THE ST. JIM'S VOLUNTEERS!

A Magnificent New, Long, Complete Tale of School Life at St. Jim's.

The GEM LIBRARY 1d. No. 396. Vol. 9.

A STAGGERING SURPRISE FOR THE SIXTH!

(The Junior Volunteer Force of St. Jim's go in for trench digging. See the great school tale inside.)

PUBLISHED IN TOWN AND COUNTRY EVERY WEDNESDAY MORNING

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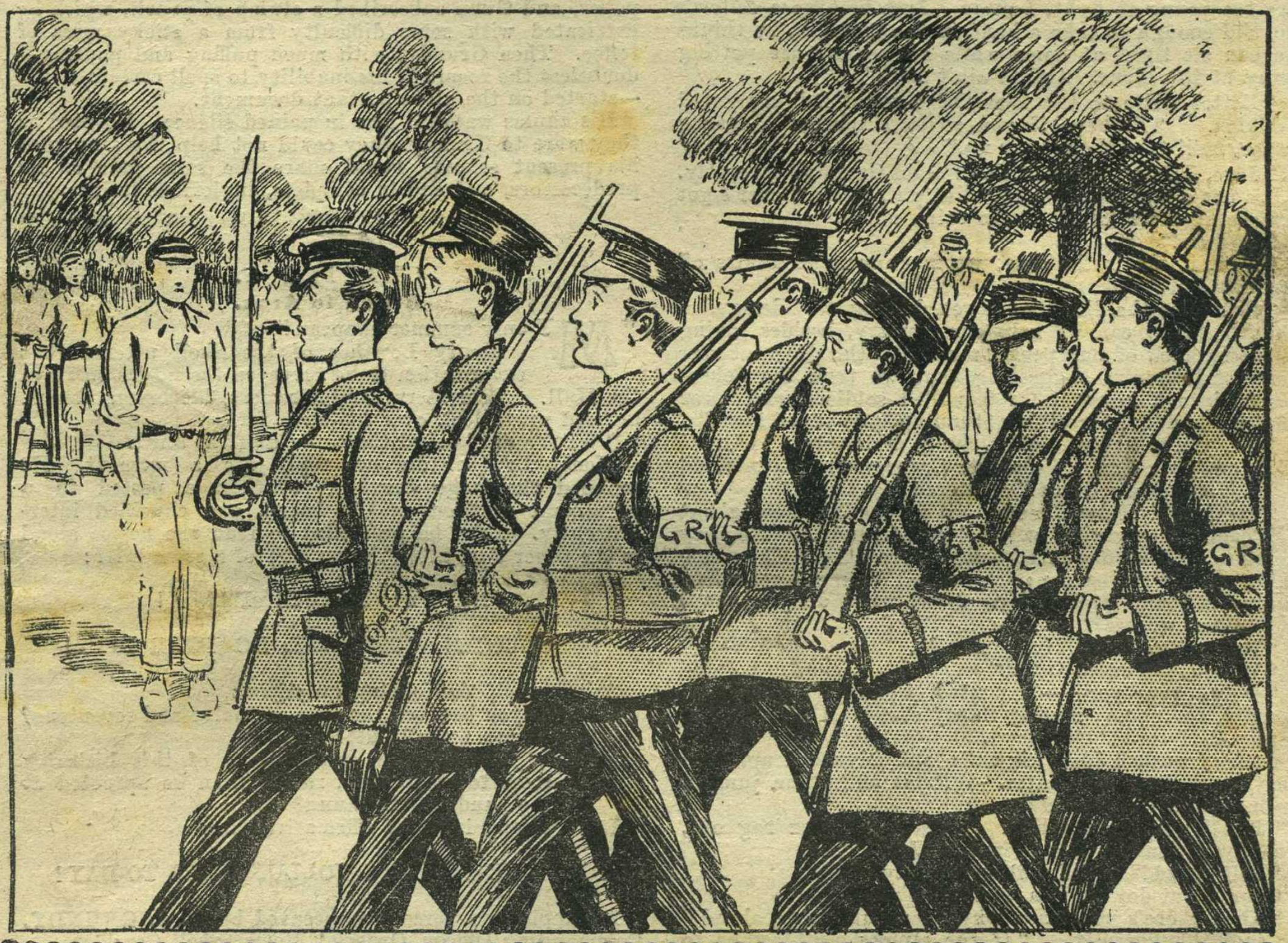
COMPLETE STORIES FOR ALL, AND EVERY STORY A GEM!

THE ST. JIM'S VOLUNTEERS!

A Magnificent New, Long, Complete School Story of Tom Merry & Co.

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.



Marching straight on to the pitch, their rifles at the slope, came the St. Jim's Volunteers. Grundy led the way, and batsmen, fieldsmen, umpires, and spectators gazed at the scene in astonishment. Then Grundy was heard to exclaim, in loud, imperious tones: "Stop! Stop this fop's game instantly!" (See Chapter 10.)

CHAPTER 1.

Grundy's Great Wheeze.

"ENGLAND expects——"

"Eh?"

"That every man——"

"What?"

"This day will do his duty!"

George Alfred Grundy, of the Shell Form at St. Jim's, repeated the celebrated words of Nelson in an impressive voice to Wilkins and Gunn, his two study-mates.

"What are you jabbering about, Grundy?" growled Wilkins, who had been disturbed from doing his prep.

"I was saying that this country expects every man to do his duty," said Grundy sternly.

"But we're not men," retorted Gunn; "so you needn't chuck stale remarks like that at us."

"And what's our duty, I should like to know?" said Wilkins. "If it's to wade in and slaughter silly asses, I'm on!"

"Hear, hear!" chuckled Gunn.

The great Grundy frowned.

"This is no time for playing the giddy goat!" he exclaimed. "Can't you chumps realise that the country's at war?"

"Come to think of it, I've heard that before," said Wilkins thoughtfully. "We're up against Germany, or something of that sort, aren't we?"

"Yes, we are," answered Grundy, fixing upon his humorous chum the glare of a basilisk. "And it's up to us to take a hand, too!"

"Thinking of enlisting?" asked Gunn.

"I would for two pins," replied Grundy, "only——"

"Only what?"

"It would rob me of the great future that's waiting for me at this school."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Grundy's study-mates together.

"What are you idiots cackling at?" demanded Grundy wrathfully.

Next Wednesday:

"THE HONOUR OF A JEW!" AND "UNDER THE DRAGON!"

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"Oh, my hat!" spluttered Wilkins. "Just hark at him! The Kildare of the future! The Darrel that is to be! D'you know why you're like Tipperary, old chap?"

Grundy shook his head in perplexity.

"Because you've a long, long way to go!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" cackled Gunn.

Grundy snatched up a ruler with a decidedly warlike air.

"Dry up!" he commanded. "I'll have none of this silly tosh in my study! If you can't look at things seriously you can get out!"

Wilkins and Gunn subsided.

"Now, see here," said Grundy, "in my opinion, there's too much slacking in this country—among the chaps who are too young to fight, I mean. Just because a fellow's not old enough to take a hand in the trenches, he thinks he can sit tight at home while his seniors are potting away at the Huns. And it ain't fair!"

"Better write to the War Office about it," suggested Wilkins. "Perhaps if you write Kitchener a strong letter, he'll take the matter up."

"Jove, I didn't think of that!" said Grundy innocently. "It's not a bad idea, Wilky. But p'r'aps Kitchener's got something more important to think about."

"Go hon!"

"And, if that's the case, we must manage affairs off our own bat."

"But what the dickens are you driving at?" demanded Gunn. "How can we help our country, besides giving a good whack of our pocket-money to the different war funds? If you're suggesting that we turn the School House into a hospital for wounded soldiers, and clear off for a holiday, then it's a stunning, gilt-edged idea!"

"Oh, you're potty!" said Grundy derisively. "Listen! Why can't we form a Volunteer Corps among ourselves?"

"A V-volunteer Corps!" stuttered Wilkins.

"Certainly! I don't mean that we should mooch about like common or garden cadets," said Grundy. "We ain't going to be Saturday-afternoon soldiers either. The whole thing's going to be done properly. We must get rifles, equipment, and everything. Now, what do you chaps say to the wheeze?"

"Rotten!" said Wilkins promptly.

"Putrid!" growled Gunn.

"Why, you—you——" panted Grundy. "This is mutiny, I suppose—mutiny in my study! I'll jolly soon cure you of that!"

Grundy pushed back his cuffs, and advanced upon his unsympathetic study-mates. Wilkins and Gunn jumped up in alarm.

"Pax!" exclaimed Gunn. "Don't get your rag out, Grundy, old man! It's a ripping idea!"

"Gilt-edged!" added Wilkins hastily.

Grundy sat down again, somewhat mollified.

"Then there's no reason why we shouldn't go ahead," he said thoughtfully. "If the seniors ain't awake to their country's peril, we are! It makes me sick to see chaps playing cricket at a time like this, when they ought to be in training for the trenches. Fellows of Kildare's age, too! They ought to be jolly well ashamed of themselves! Byron was right when he called 'em flannelled fools!"

"Was it Byron?" murmured Wilkins. "I thought it was Kipling!"

"Well, Kipling, then! Whoever the johnny was, he had sound common-sense. It's time we put the kybosh on cricket and took a hand at the greater game."

Wilkins and Gunn grinned. They could understand their leader's sudden animosity towards cricket. Grundy had no more idea of the great pastime than a Fiji Islander, and his play was a sight for gods and men and little fishes. In all the matches where Grundy had participated he had been most consistent—so far as scoring duck's-eggs was concerned!

"I'll draw up a notice at once, and stick it on the board," said Grundy. "It'll be a stirring appeal for recruits, and fellows who hang back will be branded as funks."

"Steady on!" exclaimed Wilkins. "How do you know if the masters will approve of the scheme?"

"Blow the masters!" snorted Grundy. "I'd like to see anyone trying to put a spoke in the wheel of a patriotic movement like this! Master or no master, I'd tell him what I thought of him!"

"Good old Grundy!" said Gunn admiringly. "I'm sure you'll go out of this school on your neck before you've finished! You're such an independent chap, you know!"

"Thanks!" said Grundy, colouring at the compliment. "I'll write out that notice now."

"B-but you haven't done your prep yet!" said Wilkins, aghast.

"Prep!" echoed Grundy scornfully. "Can you stop to think of things like prep when howitzers are booming in Flanders? Gimme a sheet of paper and a pencil!"

Wilkins routed out a sheet of very dilapidated-looking paper, and Gunn subscribed a stump of pencil, which he extricated with some difficulty from a sticky mass of toffee. Then Grundy, with much puffing and panting—doubtless the result of his inability to spell certain words—started on the all-important document.

His chums watched him in pained silence. Devoted as they were to Grundy, they could not help thinking that his present scheme would share the same fate as its predecessors, and end in complete, inglorious failure.

CHAPTER 2.
A Call to Arms.

"MY only summer chapeau!"

Monty Lowther of the Shell uttered that exclamation as he surveyed the notice-board in the Hall. Tom Merry and Manners, his bosom chums, hurried up to look over his shoulder.

"What's on?" asked the captain of the Shell.

Monty Lowther did not reply for a moment. He scanned the large document which was posted in a prominent position on the board, and chuckled intermittently. Then he proceeded to read the notice aloud to the other two, after the manner of a town crier:

"RALLY! RALLY! RALLY!

SCOOLBOYS! COME AND DO YOUR BITT!

Ask yoreself the folloing questions:

1. Are you between the ages of twelve and seventene?
2. Are you fisikally fitt?
3. Do you want the fowndations of this historick scool to stand firm, rather than be uprooted at the hands of the Hunn?

If yore anser is in the affirmative, then

JOIN THE ST. JIM'S VOLLUNTEERS TO-DAY!

All applicants personaly receaved by G. A. GRUNDY, Commanding Officer, Orderley Room, Shell Corridore.

LONG LIVE ST. JIM'S!"

There was a stony silence after Monty Lowther had finished reading. It was some moments before Grundy's sensational appeal fully sank into the minds of the juniors. When its meaning eventually dawned upon them, they did not behave in the manner which G. A. Grundy, Commanding Officer, would have approved. They howled with uncontrollable laughter.

"Ye gods!" chuckled Monty Lowther. "This beats the band! That chap Grundy ought not to be at large. He's a menace to society. Can't some kindly-disposed person put him on the road to Bedlam?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The silly ass!" said Tom Merry. "If his Volunteer Corps is anything like his cricket, it'll be a nine days' wonder."

"Better stop him, Tommy," said Manners thoughtfully. "We don't want any commanding officers giving themselves airs in the School House."

"Oh, let him ramp on!" laughed Tom Merry. "I dare say he'll go a step too far before long, and run up against the masters or prefects. I——"

"Goin' to join, deah fellahs?"

The interruption came from Arthur Augustus D'Arcy,

the swell of St. Jim's, who arrived on the scene with Jack Blake.

"The answer, Gustavus," said Monty Lowther, "is in the negative. What do you take us for? A set of first-class idiots?"

"Weally, Lowthah! If you were to offah your services to the St. Jim's Volunteahs I should considah it vewy patwiotic on your part. I have just been talkin' to Gwunday on the subject, and he has been kind enough to give me a commish."

"A what?" asked the Terrible Three together.

"A commission, deah boys. I am a lieutenant."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You needn't laugh, you fellows; it's true," said Jack Blake gloomily. "I've been trying to persuade Gussy not to be a sillier ass than he can help; but he's obstinate."

