" he asked, as he passed Marmaduke a second cup of tea.

"Yes," said Marmaduke.

"You're to belong to the New House definitely, then?"

"I suppose so."

"Well, we'll give you a chance," said Figgins. "If you behave yourself, we'll look over your funny ways, and make the best of you. Mind, don't talk about your pater's millions, or you'll get jumped on. Don't put on side, and you'll get on all right. You'll find us all right when you know us. And I dare say you've got your good points, though I can't see 'em at present."

Marmaduke grunted. However, the ice was broken, and Marmaduke had made a fresh start in the New House at St. Jim's on a better footing than before; but Marmaduke was far from cured yet, as we shall see. He yet had his lesson to learn.

CHAPTER 3.

A Surprise for Marmaduke and a Feed for Figgins & Co.

THE New House generally did not receive Marmaduke very kindly. They knew him for a snob, and if there is anything the average healthy British boy cannot forgive, it is snobbishness. Still, they were willing to give him a chance, and so long as he did not make himself too obnoxious he was likely to be let alone. The juniors had plenty of things to think of now besides Marmaduke.

For the reign of King Football was over, and all the thoughts of the "Saints" were now fixed upon the great summer game which was to succeed. In both houses at St. Jim's, in every Form-room, the talk ran on cricket.

While Kildare and the elders thought of the list of college fixtures, the thoughts of the younger element were given to the junior house matches. Figgins was determined that the New House should walk over the School House on the cricket field. Jack Blake was equally determined that the School House should make the New House hide its diminished head. And the junior cricketers turned out to practice at every opportunity with as much assiduity as their elders.

Marmaduke had been so coddled and petted at home that there was little of the sportsman in him. He hated sports, which he considered rough, and entailing too much exertion. But he had come to the wrong place for laziness.

For at St. Jim's, like most public schools, practice on the cricket field was compulsory. Unless a boy had a medical certificate to skulk behind, he had to go down to practice, and was all the better for it. Healthy, wholesome lads required no compulsion to play the national game. But the lazy and lackadaisical "wasters" grumbled vehemently when they were routed out to practice. They preferred lounging about the passages with their hands in their pockets, or smoking cheap cigarettes in the secrecy of their studies.

Monteith, the head prefect of the New House, had the duty of seeing that none of the juniors of his side escaped, and so he first came into conflict with Marmaduke. The new boy was called into the prefect's study. He presented himself there with his hands in his pockets, and a sullen look on his face.

"You were not on Littleaside yesterday," said Monteith, referring to a list in his hand. "I told Figgins to show you the ropes. Didn't he speak to you?"

"Yes."

"Then, you know, you ought to have turned up at the nets with the rest of the juniors?"

"I didn't want to."

Monteith stared.

"You didn't want to? What do you mean?"

"I don't like cricket. I don't see why I should play if I don't want to."

Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's, would have reasoned

quietly and kindly with the new boy. That was not Monteith's way. He picked up a cane, and took Marmaduke by the collar.

"I don't know exactly what may be the manners and customs of Park Lane," remarked the prefect, "but they won't do for this school. You've got to play the game, and as a start I'll give you a lesson which may take some of the cheek out of you."

"If you hit me I'll kick you," said Marmaduke.

"You will, will you?"

Monteith twisted him over on the table, and began to thrash him heartily. Marmaduke kept his word, and lashed out with both feet, and Monteith got a kick that made him jump.

"Oh, you little beast! I'll skin you!" he gasped.

And he gave Marmaduke a caning there and then that made him wriggle and yell.

"Now," said Monteith, jerking the new boy off the table when he had finished, and sending him spinning towards the door—"now, remember, you'll get the same again if you don't turn up at practice, and if you cheek a prefect again."

The severity of the licking had taken the spirit out of Marmaduke. He went from the study without a word, looking white and dazed.

A little later Figgins found him, sitting in the armchair in the chums' study, and rocking himself to and fro.

"Hallo! What's the matter?" exclaimed Figgins, catching sight of his face. "Anything wrong?"

Marmaduke made no reply.

"Been licked?"

"Yes!" snarled Marmaduke.

"For not turning up at the cricket?"

"Yes."

"Well, I warned you how it would be," said Figgins.

"I'm sorry for you, and I dare say Monteith has overdone it. He's a beastly bully. But it's your own look-out. Look here, Smythe, I'll help you get on to the game, if you like, and—"

"I'll ask your help when I want it," said Marmaduke.

Figgins drew a deep, deep breath, and went out without replying.

So Marmaduke was left to bear his troubles alone. For a moment a better feeling awoke in his breast, and he felt a twinge of remorse; he realised that Figgins had meant kindly. Then he hardened his heart. He was resolved to consider himself injured and persecuted, and to believe that all were his enemies.

The next afternoon, after school, however, he turned up on the field, fearful of having his name put down on the list of absentees. And from the professional, who coached the St. Jim's juniors, he picked up the rudiments of the great game.

"I say, Figgy," Kerr remarked that evening, in the study shared by Figgins & Co., "have you seen the Smythe cad?"

"Yes; I saw him going to the porter's room as I came in."

"Ah!" said Kerr.

Figgins looked at him inquiringly.

"Hallo! What have you got in your noddle?" he inquired. "Has Marmaduke been up to anything?"

"There's something in the wind, at any rate," said Kerr.

"That's the third time Marmy's been to Taggles to-day, to my knowledge. The first time I was in the room, and I heard him inquiring for a parcel from home."

Fatty Wynn pricked up his ears.

"Hallo, that looks like grub!" he exclaimed.

"My idea exactly," assented Kerr. "I believe the horrid bouncer is getting a feed from home, and doesn't intend to say anything about it."

"I don't see how that can be," Figgins remarked thoughtfully. "Grub isn't allowed to be sent to the juniors, except at the beginning of term. If Marmaduke's mamma sends him anything it will be confiscated by the powers that be."

"Marmaduke's aware of that, and he's up to snuff," said Kerr. "He was inquiring for a parcel of books."

"Well, he can't eat books, can he?"

"Is he the kind of chap to care a rap for books?" said Kerr acutely. "Why, he doesn't like reading, and he hates study. But he can keep his end up all right when it comes to feeding. My belief is that he's going to get a feed from his dear mamma, under pretence of a parcel of books."

"Shouldn't wonder. He certainly wouldn't go three times to Taggles to inquire after a lot of books," agreed Figgins. "But he hasn't said a word to us. If he gets the feed, he means to keep it all to himself."

"Yes, after we've taken him up and been like brothers to him, too."

"Oh, he's a pig! Of course, in such a case it's our bounden duty to see that the tommy is shared out among the Form."

"That's just what I was thinking."

"We're on the track of that parcel of books," said Figgins, with a grin. "Let's go down and interview Taggles."

The three were soon in the porter's room. Taggles looked at them suspiciously—he was not on the best of terms with Figgins & Co. But Figgins was geniality itself.

"Hallo, old Taggy!" he exclaimed. "We've come to inquire about that parcel of books for our study-mate Smythe. Has it arrived?"

"Yes, it has!" growled Taggles. "One 'ud think there wasn't a blessed book in the whole college by the way that blooming parcel has been inquired after to-day. There's Master Smythe been here four or five times about it."

"So it's come. I'll tell Smythe. Where is it?"

"I've told Smythe," grunted Taggles. "He's gone to the box-room for it, where I told him it was. I'm sick of that blooming parcel, I tell you."

Figgins & Co. left the room.

"Come on, kids," said Figgins; "we're on the track. We'll just peep into the box-room and see what Marmaduke is doing with those books."

"Rather!" chuckled the Co.

They made their way to the New House box-room. The door was ajar, and Figgins peeped through the crack. There was Marmaduke, as large as life. He was sitting on a box, with a bottle of currant wine in his right hand, and a jam tart in his left. Opened, before him, was the parcel of books. It was a light, wooden box, and had been carefully wrapped and tied, and labelled "Books, with Care."

Figgins's mouth watered as he saw the kind of "books" it contained. He could see the contents only imperfectly, but he saw bottles of currant wine, pies and cakes, biscuits, oranges, and apples.

"My hat!" murmured Figgins. "Look, chaps! But not a sound."

Kerr and Wynn looked in turn. Then Figgins drew them away from the door.

"He's caught in the giddy act," he muttered. "Feeding all on his lonesome, and not offering anybody a bite. Did you ever hear of such a hopeless waster?"

"Never," said Kerr.

"He ought to be scalped!" said Fatty Wynn, with heated indignation. "Let's go in and catch him baldheaded."

"Not a bit of it. Come along!"

Figgins linked his arms in those of the Co., and walked them away to the study. They looked at him in utter amazement.

"I say," ejaculated Kerr, "you're not going to leave the pig to feed in peace, are you?"

"You can't, Figgy," said Wynn. "You must be off your rocker!"

"Leave it to me," said Figgins serenely. "I know what I'm about. You trust your uncle."

He marched them into the study, and closed the door.

"Now, kids," he said impressively, "it's possible that Marmaduke intends to let us into his little secret, after he's filled himself up to the chin."

Kerr laughed scoffingly.

"Yes, I can see him doing it," he sneered.

"Well, if he doesn't, he'll fasten up the box again, and leave it in the box-room till he wants another feed," said Figgins.

"I suppose he will—he couldn't bring it here without giving himself away. But I don't see where we come in."

"We come into the box-room, my kid," said Figgins, "and we collar the tommy as soon as Marmaduke is gone. And when he goes to the place again he finds it's bare like Mother Hubbard. We'll leave him a little billet-doux to comfort him."

The Co. chuckled.

"Right-ho, Figgy!"

And there and then Figgins & Co. plotted a plot.

About ten minutes later Marmaduke came into the study. He had the look of one who has recently eaten heartily, and there were crumbs on his jacket. But not a word of the feast did he say. It was evident that he intended to keep the good things to himself. Figgins & Co. made no remarks, but they exchanged significant glances.

"Coming down to tea, Marmaduke?" Figgins asked presently.

The Co. had left the study. Marmaduke shook his head.

"No, I'm not. I can't eat the stuff they give you here."

"Going to starve to death, then?" asked Figgins pleasantly.

"Mind your own business!"

Figgins restrained himself with an effort.

"Certainly," he said politely. "Please excuse me for daring to exist and breathe the same air as your highness. I know it's like my cheek."

Marmaduke made no rejoinder to that. He was waiting for Figgins to do down to tea, so that he could go to the

box-room unseen and enjoy another solitary feast. But Figgins seemed in no hurry to go down. He began to practice at a punching-ball, much to Marmaduke's annoyance. Marmaduke sat watching him out of the corners of his eyes.

"I say," he remarked presently, "the tea-bell's gone."

"Has it?" said Figgins, punching away at the ball.

"Yes, five minutes ago."

"Then we shall be late, Marmy."

"I'm not going."

"Well, I won't, either," said Figgins generously. "I'll stay here with you."

"I don't want you to."

"I suppose that's what you call politeness in Petticoat Lane, isn't it?" asked Figgins.

Marmaduke glared.

"My father's mansion is in Park Lane," he said haughtily.

"I was referring to the place of your birth, my dear Marmaduke. But I will not be driven away by these rebuffs," said Figgins, relapsing into poetry. "With all thy faults, I'll still be true to thee."

"Look here, I don't want you to stay with me."

"We can't have all we want in this world, my son, and we often get what we don't want—sometimes a thick ear if we're cheeky," said Figgins darkly.

At this moment Kerr and Fatty Wynn came into the study again. Kerr carried a cricket-bag, which seemed to be filled to bursting-point with something. Figgins guessed what it was, but Marmaduke had no suspicion.

"Had your tea?" asked Figgins.

"No," said Kerr. "We're going to have our tea here."

Marmaduke rose and left the study. It was evidently useless to wait longer. The three chums grinned. Kerr placed the bag on the table, and turned out the contents.

"By Jove!" said Figg. "The Smythes do things in style! Pigeon-pie and pate-de-foie gras. Let's get the cloth on. Boil the kettle, Fatty. This will be simply ripping! Fancy dear Marmaduke's mamma sending all these things for us!"

"Ha, ha!"

"I'm afraid it was the good lady's intention to deceive the Head," said Figgins solemnly. "Grub in a parcel of books! Shocking! It's evident that Marmaduke hasn't brought his parents up carefully. Look the door, Kerr, in case that merchant comes back inquiring."

The door was locked. Meanwhile, Marmaduke had gone to the box-room. He lighted the gas, and closed the door. Then he went to the box, which was just as he had left it, carefully wrapped in brown paper and tied with cord. As he unfastened the cord a strange sound came from the box. Marmaduke gave a violent start. The sound strongly resembled the growl of a dog.

"Dear me!" murmured Marmaduke. "I must be dreaming!"

Without making a close examination of the box, he could not see that holes had been bored in the sides to admit air. He went on unfastening the cord, and took the brown paper away. The lid of the box was fastened with small nails. Marmaduke inserted his pocket-knife under the edge and jerked it off.

"Gr-r-r-r!"

Marmaduke jumped to his feet with a yell of affright.

"Gr-r-r-r!"

From the box, otherwise empty, rose the head and shoulders of a bulldog! Marmaduke stared at it. The bulldog stared at Marmaduke.

"Gr-r-r-r!"

"Help!" shrieked Marmaduke. "Save me! Help!"

"Gr-r-r-r!"

Now, that bulldog belonged to Taggles, the porter, and was the kindest and best-tempered animal in existence. But his best friend could not say that his voice was musical. And as he skipped out of the box where the playful Co. had placed him, Marmaduke yelled with terror, and fled from the box-room.

"Br-r-r-gr-r-r!"

Marmaduke ran like the wind. The bulldog, with the hunter's instinct within him roused, gave chase, and ran Marmaduke down at the door of Figgins's study. Marmaduke pounded upon the door as it refused to open.

"Hallo!" called out Figgins, from within. "Who's there?"

"Open the door!"

"What's the matter?"

"There's a bulldog after me!" screamed Marmaduke.

"Open the door!"

Figgins gave a yell of laughter, which seemed simply heartless to Marmaduke. He kicked frantically on the panels.

"Open the door, you beasts!"

"Say please, pretty," said Figgins, through the door.

"P-p-please—pretty," whimpered Marmaduke.

Figgins opened the door. Marmaduke bolted in and dodged round the table. Figgins went out into the passage, and patted the dog's head. Towser rubbed his nose against Figgins's knee.

"Good dog!" said Figgins. "Be off with you!"

And Towser trotted away.

"Is he gone?" asked Marmaduke fearfully, as Figgins re-entered the study.