"Blake, I wegard you as a wank wottah! Your conduct wesembles that of the dog in the mangah! You don't want to join the Volunteahs yourself, bein' a slackah, and you twy to keep othahs fwom joinin'!"

"Hark at him!" said Jack Blake. "The poor old tame lunatic thinks he's joining the Black Watch, or something of that sort. He bought a commission from Grundy——"

"What?" yelled the three juniors.

"It's a fact! Grundy's selling commissions at five bob a time."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Of course, if you can't raise the wind sufficiently to become a norficer," said Blake humorously, "you've got to take a place in the ranks. Understand, Private Merry?"

"My hat! The St. Jim's Volunteers must go on their way without me," said Tom. "Blessed if I want to be made the laughing-stock of the school!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy! You will be nothin' of the kind! Evewy chap who's got the intewests of his countwy at heart will join to-day!"

"Carries on like a recruiting-sergeant, don't he?" said Monty Lowther. "Poor old Gussy! Good-bye to the shining-silk toppers! Good-bye to the neckties as worn by the nobility! You've got to get into the humble khaki now!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And vewy pwoud I shall be to wear it!" replied the swell of St. Jim's, surveying Monty Lowther with a haughty stare through his celebrated monocle. "I'm gettin' my patah, Lord Eastwood, to finance the concern, and we shall be fullay supplied with evewything—wifles, equipment, and all the west."

The juniors looked serious now. It was evident that George Alfred Grundy meant business. At the same time, they had not the remotest intention of enlisting under his banner. To do so would be to acknowledge the great Grundy as leader of the School House. Besides, it would be a bitter pill for them to have to take orders from such a crass idiot as the commanding officer of the St. Jim's Volunteers.

"You're an ass, Gussy!" said Tom Merry bluntly. "St. Jim's doesn't want waking up; you know that as well as I do. And if it did, then it's for the masters to buck it up, not silly goats like Grundy!"

"On the contwawy," said D'Arcy. "Gwunday's action is quite in ordah. The masters don't seem to twouble whether the school goes to the dogs or not, and the pwefects spend all their time in playin' cwicket. Considewin' that the wotten Huns may come ovah at any moment, it's up to us to get into twainin', as Gwunday has just pointed out to me. Bai Jove! I'm sowwy I evah thought Gwunday was an ass! He's got more sense than all the west of us put togethah—even includin' me!"

"Go hon!" murmured Monty Lowther.

"Here comes the merchant himself," said Manners. "Like his cheek to try and run a Volunteer Corps on his own! We'll ask him what he means by it!"

Grundy strolled up, with a jauntier manner than usual. He had spoken of his great scheme to some of the juniors, and the response had been fairly satisfactory. But George Alfred had only appealed to fellows who had no minds of their own. He was likely to find that Tom Merry & Co. were made of sterner stuff.

"Going to show what you can do?" he asked genially.

"I think we've already shown you," returned Tom Merry drily. "We wiped up the cricket-ground with you, and I smashed you at boxing, and we made rings round your rotten rag, 'Grundy's Weekly!' What can we do now? Anything to oblige, you know."

Grundy frowned.

"It seems to me as though you're jealous of my latest undertaking, Tom Merry," he said. "You'd better drop that sort of thing, and toe the line with the rest. Are you going to join the corps?"

"No!" snapped Tom.

"What about you, Manners?"

"Rats!"

"And you, Lowther?"

"Go and eat coke!"

"Blake, I'm sure you'll——"

"Keep off the grass!" said Jack Blake promptly. "I wouldn't touch your rotten Volunteer Corps with a barge-pole!"

"Then you're a set of rotters!" hooted Grundy, fast losing control of himself. "You're not sportsmen, you're not patriots, and you haven't the interests of St. Jim's at heart! I'll give you one more chance——"

"Oh, bump him!" said Tom Merry, exasperated.

"Here, I say! Hold on! Leggo! I—I mean——"

But George Alfred Grundy's meaning was wasted on the desert air. Four pairs of hands seized him, and bumped him again and again without ceremony.

Grundy roared and struggled, but he got his punishment all the same. The path of a commanding officer seemed to him to be a decidedly thorny one.

"Now bump the other silly ass!" panted Monty Lowther.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy backed away in alarm.

"Weally!" he exclaimed. "I considah you have no wight to—— Oh! Yah! Stoppit!"

But the juniors had no sympathy to waste on a fellow who sided with George Alfred Grundy. They seized the elegant Gussy, and bumped him severely on the hard floor of the hall, till his aristocratic person ached all over.

Arthur Augustus rose to his feet, dusty and dishevelled, with his face flushed, and his necktie streaming loose.

"You are a set of wottahs!" he cried indignantly. "I am surpwised that you should wesort to howwid wuffianism! Undahstand this, all of you. I'm backin' up Gwunday thwough thick and thin!"

"Then you can look out for squalls, Gussy, old man," said Blake. "We're not going to let you make a bigger ass of yourself than you really are!"

"You wait!" said Grundy, brandishing a big fist in the direction of the four juniors. "Wait till the masters approve of my scheme, and give me permission to have conscription!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'll rope you all in then, and you'll have a sorry time of it. If you had any sense you'd take out commissions at once!"

"Sorry, but sense is at a discount," said Monty Lowther blandly. "You've got the monopoly of it at this school, Grundy darling!"

And he waved his hand politely to the two Volunteers as they strode away to make themselves presentable again.

That same evening, just before bed-time, another notice, in the well-known handwriting of Monty Lowther, appeared side by side with Grundy's document. It was a crude parody of the original, and ran thus:

"RALEIGH! RALEIGH! RALEIGH!
KOME AND JOINE THE GRUNDIE VOLUNTEERS!

Ask yorself the foloing queschuns:

1. Are you one of the biggest dummies who ever breethed?

2. Do you want to make an ass of yourself in publick?

3. Do you want the Hunns to have a walk-over when they kome to St. Jim's?

If yore anser is yes,

JOINE GRUNDIE'S RANKS TO-DAY!
THE ROGUE FROM REDCLYFFE NEEDS YOU!"

CHAPTER 3.

One Volunteer is Worth Ten Pressed Men!

"WHAT about you, Skimmy?"

Skimpole of the Shell gave a start as he heard his name called in the Shell corridor after morning lessons next day. Pulling up short, he almost cannoned into Grundy, who was coming up behind.

"My dear Grundy," he said mildly, "were you addressing me?"

"Yes. Going to swell the khaki line?"

"I fail to understand you."

"Haven't you seen the notice on the board?"

"If you refer to Lowther's feeble attempt at humour, I have," answered the genius of the Shell. "And I consider——"

"My notice, I mean!" roared Grundy.

"Oh, the appeal for recruits?" said Skimmy, blinking at him. "Yes, I certainly observed that, my dear Grundy."

"Going to join us, then?"

Skimpole "smiled superior," as a novelist might say.

"Upon consideration, I think the St. Jim's Volunteers must dispense with my services," he said. "I do not believe in pottering about with a Home Defence Corps. Such a proceeding would fail to bring about what I have in mind—a speedy ending to the war. I feel that I am performing a far greater service to my country by making and perfecting a new and formidable airship, to be known as the 'Skimmer.' The War Office will doubtless jump at my invention, and many hundreds of airships will be built on the same pattern. The result will be the entire destruction and devastation of Germany."

"Rats!" said Grundy, unimpressed. "You know as well as I do, Skimmy, that a kid of fifteen can't end the war. Besides, supposing the Germans come over here before the blessed aeroplane's finished. You won't be fit to face 'em. You can't use a rifle, and you don't know anything about drilling. Where will you be then?"

"Really!" exclaimed Skimpole, elevating his eyebrows. "I had never thought of that. Do you consider, if I joined your Volunteers, that it would seriously interfere with the construction of my airship?"

"Not a bit of it!" said Grundy promptly. "We sha'n't be drilling every minute, you know. You'll purchase a commission, of course?"

"How much?" asked Skimpole.

"Five bob. And you'll have a swanky uniform, too," added Grundy hastily. "It'll be a stunning investment."

"There is only one drawback to the idea," said Skimmy.

"What's that?"

"I have no money."

"You—you!" stuttered Grundy. Then he controlled himself with an effort. He did not want to lose a possible recruit.

"Very well, then," he said. "You must join the ranks as a private. Come and swear——"

"What!"

Skimpole drew himself up with a pious and shocked expression on his face.

"My dear Grundy," he exclaimed, "I hope I am far above doing anything of the kind!"

"What do you mean?" roared Grundy.

"I mean that I will never, under any circumstances, resort to profane language!"

"Who wants you to?"

"You do, of course," said Skimpole, in surprise. "You asked me to swear——"

"You silly chump!" yelled Grundy. "I was asking you to swear in, not to do the other thing. Oh, you burbling duffer!"

Skimpole tendered an apology, and then the couple made tracks for Grundy's study.

"What do I have to do now?" asked the amateur inventor.

"Sign this form," said Grundy, handing one over. "And you've got to abide by what it says, and be loyal and true to the corps as long as it lasts."

"I see."

And Skimpole scrawled his signature across the slip of paper, and turned to go.

"Half a minute," said Grundy. "Here's the King's shilling."

"The what?"

"The bob to which every recruit is entitled."

Skimpole blinked at his commanding officer in astonishment, and snatched eagerly at the coin.

"You're going to pay this to every recruit?" he gasped.

"Yes, I can easily run to it. You see, half a dozen chaps have taken commissions. That's thirty bob. I can pay the recruits out of that."

Skimpole departed, highly satisfied. In the corridor without he met Mellish and Levison of the Fourth.

"Wherefore that radiant grin?" asked Levison.

"My dear Levison, I am now a fully-accredited member of the St. Jim's Volunteers, and have received a shilling in return for giving my services."

"What!"

"Come off, Skimmy!"

Skimpole produced the shilling, and the rascals of the Fourth chuckled.

"If Grundy's chucking his money about we may as well get a front seat," said Mellish.

"Rather!" agreed Levison. "Kim on!"

And they passed along the corridor, and entered Grundy's study.

"Busy?" asked Levison pleasantly.

"Fairly so," answered Grundy. "There's a lot of work attached to forming a Volunteer Corps, let me tell you. However, I'm not grumbling. It's all for the good of the cause. What can I do for you fellows?"

"We want to join," said Mellish.

Grundy's face lighted up.

"Commissions?" he asked.

"No, thanks!" said Levison. "We're not snobs. The rank and file's about our mark."

"Sign these forms, then," said Grundy. "We'll get to bizney as soon as the uniforms come, and they're expected any minute now."

Levison wrote his name with a flourish. Mellish followed suit. Then Grundy produced a couple of shillings from the table drawer, and handed them over.

"I expect you to rally round the corps, and get as many recruits as you can," he said.

"Rely on us," said Levison cheerfully. And he quitted the study with his precious partner.

A few minutes later the King's shilling, or, as the juniors termed it, "Grundy's bob," was being expended in liquid refreshment at the school shop.

The news that George Alfred Grundy was scattering shillings broadcast soon spread, and quite a number of juniors lined up outside the orderly-room, waiting to enlist. Their thoughts were all for the cash; what would happen afterwards, when the rifles and uniforms arrived, did not enter into their considerations. They believed in the wise old saying about taking no thought for the morrow.

The sheet from an exercise-book, which Grundy designated as the Corps Register, filled rapidly. A few fellows, just for the fun of the thing, took out commissions, and by tea-time that day there were twenty recruits.

But Grundy was not satisfied yet. Like Alexander of old, he was in need of fresh worlds to conquer.

"I'll rouse up some of the seniors," he remarked to Wilkins and Gunn. "So far, not one of 'em has shown any patriotic enterprise. I've got some of the fags—young D'Arcy, and Gibson, and Jameson, and Frayne. But we want something more solid—to give weight to the concern, you know."

"Good idea!" said Gunn.

Both he and Wilkins knew very well why the Third-Formers had given their services. The four shillings which had been paid over to them would provide an excellent repast in the junior dormitory that night. When it came to drilling, however, Grundy would probably find himself "up against it." But Wilkins and Gunn were too discreet to tell their leader exactly what they thought.

"I'll tackle Kildare on the subject at once," said Grundy. "Might as well strike while the iron's hot."

Grundy brought the rifle sharply to the slope. "How do I look?" he asked. "If you ask me," grinned Wilkins, "it's a cut between a Chelsea Pensioner and a Red Indian." "Ha, ha, ha!" *(See Chapter 4.)*

"I—I say," stammered Wilkins. "I was thinking——"

"Quite a change for you—what?" said Grundy, with heavy sarcasm. "Don't go getting a nervous breakdown."

Wilkins glared.

"All right," he said. "Go your own way, and be hanged! I was only thinking that Kildare might cut up rusty. If he does, you'll get it in the neck!"

"I'd be a poor sort of specimen if I couldn't talk Kildare round," retorted Grundy. "You wait. I'll put it to him like a Dutch uncle."

And he swung out of the study, while Wilkins and Gunn winked at each other solemnly across the table.

Kildare was talking cricket with Darrel and Rushden of the Sixth when Grundy appeared. The captain of St. Jim's eyed him sternly.

"It is usual to knock before entering a senior study," he said reprovingly.

"Sorry, Kildare! But a chap can't think of little things like that when his country's interests are at stake."

"What do you mean?"

"I expect the kid's been in the sun," said Darrel. "There's a screw loose somewhere."

"Excuse me being frank," said Grundy. "I'm a plain-spoken chap, I am. Always was, you know. I found it paid when I was at Redclyffe."