"Yes, I've driven off the savage beast; alone, unaided, I did it," said Figgins cheerfully. "How did you get him on your track, Marmy?"

"He was in a—a box," stammered Marmaduke.

"In a box? What do you mean?"

"A box my mamma sent me, and—and—"

"You don't mean to say your mater sent you a bulldog in a box?" demanded Figgins, with an air of incredulity.

Fatty Wynn and Kerr nearly choked.

"N-unno!" stammered Marmaduke. "She—she sent me a box—there was tommy in it, you know, and somebody must have—"

"Rot!" said Figgins. "If you had a box of tommy come to you, you wouldn't be mean enough to keep it to yourself, would you?"

"Why shouldn't I?" snarled Marmaduke. "I don't like anybody here, and—"

"Never mind," said Figgins. "You're a hopeless cad, I can see, but we're good little boys, and we'll return good for evil. You can see we've got a good spread. Join in, my son, and do your whack. You're welcome."

Marmaduke looked at the spread on the study table, and remembered the empty state of the box from which Towser had emerged, and suspicion lighted his eye.

"Look here!" he exclaimed. "If you—you—"

"Hallo! What's the matter now?"

"You've scoffed my grub, and—"

"He's dreaming," said Figgins, tapping his forehead; "a bit wrong here, I suppose. Are you going to wire in or not, Marmaduke?"

Marmaduke looked at the chums, and saw the rats at which the things were going. He thought upon the whole that he had better wire in, and he did.

"Jolly good," yawned Figgins, when he had finished, and positively had no room for another tart—"jolly good. Hope you've enjoyed yourself, Marmaduke. When you write to your mater send her my compliments, and tell her I admire her taste. I do really. She knows how to pack a box, and no mistake."

And Marmaduke did not know whether to scowl or to grin; but, under the influence of a good meal, and the smiles of Figgins & Co., he decided to grin. Figgins & Co. were surprised.

CHAPTER 4.

On the Track of a Secret.

JACK BLAKE was looking unusually thoughtful. He stood with his hands in his trousers pockets, staring out of the window of Study No. 6 at the pigeons in the quadrangle. Once or twice Herries and Digby had addressed remarks to him, but without eliciting any remarks. It was evident that the chief of the School House juniors had something on his mind.

"What's the image thinking about?" grumbled Herries. "Look here, Blake, are you coming down to the cricket, or aren't you?"

"Eh?" said Blake absently.

"What have you got in your silly coccanut?"

"I've been thinking!"

"And has it given you a pain?" asked Digby sarcastically.

"If I didn't do some thinking," said Blake severely, "there's precious little would get done in this study. You fellows go on without seeing things under your very noses. Now, it's perfectly plain to me that the New House are getting up something against us."

"How do you know?"

"Instinct, my son," said Blake, with a superior smile. "I know enough to go in when it rains, and I wish I could say the same of you chaps. Figgins & Co. are keeping some big secret, and it's up against us. Lots of the New House chaps have been throwing out hints lately about a surprise that is in store for us."

"Oh, that's only their gas!" said Herries.

"So I thought at first, but I've altered my opinion. There's something going on, and I want to know what it is."

"I don't see what they can be planning," said Digby thoughtfully. "They can't touch us on the cricket field. When the house cricket match comes off we shall simply wipe up the ground with them."

"Figgins doesn't think so."

"Well, we'll open his eyes for him when the time comes."

"It's nothing to do with the cricket," said Blake, shaking his head. "It's something else. And we've got to nose it out. It's some move against the School House, and they're jolly mysterious about it. My hat! I wish I knew what it was. It will never do to let those bounders take us by surprise."

"Well, you're leader," said Herries comfortably. "It's your business, Blake. I'm going down to practice."

And Herries marched off with his bat under his arm.

"That's all very well!" exclaimed Blake. "But, I say, Digby—"

"What Herries says is quite correct," grinned Dig. "You're the giddy chief, and it's your business to see what the New House bounders are up to, Blake. So long, I'm off!"

And Digby followed Herries, whistling.

"I like that," grumbled Blake. "Nice sort of a blooming sinecure it is, being leader to a set of asses like you chaps! I say, D'Arcy, what do you think of—"

"Excuse me, dear boy," said D'Arcy, adjusting his eye-glass, "I quite agree with Herries and Dig. You are weally leadah, you know, and I don't want to encroach. I weally hope you will get on to this plot of Figgins & Co., whatever it is."

And Arthur Augustus strolled away. Blake looked after the deserters in wrath and disgust.

"Well, of all the cheek!" he murmured. "I've a jolly good mind to resign! No, I won't, though. I'll find out what Figgins & Co. are up to, and put a spoke in their wheel."

And Blake strolled out of the School House.

The shouts from the cricket ground, and the merry sound of bat meeting ball, were very enticing, but Blake did not yield to the temptation to join the cricketers. As his chums had plainly put it, he was leader, and it was his business to discover the plans of Figgins & Co. and checkmate them. That he was determined to do, though as yet he did not exactly know how to set about it.

"Hallo!" muttered Blake suddenly. "What's up now?"

He had caught sight of Figgins & Co. standing in the doorway of the New House, reading together what appeared to be a printed bill of some kind. They appeared to be in a gleeful mood over it. Blake, wondering what the bill could contain to interest them so keenly, came towards them. As soon as they saw him, the printed bill disappeared into Figgins's breast-pocket.

"Hallo!" said Blake cheerfully, and eyeing Figgins keenly. "What have you got there, Figgy? Something awfully interesting?"

Figgins looked at the Co. with a peculiar expression, and the three of them burst into a laugh.

"Yes," chuckled Figgins. "Ha, ha!"

"Well, what is it?"

"That's a giddy secret, my son; but we'll let you into it some time."

"Ha, ha, ha!" shouted the Co.

Blake was puzzled and curious. He felt that he was on the track of the plot that was brewing in the New House, but he could not imagine what was the nature of it, or what the bill in Figgins's pocket could have to do with it.

"Seems to me you are a set of cuckoos!" he exclaimed.

"What's the secret, anyway?"

"You'll know some time, won't he, chaps?"

"Ha, ha! Yes."

"Oh, you're talking out of your hat!" said Blake, exasperated. "I don't believe you've got any secret at all. It's gas!"

Even this taunt failed to "draw" Figgins & Co. They looked at each other, and laughed again contentedly.

"All right," said Figgins, "you'll see."

"About next Saturday," chuckled Fatty Wynn.

Figgins gave the indiscreet Wynn a warning glance.

Blake did not fail to observe it, and his curiosity was more piqued than ever.

"Next Saturday!" he exclaimed. "What's coming off next Saturday, besides a practice match?"

"Oh, nothing!" said Figgins airily. "You'll see, anyway."

"Oh, you make me tired," said Blake crossly.

"And you make us smile," said Figgins. "Hear us smile. Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the Co.

Blake looked at Figgins for a moment as if he could eat him, and then turned round and walked away. He had thought of making an attack upon the lanky chief of the New House juniors and gaining possession of the hidden paper by force. But the odds were evidently too great. So the School House chief walked away, with the mocking laughter of Figgins & Co. ringing in his ears.

"What the dickens are they up to?" grumbled Blake. "It must be some big surprise for the School House that's coming off next Saturday. What on earth is it?"

He was simply puzzled.

The sight of Marmaduke, standing looking on at the cricket with his hands in his pockets, gave him a new idea. He walked towards the heir of millions. Marmaduke looked up, a little less sullenly than usual.

Marmaduke had been doing regular cricket practice for some days now, and had learned to know one end of a bat from the other. He had also learned to bowl without braining anybody with the ball. And, to his astonishment, he found that compulsory cricket was not such a terrible infliction after all.

After an hour at the nets he felt much better, physically and mentally, and he began to understand something of the spirit of the game. A faint feeling of ambition woke in his breast, and that was the best thing that could have happened to him.

"Hallo, Marmaduke!" said Blake genially. "How are you getting on in the New House?"

Marmaduke looked at him rather suspiciously.

"Pretty well," he replied.

"Glad to hear it. Of course, they were all awfully pleased to see you back at St. Jim's?"

The heir of millions coloured.

"No," he said shortly.

Blake looked astonished.

"No?" he queried. "You're joking, of course. You're just the kid to suit the New House, and it was exactly the place for you."

Marmaduke, suspecting some hidden sarcasm in this remark, made no reply.

"I hear you're taking up cricket," said Blake. "Staggering humanity with your performances at the wicket."

"I am learning," said Marmaduke. "It is not such a silly game as I thought."

Blake slapped him on the shoulder.

"Good for you!" he exclaimed. "I'm jolly glad to hear you say so. We'll make a man of you yet. By the way, you're in Figgins's study, aren't you?"

Marmaduke nodded.

"Then you're in the secret?"

"What secret?"

Blake looked mysterious.

"Oh, if you're not, I'd better not tell you anything," he said. "I thought you knew all about it; you know, what Figgins & Co. are getting up for Saturday."

Marmaduke started.

"You don't mean to say you know!" he exclaimed.

Blake laughed carelessly.

"There's precious few things go on at St. Jim's that I don't know, I can tell you that," he said.

"But Figgins was keeping it a dead secret from you School House fellows."

"Well, it wasn't much use, was it?" laughed Blake.

His manner was carelessness itself, but inwardly he was positively thrilling with anxiety. Was it possible that he was to succeed in bluffing the desired information out of Marmaduke?

"No," said Marmaduke, in wonder. "But how do you know? Figgins said that anyone who let out the secret would be cut by the whole house, and licked into the bargain."

"He did, did he?" murmured Blake.

"Here, Smythe!" It was Monteith's voice. The head prefect of the New House came by, in rowing flannels. "I want you."

Marmaduke looked at him sulkily, with a vivid recollection in his mind of a late licking.

"What do you want?" he snapped.

"I want you to steer for me. My fag's playing cricket, and you will do just as well."

"I don't want to."

Monteith grinned.

"Really," he drawled, "you distress me. But I want you all the same."

"I don't know how to steer."

"Then it's time you learned. Come along."

"Shan't!"

Monteith's brow darkened. Marmaduke tried to run, but the prefect's grip fell upon his shoulder. The grip was so hard that Marmaduke uttered a cry of pain.

Holding him by the shoulder, Monteith marched him down to the boathouse. Blake looked after them, with knitted brows.

"What a howling beastly bit of rotten luck!" he exclaimed. "Just when I was going to get the whole story out of that kid, too!"

It was truly a bitter disappointment.

The chances were that in a few more minutes Blake would have wormed the whole history of the New House plot from

the unsuspecting Marmaduke. All unconsciously, Monteith had saved the secret of Figgins & Co.

"Never mind," muttered Blake. "I'll pin that merchant down the moment Monteith lets him go, and I'll get the secret out of him, or know the reason why. It gets more interesting every minute. The New House certainly intend to go it strong this time, and if I don't get on to the wheeze, they'll make us sing small."

And Blake strolled down to the river, to keep an eye open for Marmaduke when he should come ashore again.

Marmaduke had not submitted with a good grace. He could not resist the prefect, but he gave in with a sulky growl, and he was determined that Monteith should not benefit much by his steering. As a matter of fact, Marmaduke knew more about steering than he admitted. Most of the St. Jim's juniors were glad enough to be taken on the water by the seniors to fag at the tiller, and if Monteith had taken the trouble he could easily have found a willing volunteer. But it was not his way to take trouble if he could gain his point by bullying.

"Jump in!" he exclaimed. And he gave Marmaduke a twist that sent him flying into the boat, which was already afloat. "Take your seat!"

"I don't want to come with you."

Monteith stepped into the boat, and gave Marmaduke a box on the ears that made his head ring. Marmaduke plumped down in his seat.

"You'll do as you're told," said the prefect. "Give me any more of your cheek, you young brute, and I'll duck you in the river."

Marmaduke made no reply, but his eyes gleamed wickedly as he took the lines.

The prefect shoved off, and got out his pair of oars, and the boat glided away towards the bridge. Beyond the bridge was the Pool, the most dangerous spot in the river for swimmers, for it was of unknown depths, and below the surface were strange cross currents. A boy belonging to St. Jim's had been drowned there once, and so the spot was invested with a mournful kind of interest for the Saints. Only the best swimmers of the Upper Forms were allowed to bathe near the Pool, the Lower Form boys being confined to the safe waters above the bridge.

Marmaduke knew nothing about that; to his eyes the Pool was simply a broad sheet of water fringed with willows, quite peaceful to the eye. The skiff shot through the bridge, Marmaduke steering. A boat came pulling from the opposite direction against the current.

"Hallo there!" shouted a junior of the School House, from the second boat. "Keep out of the way, can't you?"

Mellish and Walsh, both School House juniors, were in the boat. They were only too glad of an excuse for chipping the head prefect of the New House.

Monteith's boat was certainly following a most irregular course. That was due to Marmaduke's steering. The prefect glared at the junior.

"What are you up to, Smythe?"

Marmaduke scowled.

As a matter of fact, he was intending to bring about a collision with the other boat, if he could contrive it, sullenly reckless of the consequences.

Monteith's bullying had aroused all the evil in his nature, and there was a good deal of it. He was in a mood for dangerous mischief.

"Look out, Monteith!" shouted Mellish. "Can't you manage a boat at your own time of life? My hat! You New House chaps oughtn't to be allowed on the river at all. Go home to your nurse, do, and don't try to row a boat."

Monteith snapped his teeth with rage.

To add to his fury, a voice came from the bridge with more chaff. Jack Blake was looking over the stone parapet.

"Mind you don't fall overboard, Monteith!" bawled Blake. "You'll get your feet wet if you do. You ought to learn to swim before you take a boat out, you ought. My only hat! Did you ever see such a howling duffer in a boat?"

This was rough on Monteith, who was really a first-class oarsman. His eyes blazed as he laid his oars inboard and plunged towards Marmaduke. The latter started to his feet, jerking the lines anyhow as he did so.

Crash!

The two boats crashed together with a terrific shock.

Mellish and Walsh were both standing up at the moment, and the concussion sent them into the bottom of their boat in a heap, while Monteith's skiff capsized, and in a moment the prefect and Marmaduke were struggling in the water.

The rage had gone out of Monteith's face, and it was white as wax as he came up to the surface after his plunge under.

The terrors of the Pool were present in his mind, and he was only a very average swimmer. The capsized boat had been whisked away in a flash by a turn of the current, and Monteith struck out for the shore.

The School House boat, rocking dangerously, was swept

away on the current, which jammed it into the bank in the midst of a tangled mass of weeds and bulrushes.

Jack Blake gazed from the bridge with a face suddenly white.

He saw the overturned boat whisked away, and the other skiff drift ashore in the rushes. He saw Monteith striking out for land. He looked for Marmaduke, but the new boy was not to be seen.

Blake felt a chill at the heart.

Where was Marmaduke?

But Blake was a lad of action; he did not waste a second. Like a flash he ran down from the bridge and reached the bank. In a twinkling, as it seemed, he was abreast of the spot where the accident had taken place. To his immense relief he saw a dark spot far out on the water. It was the wet, matted hair of Marmaduke Smythe.

A hand shot up into the air from the river, and then head and hand disappeared. But Blake knew now where Marmaduke was, and he was already kicking off his boots, tearing off his jacket. Jack Blake was the finest swimmer in the School House juniors, and as plucky a lad as any in wide England. He had not stopped to think twice what he should do.

Splash!

Blake was in the water, swimming as if for a wager towards the spot where the drowning boy had thrown up a helpless hand.

There was a shout on the bank; as if by magic the accident had become known; men and boys were running down to the water. Monteith, gasping and exhausted, reached the bank, and was helped ashore. Then every eye was turned upon Blake.

The brave lad, swimming strongly, and aided by the current, was in mid-stream swiftly, and as Marmaduke came up again, Blake was not two yards from him. With a swift effort the rescuer reached him, and grasped his hair.

Up came Marmaduke, showing a deathly pale, unconscious face above the water. Blake shifted his grasp to the back of his collar.

"Hurrah!"

It was a ringing cheer from the bank, where two score eyes had seen Blake's success. But only the first part of the work was done.

Blake had reached the drowning boy, and saved him from immediate death; but his attempts to reach the shore again were foredoomed to failure. The stoutest swimmer, unburdened, might have been taxed to do it. Blake could not. He was whirled away to the centre of the Pool, and once went right under with his burden.

There was a cry on the bank. Some fellows were tearing off to the boathouse to loose a skiff, and come down under the bridge to the rescue. Before it could be done, Blake would be sucked under and drowned, that was certain.

Across the river, Mellish and Walsh were making frantic efforts to push off their stranded boat and go to Blake's help. But it had stuck fast in the deep mud, and the two juniors could not move it. They shoved furiously, and at last got it clear, and the boat came out into the water. Then Mellish began to pull; but all this had taken time—and life or death hung upon seconds now!

Kildare, captain of St. Jim's, came running down to the bank in his crackling flannels. At a glance he took in the situation, and, without even pausing in his run, he threw his hands together and went off the bank in a dive.

"Hurrah!"

If any swimmer could live in the Pool, it was Kildare, the champion athlete of St. Jim's. He seemed to move like lightning. Under went Blake again, but still he clung to Marmaduke. The brave lad's senses were beginning to whirl, and he felt the shadow of death upon him. His struggles grew fainter—feebler.

"Blake!"

From the mists of semi-unconsciousness Blake came to himself with a start. It was Kildare's voice close at hand.

"Kildare! Help!"

He gasped out the words faintly.

"I am here."

A moment more and Kildare's grip was upon him. Treading water, the captain of St. Jim's supported both Blake and Marmaduke. The latter was unconscious, and Blake was too sensible to embarrass Kildare by struggling. From the bank rang out a cheer.

"Hurrah!"

"Bravo, Kildare!"

"Bravo, Blake!"

"Hurry up with that boat, Mellish!"

Mellish and Walsh had at last succeeded. They would have been too late to save Blake, but for the captain's gallant intervention. Kildare, strong as he was, was gasping when the boat reached the spot, and Mellish gripped

Marmaduke. Quickly enough the unconscious boy was drawn into the boat.

"Now, Blake!" gasped Kildare. And the junior followed. "I will hang on; you've no room for me. Pull for the bank."

Five minutes later they were ashore, and willing hands seized Blake and Marmaduke, and bore them off to the school at a run, while Kildare followed more slowly.

CHAPTER 5.

Blake Makes a Discovery.

JACK BLAKE was himself again in a couple of hours. Marmaduke was put to bed in the New House, and a doctor sent for hastily. Blake walked over to the New House in the evening to inquire after him. He met Monteith in the hall, and the prefect scowled at him.

"Hallo, what's the matter with you, Monty?" asked Blake cheerfully, not at first comprehending the cause of the prefect's ill-humour.

"What are you doing here?" growled Monteith. "Why can't you School House whelps keep over on your own side? Be off with you!"

"I've come over to see how the new kid is."

"He's all right; so now you can go!"

"Oh, hang it, Monty!" broke in Baker, a New House senior. "Don't be rough on the kid, after what he's done to-day. Let him see Smythe if he wants to."

Monteith set his lips hard together. He was frequently having friction with Baker, who did not feel the respect for his head prefect that Monteith considered himself entitled to. He was about to make a savage rejoinder, but he checked himself, and walked away without a word in reply. Baker gave Blake a friendly nod.

"You can go up and see Smythe, Blake," he said. "Here's Figgins. He'll take you up."

Figgins slapped Blake on the back. "Of course, I will!" he exclaimed. "Come along, kid. Come along, you heroic rescuer."

Blake turned red.

"Oh, chuck it!" he said hastily. "No chaff!"

"I'm not chaffing," said Figgins seriously. "We all know you might have been drowned in the Pool, and so you would have been if Kildare hadn't got you out. We're proud of you, my son—jolly proud, I can tell you. What a pity you belong to that measly old casual-ward of a School House when—"

"Look here," interrupted Blake wrathfully. "If you want a thick ear, Figgins, you've only got to say so!"

"Don't get ratty!" said Figgins soothingly. "No offence, kid. I tell you we all admire you. It was a funny specimen you pulled out of the water, but he was a New House chap, and it was decent of you! Come along."

"Right; but I say, what makes Monteith so beastly ratty? He'd never take a prize for manners, I know; but just now he seems to be a more piggish sort of fellow than ever!"

Figgins grinned.

"Well, can't you guess the reason?" he demanded.

"Blessed if I can!"

"It's all your fault!" chuckled Figgins.

"My fault!" Blake echoed, staring at Figgins in amazement.

"Yes—yours! Didn't you pull Marmaduke out when Monteith struck out for the bank, and thought only of his own precious skin? He's jolly well ashamed of it now, I can tell you, and some of the chaps have been chipping him about saving his own skin, and leaving Smythe to be rescued by a School House kid."

"Oh, I see!" said Blake comprehendingly. "No wonder he's got his rag out. Come to think of it, he doesn't show up as a hero. Hallo, here we are! How do you do, Marmy?"

Marmaduke was in bed. He was looking pale and shaken, but evidently had not really suffered much from his immersion. He was sitting up, propped against a heap of cushions and pillows. The doctor had seen him, and pronounced that there was nothing serious the matter. He gave Blake an unusually cordial look.

"They say you pulled me out of the river, Blake," he said, in rather a weak voice, with a wistful look at the chief of the School House juniors.

"Well, I helped," said Blake. "It was really Kildare who saved both of us. How are you feeling? Pretty fit—eh?"

"I'm all right," said Marmaduke. "It's kind of you to come and see me. There's something I wanted to say to you, Blake."

Blake sat down on the bed.

"Right-ho! Fire away, kid!"

"I—I've been thinking. I played a horrible, mean trick

on you once—when I first came to the school. I—I was a cad!"

Blake stared at him in astonishment. Was it really Marmaduke, the snob, the purse-proud "boulder" who was speaking thus? Was he seeing the light at last?

"So you were," agreed Blake. "I never expected you to own up to it, though."

"I—I'm sorry!" stammered Marmaduke. "It would have served me right if you had left me to sink. I shouldn't have gone in to save you."

"Well, you can't swim," said Blake practically. "It wouldn't have been any use."

Marmaduke smiled faintly.

"I wanted to tell you I was sorry, Blake, that's all."

"I'm glad to hear you say so. Of course, that's all over and done with. Bless you, I don't bear any malice!" said Blake, in his hearty way. "I'm glad to see you're getting on."

"So am I," said Figgins, who was equally astonished. "Smythe, old man, you're not half the howling boulder I thought you."

"I'll just stay and have a jaw with Smythe," said Blake. "I won't detain you, Figgy. I dare say the Co. will be missing you."

It had come into Blake's mind that the present would be a good opportunity for getting at the truth of what was to happen on Saturday. But Figgins was not so easily got rid of.

"Oh, that's all right!" he said. "We don't often need on friendly terms, and I'll stay, too, Blake, old chap."

"That's very kind of you, Figgy, but I won't deprive the Co. of your company."

Figgins looked up a little suspiciously.

"Got anything particular to say to Smythe?" he asked.

"Oh, no!" said Blake hastily. "Nothing special, only—"

"Don't see what giddy secrets there could be between you and a fellow in our house."

"Fact is, I want to have a jaw with Smythe," said Blake, taking a bold line. "There's some things we want to talk about."

Figgins looked debiously from one to the other. He was always suspicious of Blake.

"It's all right, Figgins," said Marmaduke unfortunately. "It's only about the con—"

"Shut up, you young ass!" howled Figgins.

"But Blake knows all about it."

"You've told him!"

"No; I thought you had. He—"

"Hold your silly tongue!" howled Figgins. "He's been bluffing you, you cuckoo!"

Blake's face was a study. Marmaduke looked at Blake in astonishment.

"Don't you know all about it, Blake?"

Blake could not help grinning.

"Well, to tell the exact truth, I don't know anything at all about it," he said. "I was on the trail for information, my son, and you would have blurted it all out if Monteith hadn't interrupted us that time."

"Jolly good thing he did, then," said Figgins grimly. "Now, if you've finished here, Blake, I'll see you safe out of the New House."

It was evident that the chance was gone, and Blake had no object in lingering. He said good-night to Marmaduke, and Figgins showed him out of the house. He returned to the School House in a more puzzled mood than ever.

"Here comes the giddy hero!" said Herries, as the chief of the juniors entered Study No. 6. "What have you got on your mind, Blake? What are you scowling for?"

"Silly ass, that's a thoughtful frown!"

"Is it? Looks like a scowl. But what's the matter?"

"I can't get on to Figgy's little game. They're getting something up for Saturday, and it's Monday now. We simply must find out what it is. I'd have had it out of Smythe if Figgins hadn't been so beastly sharp."

"Haven't you any idea?"

"Marmaduke half let something out. It's something beginning with 'con.' What is there that begins with 'con' that those bounders might be getting up?" said Blake, with a worried look.

The chums looked thoughtful, and racked their brains for a solution of the riddle.

"A conservatory," said Herries, scratching his head. "That begins with 'con.'"

Blake grinned. "Constantinople begins with 'con,'" was D'Arcy's brilliant contribution to the discussion.

"Oh, don't be an ass!"

"Weally—"

"Dry up. What do you think, Dig?"

Digby wrinkled his brows.

"DARING & CO."

AND A Story of John Smith, Detective.
By Mark Darran.

IN "PLUCK," 1D.

NEXT SATURDAY

"HERR SPECS,"
A Tale (School of Spies, the Twists & Co.
By H. Clarke Hook.

"What price a conversazione?" he asked. "Might the bouncers be giving a conversazione?"

Blake reflected for a moment, and then shook his head.

"No, that wouldn't worry us. It's something else."

"Look it up in the dictionary," suggested Herries. "You are sure Smythe started to say a word beginning with 'con'?"

"Quite sure."

"Then go through all the words beginning with 'con' in the giddy dictionary, and you'll be bound to come across it."

Blake thumped him on the back.

"Jolly good idea!" he exclaimed. "Never thought you had such sense, Herries."

"I've good ideas at times," said Herries modestly.

"So you have, and it's a pity the times are so few and far between," said Blake. "Chuck us over that dictionary. Here we are. Com—con—con— What a thundering lot of words begin with con! That's just our luck!"

"Oh, get on, and don't growl!"

"Concatenation—concave—conceal—conceit! They've got plenty of that over in the New House; but that's not the word. Concentration—concern—concert! My only hat!"

Blake sent the dictionary flying through the air, and it crashed against a picture on the wall, and picture and dictionary came to the floor together.

"He's mad!" gasped Herries. "You ass! You've smashed my picture!"

"And busted my dictionary!" hooted Digby.

"Hang your dictionary! Blow your picture! I've got it!"

"Got what?"

"What those New House kippers are up to."

"And what is it?"

"A concert—they're going to give a concert!"

The famous four stared at each other. In an instant the truth rushed in upon each mind. Blake had hit it.

"A concert!" said Herries. "By Jove, that's it!"

"That accounts for the frightful row Fatty Wynn has been making on his cornet lately!" exclaimed Digby.

"Bai Jove!" said D'Arcy. "And that accounts for the top-notes Figgy has been getting off his chest on and off for days past, dear boys!"

"That accounts for the bill I saw them reading, and which Figgy hid away when I came up," said Blake triumphantly. "It was the bill of the concert."

"Come to think of it," exclaimed Herries. "I saw him coming out of Green the printer's only the day before yesterday, in Rylcombe."

"We've got it!" exclaimed Blake, quite satisfied in his mind. "The bouncers are going to give a concert on Saturday. It's as plain as anything. I suppose it is the New House Amateur Dramatic Society at the bottom of it. They were going to do 'Hamlet' once, but it didn't come off. Kids, we've got 'em!"

"How?" asked Herries. "I don't see what we can do to muck up the concert, and if it's a success, St. Jim's won't be big enough to hold the conceited bouncers."

"Where will they give it?" said Digby. "When the seniors give their silly Greek play they have the lecture-hall."

"And you can bet your best socks that Figgy will have the lecture-hall for his lovely concert," giggled Blake. "Rather!"

"We'll cram it with School House chaps, and howl 'em down!" cried Herries. "We'll make such a thundering row, they won't be able to get a hearing!"

"That's a good wheeze, my son," said Blake, "if it would work, but it won't."

"I don't see why it won't."

"You never do see anything till I point it out to you. They will invite a lot of the seniors, and you can bet that the New House prefects will be there to see that the School House doesn't bust the concert up for them."

"Hum! I never thought of that."

"Kildare, too, will very likely be there, and perhaps some of the masters. It would be just like Figgy's cheek to ask the doctor, and he might come, just to encourage musical talent among the lower Forms, you know."

"Oh, oh, oh! Then we shall have to sit as still as mice!"

"Besides," said Blake, "it wouldn't be quite playing the game to spoil their poor little, dear little concert for them, would it?"

"What are you getting at? You don't mean to say you want us to let them bring it off and make a big success of it, and swagger about for ever and ever afterwards as if they owned the school?" demanded Herries wrathfully.

"You trust your uncle!" said Blake serenely. "I've got a plan in my little brain for making the New House Amateur Dramatic Society wish it had never been born."