"Go on," said Kildare drily; "don't let me interrupt you. Got any glaring reforms to suggest in the management of this school?"

"I'm here on behalf of my King and country," said Grundy. "I consider that it's up to you chaps to do something more than lounge about at a time like this."

"Really!"

"Cricket, and all those silly games, should be given the go-by. Fancy a chap flaunting about in flannels when others are facing cold steel in Flanders! It isn't British."

"Do you suggest," asked Rushden, "that we should join the Army, and take a hand in the trenches?"

"I don't see why not," said Grundy. "True, you ain't nineteen yet, but no decent chap would be afraid to tell a lie for the sake of the nation. There were kids of sixteen in the Battle of Mons."

"And who would manage the unruly fags when we were away?" asked Kildare, in interested tones.

"Oh, I reckon I could take on your job easily enough," said Grundy confidently. "I could keep order as well as anybody. I don't believe in sparing the rod. If kids were rebellious, I'd whop 'em. That's what I did at Redclyffe!"

"Indeed!"

"But, of course, I don't suppose you chaps would care to relinquish your positions. After all, it's a bit thick to expect schoolboys to fight. But you can help at home, and that's what I came to speak to you about."

"Very good of you," drawled Darrell. "How can we help?"

"By joining the St. Jim's Volunteers. I'm in command, and if you three chaps cared to buy commissions, you could have a fairly soft time of it. Chuck cricket, chuck games of every description, and throw in your lot with us. You'll be as welcome as the flowers in May."

There was a grim silence in Kildare's study.

"Come on!" urged Grundy. "One volunteer is worth ten pressed men!"

"You want an answer now?" asked Kildare, after a pause.

"Yes."

"Then you shall have it. You remarked just now that you didn't believe in sparing the rod. Neither do I. You might hand me that cricket-stump, Rushden, there's a good chap."

"Certainly," grinned Rushden. "Anything to oblige."

Grundy backed towards the door, but Darrel placed his back to it, and there was no way of escape.

Striding forward, Kildare gripped the commanding officer by the collar, and swung him on to the table, face downwards. Then he proceeded to belabour him lustily with the stump.

"Yow!" roared Grundy, as the weapon descended, and a miniature Sahara of dust rose from his trousers. "Ow! Yah! Chuckit! Stoppit! Lemme alone!"

"You've had your little joke," panted Kildare, "and now I'm having mine. You must learn—whack!—to be more respectful—whack, whack!—to your superiors—whack, whack, whack!"

The unfortunate Grundy struggled and roared, and roared and struggled; but he was helpless in Kildare's iron grasp. The stump came down a good many times before the captain desisted, and then the luckless victim slid down from the table, and lurched towards the door.

"The next time you come here with such a colossal piece of cheek, I'll lam you harder!" gasped Kildare, who was perspiring.

George Alfred Grundy gave a dismal groan as he passed out. There was likely to be no next time!

CHAPTER 4.

Rounding Up the Slackers.

"THEY'VE come!"

Wilkins of the Shell burst excitedly into Grundy's study early on the following afternoon, which was half-holiday at St. Jim's.

George Alfred Grundy, who was seated on the table talking to Gunn, leaped to the floor with amazing alacrity at his chum's dramatic announcement.

"Who's come—the Germans?" he exclaimed.

"Rats! No Hun will ever arrive at this school in one piece. I mean our uniforms have arrived."

"Oh!"

"And the rifles, and all the rest of it," panted Wilkins.

"That's good! Where are they?"

"Outside Taggy's lodge. They'll want some carrying in, too. Let's come and give Taggles a hand."

The three juniors went down to the gates, where several tremendous parcels had been dumped down. A crowd of interested fellows had gathered round, and the school porter surveyed the bundles with a worried frown.

"Which these 'ave arrived for you, Master Grundy," he observed.

"That's all right, Taggy. Give us a hand, old sport. We'll get 'em up to my study!"

"Been buying up Harrod's?" asked Jack Blake.

"Rats!"

"He's laying in for a siege, I expect," said Harry Noble.

"Go and eat coke!" snapped Grundy.

"You—you cheeky rotter!" roared Noble. "I'll jolly well——"

Grundy turned, and surveyed the Cornstalk with a haughty stare.

"Don't address me," he said, with dignity. "I'm not on speaking terms with slackers!"

"What do you mean?"

"What I say. Unless you show your patriotism by joining the St. Jim's Volunteers, you'll be regarded as a rank outsider."

"Thanks!" said Noble drily. "I don't care tuppence for the opinion of silly imbeciles like you! The sooner you're shipped off to St. Helena with the Kaiser the better!"

Grundy made no reply to this scathing outburst. Probably he was incapable of speech just then, for the load he carried was so heavy that even Samson of old might not have been able to manage it.

Wilkins and Gunn, and D'Arcy and Digby followed, with parcels of all sorts and sizes, Taggles bringing up the rear; and, with much panting and puffing, they proceeded to Grundy's study in the Shell passage.

"Phew!" grunted Digby, as he deposited his burden on to the study table. "These things are jolly weighty, by Jove!"

"Which it makes a man feel parched nigh unto suffocation, Master Digby," hinted Taggles.

"I can quite believe you, Taggay, deah fellah!" assented Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Pway accept this half-a-cwown for some gingah-pop!"

Taggles grinned as he pocketed the tip. That half-crown was likely to be expended in liquor of a more stimulating nature than D'Arcy intended.

"And now we'll unwrap the giddy box of tricks," said Grundy, as the porter departed. "I hope everything's all right."

"Bound to be, deah boy! I gave personal instwuctions in the mattah," said D'Arcy.

"What on earth's this?" gasped Digby, dragging forth a gaudy mass of material.

Grundy sprang forward eagerly.

"That's my uniform!" he exclaimed.

"My hat! I wish you joy of it!" said Dig. "I'm blowed if I'd wear that thing for a pension!"

"Silence, Private Digby! Don't insult your superior officer!"

"W-w-what!" stammered Digby.

"Insubordination will be met with severe punishment," said Grundy darkly. "This corps wasn't formed for the convenience of fellows wishing to play the fool. Dry up!"

"Yaas, Dig, deah boy!" chimed in D'Arcy, as Digby was about to pour out the vials of his wrath on the head of his commanding officer. "There's such a thing as discipline, you know. We must stand by Gwunday in this—thwough thick and thin!"

Digby grunted, and turned his attention towards a large oblong box which apparently contained rifles.

Meanwhile, George Alfred Grundy, with eyes aglow, proceeded to don the gorgeous uniform which had been ordered expressly for him. The tunic resembled the coat of many colours worn by Joseph of old. The buttons were brilliant; the scarlet facings were nothing if not striking; and the shoulder-badge, "S.J.V.," was prominently displayed.

The trousers were long, with a broad red stripe running from end to end; and D'Arcy, with whom money was no object, had actually ordered silver spurs, to be affected by the officers only.

In a few moments Grundy had undergone an entire transformation. He was no longer a schoolboy in Etons, but an imposing-looking warrior.

"Private Digby!" he ordered. "Hand me a rifle!"

Digby did so, with a muttered imprecation. Grundy brought the rifle to his shoulder, and came to attention.

"How do I look?" he asked.

"If you ask me," grinned Wilkins, "it's a cut between a Chelsea pensioner and a Red Indian."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Grundy frowned.

"Drop that rot!" he said sternly.

"It ain't rot!" argued Wilkins. "You asked me what you looked like, and I told you the plain truth. You don't suppose I was going to say you resembled St. George when he slew the dragon, do you?"

"Weally, Wilkins, I considah that Gwunday looks quite smart in his militawy wig-out! I twust I shall cut a good figgah myself."

And D'Arcy proceeded to don his uniform, which almost out-Grundied Grundy's in the matter of gaudiness.

"Now, then," said the commanding officer, "Privates Wilkins and Gunn, get into your uniforms at once! Private Digby, summon the other members of the corps to the orderly-room!"

Digby was inclined to rebel, but he felt that he ought to stand by D'Arcy, his study-mate, in the new enterprise; so after a glare at the lavishly-attired Grundy, he departed.

The new recruits were very slow to respond to the

call. Most of them said, in very impolite terms, that Grundy could go hang, and that they were going to play cricket. Skimpole, Blenkinsop, and Hammond were the only fellows who willingly consented to turn up, barring Herries, who was to perform on his cornet. The juniors of Levison's stamp considered that with the payment of a shilling for their services the whole affair began and ended.

Quite a scrappy collection paraded in the orderly-room—Grundy's study. The only officers present were the great George Alfred himself and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. The other fellows who had bought commissions —Bernard Glyn, Dane, Reilly, and Kerruish—would probably have put in an appearance, but for the fact that they were playing cricket against the New House. Wild horses wouldn't have dragged them away from that match.

Grundy gave the new arrivals instructions to equip themselves, in the hope that the other recruits would soon filter in. But he was destined to be disappointed. Minute after minute passed, and still no one came.

"We'll jolly soon rout out the slackers!" said Grundy, with a dark frown. "Line up, here! Tallest on the right, shortest on the left!"

The recruits shuffled into position, to await further orders. A more motley collection it would have been impossible to find. Despite the fact that D'Arcy had ordered the uniforms from an expert firm of military tailors, they were decidedly ill-fitting, the firm having imagined that they were wanted for full-grown men. Skimpole's tunic bulged out so much, on account of his pigeon-chest, that he could have stuffed a pillow inside with the greatest of ease; while the striped trousers worn by Herries effectively concealed his somewhat large feet.

The only things that were really up to standard were the rifles. There were also several boxes of ammunition. Grundy was not quite sure that the masters would approve of juniors going about armed up to the hilt; but on patriotic grounds he resolved to chance it.

"Now, then!" he exclaimed, surveying the file of juniors which reached from end to end of the study. "'Shun!"

The squad came clumsily to attention.

"From the right, number!"

"One!" roared Wilkins.

"Two!" bellowed Gunn.

"Thwee!" piped Arthur Augustus, who although an officer, was not averse to drilling with the others, in order, mainly, to show how it was done.

"Four!" grinned Hammond.

"Five!" growled Digby.

"Six! Seven! Eight!" responded Blenkinsop, Skimpole, and Herries.

"Now, when I say 'Eyes right!'" said Grundy, "I want to see all the eyes turn to the right with a smart click!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What are you cackling at, you—you dummies?"

"You!" said Digby blandly.

"What!"

"How can a chap make his eyes click, I should like to know?"

"Go and eat coke—I mean, silence, Private Digby!" roared the exasperated commander. "If I can't have discipline in this corps, I'll know the reason why! Squad! Eyes right!"

The juniors obeyed.

"Eyes front!"

Again the recruits responded.

"You're getting on famously," said Grundy condescendingly. "Right turn!"

There was a confused clatter of feet, and, when the air had cleared, half the squad was seen to be facing one way, and half another.

"As you were!"

The recruits came back to their original position.

"You silly lot of fatheads!" said Grundy scathingly. "Don't you know right from left, you burbling chumps?"

"Weally, Gwunday! Suahly that is not the way to addwess your subordinates! Pewwaps I had better take command."

Grundy became suddenly active.

"I'll see that you jolly well don't!" he roared. "It's my place to lick all this raw material into shape, and I mean to do it! Now, when I say 'Right turn,' turn to the right sharply in two motions. Right turn!"

The juniors managed it successfully this time.

"Quick march!" said Grundy, holding open the door.

With their rifles at the slope, and with Herries blowing shrill blasts on his cornet, the St. Jim's Volunteers passed out of the orderly-room and along the passage. Many fellows came to stare at them, and were immediately seized by violent fits of convulsion. In truth, the procession was a sight to see and wonder at.

Grundy led his men into the quad, and marched them over to the tuckshop, where Dame Taggles was doing a roaring trade.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Levison, coming to the door with a glass of ginger-pop in his hand. "What's all the giddy rumpus?"

"Squad—halt!" roared the stentorian voice of Grundy.

The Volunteers halted, feeling very uneasy under the scrutiny of the crowd in the tuckshop.

"Now, you slackers," said Grundy, detaching himself from his followers and addressing Levison and Mellish and Crooke. "I sent Private Digby to round you up. Why have you not responded to the call?"

"Why, oh, wherefore?" sang Levison softly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You filled in the form," Grundy went on, "binding you to serve the St. Jim's Volunteer Corps loyally and faithfully. It's up to you to keep the compact."

"Compact be blowed!" said Levison. "I wouldn't be found dead in that lot!"

"Weally, Levison——" came in a feeble protest from Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"You can go and eat coke, Gussy—and you, too, Grundy! Another fourpenny ice, please, Mrs. Taggles!"

Grundy stepped inside the shop, fuming.

"If you won't come quietly," he raved, "I'll take you by force!"

"Reminds you of old Constable Crump, don't he?" grinned Crooke. "Go it, Grundy! On the ball! It's better than a pantomime. Which pawnshop fitted you out with that tunic?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The fellows in the tuckshop, scenting fun, looked on with interested amusement. Grundy's face was a study.

"'Shun!" he roared, facing round on his warriors. "Quick march! Collar the slackers!"

"Yaas. Into the fway, comwades!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, brandishing his rifle.

The St. Jim's Volunteers, with a businesslike look on their faces, advanced into the tuckshop. Their opportunity for active service had arrived sooner than they had anticipated.

Crooke of the Shell armed himself with a syphon of lemonade, and turned it upon the invaders. There was a startling sizzing sound, and a loud roar from Grundy, who was leading his men. The brand-new uniform, his pride and joy, was completely drenched.