"Spout it out, then! Get it off your chest!"

"We've got to get hold of that bill of Figgy's, and learn all the items of the concert by hook or by crook."

"What's the good of that? We should know it all on Saturday evening, anyway."

"But we've got to know it all before Friday evening."

"Why?" demanded the three in a breath.

"Because," said Blake serenely—"because we're going to give the giddy concert ourselves on Friday evening; then the New House can give it over again on Saturday evening if they like."

For a moment his chums stared at him, their breath taken completely away by the magnitude of the scheme. Then, with a whoop, they threw themselves upon Blake and hugged him.

CHAPTER 6.

An Amended Programme.

BLAKE had hit upon the truth, there was no doubt about that. The more Study No. 6 thought about it and compared notes, the more certain they felt. Of late Figgy had been practising his singing with a perfectly reckless disregard for everybody within range of his powerful bass, and Wynn had made his cornet audible to many sufferers in both houses.

New House juniors had been seen in all sorts of places spouting from Shakespeare, or practising doubtful notes or various instruments. Now that Blake had hit upon the secret, he was surprised that he had not thought of it before.

"It's as clear as daylight," said Blake. "We've got to bag the programme, and then bag the concert; that's the little game. To-night is Monday. By Friday we've got to have the programme by heart, and everything ready. I'll see about the lecture-hall."

"The programme's the difficult part," said Herries.

"I know it is," said Blake, with a nod; "but it's got to be done somehow. We haven't time to get 'em printed, like Figgy, but we'll run 'em off on Dig's copying-press. That will answer all right."

"How will you manage about the lecture-hall?"

"Ask Mr. Kidd to see to it with the doctor."

"Think he'll do it?"

"Yes, he's a good old sport, and he'll do it like a bird," said Blake confidently; "and at the same time I'll make sure whether Figgy's booked the hall for Saturday night."

"How?"

"By asking for it on Saturday myself."

"Good!" chuckled Herries. "And the sooner the quicker."

"Right-ho!"

And Blake was off to the housemaster's study a few minutes later. Mr. Kidd, the housemaster of the School House, was a genial man, and he liked Blake. He gave the junior a cheery nod.

"What can I do for you, Blake?"

"If you please, sir, I should like to ask you a favour," said Blake.

"Certainly."

"We're thinking of giving a concert, sir."

"Oh! I did not know you were musical, Blake."

"Oh, yes, sir," said Blake confidently. "I—I play the mouth-organ, and—"

Mr. Kidd laughed.

"Ahem! Are you thinking of giving an organ recital—a mouth-organ recital?"

Blake coloured.

"No, sir. It's a big concert. Half the School House will be in it. We're going to do the thing in style, sir, and I thought—"

"Go on, Blake," said the housemaster, with an amused smile. "If I can help you in any way, you can rely on me, my boy."

"Thank you, sir," said Blake, encouraged. "We thought you might ask the Head for us, sir, to let us have the lecture-hall to give the concert."

"Hum! When will you want it?"

"Is it wanted for Saturday night, sir?"

"Yes, I fancy it is," said Mr. Kidd, with a smile. "Mr. Ratcliff, of the New House, seems to have been asked a similar favour by the boys of his house."

Blake's heart bounded.

"The New House ends—I mean, kids—have asked for the hall for Saturday night?" he said breathlessly.

"Yes; the Head mentioned as much to me."

"Then can we have it on Friday night, sir?"

"I dare say you can, Blake," said Mr. Kidd. "You had better not tell me any of the details. If you are really thinking of giving a concert, I will ask the Head about it."

"Thank you so much, sir!" said Blake gratefully. "Would you be kind enough to come to the show, sir? No charge for admission."

The housemaster laughed heartily.

"I will certainly look in during the evening, Blake."

"Thank you, sir! And—would you mind if I put your name on the bill? Under the distinguished patronage of Arthur Kidd, M.A., Oxon," said Blake eagerly.

"You have my full permission," said the housemaster, laughing.

"And I can be sure about the lecture-hall, sir?"

"I think so, Blake. I will speak to the Head this evening, and as he has already granted it to the New House for Saturday evening, I am sure he can have no objection to your having it for Friday evening."

Blake thanked the housemaster gratefully, and hurried away to tell his chums. They executed a war-dance round Study No. 6.

"It's proof positive!" said Digby. "We shall knock them simply silly by giving the same concert the previous evening and asking them to it. I can picture Figgy's face when he gets the invitation and a programme enclosed!"

The four chums shrieked at the idea.

"But we haven't got hold of the programme yet," said Herries.

"That's so," agreed Blake; "but, you see, there must be some in Figgy's study, and all we've got to do is to get hold of one."

"You're thinking of raiding the study?"

"Well, the programme won't come to us all on its lonesome, will it?"

"I suppose not."

"And if the mountain will not come to Mahomet, Mahomet must buzz off to the giddy mountain," declared Blake. "I'm going to burgle the New House to-night."

"Take care Figgins & Co. are out of the way, that's all!"

"You chaps must help me. We've got to play a deep game. Marmaduke Smythe is in bed, luckily, so he won't be in the study. Figgins & Co. can be got out."

"How!"

"Dig can challenge Figgy to a round with the gloves on in the gym. Figgy cracks up his boxing a lot, and—"

"And he'll crack me up a lot, too!" protested Digby.

"Why, I couldn't box one side of Figgins. I think you'd better take him on."

"Can't be did. I'm the enterprising burglar in this act," said Blake calmly. "I dare say he'll knock you about a bit, but it's all for the good of the cause."

"That's all very well, but—"

"Look here, you were telling me I was leader, when it was a question of thinking things out. If I'm leader, I'm going to be obeyed. You'll tackle Figgy with the gloves, or me without 'em," said Blake, looking warlike. "Take your choice, my son."

"Oh, don't be an ass!" said Dig. "I'll do it if you like, of course."

"That's the ticket! Let's go and chip 'em now."

Figgins & Co. were usually to be found in the gym, at that hour, and there, sure enough, the chums of Study No. 6 found them.

"Hallo, Figgy!" said Blake cheerfully. "I hear you fancy yourself lately as a boxing kangaroo!"

"I'll box any cad in the School House, and knock spots off him!" said Figgins hotly.

"Would you? Is that gas, or do you mean it?"

"Just shove the gloves on and I'll show you if I mean it!"

"Here's Digby been looking for a chance to box you for a long time. He thinks he could make you sing small, Figgy."

"Right-ho! Let him try," said Figgins disdainfully.

"There's a chance for you, Dig. Stick the gloves on."

Digby donned the gloves, and Figgy did the same, and they faced each other. A ring was formed round them by New House and School House boys mingled. The general opinion was in favour of Figgins.

Figgins was certainly the bigger of the two by a good four inches, and much longer in the reach. It was really very plucky of Dig to face him at all.

"Go it, Dig!" said Blake, patting the School House champion on the back. "Give the lanky boulder socks!"

"I'll take all the socks he can give me, and wear 'em," sniffed Figgins.

"Go it!"

"Buck up!"

Under cover of the excitement of the commencing boxing-match, Blake quietly withdrew. His chums made plenty of noise, and the Co., of course, looked on to watch their redoubtable chief make hay of the School House "kid."

Blake, certain that Figgins & Co. would be busy for at least ten minutes, scuttled off to the New House, and in a few minutes was in the study of the unsuspecting Figgins. He lighted the gas and began a hurried search. As it happened, he had not far to look. In the cupboard was a bundle of

printed bills, and Blake soon discovered that they were what he sought.

He quickly unfastened them and extracted one. Staying only to glance at it to make sure that he had found what he wanted, he thrust it into his pocket, and then refastened the bundle just as he had found it.

To escape from the New House was only the matter of a minute. With the precious paper buttoned up inside his jacket, Blake hurried back to the brightly-lighted gymnasium. The boxing-match was still proceeding, but poor Dig was looking decidedly the worse for wear. He gave a gasp of relief when he perceived Blake in the throng again. He had had enough of it.

"Tired?" said Figgins, with a grin. "Had enough, kid?"

"Yes," said Digby, throwing off the gloves; "I give you best. You can box a bit."

"Good old New House!" howled Figgy's comrades.

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

"Let 'em howl!" said Blake contentedly. "How do you feel, Dig?"

"Like a punching-ball, I think," said Dig, as they walked out of the gymnasium. "Figgins simply walked all over me!"

"Never mind; I've got the programme."

"Got it!" exclaimed his three chums in a breath.

"Yes; come into No. 6 and we'll look it over."

The famous four were soon locked in Study No. 6, and there Blake produced the precious paper. He read it aloud, with a grinning countenance:

"Programme of a Grand Concert to be given in the Lecture Hall at St. Jim's, by the members of the New House Dramatic Society, on Saturday evening at 7 precisely. Under the distinguished patronage of Gordon Ratcliffe, Esquire, M.A., Cantab, master of the cock house at St. Jim's. 'My only Panama hat!' ejaculated Blake. "Talk about check!"

"Check isn't the word for it," said Herries; "but get on. Let's have a look at the items, kid. Here's Figgy at the head, of course. He would be."

Blake read out the programme, amid the subdued chuckles of his comrades:

"Song, 'Down Among the Dead Men,' G. Figgins; Cornet Solo, Frederick Wynn; Cake-Walk, 'Giddy Gilbertine,' Herbert Pratt; Sketch, 'School House Funniosities,' Messrs. Figgins, Wynn and Kerr; Song, 'Give Me Back My Eighteenpence,' H. Kerr; Scene I., Act 4, 'King John' (Shakespeare), Messrs. Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn; March from 'Lohengrin' (Wagner), Mouth-Organ Solo, James Perkins; Duet, 'Sing Me a Song, Oh!' (Sullivan), F. Wynn and H. Kerr.

"God Save the King! Admission free to residents of the New House, and the same to School House kids who are willing to wash themselves and put on a clean collar for the occasion. Any School House kid found in the hall in his usual state will be summarily ejected."

Blake breathed hard through his nose.

"How's that for high?" he said.

"Oh, never mind, we'll take 'em down!" grinned Digby. "What a howling bit of real luck it was, your getting hold of this precious document, Blake!"

"I should say so! My hat, what will the New House say to our concert on Friday night?" said Blake joyously. "Let's run it over and see how we can fix it. You're a deep bass, as good as Figgy any day in the week, Herries, and I think you're all right for that cheerful song about the dead men."

"Right-ho!" said Herries. "Listen: 'Down among the dead men; down among the dead men—down, down, down, down, down among the—'"

"First-rate; and we'll have the rest presently!" said Blake affably. "I'll jot down the points as we go along." He took a sheet of paper and a pencil. "Song, 'Down Among the Dead Men,' G. Herries. That's the start. We shall have to miss out the cornet solo, as we haven't such an instrument, thank goodness, in the School House. But I'll bet you my Sunday socks that the audience will be jolly glad of it."

"That's safe betting," assented Dig. "Put in a flute solo. I can do that Al."

"That's so, Flute Solo, A. Digby," said Blake, jotting it down. "Now, that cake-walk is just about my style. I did it at home in the last holidays, and nobody threw anything at me; so I think I'll put my name down there. J. Blake, Cake-Walk, 'Giddy Gilbertine.' That's done. Now, about that giddy sketch?"

"We'll alter that a trifle," grinned Dig. "Make it New House Funniosities instead."

"Ha, ha, yes! New House Funniosities, Messrs. Blake, Herries, and Digby," said Blake, putting it down. "We shall have to make up the sketch, but we can do that quite as

easily as those New House bounders could make one about us."

"Rather! Now for a song. That ought to suit D'Arcy."

"Wathah!" said Arthur Augustus.

"Song, 'Give Me Back My Eighteenthence,' Arthur Augustus D'Arcy," wrote down Blake. "Good! You think you can negotiate it, Gussy?"

"Weally I do," said D'Arcy. "I shall have to pwactise a little, that is all, deah boy. My mamma says I have a sweet voice."

"Your mamma's prejudiced!" said Blake. "I know, you sing like a syren—a syren on the Thames. However, you don't want a specially good voice for a comic song; you want to look funny, and you look funny enough, in all conscience! You won't have to make up for the part!"

"Oh, weally!"

"Now for the Shakespeare," said Blake. "The New House Dramatic asses are strong on old William, but if we can't cram up a scene from King John in three days, we want whacking! Scene I., Act 4, 'King John,' Messrs. Blake, Herries, and Digby."

"Where do I come in?" protested D'Arcy.

"You can come in as an extra murderer," said Blake graciously. "I believe there's two of the horrid bounders. I'll stick your name on. Now, March from Lohengrin, Mouth-Organ Solo, comes next. I don't think anybody can beat me on the mouth-organ."

"Shove your name down, then."

"Good! Duet comes next—'Sing Me a Song, Oh!'" said Blake. "That's a jolly good song, and I know that Figgins must have got the score of 'The Yeomen of the Guard' from the school library to learn it up. We can do the same. Now, we can't have the whole bag of tricks to ourselves; so I think we'll put down Mellish and Walsh for that duet."

"Can they do it?"

"I'll make 'em. Kerr would have made-up as a girl in that duet—you know how jolly clever he is at making-up—but Mellish can rig up some girl's clothes, I think. He's a smooth-faced whipper-snapper, you know. And Walsh sings well."

"Good! We'll have 'em in her to practise, and break their necks if they don't get on like wildfire!"

"That's the wheeze! I reckon we've made up a jolly good programme. I'll go and fetch in Mellish and Walsh and put them up to it."

"What about telling the other fellows?"

"Not a word to a soul. We'll tell them all on Friday, that's soon enough. I've got on to Figgy's game, because he wasn't close enough about it. It would be a nice sell if he got on to ours, and gave the concert on Thursday night instead, and cut the ground from under our feet."

The chums gasped at the idea.

"You think of everything, Blake!" said Herries admiringly.

"Blessed if I've got a head like yours!"

"It's like mine outside," said Blake; "but there's a difference inside, chappy, and no mistake. Wait here for me."

Blake left the study, and in a few minutes returned with Mellish and Walsh. The two latter were looking surprised. Blake had told them nothing so far of what was intended. Their surprised changed to alarm when Blake locked the door as soon as they were in the study.

"Here I say!" exclaimed Mellish. He was not on the best of terms with Blake, as it happened. "None of your tricks, you know. What have you brought us here for?"

"Yes; that's what we want to know!" exclaimed Walsh.

"What are you up to, Blake?"

"It's all serene!" said Blake soothingly. "We're going to let you into a secret."

Mellish looked at him suspiciously.

"What's the secret?"

"Look at that programme."

Blake put the programme of the New House concert into the hand of the doubting Thomas. Mellish and Walsh gave a simultaneous whistle.

"Thought they were up to something!" ejaculated Mellish. "Never thought of that, though. This will make us sing a bit smaller."

"We're going to dish 'em," explained Blake. "That's where you come in."

And he explained the plot that had been hatched in Study No. 6. Mellish and Walsh shrieked over it.

"Think you can do the duet?" asked Blake.

"Rather!" exclaimed Mellish. "Don't I sing in the giddy choir of a Sunday? I shall be able to get the girl's part to a 't,' quite as good as Kerr could, anyway."

"Better, my son—better!" said Blake. "You can't make up so well, but we'll rig you out somehow. Walsh will sing Point's part, and I will just suit him."

"I'll do my best," said Walsh modestly.

"Then I'll shove your names down," said Blake. "You'll

come here to practise; and mind, not a word to a soul before the notice is put up on Friday."

"Not a word."

"We're going to take the New House by surprise," said Blake, rubbing his hands. "We'll send Figgy an invitation to the concert on Friday evening, with a programme enclosed. The only thing that worries me is that I sha'n't be able to see his face when he gets it. Ha, ha!"

CHAPTER 7.

A Kind Invitation.

MARMADUKE SMYTHE was down the next day as usual, little the worse for his perilous adventure in the deep waters of the Ryle. But the most casual observer could have seen that there was a change in the "bounder."

Already his reformation had commenced, and that adventure on the Ryle had been the finishing touch. Marmaduke saw things in a truer light at last. He had, when he first came to St. Jim's, acted very badly towards Blake, and Blake, pitying his folly, had treated him very patiently. Now Blake had risked his life, and nearly lost it, for the sake of the boy who had never had a kind thought of him. And the truth was borne in upon the mind of Marmaduke that he had been a cad and a snob, that he had deserved a worse handling than he had received at St. Jim's, and that he was fortunate in having an opportunity of turning over a new leaf. That very day he proceeded to astonish Figgins.

"Please, Figgins," he said diffidently, after prep, in the study

Figgins stared at him.

"Hallo! What's the matter?"

"Do you remember the other day you said—said—"

"I dare say I said a good many things, but I can't remember them all," said Figgins good-humouredly. "What is it, kid?"

"You said you'd help me with the cricket if I liked."

"Yes; and you told me to leave you alone."

Marmaduke coloured.

"I was a pig, Figgy."

"That's so," agreed Figgy. "You were. A more absolutely hopeless and howling specimen of a pig I never had the misfortune to happen upon, Smythe!"

"I'm sorry I said that, Figgins. I'd like you to help me if you would."

"You want to take up cricket seriously?"

"Yes."

"Only a week ago Monteith had to lick you for not turning up on the ground."

"Yes, I know; but—but I'd like to learn, all the same."

"I'll help you, rather!" said Figgins heartily. "They've stuck you in our study, and as you've got to stay, I'll make the best I can of you. I said before that you had your good points, only they wanted finding. Look here, if you buck up, and don't be such a silly ass, and learn to play the game, I'll let you into the Co."

Marmaduke's eyes glistened.

It was the sight of the true friendship and faith between Figgins and the Co. that had opened his eyes, as much as anything else, to what he lost by being a snobbish and sulky outsider.

To become a member of the Co., to be taken into the life of the chums, and treated as a comrade—well, that was better than sulking and snarling, he could not help realising that.

"Do you mean that, Figgins?" he said breathlessly.

"Certainly," said Figgins condescendingly.

"And look here," said Marmaduke eagerly. "My pater has lots of tin, and he gives me all I want, and I'll stand a jolly lot of good feeds—"

"Shut up!"

Marmaduke stared at Figgins.

"What's the matter now?"

"I suppose you mean well, Marmaduke, but you've got your governor's money on the brain, I think," said Figgins. "Do you think that any of us would sponge on you?"

"But I didn't mean that. I—"

"If you came into the Co., you'd come in on a level footing, and leave all your beastly money out of it," said Figgins.

"I—I'm sorry," said Marmaduke penitently. "I—I suppose I think a lot of the money. You see," he went on, in a burst of confidence which showed how much he had changed—"you see, Figgins, we weren't always rich, and I dare say the money got into all our heads a bit."

"Well, that's candid, anyway," grinned Figgins. "I see there's hope for you yet. Come down and bowl to me, kid."

"I'll bowl as long as you like, Figgins."

"All right; I'll put you through it."

They went down to Littleisle, and Marmaduke bowled to

Figgins. The boulder was at last imbued with an ambition to excel, and that alone worked wonders. His bowling was naturally a little erratic at first, but it was improving. He bowled to Figgins, and then to Kerr and to Wynn, who were not displeased at having such a willing fag. He tired himself out, and felt all the better for it, and a word or two of praise from Figgins made him happy. But that was not all. Kildare, captain of St. Jim's, noticed him, and Kildare knew how much a word of encouragement might mean to a budding cricketer.

He tapped Marmaduke on the shoulder as he left the field. "I see you're taking up the game," he said, with a smile. "Have you grown to like it yet?"

"Rather!" said Marmaduke. "I used to run it down. That was because I didn't know anything about it."

Kildare laughed heartily.

"Well, I'm glad to see you improving," he said. "It's very good of Figgins to take you in hand like this. Keep it up, and you'll make a cricketer yet."

And he walked away, leaving both Marmaduke and Figgins very well pleased with themselves.

"I told you so," said Figgins. "This is better than sulking in a corner, ain't it?" And he slapped the heir of millions upon the back.

And Marmaduke confessed that it was.

While Marmaduke's newly-born ambition to shine as a cricketer was occupying most of his thoughts, Figgins & Co. were mainly engrossed by the coming concert.

Not the slightest suspicion did Figgins have that Blake had learned what was coming.

Mr. Kidd had obtained the Head's permission for the lecture-hall to be used as a concert-room by the School House musicians, but that was not mentioned to the New House.

The Head knew nothing, of course, of Blake's plan for forestalling the New House concert, and if Mr. Kidd suspected anything, he did not say so.

Figgins thought that things were going on swimmingly; and so did Blake.

Frequent rehearsals were held in No. 6 Study over in the School House.

The time at Blake's disposal was short, but he was the boy to make the most of it. He worked hard himself, and he made his comrades work hard. Herries was driven through "Down Among the Dead Men" again and again, till, as Dig said, it was enough to make the dead men turn in their graves. Digby practised his flute till Study No. 6 rang again, and his comrades fled from the sound of it. Blake cake-walked all over the School House, and forgetting himself on one occasion, cake-walked when Mr. Lathom called him out before the class, and was given a hundred lines by the astounded master.

The sketch, newly-christened "New House Funniosities," was mapped out by Blake, and the chums filled it in with a great deal of care. It was a caricature of alleged New House manners and customs, and it was certain to go down with the School House portion of the audience, at least.

D'Arcy seemed rather hopeless at first with his song, for he insisted upon lisping all through it, but Blake said finally that that would make it really all the funnier, and it was certain that the singer of that song would be unique, at least.

Then there was the scene from Shakespeare. The chums rehearsed and re-rehearsed that scene, and they soon had most of it by heart, and delivered themselves of their lines in a really creditable manner.

The march from "Lobengrin" came from Blake's mouth-organ as well as if Richard Wagner had composed it for that instrument. Dig offered to supply an accompaniment on his flute, but the offer was received so ungratefully that he withdrew it.

Mellish and Walsh came out strong as Jack Point and Elsie Maynard in the duet from Sullivan, Mellish making up as a quite charming girl. A Hebrew dealer in Rylcombe supplied the costume.

All was in full swing by Tuesday evening, and practice was constant after that, the chums even neglecting their adored cricket for the sake of perfecting themselves in their parts.

"There will be time enough to pull up, and lick Figgins & Co., in the house match, after Friday," said Blake. "Just at present we want to get the concert to go with a swing. We've got to give a decent entertainment, or the grin will be against us."

"It will beat what those New House wasters would have given, anyway," said Dig. "But you're right about giving the best we can. If you like, I'll give another solo on my flute, instead of that mouth-organ business. That's rather rotten."

Whereupon Blake offered him a thick ear, if he wanted one.

During Friday Blake took all of the School House juniors into the secret, whom he was certain he could trust to be discreet. Meanwhile, the programme, based on that issued

A NEW TALE BY S. CLARKE HOOK.



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by Figgins, was drawn up, and a great number turned off on Dig's copying press.

On Friday evening all was ready.

Figgins, all the time, was going on in the even tenor of his way in blissful unconsciousness. He had fixed a final rehearsal for Friday evening, and when the Co. went to the study in the New House for prep., they decided to go through their programme instead of preparing for the morrow's lessons.

"A bit of a row in the morning won't hurt us," said Figgins. "We've got to have it all perfect for to-morrow night, kids. My hat! Won't Blake be ready to tear his hair when he sees the programme?"

"They've been very quiet over in the School House lately," remarked Kerr. Kerr was a canny Scot, and given to being rather suspicious of Blake. "I wonder if they've been getting up to anything?"

"Let 'em! Whatever they do, this concert will knock 'em," said Figgins complacently. "Blake will be ready to kick himself for not thinking of it first."

"They may try to bust it up by making a row," Pratt remarked.

Figgins laughed.

"I've taken care of that. I've got Mr. Ratcliff's promise to attend, and they won't dare to be obstreperous in the presence of a housemaster."

"Good old Figgy! We've done them this time, done them brown!"

There was a tap at the door. "Come in!"

"Hallo!" called out Figgins. "as cool as a cucumber."

Jack Blake walked into the study, as cool as a cucumber. Figgins had not expected that. Kerr was in his feminine garb for the Sullivan duet, and Wynn had his cornet on his knees. The Dramatic Society were caught in the act, as it were. Figgins jumped up hastily.

"Hallo! What do you come stalking in here like this for?" he exclaimed angrily. "Why can't you keep on your own side?"

"Don't be rude," said Blake admonishingly. "I've come

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over in the friendliest spirit in the world to do you a good turn."

He looked round him with a grin. Wynn had carelessly put his cornet behind a chair, and Kerr was looking very sheepish in his strange attire.

"Hallo! What's the little game, Kerr?"

"Mind your own business!" snapped Kerr.

"Right-ho! Don't get ratty!"

"What do you want here?" growled Figgins.

"I've come to give you an invitation."

Figgins's face relaxed somewhat.

"Is it a feed?"

"Sit down, Blake, old chap," said Fatty Wynn, with sudden politeness.

"Thanks; but I'm not going to stay a moment. I've got to get back, as I'm stage-manager."

"You're wh-what?"

"Stage-manager," said Blake, with a sweet smile. "It isn't a feed; it's a concert."

"A what?" howled Figgins & Co.

"We're giving a concert," said Blake calmly. "The Head has let us have the lecture-hall for the evening to give it in, and—"

"What concert? Which evening?"

"This evening," answered Blake. "We want all you fellows to come. We invite the whole of the New House, en masse. The School House will all be there. Mr. Kidd has promised to attend, and I hope the Head may look in."

Figgins & Co. looked at one another in a dazed sort of way.

Blake laid a sealed envelope on the table.

"There's the programme," he said. "They'll be given away in the hall, but I thought you might like to see what was going to come on. Ta-ta!"

And he left the study before any of the New House juniors could reply.

They heard him whistling as he went out of the New House. A deadly silence reigned in Figgins's study. Blank dismay had fallen upon the New House Dramatic Society.

CHAPTER 5.

The Programme.

FIGGINS was the first to break that dreadful silence.

"It's a joke," he murmured. "It can't be true."

But he knew that it was true, and so did the others. His glance wandered to the envelope on the table, and he mechanically picked it up.

"They found it out!" said Kerr wildly. "They've got on to the wheeze, and they're giving a concert to-night to take the shine out of ours to-morrow."

"We can't give it," groaned Fatty Wynn, with a mournful look at his cornet. "What's the good of giving it after Blake's one to-night? The fellows will all say that we boned the idea from Blake."

"It will fall flat," grumbled Pratt. "How absolutely rotten! But how did Blake get on to the wheeze? Some New House chap must have told him."

"I'll wager it was Smythe let it out!" exclaimed Perkins. Every eye was turned upon Marmaduke.

"I didn't!" exclaimed Marmaduke. "You know all that I said to Blake, Figgins, and he hasn't spoken to me on the subject since, nor I to him."

Figgins nodded gloomily.

"That's all right," he said. "I don't believe you'd give us away, Marmy. Anyway, it doesn't matter now—the cat's out of the bag, and Blake has dished us."

"I don't know," said Kerr quickly. "They can only have found it out lately, and they've had to get the thing up in a hurry, you know. Ten to one it will be a rotten, measly affair, and ours will come with a regular triumph after it, by contrast."

Figgins brightened up a bit.

"Well, I didn't look at it like that," he said. "But there's something in what you say, Kerr, old man. If they give a rotten show we shall come out strong."

"The brute's left the programme, luckily," said Wynn. "Let's have a look at it."

Figgins tore open the envelope. A programme, very neatly got up, was disclosed to view. Figgins gave one look at it, and then he gave a wild whoop, and danced round the study in a fury. The others stared at him in amazement.

"What's the matter?" demanded Kerr. "Have you gone off your rocker?"

"The beasts! The mongrels!"

"Let's look at the programme."

The programme was tightly clenched in Figgy's hand.

"The bouncers! The rotters!"

"What's the matter?"

"The howling cads—"

Kerr and Wynn threw themselves upon the furious Figgins, and pinned him against the wall, and then Pratt extracted the crumpled programme from his hand. Then, as they looked at it, the New House Dramatic Society understood the cause of Figgins's excitement.

"Our concert!" howled Kerr.

"Our giddy programme!" yelled Fatty Wynn.

"All our items!"

"All our songs!"

"Our 'King John' scene."

"Our business from start to finish!"

"The beasts!"

"The brutes!"

"The cads!"

It was some minutes before the Dramatic Society calmed down sufficiently to read the programme through. Then the reading was frequently interrupted by bursts of rage and indignation. For this is how it ran:

"Programme of a Grand Concert to be given in the Lecture Hall, at St. Jim's, by the members of the School House Dramatic Society, on Friday evening at 7 precisely. Under the distinguished patronage of Arthur Kidd, Esq., M.A., Oxon, master of the cock house at St. Jim's."