"Yaroooooh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Stick it, Crooke!"

Crooke brought his syphon into play upon the main line of attack, and there were fiendish yells on every side as the seething liquid burst upon the brilliant uniforms of Grundy's Volunteers.

"Ow!"

"Yah!"

"Stoppit!"

Sizz-z-z-z-z!

"Collar 'em!" roared Grundy again and again.

But that steady, relentless stream was too much for the invading party. They stood up to it gallantly for a minute, in which time they were drenched; and then, turning about, rushed pell-mell out of the tuckshop.

Grundy raved and stormed and threatened, but he might just as well have shouted to a brick wall. D'Arcy & Co. had had enough. Though armed with rifles, they had found progress practically impossible against that deadly syphon wielded by Crooke. For the present, they felt that they must let the slackers slack. The rounding-up process would have to take place at another and more convenient time.

CHAPTER 5.
Drillmaster Grundy.

"OH, my hat!"

"Just look at 'em!"

"The wild men of Borneo!"

These and similar exclamations greeted the St. Jim's Volunteers as they trooped on to the cricket-field next day.

Grundy's ranks were considerably reinforced on this occasion—a circumstance which doubtless arose from the fact that he had promised a substantial feed to his followers that evening. Free feeds were just what Levison, Mellish & Co. wanted. They were not averse to playing at soldiers for an hour or two when there was a royal repast to crown their exertions.

Tom Merry & Co. were sunning themselves by the pavilion when the recruits appeared, marching out of step, and with their rifles at various angles.

Grundy gave the Terrible Three a contemptuous glance.

"Slackers!" he shouted. "Come and join in, if there's anything British about you!"

"Fall in and follow me!" sang out Monty Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"P'r'aps you'll have to fall in before long, whether you like it or not!" hinted Grundy. "You'll have no choice in the matter. When the masters realise the good and useful work I'm doing, they'll plump for conscription!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Poor old Grundy!"

"Keep out of the sun, old man!"

And Tom Merry & Co. laughed loud and long as Grundy doubled up to take command of his disorderly soldiers.

"Halt!" he roared. "Get up into line—sharp!"

The recruits obeyed..

"Fall out the officers!"

There was no need for Grundy to have spoken in the plural, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy being the only officer present. Gussy came forward and saluted his superior with a flourish.

"I'm going to split the company up into two," said Grundy. "You, Lieutenant D'Arcy, will take command of one section, and I'll see to the other."

"Vewy good, sir!"

"Keep 'em hard at it!" said Grundy. "Make 'em work! Everything's going to be done on the jump in this corps. We mean bizney!"

"Yaas, deah boy—I mean, sir!"

D'Arcy saluted again, and went back to the ranks. Then he judiciously selected his men, being careful not to choose Levison and his set, who regarded the whole thing as a gigantic "lark."

Quite a crowd of fellows had assembled by the pavilion to watch the fun. Grundy was a never-failing source of amusement to his school-fellows. They never knew what he would do next.

D'Arcy ordered his men to number off and form fours; then he set them on the move. With Grundy, the operation was more difficult.

"Number!" he shouted.

Levison, who was at one end of the ranks, thundered out "One!" in a loud voice; and at the same instant Crooke, at the other end, shouted "One!" also. The other juniors took up the numbering from each end, with the result that there was a confused clash of voices, which put the celebrated Tower of Babel in the shade.

"As you were!" yelled Grundy, above the uproar.

The voices of those who were in the middle of the ranks died away.

"I didn't tell you to number from both ends!" shrieked the infuriated commander. "What sort of game d'you think you're playing?"

"Please, sir, you didn't say whether we were to number from the right or the left," said Levison meekly. "So I started off, to be on the safe side."

"Same here, sir," said Crooke demurely.

"You—you——" stuttered Grundy. He had not yet forgiven Crooke for the tuck-shop episode. "My hat, I'll make some of you sit up if you ain't careful! From the right, number!"

Levison led off, and this time the process was successfully accomplished.

"Form fours! Right turn! Forward!"

The company marched off, with mischief in their faces. D'Arcy's men were approaching in an opposite direction, and a collision was unavoidable, unless Levison & Co. swerved to one side.

But this they never dreamed of doing. Straight ahead they marched, until Levison suddenly exclaimed:

"Charge!"

The effect was instantaneous. Grundy's company brought their rifles into position, and dashed into the fray. Wild yells arose from D'Arcy's contingent, and they scattered before that rush like chaff before a whirlwind.

There was a perfect pandemonium. In vain Grundy stormed and raved, and raved and stormed. The din was simply terrific.

"Ow!"

"Yarooooh!"

"Gerroff me chest!"

"Grooh! Keep that rifle away, Levison, you rotten Hun!"

The crowd by the pavilion roared with unrestrained laughter.

Levison desisted at last, lest a master should happen on the scene. Lieutenant D'Arcy, with a heightened colour on his aristocratic face, recovered his men from the four corners of the cricket-field, and got them into line again.

There were many casualties. The bump on Skimpole's forehead was more pronounced than usual, and D'Arcy himself gave the impression that he had just come out of a mangle. Several other juniors had had their shins hacked by the weapons of Grundy's men, and all were feeling decidedly "wrathy." Arthur Augustus demanded an explanation.

"Weally, Gwunday," he said peevishly, "I am afwaid you lack the qualities of the twue soldiah! Why didn't you diwect your men pwopahly?"

"I did," howled Grundy, "but they defied me! Me—Grundy of the Shell! I've been shouting to them to fall in for the last ten minutes, and they've not taken a bit of notice!"

"Sorry, sir," said Levison blandly. "But didn't you yell out 'Charge'?"

"Me yell out 'Charge'!" shrieked Grundy ungrammatically. "You burbling chump! You bullet-headed Prussian! You know jolly well I did nothing of the sort!"

Levison looked aghast.

"Great Scott!" he ejaculated. "Can it be possible that there was a mistake—a terrible mistake? I made sure I heard you give the order."

"Same here," said Crooke.

Grundy looked staggered.

"But I didn't!" he gasped.

"We made sure we heard you give the command, sir!" chimed in Digby, "and we obeyed it without hesitation. You couldn't blame us, sir. We felt like those johnnies in the Charge of the Light Brigade:

"'Theirs not to reason why,
Theirs but to do or die,'

and all that. And we were so wrapped up in our deadly work that we didn't hear you tell us to stop."

"Weally, Dig, nothing can excuse such a violent outburst of wuffianism! My uniform has suffered considewably! I considah——"

"Silence, Lieutenant D'Arcy!" roared Grundy. "Upon due deliberation, I will take the word of these privates. We will now get on with the washing—ahem—I mean, proceed with the orders of the day!"

"But——"

"Silence, sir! Don't let me have to reprimand you for interrupting your superior officer again, or you will be relegated to the rank of private!"

"Gwoo!"

Arthur Augustus groaned, and subsided.

"As you seem incapable of taking command," continued Grundy, "the two forces will link up as one, and drill at my direction! Fall in, there!"

"If you please, sir," said Hammond meekly, "there's some of the first eleven chaps coming."

Grundy glanced round. He could see Kildare, Darrel, Monteith, and a number of other seniors coming on to the ground, with cricket bags and bats in their hands. Baker and Webb came behind with the nets, which they were evidently about to put up ready for practice.

Grundy frowned, and turned to his men.

"They're flannelled fools!" he said scornfully. "Don't you take any notice of 'em! Sooner or later I hope to rope 'em in to this corps. They're slackers who can't understand that Britain's at war!"

The juniors grinned. However praiseworthy Grundy's patriotic motives might be, it was certain that they would not be tolerated at St. Jim's.

"Squad, 'shun!"

The St. Jim's Volunteers came respectfully to attention.

"About turn! Forward!"

The recruits swung merrily along towards the lower boundary of the field.

Kildare and the other Sixth-Formers shouted to Grundy, but the youthful commanding officer took no heed. He tramped along by the side of his men.

There was another scene when the railings at the other end of the field were reached. Grundy was so anxious lest Kildare should be coming up behind him that he forgot to give the order, "About turn!" The result was that, when Levison and the fellows in the foremost rank reached the railings, they diligently marked time there, and the others, who had been going at a swinging pace, literally fell over them.

A wild yell proceeded from Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, who was groping about among the debris.

"My eyeglass!" he shrieked. "Pway look out for my eyeglass! It'll be cwushed and wuined! Levison, Mellish, Cwooke, deah boy!"

But the other fellows had much ado to look after themselves. A wild and whirling heap of juniors were struggling on the ground, and the scene was one which Milton would have described as "confusion worse confounded."

It was some time before the Volunteers succeeded in sorting themselves out. Luckily, D'Arcy's celebrated eyeglass was discovered intact; but this was not much of a recompense for the swell of St. Jim's, whose aristocratic nose, having come into violent contact with someone's elbow, now presented a most bulbous appearance.

"Oh, my hat," sobbed Monty Lowther, from the pavilion, "there's no need to go to the Wayland pantomime after this! Grundy's the very latest!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Battered, bruised, and discomfited, the St. Jim's Volunteers fell into line and marched—or, rather, staggered—back. Kildare of the Sixth came to meet them.

"What is this, Grundy?" he asked, a curious smile hovering about his lips. "A new sort of acrobatics?"

Grundy scowled.

"We're drilling!" he muttered disrespectfully.

"Oh! So that's what you call drilling, is it? Well, it's interesting, very! But I'm afraid you must chuck it now. We're waiting to put the nets up."

"Rats!" said Grundy defiantly. "Which is the most important—cricket or training to defend one's country?"

Kildare's brow grew stern.

"I'm not here to argue with you," he said, "and I'm not standing any cheek either! You may have one corner of the cricket-field, if you like, but you're not going to march backwards and forwards where our men are fielding. Understand?"

"Kildare, deah boy——"

"Well, D'Arcy?"

"I quite agwee with my fwiend Gwunday. It's not playin' the game not to give us a fwee hand with our dwillin', just because of your mouldy cwicket. And no decent fellah ought to handle a bat at a time like this!"

"I've heard that before," said Kildare grimly, "and I'm not likely to allow myself to be dictated to by a junior! After what you have just said, I forbid you to drill on any part of the ground whatever!"

"Oh, cwumbs!" groaned Gussy, in dismay.

"Then I shall appeal to a higher tribunal," said Grundy with a dim recollection of something he had seen in the papers. "I'll jolly well get permission for our chaps to drill, or know the reason why!"

"Leave the ground at once!" roared Kildare, in a voice of thunder.

Grundy glanced round upon his followers. In most of their faces he read a determination to uphold him in his position, and the fact gave him fresh heart.

"I won't go!" he exclaimed hotly.

And there was a murmur of applause from the ranks of Volunteers.

Kildare turned, and conversed in a low tone with Monteith and Darrel. The two prefects left the field, and returned, after a brief interval, with about a dozen canes, which they had secured from the senior studies.

"Now," said Kildare grimly, "we'll try a little gentle persuasion!"

Grundy backed away in alarm. This was a crisis he had not bargained for. Before he could quite decide what to do, the captain of St. Jim's had him by the collar.

Swish!

The commanding officer roared as the cane swept down upon the seat of his trousers.

"Yaroooh! Chuckit! Stoppit! Leggo!"

But Kildare had got his hand in, and he lashed away with surprising energy. The other seniors were not idle either. They waded into the ranks of juniors, and smote them hip and thigh, amid wild yells of anguish.

There was nothing for it now but to retreat. And Grundy's Volunteers retreated. They sprinted off the cricket-ground as though they were on the cinder-path, and had to run the gauntlet of a crowd of grinning fellows on their way.

"Why don't you go for 'em, Grundy?" yelled Monty Lowther. "Fancy letting a crowd of slackers chuck you out on your neck!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You'll have to lie down for a bit now," said Tom Merry. "Especially as you're barred from performing on the cricket-ground!"

"Who says I am?" demanded Grundy heatedly. "Kildare might try to stop me, but I don't care shucks for Kildare! I'll appeal to the Head!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The idea of Grundy petitioning the reverend Head of St. Jim's struck the juniors as being rather funny. Grundy generally imagined that he was a person of tremendous influence and importance. Indeed, he had been so at his former school, Redclyffe, but at St. Jim's he was likely to come up against some hard knocks.

"Come on in, you chaps!" he said. "This ain't the finish of the affair by any means. It's only the first round. Those slackers will sing small directly."

And while Grundy spoke, the "slackers"—Kildare and Baker and Darrel, and the rest—were smiling serenely as they put up the nets.

CHAPTER 6.
Soft Sawder!

"I'LL do it now!"

George Alfred Grundy uttered the words with an air of great determination. He was seated on the window-sill of the "orderly-room" after tea, with Wilkins and Gunn in close attendance.

"You'll do what?" asked Wilkins. "Join the Army?"

"Ass!" snorted Grundy. "I'm in the Army already, ain't I?"

"The Army's a marvellous place for contractions, then," said Gunn. "You talk as if you were in the giddy trenches!"

"I would be, for two pins!" replied Grundy. "But I'm doing a more useful work at home. There's raw material to be trained, you know."

"If you're referring to me as raw material," began Gunn, clenching his fists, "I'll jolly well smash you!"

"Don't get excited," said Grundy calmly. "You and Wilky ain't so bad. It's chaps like Mellish who have got to be licked into shape. You chaps are improving every day under my tuition."

"Thanks!" said Wilkins drily.

"What I meant by saying I'd do it now," Grundy went on, "was that I'd write to the Head."

"You'll what-er?"

"Getting deaf in your old age? I'll write to Dr. Holmes."

Wilkins drew a deep breath.

"I say!" he exclaimed awkwardly. "That's a bit thick, isn't it?"

"Not at all. I'm not going to allow Kildare, and all those stay-at-home johnnies to usurp my rights. No fear! I'll ask the Head if I can have a free run with my Volunteer Corps. We want the use of the cricket-ground, for one thing, and I mean to get it! I'll put it to him as one man to another."

"In your spelling?" asked Gunn, aghast.

"Eh? What's wrong with my spelling?"

"Oh, n-nothing!" said Gunn hastily. "It's quite novel. Stands out by itself, you know."

Grundy glanced suspiciously at his chum, but Gunn's face was impassive. Then he took a sheet of paper from the table drawer and commenced to write.

For some moments nothing could be heard but the industrious scratching of Grundy's pen, and the various grunts which he emitted from time to time. Grundy was not a man of letters. The compiling of a sentence was hard work to him, though he would never have admitted as much. Time was when the junior from Redclyffe had established an amateur magazine in the Shell, to rival "Tom Merry's Weekly." But, like most other things undertaken by the great Grundy, it had ended in smoke.

At last the document was finished. Grundy blotted it, and read it over with a satisfied sigh. Then he handed it to his chums.

Wilkins and Gunn read the effusion together, and made herculean efforts to keep serious. It was difficult, and a less obtuse person than George Alfred Grundy might have noticed the signs of hidden merriment which struggled for an outlet.

The letter was worded thus:

"Dear Dokter Holmes,—As you are no dowt aware, I have taken it upon myself to form a Vollunteer Core in the scool. So far my efforts have met with grate sucksess, but in sertain kwarters they have not been dewly apreciated, notably, so far as the Sixth Form is conserned.

My mane object in forming the core was to make the fellows fitt, in case the Jermans come over. By konstant driling and skermishing we shall be able to give a good akount of ourselves in an emergensy.

May I appeel to you, as a trew patriott, to allow us the free use of the crikit-ground for our manoovers? By so doing you will grately oblyge

Yore devoated pupel,

GEORGE ALFRED GRUNDY."

There was a blank silence in the study for some time. Then Wilkins spoke.

"You're going to send this to the Head?" he exclaimed.

"Certainly!" said Grundy. "What do you take me for? A born fool? Do you suppose I've written this out for a joke?"

"Not exactly. But the Head—oh, my hat! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" echoed Gunn.

"Dry up, you cackling lunatics!" roared Grundy. "This ain't a mad-house! Why shouldn't I send a letter to the Head, I should like to know?"

"But that—that ain't a letter!" shrieked Wilkins. "It's the freakiest thing a chap could ever write! The Head will have several sorts of a fit!"

"Look here——"

"Bow-wow!"

"Don't pick holes in a thing unless you can do better!"

"If I couldn't do better than that," said Wilkins solemnly, "I'd eat my hat! With Gussy's topper thrown in!"

"You chaps are dense!" declared Grundy. "You're no judges of literary work, I can see."

He moved to the door and opened it, taking a survey of the Shell corridor. Toby the page was approaching leisurely with a letter. Grundy called to him.

"Going along to the Head's study?" he asked.

"Yes, Master Grundy, after I've taken this letter to Mr. Linton."

"Then give Dr. Holmes this note," said Grundy, placing an envelope in Toby's hand. "I've marked it 'Reply Urgent.' He'll send you along with the answer, I expect."

"Yes, Master Grundy."

And Toby shuffled, greatly wondering.

"The fat's in the fire now, with a vengeance!" said Wilkins. "I expect the Head'll get his rag out."

"Bosh! Why should he?"

"I don't know, unless it's at your spelling, and the idea of a junior writing to him when he might just as easily go in and jaw to him."

"I consider a letter carries more weight," said Grundy. "Just you see if I'm not right. I shall get a reply soon."

The juniors waited in tense anticipation. All were expecting the Head to send a message. Grundy considered that a polite note would arrive, but his study-mates were under the impression that Dr. Holmes would require Grundy in person, to be flogged for his cheek.

Ten minutes had elapsed ere Toby reappeared. He carried a note in his hand, and Grundy bounded forward joyfully.

"Told you so!" he exclaimed. "The Head's nothing if not polite."

He slit open the envelope, and read the eagerly-awaited letter, Wilkins and Gunn glancing over his shoulder.

The note ran thus:

"Dear Grundy,—I acknowledge your request, and, in so doing, must express surprise that any pupil of mine should resort to such slipshod and faulty spelling. At first I was under the impression that you were presuming to play some joke upon me, but on consulting Mr. Linton, your Form-master, I find that bad spelling is habitual with you. You must see that this branch of your education is speedily improved.

With regard to the appeal you put before me for the use of the school cricket-ground, I have pleasure in granting you your wish. Your enterprise in forming a Volunteer Corps does you credit. I am pleased to see such a demonstration of patriotism on the part of one of my boys, and doubtless the enclosed donation will assist you in your good work.—Believe me, Yours sincerely,

THE HEADMASTER."

"What a brick!" exclaimed Grundy, with enthusiasm.

"What a stunning, gilt-edged brick!" echoed Wilkins. "Where's the remittance?"

"In the envelope," said Grundy, producing a sheaf of postal-orders. "Here you are! Two for ten bob, and one for a bob. That's a guinea. My hat! This is great!"

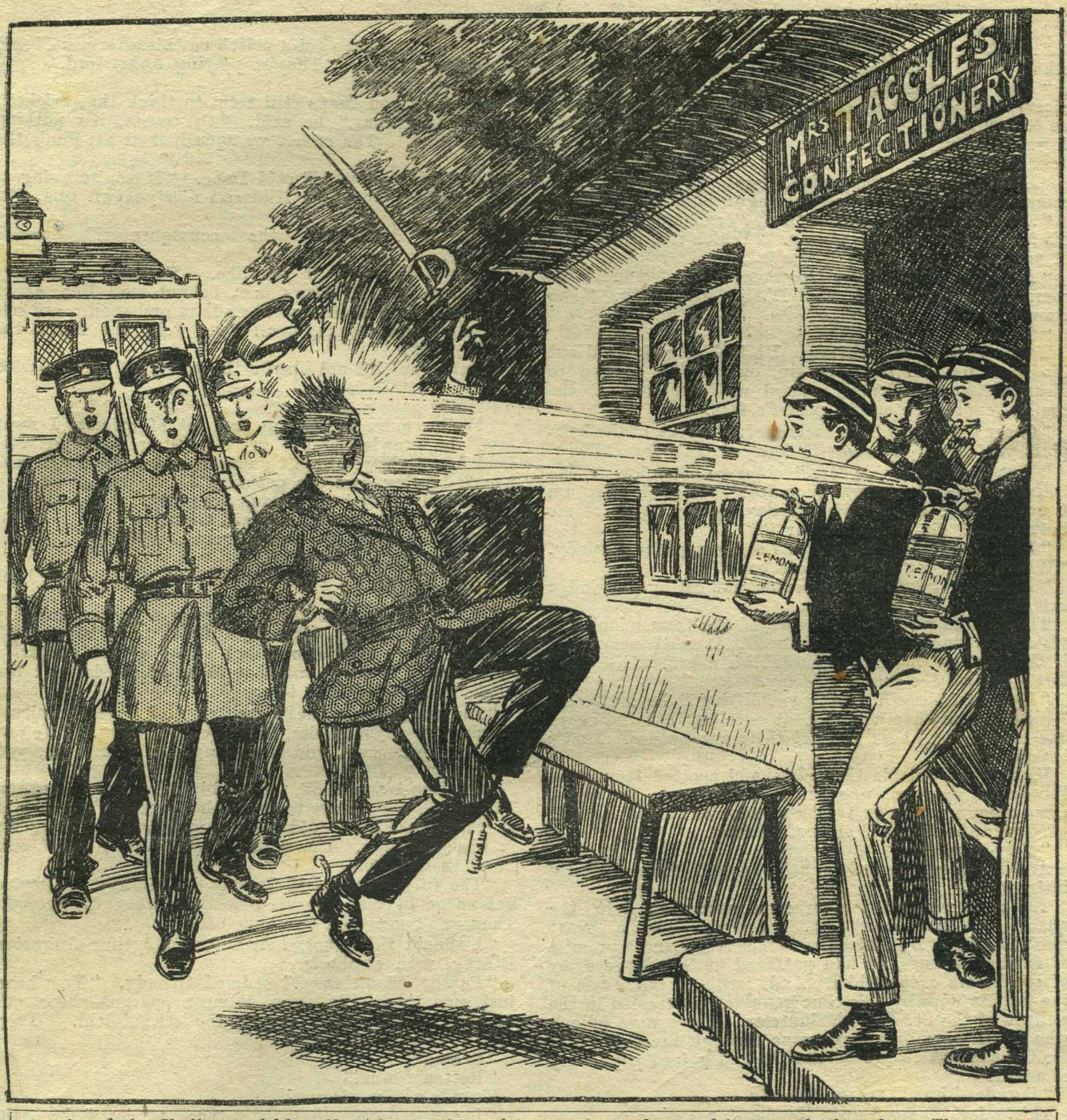
"The Head doesn't seem to appreciate your new style of spelling," grinned Gunn.

"Oh, blow the spelling! What's it matter about the mouldy spelling? It's the guinea that counts, and the fact that we've got the free run of the cricket-ground. Those Sixth-Form slackers must take a back seat after this."

"What beats me," said Wilkins slowly, "is the Head taking the trouble to reply to your letter. I thought that if he replied at all, it would be with a pretty stout cane!"

"There's nothing like a bit of cheek," said Grundy. "Never be backward in coming forward. That's my motto."

And Grundy's study-mates, as they made ready for prep, could not help thinking that there was a good deal in what their leader said. At all events, he had won the day this time, and held all the trump cards!



Crooke of the Shell armed himself with a syphon of lemonade, and turned it upon the invaders. There was a startling sizzing sound, and a loud roar from Grundy, who was leading his men. The brand-new uniform, his pride and joy, was completely drenched. "Yarooooh!" *(See Chapter 4.)*

CHAPTER 7.
The Trench-diggers.

GRUNDY'S Volunteers continued to flourish. They drilled daily before the amused eyes of the rest of the fellows, who declared that such star men as George Robey and Little Tich could not give them half so much entertainment.

George Alfred Grundy as drillmaster was not an imposing figure. He had consulted a book on infantry training, and thrown it aside with disgust. Thereafter he drilled the fellows on a system of his own, which Monty Lowther humorously referred to as the "nu driling."

In class, and when they were not training, the Volunteers sported a badge over their buttonholes, bearing the letters "S.J.V.," which most of the fellows construed to mean "Silly Jays' Venture." Several more juniors had joined the corps, despite the fact that public opinion was against them, and the funds were in a most healthy state.

"It's about time we did some practical field-work," said Grundy, consulting Lieutenant D'Arcy after dinner on the following Wednesday. "I've blued a good bit of our spare cash on spades."

"Spades, deah boy!"

"Yes. They're coming down from London to-day."

"But—but what——"

"We're going to dig trenches," explained Grundy.

"Bai Jove!"

"That's one of the essentials of warfare, trench-digging," said Grundy, with an air of authority. "Most of the Volunteer organisations have done a good whack of it, and we're not going to be behind, you bet!"

"But where do you intend that we should dig twenches, deah boy?"

Grundy hesitated.

"To tell you the truth, I hadn't given it a thought," he said. "But any old place will do. The first thing is to get the spades. They ought to be here by now. Let's stroll down to Taggy's lodge and see if they've turned up."

And the two comrades-in-arms sallied forth together.

"Anything come for me, Taggy?" asked Grundy of the school porter, who was wielding a broom in the gateway.

"Yes," grunted Taggles surlily, "a blessed pantechnicon's bin, and left no end of boxes. There's about fifty on 'em, I think. Drat the things! I 'urt me 'and when I was a-lifting on 'em down. It was the band-iron wot done it."

"Hard cheese, Taggay, deah boy! Pewwaps a little compensation would be—ahem!—agweeable?"

"That it would, Master D'Arcy!" exclaimed Taggles, his face brightening up visibly. "Which it's werry kind of you, sir!"

"Then you shall have a tip when my next wemittance comes, in a few weeks," said D'Arcy graciously. "I'm stonay at pwesent."

"Oh, lor'!"

Taggles's face was a study. He had actually held out his hand for the expected tip, only to be doomed to disappointment. Grundy roared with laughter at the comical expression on the porter's face.

"Cheer up, Taggy!" he exclaimed. "Think of the half-pints you've got to come—if Gussy doesn't forget!"

"Wot I says is this 'ere," observed Taggles. "The liftin' of them boxes was a puffect noosance! 'Ere am I workin' like a nigger every day by the sweat of me brow, and I git no thanks for it."

"Better ask the Head for a rise," suggested Grundy. "Where have you shoved those boxes?"

"Hinside!" grunted the porter, indicating the lodge entrance.

The juniors went in and surveyed the tremendous pile which was stacked against the wall. It really seemed as if Grundy had intended to establish a barricade at St. Jim's against the common enemy.

"By gum, these'll want some lifting!" he muttered. "We'd better have a parade at once, so that the chaps can march down here and get their own spades. That's the best way."

He stepped outside the lodge, and spotted Herries in the quad. Herries, who acted as bugler to the corps, came running down in response to his commander's call.