"Song, 'Down Among the Dead Men,' G. Herries; Flute Solo, A. Digby; Cake-Walk, 'Giddy Gilbertine,' J. Blake; Sketch, 'New House Funniosities,' Messrs. Blake, Herries and Digby; Song, 'Give Me Back My Eighteen-pence,' Arthur Augustus D'Arcy; Scene I, Act 4, 'King John' (Shakespeare), Messrs. Blake, Herries, Digby, D'Arcy; March, 'Lohengrin,' Mouth-Organ Solo, J. Blake; Duet, 'Sing me a Song O' (Sullivan), P. Mellish and K. Walsh."

"God Save the King! Admission free to the young gentlemen of the School House. New House cads may come in if they like, but they will be expected to wipe their boots, and to behave as nearly like civilised beings as possible."

Figgins stamped round the study as though he were seriously bent upon testing the strength of the floor-boards.

"Done!" groaned Kerr. "Foiled, diddled, dished, and done!"

"Hopelessly done!" said Fatty Wynn, staring at the programme. "How on earth did that horrid bouncer get hold of our programme?"

"You must have left some of them lying about, some of you," said Figgins.

"No; you remember we didn't allow any to be taken outside the study, except the one you had yourself," said Kerr.

"You've lost that one!" hooted Pratt. "It's all Figgy's fault."

"I haven't! Here it is."

And Figgy dragged a crumpled bill out of his breast-pocket.

"Blake must have boned one from our study, somehow. We weren't on our guard against that, as we never suspected he knew anything about the affair at all. Anyway, the why and the wherefore don't matter now. The thing's done."

"That's true enough. We can't give our concert."

"Of course not. A lot of good it would be giving the same concert over again to-morrow night. Blake's secured the hall for to-night, and he's kept the whole game dark till the last moment. We've been done brown."

"We're not going to take it lying down!" said Kerr fiercely. "We've got to smash up their concert, somehow."

Figgins shook his head hopelessly.

"Too late! There goes the clock—a quarter to seven."

The Dramatic Society gritted their teeth. Blake had certainly left the thing till the last possible moment. The concert was to begin in a quarter of an hour now, and there was no time to plan any kind of a counter-move. They were "done" at all points.

"Too late!" repeated Figgins. "It's victory to the School House this time, and no mistake."

"It can't be! It shan't be! Look here, Figgy, you're leader! Think of something."

Figgins wrinkled his brows in a painful effort of thought.

"I can't think of anything, except to go there in force and kick up a thundering row," he said. "Of course, we might cut the concert. But that would be taking it lying down with a vengeance. They'd say we were jealous, and they'd crow no end. It's no good staying away like a lot of sulky kids. We'd better go, and make such a blithering row that they won't be able to hear themselves."

"But if there's any masters present we can't do that."

"Well, we'll do our best, anyway. You can get out of those things, Kerr; they won't be wanted now. Send the word round among the fellows, and tell them to bring all the rattles and mouth-organs and things they can."

It was evidently the only thing to be done, and the Dramatic Society broke up, and went round to gather forces

of the New House juniors. Figgins remained in the study, with knitted brows, trying to think of something. He hardly noticed that Marmaduke remained with him. Marmaduke wasn't of much importance at this critical moment. But the heir of millions was doing some thinking, too.

The Co. found the news of the concert known all over the house. Blake had stuck a programme up in the hall as he went out, and it had been read by all the house. The New House juniors were simply furious. Some were for staying away, but the general opinion was that it would be best to go to the concert, and wreck it if they had half a chance.

So the New House boys, some of them with knotted towels under their jackets—there was nothing like being prepared for anything—trooped across the quad towards the School House. Kerr put his head in at Figgins's door.

"Better come, Figgy. It's five to seven."
"Right!" said Figgins, rousing himself with a sigh. "I can't think of any way of getting our own back, unless we can manage to wreck the concert. It's the masters being there that will spoil our game. Are you coming, Smythe?"
"Yes," said Marmaduke; "if I may come with you, Figgins."

"Oh, come along!"
"I wish I could think of something," said Marmaduke wistfully, as they left the study. "I'd like to help you, Figgins."

Figgins looked at him curiously.
"What's the matter with you, kid? Getting patriotic?"
"I'm a New House boy," said Marmaduke stoutly. "Of course, I feel the same as you all do about it. Don't you believe me?"

"Yes," said Figgins; "you're getting on, kid. I wish you could think of something; but if I can't, it's pretty certain you can't. Come on!"

"Would you let me into the Co. if I did, and busted up their concert?" asked Marmaduke.

"Rather! I'd be a brother to you for life," said Figgins. "But you can't do it."

They had reached the great door of the lecture-hall.
"Ain't you coming in?" said Figgins, as Marmaduke hung back.

The heir of millions shook his head.
"No. I don't think I'll come in, Figgins."

"Have you got some idea in your head?"

"Yes. I don't know if it will work. But I'm going to try, and I don't care if it means a flogging," said Marmaduke. "You and the rest will be ready to muck up the concert if anything happens to give you a chance, won't you?"

"Won't we, rather!" said Figgins grimly. "But I don't see—"

But Marmaduke was gone. Figgins went into the hall with a peculiar expression on his face.

"What on earth has he got in his noddle?" he muttered.

"Has he got an idea, or was he just talking out of his hat, I wonder? Hallo, they're starting!"

The great hall was crowded. The School House boys had crowded in before the New House knew anything of the concert at all, and they filled all the front seats. This served a double purpose—it gave the School House the best seats, and enabled them to mass themselves for a guard to the platform, in case the New House should interrupt the concert. If the New House tried to rush the platform, they would have to walk over the School House first.

All the juniors of both houses were there, and a good many of the seniors. Kildare sat with a group of School House seniors, and Mr. Kidd, the housemaster. They had yielded to Blake's pressing invitation to see the concert, and also they thought that their presence would probably be necessary to keep order. Monteith, with a group of New House seniors, had come in. The seniors were allowed politely to take front seats, but all the New House juniors were crammed in the rear of the hall. Many of them had to stand up.

Figgins joined the Co. They were as near the front as they could get, but there was a solid phalanx of School House boys between them and the platform. Kerr turned a hopeless look upon his leader.

"No go!" he muttered. "We can't kick up a row, with Kidd there, and nearly every blinking prefect in the school."

Figgins nodded a gloomy assent.

"They may not stay all the time," said Wynn hopefully.

"Anyway, we can hiss and groan all the songs, and make the bounders feel uncomfortable."

"Hallo, they're beginning!"

The accompanist, a School House senior of musical taste, who had kindly offered his services, struck a chord on the piano. There was a general cry for silence.

"Booh!" hooted the New House as one man.

"Silence!"

"Yah!"

Mr. Kidd rose to his feet.

"Silence must be preserved for the concert!" he said. "Come, lads, fair play! Any boy who wishes to make a noise can leave the hall."

The New House relapsed into silence. The housemaster resumed his seat, and the pianist gave another touch to the keys. In the midst of a deathly silence, save for that sound, Herries came forward. The great concert was about to commence.

CHAPTER 9.

The Great Concert—How Marmaduke Distinguished Himself.

SILENCE reigned in the hall. The New House juniors fixed stony eyes upon Herries, and it seemed to disconcert him. He turned very red in the face, and Rushden, at the piano, kindly gave him another chord. "Go it, Herries!" called out an encouraging voice from the School House crowd.

Herries made an effort.

"Here's a health to the King and a lasting peace——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Blake made signs to Herries from the side of the platform. Herries, greatly flustered, left off singing, and made matters worse by walking over to Blake to ask what he meant.

"Go on!" muttered Jack savagely. "Get on, you dunder!"

Herries walked back.

"Go it, Herries!"

"Here's a health to the King and a lasting peace——"

said Herries.

"Hurrah! Go it!"

"On the ball!"

Herries desperately pursued the song. Rushden was a good pianist, and he did his best; but it was not easy to accompany Herries. He sometimes slowed down, and sometimes backed up, and sometimes gave himself a rest that was not marked on the music.

However, he lost some of his nervousness as he proceeded, and the succeeding verses came out better. Herries was loudly cheered by the School House when he made his bow.

The New House groaned itself hoarse, but nobody took any notice of them. The School House cheered and stamped. All the house, of course, knew how the concert had been bagged from the rival house, and that that song ought to have been sung by Figgins; and if Herries had had a voice like a steamer's siren he would have been cheered just as enthusiastically.

The juniors were not musical critics, but they keenly enjoyed a triumph over the New House.

"Bravo, 'ray, 'ray! Good old Herries!"

"Ray!"

Herries had to take his call half a dozen times, and when he finally retired he was crimson with bashfulness and gratification.

A Digby, Esquire, came next, with a flute solo. Strange and mysterious sounds came from Digby's flute. Afterwards, in an argument in Study No. 6, he declared positively that he had played a tune. He did not find believers. While it was going on nobody recognised it; but it was all the same to the audience.

The New House hooted, and the School House clapped and cheered. Digby made his bow, mightily pleased with himself, and Blake heaved a sigh of relief.

Next came Blake, in a cake-walk. He did it so well that even the New House had to admire, and the hooting was only half-hearted. The School House clapped frantically.

"Oh, my aunt!" growled Figgins. "Is Kidd going to stick it out the whole evening? He must be sick of the blessed row by this time!"

"Rather!" said Kerr. "But he won't go, old chap. He knows there would be a rumpus if he did. He can see that we mean business if we get a chance."

"If we could only get a chance!" said Fatty Wynn. "I wish the lights would go out, or something, so that we could go for the beastly bounders!"

"Not much chance of that."

"Well, it seems sickening that we should have to stand it the whole evening."

"It's not cricket to bring a beastly housemaster into it. If it wasn't for Kidd being here we'd rush them bald-headed!" said Figgins wrathfully.

"Oh, I don't know!" said Kerr, with a grin. "It's no good growling. We were going to have Ratcliff at our concert for the very same reason."

"Hallo, here's the sketch!" said Figgins, changing the subject. "Wonder what beastly rot they're going to trot out now?"

The whole hall was eager to see the performance of the

"DARING & CO."

A Tale (School) of Spies, the Twiss & Co. AND A Story of John Smith, Detective.

IN "PLUCK." 10

NEXT SATURDAY:

"HERR SPECS."

A Tale (School) of Spies, the Twiss & Co. BY H. CLARKE HOOD

sketch, entitled "New House Funniosities." It was done by Blake, Herries, and Digby, with minor parts taken by D'Arcy, Mellish, and Walsh.

It represented a rehearsal by the New House Amateur Dramatic Society, and the blunders which the supposed amateur dramatists were made to commit were decidedly comical.

It brought the house down, and even the rival juniors could not help laughing at the caricature of Figgins & Co. The unfortunate Co. did not know where to turn their eyes, and their fury reached boiling-point.

When the applause died away, the New House burst into a concerted uproar, headed by Figgins & Co. They shouted and stamped and yelled, and for a time it seemed impossible for the concert to proceed; but Mr. Kidd jumped up with a frown on his face, and the threat to clear the hall of the disturbers of the peace restored order.

The next item on the programme was the song entitled "Give Me Back My Eighteenpence," sung by Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

It was a comic song, but it is safe to say that it had never sounded so comical as now, when the swell of the School House sang it in a drawing voice, lisping over the words, and regarding the audience nonchalantly through his eye-glass.

The whole hall was in convulsions, and the New House cheered D'Arcy as cordially as the School House when he had finished. Even Figgins & Co., like the Tuscans of old, could scarce forbear a cheer. Jack Blake slapped Arthur Augustus on the back.

"Good old Adolphus! You're simply stunning!" "Weally?" chirped Arthur Augustus. "Do you think it was weally good, deah boy?"

"Good! Ripping! You've made the New House kids laugh. What a sell for Figgins & Co., when we get a cheer from their own backers!" said Blake gleefully. "This concert will be a howling success."

There was some little delay before the next piece commenced. It was the scene from Shakespeare, and Blake was anxious that it should go off well. The time allowed for preparing the concert had been so short that some of the artistes were not letter-perfect by any means. A last hurried look at the written parts, a hurried consultation, and the chums of Study No. 6 marched on to do or die. Blake, as Hubert, opened the scene:

"Heat me those irons hot, and look thou stand
Within the arras. When I strike my foot
Upon the bosom of the ground, rush forth
And bind the boy whom you shall find with me
Fast to the chair. Be heedful hence, and watch."

Then Herries chimed in:

"I hope your worship will bear out the kid."

That beautiful improvement upon Shakespeare was the result of a hurried, surreptitious peep at the part, by no means plainly written.

Blake gave Herries a withering look as the audience chuckled. But he thought it best to cover up the blunder by going ahead, so he started quickly to reply:

"Uncleanly scruples. Fear not—"

Unfortunately, Herries felt that he had blundered, and was only anxious to give the correct version. Another hurried peep at the paper having enlightened him, he broke out:

"I hope your warrant will bear out the deed."

Blake gave him another paralyzing look.

"Shut up, you ass!" he muttered.

"Fear not, you. Look to it."

"I've just looked at it," said the flustered Herries, misunderstanding him. "I assure you I've got it right this time. Shall I say it again?"

The audience shrieked. Jack Blake looked inclined to commit assault and battery on the spot. He looked unutterable things at Herries, who, mistaking silence for consent, blundered on:

"I hope your warrant will bear out the deed."

Blake crushed down his private feelings, and went bravely on:

"Uncleanly scruples. Fear not, you. Look to it. Young lad, come forth. I have to say with you."

Enter Digby:

"Good-morrow, Blake!—I mean, 'Hubert.'"

Blake groaned inwardly, and replied:

"Good-morrow, little prince."

"Wait a minute!" said Digby hurriedly. "Oh, all right; I've got it:

"As little prince—having so great a title to be mere prince. As may be. You are sad."

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Figgins. "He looks sad, doesn't he?"

The whole audience laughed. Blake went on, steadily ignoring the ribald interruption:

"Indeed, I have been merrier."

"Have you?" said Dig, confused by the laughter. "I mean—that is to say—"

"Mercy on me!

Methinks nobody should be sad but I;

Yet I remember, when I was in France—"

"Good old Cooks!" yelled Figgins. "Saturday to Monday, ten-and-six!"

A roar of laughter went through the hall. Blake turned wrathfully to the interrupters.

"Look here, you New House wasters," he shouted, "if you want a hiding all round you've only got to say so!"

"Order—order!"

"Shut up!"

"Silence!"

"Hallo!" exclaimed Figgins. "What's wrong with the light?"

A good many other voices echoed the question. The hall was lighted by three great clusters of gaslights, and all of a sudden the lights had begun to waver uncertainly. The scene on the platform stopped, the laughter died down, and every eye was turned up to the ceiling.

"The gas is going out!"

"What's the matter?"