"Sound the fall in!" ordered Grundy.

"Very good, sir!"

And the most unearthly noise issued from Herries' instrument.

The next moment juniors came swarming into the quad, and fell into line. Grundy was a great disciplinarian. By dint of numerous feeds, and a promise of further favours, he had gathered quite a large army of supporters around him. And, truth to tell, some of the juniors were by this time genuinely interested in the welfare of the St. Jim's Volunteers. There were fellows who would cheerfully have gone through fire and water for Grundy, which proved that he had gained popularity of a sort.

"Parade, 'shun!" roared Grundy.

Thirty feet clamped upon the flagstones as one.

"I have now been able to secure a number of spades for trench-work," said Grundy. "It is necessary that every member should learn how to dig a trench in the shortest possible space of time. We will commence operations this afternoon. Fall out the officers!"

For once in a way, nearly all the officers were present. Bernard Glyn and Dane and Reilly and Kerruish came out at the double. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy followed with his dignified stride.

"Where do you propose that we should dig?" asked Grundy.

"Goodness alone knows!" said Clifton Dane. "It's a bit thick, really, hewing out whacking great trenches. We shall have chaps falling in and breaking their necks!"

"Nonsense, Lieutenant Dane! Look here, I propose that we dig 'em out on the cricket-ground."

"The which?" gasped Bernard Glyn.

"The cricket-ground, I say. The Head's given us full permission to do as we like. And, after all, that's one of the only places where it can be managed successfully."

"My hat!"

"We'll set to work on the senior pitch——"

"What!"

"The seniors have got a match on this afternoon!" said Kerruish, aghast. "They're playing Abbotsford."

Grundy frowned.

"Some of you chaps still seem to think that cricket's vitally important," he said. "Of course, it's nothing of the kind. The sooner we squash it at St. Jim's the better!"

"Well, I'm blowed!" said Dane. "If you're going to start hacking about on Kildare's nicely-mown turf, I'm off!"

"You're funky of the consequences?" sneered Grundy.

"Put it that way if you like. I'm not desperately anxious to get Kildare's boot behind me. But, apart from that, it's unheard-of to wade in and spoil a cricket-pitch! Trench-digging's all very well, but that's the giddy limit!"

"Faith, an' it's not playin' the game, entirely!" added Reilly.

Grundy gave a snort.

"Well, you're a precious fine set of officers, I must say!" he growled. "I'm getting fed-up with you all! Look here! If you aren't game to take a hand with the trench-digging, you can get out!"

"Then I resign," said Dane promptly.

"Same here!" echoed Bernard Glyn.

"Sure, an' I say the same," remarked Reilly.

"And I," added Kerruish.

"That settles it, then," said Grundy. "What about you, D'Arcy?"

"I'm stayin', deah boy! I agwee with you entiahly about the cwicket. What does a paltwy cwicket-match mattah, when the honour and glowy of the Empiah's at stake? I'm surpwised that these fellahs haven't the pluck to see this thing thwough!"

"I'm not going to make a silly ass of myself to please Grundy, or anybody else," said Bernard Glyn. "He can go his own way, and be hanged! Come on, you fellows!"

And Glyn tramped off, followed by his three colleagues. They could not see eye to eye with Grundy in the matter of where trenches should be dug, and the only thing for it was to resign. Thereafter the St. Jim's Volunteers knew them no more.

"The silly asses!" said Grundy disdainfully. "They've got no go in 'em! There's one thing about it, though. They won't get their five bobs back."

"I should think not, indeed!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, with emphasis.

"Parade, stand easy!" ordered Grundy. "You have just seen those silly asses—I mean, officers—sheer off. They funk trench-digging on the cricket-field. They fear the wrath of Kildare."

"Shame!"

"Rotten funks!"

Grundy's eyes gleamed.

"I can see you chaps are true soldiers," he said approvingly. "You're willing to go through with this thing, and ready to face the consequences. We've got the Head on our side, and we're acting from a sense of the highest patriotism. And as for the four funks who have resigned, I'm going to arrange for four privates to fill their places. It'll be promotion from the ranks."

"Hurrah!"

"And now, every man will fall out and arm himself with a spade from Taggy's lodge."

The company saluted, and rushed off for the implements in question. The boxes took a good deal of opening, but in a few minutes the work was accomplished, and every Volunteer shouldered a brand-new spade.

Grundy marched his men off to the cricket-field before a wondering crowd.

"Going to dig for hidden treasure?" asked Blake, who was among the onlookers.

"No, deah boy! We're goin' to make twenches," explained D'Arcy. "I do wish you'd fall in and join us, instead of moochin' about all the aftahnoon."

"You can wish till you're blue in the face, then. Where are you going to dig?"

"On the cwicket-field."

"The which?"

"The cwicket-field, deah boy."

"What?" roared Blake. "You're going to hack up our pitches? You frabjous chumps! And there's the Abbotsford match this afternoon, too! Kildare'll slaughter you!"

"I am not afwaid of Kildare," returned Arthur Augustus icily. "He can do his worst. The Head's given us permish to use the cwicket-gwound, and we mean to take advantage of his kind offah."

"My hat!" muttered Blake, as his study-mate doubled up to join the others. "Grundy's mad! Digging trenches on the senior pitch. They're all dotty! By my halidom, but there'll be a row about this later on!"

CHAPTER 8.
A Shock for the Sixth!

"FEELING fit?"

Eric Kildare put his head in the doorway of Darrel's study, and jerked out the question.

"Fit as a fiddle!" replied Darrel. "I fancy we shall make shavings of Abbotsford this afternoon. What sort of a crew are they?"

"Territorials, mostly," said Kildare. "They're coming over by train. I was thinking we ought to go down to Rylcombe to meet 'em. It's only civil."

"Right you are!"

"I'll buck the others up. They're changing, I believe," said the captain. "Be at the gates in ten minutes."

Darrel nodded, and Kildare went to round up the rest of the team.

The Sixth-Formers were in blissful ignorance of the fact that Grundy & Co. had designs on their playing-pitch; otherwise, they might not have been in such a hurry to quit the school premises.

A few minutes later the first eleven went out at the gates, and passed along the hard, white road to Rylcombe.

The train was in when they reached the station, and a fine lot of fellows descended to the platform with their cricket-bags. It was not the Abbotsford of old. Several of last season's eleven were in the trenches, taking a hand at the greater game. Those who remained were in khaki, mostly, awaiting the call for foreign service; and the team was completed by special constables and those who, for reasons best known to themselves, were unable to join the colours.

Lieutenant Gray, their captain, shook hands cordially with Kildare.

"In the words of the song, 'It's a long time since we met!'" he said, with a laugh. "But we've got a decent team together at last, and it will be our own fault if we can't make rings round you. Very good of you to turn out in force to meet us."

"Don't mention it," said Kildare politely. "Let one of our chaps relieve you of that bag. This way!"

Kildare led the way out of the little station, and the rival teams trooped up to the school.

There were several juniors loitering in the quad, and they glanced at Kildare and his followers with scared faces.

"Anything the matter?" asked Kildare, clapping his big hand on to Tom Merry's shoulder. "You look as if a Zep had been over!"

Tom Merry coloured.

"Sorry, Kildare," he stammered. "I—I was feeling rather worried, that's all."

"Nonsense, kid! Pull yourself together! Coming along to see us wipe up Abbotsford?"

"I'm afraid you won't lick 'em, Kildare."

"What!" roared the captain of St. Jim's. "You're a loyal supporter of the old school, I must say! Why won't we win?"

"You see, you haven't a pitch to play on."

"Great Scott!"

"He's talking through his hat!" said Monteith incredulously. "The ground was quite in order when we looked over it this morning."

"What's wrong with it—hey?" asked Kildare sharply.

"Better go and see for yourself," replied Tom.

"I will. And remember, Merry, that if this is some silly joke of yours, you'll hear from me!"

And Kildare joined the rest of the cricketers, and led the way to the ground.

When the players arrived at the spot they stood still, with expressions of frozen horror on their faces. Some of them rubbed their eyes, wondering if they saw aright. For long lines of deep trenches had been hewn out right across the playing-pitch!

"Who—what——" muttered Kildare fiercely. "What demon has done this?"

The fellows from Abbotsford relaxed into a chuckle.

"Looks as if you've got Tommies billeted here—what?" Lieutenant Gray exclaimed.

"Tommies be blowed! Some idiot—some imbecile——"

Kildare was quite at a loss for words. He gazed upon the awful scene of devastation like a fellow in a dream.

Only an hour or two ago the verdant green of a nicely-mown pitch had greeted his eye, causing his heart to rejoice, for Kildare was a true cricketer. Now, however, it seemed as if the Crown Prince had been in the neighbourhood.

"This takes the cake!" murmured Darrel faintly. "Who ever can have done it? Trenches, by Jove!"

A curious glitter came into Monteith's eyes.

"I believe," he said forcibly, "that this is the work of Grundy and his precious Volunteers!"

"My hat! If it is, we'll scalp 'em!" said Kildare savagely. "They've wrecked the match! It's unheard of!"

The seniors began to look about for Grundy and his warriors, but the Volunteers seemed to have made themselves scarce.

Kildare drew Darrel aside.

"I say, old man," he muttered, "what's to be done? We can't send these chaps back to Abbotsford without a match. It would be doocid bad form."

"There's only one alternative," said Darrel, his face lighting up a little. "We must play on Little Side. It's inconceivable that the young rascals have treated that pitch in the same way."

And they went off towards Little Side. From a distance it seemed quite as usual, but as the seniors came nearer their hearts sank. Trenches had been dug out there also.

"Good heavens," panted Kildare, "this is the limit! I feel as if I could brain the young lunatics who are responsible for this outrage! Why—— Great Scott, here they are!"

Ensconced in a trench which was nearly six feet deep were Grundy and his ardent followers. Spades were being plied merrily, and a clod of earth, shooting up from the depths, caught Darrel full in the face. He staggered back, choking and spluttering.

"Come out of there!" roared Kildare, his handsome face white with passion. "Do you hear me? Come out at once!"

"Not this afternoon!" said Grundy politely. "Some other afternoon!"

"You—you——"

"Don't get your rag out, Kildare! We're not doing any harm."

"Like to have a go, deah boy?" asked D'Arcy, who stood in the trench, with shirt-sleeves rolled up, and perspired profusely.

"I'd like to have a go at you, you crass idiot!" yelled the enraged skipper. "This is unparalleled! Do you know you've mucked up an important match? It's enough to bring about your expulsion from the school! Come out of that trench, all of you!"

"Certainly—when it's finished!" said Grundy calmly.

"Do you dare to defy me?" roared Kildare. "Do you realise whom you are addressing?"

"You've no right to interfere with us!" retorted Grundy. "We're doing a good and patriotic work, and the Head's backing us up."

"I'll soon see about that!" said Kildare grimly. "Call some of the other fellows, Darrel!"

Darrel, who for a couple of minutes had been vainly endeavouring to dislodge a lump of dirt from his eye, obeyed. Monteith and Baker and Rushden came running up.

"Here are the perpetrators of this astounding affair!"

said Kildare. "They're adding insult to injury by refusing to come out of it when I order them! You might give me a hand!"

"With pleasure!" said Monteith, snapping his teeth together. "The young rascals deserve to be lynched!"

Grundy was prepared to resist as the seniors jumped down into the trench. He raised his spade, with a dogged expression on his face.

"Better go steady," muttered Digby. "Can't commit assault and battery on prefects, you know."

Grundy saw the wisdom of this remark, and put down his spade.

"Now," said Kildare, placing an iron grip on the commanding officer's collar, "out you come!"

Violently protesting, Grundy was hauled up out of the trench, Kildare lifting him up to the outstretched hands of other seniors who had arrived on the scene. The rest of the Volunteers had no recourse but to surrender, and soon they stood in a sheepish row on the brink of the trench.

"I'll make you kids sorry for this day's work!" said Kildare, in tones of concentrated rage. "Take them along to my study, chaps, and I'll break the news to Lieutenant Gray that we haven't a ground to play on."

In the custody of a dozen mighty men of the Sixth Grundy & Co. were marched off to the captain's study. Meanwhile, Kildare, with a clouded brow, went back to Lieutenant Gray and the rest of the Abbotsford eleven.

"I'm awfully sorry to have brought you chaps here on a fool's errand," he said. "Some silly asses here have been and mucked up the entire cricket-ground. So there's nothing for it but to declare the fixture off. It'll take days to get the ground properly set again."

Lieutenant Gray gave a light laugh.

"Well, I've played in some hundreds of games in my time," he said, "but I've never yet been to a place and found whacking great ditches dug all over the ground. What was it—a jape?"

"A freak called Grundy has organised a party to play at tin soldiers," explained Kildare. "He's not responsible for his actions. I'm going to teach the young monkey a lesson presently. It's put you all to no end of inconvenience, I'm afraid. If you like, you and your chaps can stay to tea. I'll pilot you round the building, too, if you wish."

"Very good of you!" said the Abbotsford skipper, who felt genuinely concerned at the look of distress on Kildare's rugged face. "I know it's no fault of yours, old son. I think we'll be off now, though. There's a train in twenty minutes, and not another till this evening. We must postpone licking you till next season—if we haven't helped to swell the casualty list by that time," he added seriously.

"You're a brick!" said Kildare. "Most chaps would have been frightfully annoyed over this. I know I should feel pretty exasperated if I were in your shoes."

"Oh, that's all right! No good crying over spilt milk. You'd better teach those young rips that a cricket-pitch ain't an ideal place for trench-digging."

"I will!" said Kildare grimly. "Good-bye!"

He saw the visiting team off the premises, and then proceeded to his study, where Darrel and several more prefects were keeping guard over Grundy and his discomfited warriors.

"It would serve you chaps right," he said, closing the door, "if I were to haul you up before your Housemaster for a flogging. As it is, however, I feel justified in taking the law into my own hands. You will each receive a severe caning from me!"

He took an ashplant from the cupboard.

"You first, Grundy!"

"I protest!" said Grundy, in a shrill voice. "We were only doing our duty, and you've no right to lam into us. I'll appeal to the Head!"

"Anything you care to do afterwards you may," was the reply; "but you're not going to evade this well-merited punishment. Hold out your hand!"

"Weally, Kildare——"

"Silence, D'Arcy! I'm not in the mood for argument. Now, Grundy!"

The commanding officer gave a wild look round. Baker, with an impassive countenance, was standing with his back to the door. There was no way of escape.

"Be quick!" snapped Kildare tersely.

Grundy gingerly held out his hand.

Swish!

"Wow!"

Swish, swish, swish!

"Now the other!"

The captain of St. Jim's repeated the dose. It was one of the severest thrashings Grundy had experienced since his entry to St. Jim's.

"You next, D'Arcy!"

"I uttahly wefuse! I wegard you as a bwute beast! I considah——"

Kildare seized the swell of St. Jim's by the collar, and brought the ashplant down sharply across Gussy's elegant military trousers. The victim let out a wild yell, and leaped a couple of feet off the study carpet.

Whack, whack, whack!

Again and again the ashplant descended, and by the time Kildare had finished, D'Arcy resembled a limp rag. The rest of the Volunteers came forward in turn and took their gruel. Kildare was in a towering rage, and he did not desist until his arm ached.

"You can congratulate yourselves," he panted, "that you've got off jolly lucky. Had I reported you to your Housemaster, the matter would have gone further."

"It'll go further yet," moaned Grundy. "We're not going to take this lying down. The Head gave us permission to use the cricket-ground."

"He didn't mean that you were to wantonly destroy the playing-pitches. And had he known that I had already refused you the use of the ground, he would never have given his consent. It was a caddish thing to do, to appeal to someone over my head after I had already given an order. I won't tolerate that sort of thing here. If you are still determined to fight the matter out before Dr. Holmes, Grundy, I'll take you along to his study now."

Grundy hesitated. He knew he would lose the day by such a proceeding. The Head would certainly wax wroth if he knew that the Volunteers had taken unfair advantage to secure the use of the cricket-ground.

"All right," he growled. "I suppose I must climb down. I don't want to cause another shindy."

"And you'll make it your business," said Kildare, "to fill up those trenches as speedily as possible. If you must do that sort of thing, go out on to Wayland Common. It might be sanctioned there. And now you can get out!"

The St. Jim's Volunteers, writhing and squirming, "got out." And it was likely to be a long, long time before they wrought havoc again on such a sacred spot as the school cricket-ground!

CHAPTER 9.

The Match at Greyfriars.

FOR the next few days little was seen or heard of Grundy and his Volunteers. They had come an early cropper in their enterprise, and were apparently hiding their diminished heads. It was observed, however, that the earth had been replaced into the trenches on both Big and Little Side, which proved that Kildare was master of the situation.

Another thing, too, greatly detracted the minds of the juniors from the Grundy Volunteers. The return match with Greyfriars—one of the last fixtures of the season—was being looked forward to with tremendous eagerness by the Saints. The previous match had witnessed their downfall, and they were desperately keen on turning the tables.

The German handed over the paper, with a twinkle in his pale blue eyes. "Here's some rotten Hun running down British boys!" "Great Scott!" gasped Grundy. (*See Chapter* 13.)

It was to be a whole day's match, in order to minimise the chances of a draw, and when, on a bright Saturday morning in September, Tom Merry posted up the list of players, the excitement reached boiling-point.

The eleven selected to do duty were as follows:

Tom Merry (captain), Talbot, Blake, Redfern, Figgins, Noble, Wynn, Kerr, Manners, Lowther, and Lumley-Lumley.

It was an excellent team, and hope rose high in Tom Merry's breast. He felt confident that such a combination was capable of defeating all comers.

Shortly after breakfast the Greyfriars contingent arrived. In spite of the long train journey, they looked very fresh and fit, and there was a business-like expression on the face of Harry Wharton, their captain, as he shook hands with the skipper of St. Jim's.

"Thirsting for revenge—what?" he asked genially.

Tom Merry nodded, and laughed.

"We mean to have your blood this time," he said. "Our chaps are in great form. What price yours?"

"Oh, they're going the pace. They whacked Courtfield County Council School by an innings and unlimited runs the other day."

"Good! Let's sally round to the cricket-field, and get in a bit of practice. And don't think me rude when I say that you'll need it."

Wharton laughed, and led his men off to the nets.

A few minutes later he and Tom Merry tossed for choice of innings. The Greyfriars captain won, and elected to bat first.

"Why on earth are those fellows posted round the ground?" he asked, indicating a number of juniors who stood half a dozen yards from each other.

Tom Merry frowned.

"A chap named Grundy," he said, "seems to have a fixed idea that we ought not to play games in war-time. He wants us to mooch about with long faces. Of course, it's all tommy-rot. He's formed a Volunteer Corps, made up of the biggest freaks in the school, and only the other day they went and dug trenches all over the cricket-ground."

"My hat!"

"So we're taking precautions, in case he does it again," said Tom. "The match is due to start now, though, and there's no sign of the silly Prussians; so I think I can safely call those chaps off."

He shouted to the fellows who were keeping guard, and they came up to the pavilion.

"Grundy's shot his bolt!" declared Thompson of the New House. "He won't shove himself in again where he's not wanted. Kildare laid it on too hard the other day."

"Good job, too!" said Tom Merry. "If he'd mucked up this match we'd have massacred him!"

Harry Wharton and an Australian youth named Field went in to open the innings, and Tom Merry took his place in the field. Figgins and Fatty Wynn went on to bowl.

The first few overs were uneventful. The visitors were evidently prepared to take no risks, and they batted slowly and stubbornly. Twenty runs were on the board before they were separated, Field being caught at the wicket.

Bob Cherry went in next, and a lot more life was infused into the play. Bob was a true type of the aggressive batsman, and he had scant regard for the wiles of Fatty Wynn. Thirty, forty, fifty were registered on the board before he fell, a prey to short slip.

The St. Jim's juniors looked glum. Fifty for two, and Wharton still going strong! Frank Nugent took Bob Cherry's place, and hit out vigorously. He was a nice player, was Nugent—a youthful Trumper so far as style went—and he stayed in with Wharton until the 100 went up. Then his partner was run out, having scored a meritorious 55.

If the St. Jim's juniors anticipated a complete collapse before the innings ended they were doomed to disappointment. Nugent stayed long enough to reach his 50, and Vernon-Smith and Mark Linley scored just over 20 runs apiece. The last wicket fell with the total at 170.

"This is where we get it in the neck," grumbled Manners. "It looks as if we're booked for defeat by an innings."

"Rats!" said Tom Merry cheerfully. "We've got rid of 'em at last, that's one blessing. I'll take old Talbot in first with me, and we'll see if we can't make the fur fly."

"Old Talbot" was in great form. He settled down to the Greyfriars bowling at once, and gave the impression that he could defend his wicket until Doomsday.

Tom Merry was more careful. He was prepared to leave the run-getting to his more vigorous chum, and when at last Talbot was clean bowled by Hurree Singh at 60 he had scored 42 against 15 of Tom Merry, 3 being byes.

Redfern followed on, and met Hurree Singh's deadliest balls with a defence like a barn door. At last Vernon-Smith displaced the Indian junior with the ball—an arrangement which met with immediate success, Tom Merry being caught off the Bounder's first delivery.

The spectators were in high spirits. There was certainly no element of one-sidedness about this tussle. It was to be a fight to a finish, and the predominant hope was, of course, that St. Jim's won.

Redfern and Jack Blake were the principals in another great stand. They stood up gallantly to everything that came their way, Redfern in particular being in fine form. When Jack Blake was cleverly caught by Peter Todd at point, the score stood at 110 for three wickets.

Then a "rot" set in. Monty Lowther retired with an inglorious duck's-egg, and Kerr and Wynn saw their stumps spreadeagled shortly afterwards.

Jerrold Lumley-Lumley was last man in. Tom Merry had been doubtful up to the last as to who should fill the eleventh place, and he had decided on Lumley with some misgiving. The American junior was a good player on his day, but his form was erratic and unreliable.

"Play up, old man!" called Tom Merry anxiously from the pavilion.

Lumley-Lumly smiled as he walked out to the wicket, pulling on his batting-gloves. He was determined to do his level best.

Redfern was still batting, much to the delight of the New House contingent. The bowling had no terrors for him, and he had been smiting like a Goliath. When Lumley-Lumley came in the two put up a spirited last-wicket stand, and the side was ultimately dismissed for 167, only 3 runs behind the Greyfriars total.

"Played, Lumley!" panted Redfern, who had contributed 70, not out. "We're putting up a pretty good show, one way and another."

"Rather!" said Lumley heartily.

The luncheon interval followed, and Tom Merry was careful to post sentries round the cricket-field, for there was no telling what Grundy and his gang of barbarians might do, if they were given half a chance.

During lunch Tom made inquiries, and learned from Taggles that the Volunteers had gone to Wayland Common for manœuvres.

"They won't worry us to-day," he assured himself. "Everything in the garden will be lovely."

On the resumption of the game the St. Jim's bowlers exerted themselves to the utmost. Fatty Wynn flashed down his deliveries with deadly speed, and Tom Merry himself took a hand, capturing two wickets in as many minutes.

The spectators who bordered the pitch yelled their encouragement. It was good to see the Greyfriars wickets go down like ninepins.

And go down they did. Fatty Wynn had touched the top of his form, and there were none to say him nay. The fielding, too, was excellent, and had it not been for a splendid stand made by Linley and Penfold, the Greyfriars score would have been a very poor one. As it was, it reached 96 before the last man scooped up an easy catch.

A hundred to win! The St. Jim's fellows were jubilant as they came into the pavilion Although the match was going to be no walk-over, they felt pretty confident that they could pull it off. There was Talbot, and Tom Merry, and Blake—all very valiant trenchermen. Oh, yes, they would do it, or die in the attempt!

And it was a very happy, good-natured crowd that watched Tom Merry and Talbot go out to open the second innings for St. Jim's.

CHAPTER 10.

Grundy Takes a Hand.

"WELL hit, sir!"

"Good old Talbot!"

"Pile 'em on!"

The shouts which echoed and re-echoed round the ground showed St. Jim's to be in the ascendant.

Talbot was thoroughly set, and seemed quite at home to the Greyfriars bowling. Tom Merry, at the other end, backed him up loyally. He realised that a good start was half the battle, and played with a straight bat to anything and everything that came his way.

Greyfriars was a very keen side in the field, otherwise the runs would have mounted up at an almost uncanny rate. The good work done in the slips met with its own reward at last, Penfold whipping up for the ball and hurling it in with unerring aim as the batsmen were running.

Talbot pelted down the pitch, but the ball beat him by yards.

"How's that?"

"Out!"

Talbot retired to the pavilion, colouring as he met the gaze of frank admiration which Marie Rivers accorded him, and heard the deafening storm of cheering. He had scored 32.

Harry Wharton had not given up hope. He knew that a game was never lost till it was won, and the downfall of Talbot's wicket was a tremendous incentive to the whole of the Greyfriars eleven. They were keenness itself.

"Come on, my dusky warrior!" said Bob Cherry boisterously, as Hurree Singh prepared to take his run against Redfern. "Let 'em have it, old son!"

Redfern "had it." There was an ominous smashing sound behind him, and he wheeeld round just in time to see his stumps scattered.

The air rang with cheering. The St. Jim's fellows were sportsmen all, and were ever ready to applaud good play by the opposition. This was going to be a game fight after all.

Jack Blake took Redfern's place. He patted the turf most diligently for quite a minute, and then took careful guard. But his precautions were all in vain. The flight of Hurree Singh's next ball deceived him completely, and the next moment Blake's off-stump lay prone at an angle of forty-five degrees.

"Inky, you cherub!" said Bob Cherry delightedly. "Come to my bosom and shed briny tears down the back of me neck! That was great. Do it again, and half my kingdom is thine!"

The Nabob of Bhanipur grinned. Monty Lowther was the next batsman, and Lowther's cricket was worse than

his punning. Against moderate bowlers he was a very fair bat, but Hurree Singh was not a moderate bowler. In his own quaint language, he was "terrific."

Lowther took guard with a grim expression on his usually sunny face. He meant to try and stop the rot, but he was destined never to succeed. The ball, apparently well to the off, broke in and completely shattered the middle stump.

"Hurrah!"

The fieldsmen closed in on Hurree Singh as one man. They embraced him, and hugged him, and thumped him on the back, until he was obliged to let out a wild yell for mercy.

It was time for the field to cross over, and Tom Merry had the bowling again, with Manners at the other end. Tom scored three 4's and a 2, bringing the St. Jim's score up to 70.

Manners was inclined to take things quietly. He played on the defensive, and generally arranged that his chum should get the bowling. The result was that the field was kept pretty busy.