The gas was certainly going out. Two or three at a time the burners flickered out, and in a few moments from the time when Figgins first noticed the strange phenomenon the hall was plunged into darkness.

A babel of voices arose immediately. The concert-givers were silent with dismay. Figgins & Co. were too astonished for a minute to take advantage of this glorious opportunity. Then the truth rushed into Figgins's mind.

"Marmaduke!"

"What's that?" asked the Co., in wonder.

"Marmaduke! Good old Smythe! He said he had an idea in his noddle, and would risk a flogging to bust up the giddy concert!"

"What's he done, then?"

"Ha, ha! Turned off the gas at the meter!"

"Great Christopher Columbus!"

"That's it!" trilled Figgins. "I wondered what he would be up to. We'll take him into the Co. after this. Rather! Come on!"

"Good wheeze. Let's rush those cads before they can get light!"

Everyone was on his feet now. Voices were inquiring and calling on all sides—some wanting to know what was the matter, others demanding lights, but without specifying where they were to come from. In the midst of it the signal went round from Figgins:

"Sack it to 'em! Rush the giddy platform!"

Mr. Kidd was on his feet. He did not know what was wrong with the gas supply, but he feared that the New House would take advantage of the happening to start a disturbance.

"Keep your seats, boys! Remain where you are till I procure lights!"

Figgins chuckled.

"Yes, that's likely!" he murmured. "You can't tell 't'other from which in the dark, old sport, and this is where we come out strong!"

The New House juniors, overjoyed by the chance, were only too glad to follow the lead of Figgins & Co. A rush was made from the back of the hall, and the New House pack swept through the School House, and Figgins and five or six more gained the platform.

"Stand up for your house!" shouted Jack Blake. "They're trying to bust up the concert! Go it, School House!"

"Go it, New House!" bawled Figgins.

"Order!" shouted Mr. Kidd.

"Order!" bellowed the prefects.

But in the darkness the juniors cared nothing for masters or prefects. The New House were determined to avenge themselves, and the School House were not averse to a terrific row.

"Buck up, School House!" shouted Blake. "Throw the measly wasters out!"

"Throw 'em out yourself!" said Figgins's voice, close to him in the dark.

Blake jumped at him, and the two rival leaders closed and staggered about the platform, locked in deadly strife. They collided with a good many others and sent them flying, and some of the unfortunate artistes rolled off the platform.

Marmaduke was sitting on a box labelled "BOOKS—WITH CARE," and Figgins's mouth watered as he saw what kind of "books" it contained.



A free fight was raging in the hall. The New House boys had the advantage, as they had come provided with weapons of war. But this advantage did not last long, as the combatants were soon inextricably mingled, and it was impossible to distinguish friend from foe. And some of the juniors, as they grew more excited, did not seem to care much where their blows fell, so long as they hit somebody or something. There was a sudden alarm.

A door at the back of the platform had opened, and the light-streamed through, and in the light stood an awe-inspiring figure in cap and gown. It was the doctor!

There was a wild scramble for the door immediately. In a couple of minutes the hall was cleared. Some of the juniors continued their combats in the open air, but most of them were content with the damage already done. Blake had a black eye, and his nose was very, very red, and Figgins was looking much the worse for his encounter; but he was jubilant.

"We're the giddy victors!" he exclaimed. "Ha, ha! We've settled their beastly old concert for them! Ha, ha, ha!"

That was certainly true. Study No. 6 believed in sticking to it, but even they could hardly proceed with the concert now. The New House juniors streamed off, cheering and hooting; and even the optimistic Blake had to confess that

the bagged concert hadn't been such a howling success as he could have wished. In the quadrangle Figgins & Co. came upon Marmaduke.

"Is it all right?" cried Marmaduke eagerly. "I turned off the gas at the meter, and—"

"It was really you?"

"Yes. I had to do a lot of dodging to get at it, but Figgins fell upon his neck, and hugged him like a long-lost brother. "It was gorgeous! And I

"It was great!" he gasped. "It was gorgeous! And I never thought of it. From this time forth you belong to the Co., my son! Kids, Marmaduke Smythe, Esquire, is taken into the firm from this day forth!"

Co., my son! Kids, Marmaduke! into the firm from this day forth!" "Right-ho!" said Kerr and Wynn heartily. "Good old Marmaduke! It was great!" On the following day the great concert, so wonderfully surprising

“Right-ho!” said Keri. “Marmaduke! It was great!” So ended the great concert. On the following day the Fourth Form at St. Jim’s exhibited a really surprising assortment of black eyes, thick ears, and swollen noses, and that day was the happiest Marmaduke had spent at the good old school. For his reformation was complete, his probation was over, and now he had the proud consciousness of being a fully-accredited member of Figgins & Co.

(Next Saturday: "Herr Specs," a School Tale by
M. Clarke Hook, and "Daring & Co.," by Mark Darran.
Order your PLUCK in advance.)

NEW SCHOOL TALE.

YOU CAN START NOW.



THE RIVALS OF ST KIT'S

By Charles Hamilton

BRIEF ACCOUNT OF THE FIRST CHAPTERS.

When Pat Nugent arrives at St. Kit's an election is taking place for the captaincy of the school between Arthur Talbot and Eldred Lacy. Talbot gains the victory. Pat is thrown into a cupboard by some juniors, and falls asleep. On waking up he hears voices—the voices of Eldred Lacy and his brother, Rupert Lacy, the squire of Lynwood: "You must ruin and disgrace Arthur Talbot, and drive him from the school. He is a menace to me—to both of us. But ruined and disgraced, driven forth into poverty and obscurity, I shall no longer fear him!"

Pat is eventually released, and becomes great chums with Blagden and Greene.

One day a tramp, named Black, stops Arthur Talbot and tells him he is his father. The latter believes him, as he has never known his parents. He gives Black some money. A day or two after Talbot receives a note from Black demanding more money. He calls on the tramp at the Dragon Inn. On entering Black's room he is surprised to find Rupert Lacy quarrelling with Black. However, Lacy at once leaves the room, and the tramp asks Talbot for some more money. The three chums see that the captain is worried over something, and talk the matter over round their study fire. "Well, I say that that chap Black is a rotten blackmuller, or something!" said Greene. (Now go on with the tale.)

Blagden Puts the Case Clearly.

Pat Nugent nodded.

"Yes; I had that in my mind, too. But I'm quite sure of what I've told you. The squire and Lacy are plotting against Talbot. They want to disgrace him for some reason, and drive him away from St. Kit's. That's solid fact."

"You ought to tell him, and put him on his guard."

Pat shook his head.

"It wouldn't do. He'd think I'd dreamed it. He wouldn't be likely to listen to such a tale from a junior about a prefect of St. Kit's. Besides, the yarn does sound impossible, for the squire's motive is a mystery."

"I suppose you're right there."

"You see, you two chaps are half inclined to believe that I dreamed it all," said Pat practically.

"Well, not exactly; but—but—" stammered Nugent.

"Oh, I don't mind. I know it sounds too steep for anything. But, if that's the way you look at it, it stands to reason Talbot wouldn't believe a word of it."

"N-n-o, probably not."

"And if he did, he's just the chap to go to Lacy and tax him with it. Lacy, of course, would deny everything, and he'd be more careful in future, knowing that his game was suspected. We don't want to put him on his guard."

"That's true. Look here, Nugent, I believe you," said Blagden. "I remember how you came round, and got as keen about getting Talbot in as captain as we were, and I couldn't understand it at the time. That's proof, I think. Of course, I wouldn't dream of doubting your word; but, except for that proof, I might think you had had a nightmare."

"That's just it," agreed Pat. "Now, you see, I have a jolly good reason for suspecting that a plot is going on against Talbot, haven't I?"

"My hat! Rather! But I don't see what the game is yet. How can they hurt Talbot?"

"Lacy's cunning enough for anything. Some of the chaps are saying that Talbot has been seen going in and out of the Dragon—that low pub in the village. Now, we know that Talbot isn't that sort, don't we?"

"I heard that yarn, and never attached any importance to it," said Greene. "But I know some of the fellows say they are certain of it. Dunn, of the Sixth, said in my hearing that he saw him there, but Dunn's no class!"

"He's a chum of Lacy's," said Pat. "As likely as not, this is the first step. But it isn't that, or only that, that is worrying Talbot. He's got something on his mind. I went into his study to-day to fag, as usual, and he was sitting, staring into the fire, with a face as white as chalk."

"What the dickens can be the matter, then?" said Blagden, puzzled. "Talbot isn't the fellow to let a thing knock him over easily. It looks as if there was something wrong, but I can't see how Lacy could do anything to worry him. He's always setting himself against Talbot in the school, I know, but that wouldn't bother the skipper much."

"Well, I've thought it out," said Pat, "and I've come to a decision."

"What's that?"

"We're going to take up the matter and look into it," said Pat calmly. "If there's any underhand game going on, we're going to show the scoundrels up. We're going to get Talbot out of the mess he seems to be in."

"I say, mind your eye," said Greene warningly. "We'd all like to see Talbot right, but he might think it a cheek of us to interfere—and, between ourselves, it does look a bit that way, Pat."

"We sha'n't trumpet forth our intentions to all the school, father!" replied Pat. "Of course, we're going to keep it dark, even from Talbot. Talbot's such an easy-going, unsuspecting chap that he'll never see anything himself. He's got no chance against a fellow of Lacy's calibre."

"That's true enough; but it's easy to decide to look into the thing, but it's not so beastly easy to know how to do it," said Blagden sagely.

"I know; but we must go into the thing scientifically. I've been reading up a lot about Sherlock Holmes and Sexton Blake lately," explained Pat. "I've got the whole bag of tricks at my finger-tips. This is how you work it out: First of all, there's a crime committed; in this case the crime seems to have been left out, but we know there's something wrong."

"Yes, that's the first point. There's something wrong—somehow, somewhere," agreed Blaggy.

Pat looked at him quickly, suspecting chaff; but Blagden's face was as solemn as a judge's.

"Next point—find out the party to be suspected," said Pat. "That's Lacy."

"Yes; Lacy is the giddy-suspected party."

"Now we've got to prove him guilty."

"Guilty of what?"

"Well, not exactly guilty," said Pat hastily. "I don't mean that. We've got to prove that he's at the bottom of the—something wrong."

"That's the ideal! You put it awfully clearly!"

"Look here, Blaggy, if you start being funny—"

"I wasn't being funny. There's something wrong—somehow, somewhere. That's admitted. It follows that somebody, somewhere, somehow, has been up to something. Now, if somebody has somehow done something somewhere—"

Blagden was interrupted by a cushion that sailed through the air and smote him upon the chest. He sat down on the floor of the study with surprising suddenness.

"I say, what are you up to?" he exclaimed. "Gone off your rocker?" He scrambled to his feet. "I was only putting the case clearly and concisely."

"Well, don't do it any more," said Pat. "I've another cushion here. Now we come to the third point. The suspected party has to be shadowed next."

"HERR SPECS,"

A Tale (School) of Specs, the Twins & Co. By H. Clarke Hook.

AND

"DARING & CO.,"

A Story of John Smith, Detective. By Mark Darran.

IN "PLUCK," ID.

NEXT SATURDAY:

"Shadowed!" ejaculated Blagden. "Well, that's a good word, anyway."

The second cushion flew, but Blagden dodged it this time, and it crashed against the wall.

"Hold on, Pat. I'll be as sober as a judge."

"Well, we've got to shadow Lacy," said Pat. "That's the proper caper, and it is the only way to discover what the little game is."

"But where are we to shadow him? We might follow him from his study to the Sixth Form room, and from the Sixth Form room to the gym, and from the gym to the prefects' room, and from the prefects' room back to his study, and keep that up for a month of Sundays without discovering anything very important."

Greene giggled. But Pat was perfectly serious.

"He sometimes leaves the school, doesn't he?" he exclaimed. "Anyway, if he's plotting a plot, he can't do it all on his lonesome, that stands to reason; and so, if we keep an eye on him, we must discover something in time."

Blagden shifted uneasily.

"I say, Pat. That's a rotten game, watching a fellow about, isn't it?"

"Under ordinary circumstances—yes," said Pat. "If we had nothing definite to go upon; but that isn't the case now. We have it out of their own mouths that they are plotting against Talbot. Are we to stand by quietly while they do it?"

"No; that wouldn't be cricket."

"If you've got any other suggestion to make—"

"I haven't."

"Then don't start criticising my methods," said Pat. "I don't like the idea any more than you do; but I'm not going to see old Talbot done in without raising a finger to help him."

"I'm with you!" said Blagden heartily. "Talbot's a jolly good sort, and we ought to stand by him. The only thing is, that I don't see how we're going to do him any good."

"We don't know what we can do till we try. Hallo, talk of the Prince of Darkness."

Pat nodded towards the window. The evenings were lengthening out now, and it was still light in the close. The figure of Eldred Lacy could be seen crossing towards the gates.

"He's going out," said Blagden.

"Now's your chance, Pat," said Greene. "This is where you shadow him."

Pat hesitated.

"Ain't you going?" demanded Blagden. "Why, you were a regular Sexton Blake two minutes ago, and now you're too lazy to move. You can risk breaking bounds for once, I suppose, for the sake of your—ahem!—detective work."

"It isn't that," said Pat slowly. "But—but—but—"

"He's all but!" said Greene. "Afraid Lacy will spot you?"

"No; I wouldn't care. He could only lick me. But now it's come to the point, I feel—well, it seems so beastly mean to follow a chap," confessed Pat. "It's all very well in theory, but to do it is a different matter."

"Oh, buck up!" said Greene encouragingly. "I understand all that, but the motive's the thing."

"Of course," chimed in Blagden. "Think of poor old Talbot being done in, and us sitting comfy here and not lifting a giddy finger."

Pat jumped to his feet.

"Bedad, and sure I'll do it, kids!"

"Right-ho!" grinned Blagden. "He's in deadly earnest, Greene; he always begins to talk in Irish when he's on the war-path. Go it, Tipperary!"

"I've no time to punch your head, Blaggy!" said Pat, snatching up his cap. "I'll do it when I come back."

And he hurried out of the study.

Blagden and Greene, looking with great interest from the window, saw Pat stalking the prefect across the close. The shadower and the shadowed disappeared. Pat was on the track!

Pat as a Shadower.

"Hallo, guv'nor!"

Eldred Lacy halted at the stile in the Northley lane. There, in the same spot where he had encountered Arthur Talbot on a memorable occasion, Seth Black was lounging, his hands in his pockets, the black pipe in his mouth, the filthy fur cap upon his head. He grinned at Lacy as the latter stopped.

Lacy looked about him nervously. He had come to that spot especially to meet the man, for he was very chary about going to the Dragon Inn if he could help it. But he was far from wishing to be seen in conversation with such an utter ruffian as Seth Black.

The dusk was closing in over the fields, and the lane

seemed deserted. Black saw what was passing in the prefect's mind, and grinned.

"It's all right," he said, removing the pipe from his mouth. "It's all serene, mister. There ain't nobody to see you."

"One has to be careful," said Lacy apologetically. "I am a prefect up at the school, you know, and people are always looking for an excuse to talk about a chap."

"Yes, they'd open their eyes a bit if they knew the game you was playing at the school," Black remarked. "Mum's the word, of course. You can trust me."

Lacy made an uneasy movement.

It occurred to him that he was playing a dangerous game by dealing with this scoundrel at all, and that he would have to be very careful. But the opportunity to bring about his rival's ruin was too good to be lost; and, besides, there was the squire to be considered. The game had to be played out.

"Yes, of course I can trust you," he said. "Besides, what you said is quite true, isn't it? You are Arthur Talbot's father?"

"Of course I am. Haven't I proved it?"

"Yes—yes," assented the prefect hastily. "Of course. But—Hullo!"

His eyes had fallen upon a figure in the lane some distance towards St. Kit's.

It was that of Pat Nugent.

The junior was strolling along in the most careless manner imaginable, his hands in his pockets, and humming a tune.

No one, looking at him, would have dreamed that he was shadowing anybody, and, as a matter of fact, nothing of the kind occurred to Lacy; but he was naturally of a suspicious turn of mind, and he was caught at a very awkward moment.

He glared savagely at the junior, who was coming round a bend in the lane. Pat looked at him and met his glance. He had not known that Lacy had stopped, and now he realised that he had not done his shadowing in a very workmanlike manner. For he had walked right on into the view of the shadowed party, which was certainly not what Sexton Blake would have done. However, there was no help for it now, and Pat could only carry it off as boldly as possible.

At the same time, his heart beat as he saw whom Lacy's companion was. He had succeeded in one part of his object, at least; he had surprised Eldred Lacy in what was evidently a secret rendezvous with a man no St. Kit's fellow ought ever to have spoken to.

It was useless to cut and run now that Lacy had seen him, so Pat strolled on, pretending not to notice the glance of the prefect. Lacy stopped him as he came near.

"Where are you going, Nugent?"

"Northley," said Pat carelessly.

"Don't you know it is near locking-up time at the school?"

"I haven't a watch on," said Pat.

"You must have known you ought not to be out now, watch or no watch. Go back instantly to St. Kit's," said Lacy, frowning.

"But, I say—"

"Return to the school at once, do you hear, and report yourself to Mr. Slaney as having been out of bounds!" exclaimed the prefect angrily.

"Sure, and what should I do that for?"

"Because I tell you. Now be off, or I'll give you a licking into the bargain."

Pat looked at the prefect with a wicked gleam in his eye.

"Anything else for me to report to Mr. Slaney?" he asked.

"No! What do you mean?"

"Sure, I thought you might like me to report what gentlemanly friends you come out to meet, Lacy," said Pat innocently.

Lacy's brow turned black as night.

He made a movement as if to strike Pat, but checked himself. He realised that it would do him no good if the junior talked about what he had seen at St. Kit's.

"Look here, Nugent," said the prefect thickly, "you'll go too far with your impudence one of these days. Go back to the school at once!"

"Must I make that report to Mr. Slaney, Lacy darling?"

"N-no, you need not bother about that. But you must not stay out, and you know it. I will let you off. Now go!"

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Tale in

The British

"But I want to go to Northley," said Pat, feeling that he had the victory on his side. "I want to go particularly, Lacy."

Lacy breathed hard.

He would have given a good deal to take Pat by the collar and thrash him within an inch of his life, but he felt that it would not do.

"You cannot go, Nugent. What do you want there?"

"I'm having a bat mended at Simpson's," said Pat, truthfully enough.

"Oh, very well, you can go, if you like!"

"Thanks, Lacy," said Pat demurely, and he strolled on. Lacy looked after him with a black scowl.

"I'd have wrung the little brute's neck!" growled Seth Black.

"You don't understand," said the prefect uneasily. "It was a beastly bit of ill-luck his coming on us like this. I don't want this meeting to become the talk of St. Kit's."

"I s'pose not," grinned Black. "The fellows might suspect something when I come in on the scene and claim Talbot."

"That's it. Let's get somewhere out of sight to talk."

"There's a shed in the field," said Black. "We can talk there without being seen, and it's not a minute's walk."

"Right!"

They crossed the stile. The shed was an old ruinous building, sometimes serving as a shelter for cattle. It answered the purpose of screening the plotters from observation very well.

Pat had walked on towards the village, and passed out of sight. But as soon as the hedge hid him, the junior stopped, his heart beating hard.

He felt that he was upon the track of something, he did not know exactly what. But as a shadower, it was wisest to be thorough. Through an opening in the hedge he saw the prefect and his strange companion cross part of the field, and enter the shed. What could be the object of their meeting, when they felt it necessary to keep it so secret? Could it be anything to do with Talbot?

The squire and Lacy were plotting against Talbot, Pat knew that. This ruffian Black had some connection with the squire. Lacy was keeping what was evidently an appointment with him for some secret purpose. It decidedly looked as if Black was in the plot, too.

Pat thought it over, and then ran along the lane for some distance, and passed through the hedge at the end of the field, and out across the field behind the shed. It was growing thickly dusk over the fields, and he had little fear of being discovered. He had no definite plan in mind, but he was on the alert. He reached the shed, which, as we have said, was in a tumble-down condition. The sound of voices came to him from within the little building, with the wafted scent of tobacco.

And then Pat paused. His motive was good, and the fortunes of an unsuspecting lad might hang upon what these rascals were plotting. Yet to listen—that was repugnant! Could he—should he do it?

As he hesitated, Lacy's voice came to his ears with distinctness.

"It will be his ruin, absolutely, for he will not have the nerve to remain at St. Kit's afterwards. Carry out your instructions without a bungle, and I shall be rid of Arthur Talbot for good."

Pat set his teeth hard. There could be no further doubt now. Seth Black was in the plot, and the plot was nearing its culmination, and the ruin of the unsuspecting captain of St. Kit's was what was at stake. The boy remained quite still, his face white and determined. He would know what their cowardly scheme was, and baffle it if he could. The ruffian's hoarse chuckle followed Lacy's words.

"You hain't werry partickler about a father's feelings, Mister Lacy."

"Oh, don't talk rot!" said Lacy. "You know you don't care a rap for Talbot, except for what you can screw out of him. Don't try to put on any rot with me. Whether he's your son or not, you love him about as much as I do."

Pat's heart almost stopped beating. For a moment he wondered whether he had heard aright. Talbot's father! This brutal ruffian the father of the captain of St. Kit's!

Seth Black chuckled again.

"Oh, all right!" he said. "I'm your man, as I said; and if you make it worth my while, I'll work it as you choose. If you pay the piper, you can call the tune. Mind, I want my price. If I break with Talbot, I give up all I can get from him."

"What can you get from him?" said Lacy contemptuously.

"He's as poor as a church mouse!"

"There's that scholarship, you know."

Lacy started.

"What the dickens do you know about that?"

"He told me. He expects to get it, and there will be fifty pounds down on the nail for me when it comes off."

"Bah!" said Lacy scoffingly. "That's all talk. I'm going in for that scholarship, and so is Haywood, and Talbot hasn't a ghost of a chance against either of us!"

"He spoke as if he was almost sure of it."

"Well, I'm quite sure he won't get it. You can bet anything on that."

"Then he was taking me in!" said Black, with a growl.

"Maybe that's what you are doing, though. Anyway, my price is fifty."

"You said—"

"Never mind what I said, Master Lacy. If you don't choose to make it fifty, I'll wait and see how the scholarship turns out for the other party. I'm getting something from him pretty frequent to go on with."

Lacy muttered something under his breath.

"Take it or leave it," said Black; "I don't care much which. Your brother is a rich man, and he'll stand the fifty."

"I dare say he will; but— Well, if that's the price I'll pay it. I've brought you twenty. You'll have to wait for the rest until afterwards."

"Cash in advance, Mister Lacy."

"Not a shilling but the twenty now. Do you think I'm going to pay you, and then have you put up the figure again, confound you?" said Lacy savagely.

"I'm pretty sure you wouldn't pay me if I did the job first."

"I'll give you a note of hand; then I shall have to pay up, for if you sent it on to the doctor I should get into a fearful row," said Lacy. "You'll have a hold on me then, and I'll redeem the paper with the thirty."

Black reflected for a few moments.

"I suppose that's all right," he said at last.

"Of course it is! I shouldn't dare to play you false if I wanted to; and I shouldn't want to. It's worth the money to me to bring Talbot's head down to the dust!"

"Gimme the paper, then."

"Strike a match, and I'll write it out on a leaf of my pocket-book."

There was a scratch in the gloom. A match flickered, and then another. Pat, through a crack in the crumbling wall, caught sight of Lacy, and saw him scribble something on a leaf, tear it out of his pocket-book, and hand it to Black.

Black struck another match, and examined it closely. Apparently satisfied, he folded it and stowed it away in an inner recess of his coat.

"I reckon that will do," he said. "Now the twenty."

Lacy handed him four five-pound notes. Pat's ears caught the crisp rattle of them as Black counted them over.

"Good!" said the ruffian, in tones of deep satisfaction.

"That's the real stuff; and now I'm willing to take your orders, Mister Lacy."

"I'll tell you what to do. To-morrow's a half-holiday at St. Kit's, and now the cricket's on all the fellows will be on the cricket-ground. Talbot is making up the first eleven, and he's certain to be there—either at practice or watching the form of the others. If things work out well," went on Lacy between his teeth, "I shall be captain of the St. Kit's first eleven instead of Talbot; but that's by the way. I want you to come up while the whole school is on the ground, and claim Talbot before the lot of them."

"Shall I be able to get on the ground?"

"Yes; there's no difficulty there. The villagers are allowed to come and see the matches if they like, and there's no restriction. You'll simply have to walk in."

"It sounds easy enough. I don't want to get chucked out, though, or mobbed by a blooming lot of them!" said Black, evidently not quite easy in his mind.

"That will be all right. There's bound to be a master on the ground; and besides, I shall be there, and I'll see there's nothing of that kind. Besides, Talbot isn't that sort. He fully believes that you are his father, doesn't he?"

"Of course he does. I've proved it to him."

"Then, whatever he feels like, he won't want you to be hurt; and he'll be so knocked into a cocked hat that he won't feel like doing anything but sneaking off and hiding himself somewhere out of sight," said Lacy, with a chuckle.

Pat, in the gloom outside, clenched his hands hard.

"I s'pose so," assented Black. "I'll be there, Mister Lacy. Mind, after it's over I shall expect that other thirty."

"I shall keep this paper on me, and the doctor will see it right enough if there's any dodging."

"There won't be any dodging," said Lacy impatiently.

"Take care of the paper, and don't let it be seen, and I

"DAILY MAIL."

NEXT SATURDAY:

"HERR SPECS,"

A Tale (School of Specs, the Twins & Co. By H. Clarke Hook.

AND

"DARING & CO."

A Story of John Smith, Detective.

By Mark Duffau.

IN "PLUCK," 10

shall redeem it all right. Now, I think that's about all. I can rely upon you for to-morrow?"

"Oh, yes. It will be a good joke," grinned Black. "So long as there's no chucking out, I shall enjoy it."

"I'll take care of that. Now, good-bye!"

"So long!"

Lacy hurriedly left the shed, and strode away towards the school, his eyes gleaming. He felt that he had victory within his grasp at last. The rival he had so long hated and feared was to be brought so low at last that he could afford to pity him. Not that there was much pity in Eldred Lacy's breast for a vanquished rival.

Seth Black lounged out of the shed. Pat crouched low in the shadows. The ruffian slouched off and disappeared; then Pat rose to his feet.

The boy's face was white and hard. The cruel plot he had listened to had almost taken his breath away, and his breast was filled with a righteous anger and indignation against the remorseless schemers. To baffle them Pat would have given a year of his life; but how was he to do it?

The game was in their hands. What could be done? It did not seem possible for the boy to do anything, yet something, somehow, he was determined to do. He must, he would help Arthur Talbot somehow.

He walked rapidly towards the village. It was necessary to fetch his mended bat, in order to afford a good pretext for his absence from the college. Lacy must not suspect that he knew. He must have time to think, time to consult with his chums, before he allowed the prefect to get a hint of his discovery.

Half an hour later Pat knocked at the school gates, with his bat under his arm. The gates were, of course, closed for the night, and when Pat was admitted he had to go and report himself to Mr. Slaney.

The master of the Fourth was in his study, and he gave Pat a severe look when he presented himself there. Pat had had time to pull himself together, and he did not allow his face to betray anything of what was in his mind. Mr. Slaney carelessly picked up his cane as the junior came in, with his usual demure expression.

"You were not present at call-over, Nugent?"

"No, sir," said Pat meekly.

"Where have you been?"

"To Northley, sir. I've fetched my bat from Simpson's, who were mending it for me."

"Had you permission to stay out after locking-up?"

"Yes, sir," said Pat promptly.

"H'm! Who gave you permission?"

"Lacy, sir."

(Another long instalment of this school tale next Saturday.)

Your Editor's Corner.

All letters should be addressed, "The Editor, PLUCK, 2, Carmelite House, Carmelite Street, London."

"HERR SPECS"

is the title of next week's special, long, complete school tale. It will deal with the adventures of Specs, the Twins, & Co., by H. Clarke Hook. "Herr Specs," is an excellent story.

The second, entitled

"DARING & CO.,"

is a tale of John Smith, Detective, by Mark Darran.

John Smith has always been a favourite character among Pluckites; so I think this is sufficient recommendation to new readers that they should not miss reading "Daring & Co."

No. 6 of "The Gem" Library is now on sale, and obtainable from your newsagent. You should not fail to get this issue, as it contains a grand, long, complete adventure tale, entitled

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On Friday, May 3rd, two more new additions to "The Boys' Friend" 3d. Complete Library will be on sale.

These will be Nos. 17 and 18, and now is the time to place an order with your newsagent.

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"THE MISSING HEIR,"

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a new, complete tale dealing with the adventures of the three famous comrades, Jack, Sam, and Pete, by S. Clarke Hook.

May I remind all my readers that pocket-knives are awarded to those who send in fair criticisms of the stories that appear in PLUCK.

YOUR EDITOR.

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