With 90 on the board Manners was caught at cover-point, and then followed another extraordinary collapse. Fatty Wynn and Kerr shared with Lowther the doubtful distinction of having scored two duck's-eggs in the same match, and Figgins and Noble only scored 3 runs between them.

The excitement was intense as Lumley-Lumley, last man in, stepped out to the wickets. Seven runs would ensure the St. Jim's team of victory. Seven more runs, and that inglorious defeat earlier in the season would be amply avenged!

Lumley had to face Hurree Singh. He was just the player for such an emergency. Cool as a cucumber, he stood up gamely to the last two balls of the over, and stopped them successfully each time.

The air was tense with an excitement which could almost be felt as Tom Merry braced himself for the final stage of that stern struggle. Harry Wharton had the ball, and there was a do-or-die expression on his face as he took his run.

The first ball deceived the batsman completely, and a shiver of dismay ran round the spectators. But the unexpected happened. Instead of hitting the wicket, the leather missed it by a hairsbreadth, and the crowd breathed freely once more.

Tom Merry pulled the next ball to leg for 2.

Five more runs!

Tom Merry got the full force of the bat to Wharton's next delivery, and the ball bounded swiftly along the turf to the railings. En route, however, it cannoned against somebody's leg, and that somebody was Mr. Ratcliff, the sour, ill-tempered master of the New House.

Mr. Ratcliff uttered a fiendish yell, and leaped into the air, clasping his damaged ankle. The crowd cheered frantically. They were, of course, cheering Tom Merry's hit, not Mr. Ratcliff's injury. But the New House master thought otherwise.

"Poor old Ratty!" murmured Monty Lowther, from the pavilion. "Still, boundaries must be made, you know, even at the cost of masters' legs!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Whatever did the silly idiot want to walk on the playing-pitch for?" exclaimed Figgins. "Serve him jolly well right!"

"One more to win!" said Harry Noble, drawing a deep breath. "Can we do it?"

Amid the confusion came the shrill blast of a cornet, unmistakably that belonging to Herries of the Fourth. Then an extraordinary thing happened.

Marching straight on to the pitch, their rifles at the slope, came the St. Jim's Volunteers. Herries led the way, and Grundy pounded along just behind him. Batsmen, fieldsmen, umpires, and spectators gazed at the scene in astonishment.

Then Grundy was heard to exclaim, in loud, imperious tones:

"Stop! Stop this fop's game instantly!"

To say that everyone was flabbergasted was to put it mildly. It was unprecedented, unheard of, for the Grundy Volunteers to barge in at such a critical moment, when the result of the match hung by a single thread.

But George Alfred Grundy did not seem to see it in this light. He looked like a pious police-constable who had just caught a group of small children playing half-penny nap.

"It's time we put our united foot down!" he said sternly. "We've been neutral long enough, so far as cricket is concerned. Get off the field instantly!"

"W-w-what?" gasped Tom Merry, who was the first to find his voice. "Grundy, old man, you're mad! Stark, staring mad!"

"I'm as sane as you are, Merry," was Grundy's reply. "By a fortunate chance I remembered that you had a match with Greyfriars this afternoon, and marched my men back from Wayland post-haste. It's our rooted intention to crush cricket for good and all, and I must repeat my order to you to leave the field."

"B-but can't you realise what you're doing, you chump? You're trying to wreck the game of the season!"

"The only game worth thinking about just now is the one out in Flanders!"

"Hear, hear!" came in unanimous assent from the ranks.

"It's you who had better get off the ground!" said Tom Merry, his wrath rising. "I don't want a scene before these Greyfriars fellows, but if you don't clear your tame lunatics off at once, we'll wade in and slaughter you!"

"I'm staying!" said Grundy, with a grim smile.

"Very well, then!"

Tom Merry crossed over to where Harry Wharton was standing, and explained the situation.

"They must be kicked off at all costs!" he said. "It would be too foul to have the game wrecked by a set of silly freaks like that!"

Wharton nodded.

"May we take a hand in the chucking-off process?" he asked.

"Better not. I can get our own chaps to manage 'em. They'll get it in the neck, too, the silly duffers!"

Tom Merry beckoned towards the pavilion. He indicated Grundy and his Volunteers, and made an imaginary kick through the air. The St. Jim's fellows knew what he meant. Grundy & Co. were to be ejected.

Immediately there was a combined rush of cricketers and others to the playing-pitch. Figgins & Co., and Redfern and Co., of the New House, and Manners, Lowther, and most of the School House contingent, dashed into the fray with murder in their eyes.

Undaunted, Grundy swiftly rapped out his orders. The Volunteers were brought up into line, ready to receive the charge.

Before it could be made, however, another interruption came about, in the shape of Mr. Horace Ratcliff. The New House master, his gown flapping in the breeze, came limping upon the scene.

"What is this?" he jerked, in the cutting tones for which he was notorious. "What does this unparalleled scene of—ahem!—horseplay mean?"

"It's not difficult to see, sir," said Tom Merry mildly. "We're in danger of having the best match of the season spoilt."

"I was unaware that this—er—fiasco was supposed to be a match," said Mr. Ratcliff, with heavy sarcasm. "Every time these Greyfriars boys come over you seem to hold a sort of joy-day, with a view, I suppose, of inflicting injury on any master who happens to be in the vicinity."

Tom Merry flushed.

"It was an accident, sir, that ball hitting your leg," he said, with a ring of indignation in his voice. "You do not suppose I would deliberately injure you?"

"I do not know what to suppose, Merry, when you meet these Greyfriars boys. You seem to forget that you are pupils at a public school, and become hooligans for a time."

Tom Merry checked the hot retort that came to his lips. He did not want to incur Mr. Ratcliff's wrath more than he could help, or there might be no chance of finishing the game.

"I hope you will see fair play, sir," he said quietly, "and permit us to finish the match?"

Mr. Ratcliff ignored the question, and turned to Grundy.

"What is your version of this affair, Grundy?" he asked.

"I am making it my duty, sir," said Grundy piously, "to put down such dangerous games as cricket. That they're dangerous, sir, is proved by the injury you sustained just now. In my humble opinion, drilling and military training are a jolly sight more useful; and, at the risk of being thrown off the field, I have marched my men here to try and prevent such silly antics from taking place in war-time."

"And a very laudable motive, too, Grundy!" said Mr. Ratcliff approvingly. "Dr. Holmes has, I understand, given you permission to use the cricket-ground for purposes of drilling?"

"That is so, sir."

"And you wish to drill your—ahem!—brigade now?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then remove those stumps and foolish playthings at once, Merry!" said the New House master, with a flourish of his hand.

Tom Merry stood petrified.

"But, sir——" he began.

"Not a word, Merry! Do as I tell you! How dare you to presume to question my orders, sir!"

There was nothing for it but to obey. Tom Merry wrenched out the stumps, and walked gloomily back to the pavilion. Lumley-Lumley and the Greyfriars fieldsmen followed. The match—one of the greatest of its kind ever played—was abandoned, and would have to stand as a draw.

Someone from the pavilion started to hiss, and immediately a hundred juniors took up the sound. Mr. Ratcliff heard it, but in the innocence of his heart he imagined that the hissing was directed against Grundy & Co. For who would dare to hiss at such an august personage as the New House master?

"Take no notice of them, Grundy," said Mr. Ratcliff. "They will not interfere with you. I will see to that."

"Thank you very much, sir."

"Yaas, sir! We're awf'lly obliged to you, sir!" added Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"I hope I may be relied upon to see fair play in a case of this kind," said Mr. Ratcliff. "And now I will leave you to your drilling. You will not be molested, I assure you."

And Mr. Ratcliff rustled away. He did not go into the building, however, but took a seat near the pavilion, in order to see that no effort was made to resume the match. Tom Merry & Co. ground their teeth with rage.

"The beast!" said Manners wrathfully.

"Oh, the rotten Prussian!" muttered Monty Lowther. "If the New House chaps had any gumption, they'd have had Ratty publicly hanged, drawn, and quartered years ago!"

"That ass Grundy's the limit," said Tom Merry. "He's too utterly asinine for words! Fancy wading in and spoiling the match of the season! That affair the other day was nothing to this!"

"Hard cheese!" observed Harry Wharton. "It's a howling shame. It was touch and go who won, too. Can't you contrive to get that chap Grundy in a padded cell?"

"I wish I could!" growled Tom Merry. "Look here, Wharton, old man, what are we to do? I hate to send you chaps empty away."

Harry Wharton compressed his lips.

"There's no alternative," he said. "We shall have to let the result stand as a draw."

"I'll make a last appeal to Ratty," said Tom Merry desperately; and he walked over to where Mr. Ratcliff was seated, deep in the exploits of the St. Jim's Volunteers.

"Please, sir——"

"What is it, Merry?" snapped the Housemaster.

"It's awfully important that we should finish our match, sir," said Tom. "It's not playing the game to send the Greyfriars chaps all the way back without——"

Mr. Ratcliff cut him short.

"Silence, Merry! I have already forbidden you to proceed with the game, and I have no intention of going back on my word. If you possessed any sense of patriotism, you and your friends would now be engaged with that enthusiastic band out there."

Tom Merry coloured to the roots of his hair. He opened his mouth to speak, but checked himself just in time. Probably his words would not have shown that measure of respect which was due to a Housemaster.

"Cricket is both a selfish and dangerous game," said Mr. Ratcliff, with conviction. "It should be strongly discountenanced in war-time. You should take a leaf out of Grundy's book, and seek to safeguard your school against possible attack. That is all I have to say to you."

Tom Merry, with feelings too deep for words, made his way back to the pavilion.

"It's N. G.," he said gloomily. "Ratty won't listen to reason, so we must make the best of a bad job. I'm sorry, Wharton—more sorry than I can say. But we'll contrive to play you over again before the season closes to make up for this."

"That's all right, old scout," said Harry.

"And now we'll have tea, and try and forget the disgusting affair for a time," Tom Merry went on. "We can't slaughter Grundy now, with Ratty looking on."

And the cricketers of both schools trooped off to the study shared by the Terrible Three, where a sumptuous feed had been prepared earlier in the day. It was a tight fit for twenty-two fellows, but with the window-sill and coal-scuttle acting as deputies for chairs, it was managed.

Annoyed though most of the fellows were, the day had not been a complete "wash-out." There had been bright, exhilarating cricket, played in a most sportsmanlike manner, and the utmost good fellowship had prevailed. And Wharton & Co., filled with food and with a resolution to win the replayed match with St. Jim's, left to catch their train with light hearts, reflecting how highly amused their school-fellows would be when they recounted the strange and startling exploits of the St. Jim's Volunteers.

CHAPTER 11.

Monty Lowther Has a Brain-wave.

"HA, ha, ha!"

"What the merry deuce——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Monty Lowther had burst into one of his familiar guffaws while the Terrible Three were wiring in at their prep later on that evening. What there was to guffaw at neither Tom Merry nor Manners could, for the life of them, realise. The occasion was a most melancholy one, for, although the chums of the Shell had not said as much to Harry Wharton & Co., they felt that victory had been within their grasp, and it had been wrested from them at the last minute through the glaring insanity of George Alfred Grundy.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Monty Lowther. "Oh, my hat! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Before putting me to the trouble of tilting this inkpot over your napper," said Tom Merry patiently, "you might explain to us where the joke comes in."

"Ha, ha, ha!—I mean, pax!" said Monty Lowther hastily, as Tom Merry showed signs of putting his threat into effect. "I can't help it, really!"

"Thought as much," said Manners. "He's been like it from infancy, you know. Hereditary lunacy, I believe they call it."

"Rats!" said Lowther. "It's a wheeze!"

His study-mates became suddenly interested. Lowther's wheezes were not to be despised, as a rule, though even the humorist of the Shell sometimes came a cropper, as he had done when trying to jape Dick Julian, the Jewish junior. On that memorable occasion his dignity had suffered pretty considerably.

"Trot it out, old son!" said Tom Merry. "Is it up against Grundy?"

"It is—it are."

"Good! No other wheezes are worth a tuppenny rap until we've settled with that clown."

"This is the idea," explained Lowther; "and it's bound to work, if we go about it properly. It'll be the japiest jape we've played for a dog's age. Have either of you chaps any objection to becoming Germans——"

"What!" yelled Manners.

"Becoming which?" roared Tom Merry, jumping up from the table and clenching his fists. "Lowther, you ass, I'll jolly well wipe up the floor with you!"

"Hold on! I mean in fun, of course—disguised as Germans."

"Oh, that puts a different complexion on it. I thought you were suggesting that we went over to Prussia and became naturalised."

"Rats! What I mean is this. We've got all the props and that—we had 'em for the war drama, you know—and we could make up our chivvies all right."

"B-but I don't quite cotton on to it," said Tom Merry. "Where's the fun in merely togging up as Huns?"

"Listen, O King! I will a tale unfold. We'll get Kerr, of the New House, to disguise as some big colonel from the War Office, and come down to the school."

"Like he did as Lieutenant Lynx that time?" asked Manners.

"Ahem! Well, it's just the same only different," said Lowther vaguely. "This time he'll see Grundy, not Gussy."

"And what's he going to say to him?"

"Oh, he'll tell Grundy he's heard what an efficient Volunteer Corps he's got, and instruct him to go and guard German prisoners."

"My hat! That doesn't sound bad," said Tom Merry. "But who are the German prisoners?"

"Us, of course!"

"What!"

"Us! Our little selves," chuckled Monty Lowther. "We'll be disguised, see?"

"And this colonel johnny—Kerr, of course—will order Grundy's gang to come out and guard us. We'll rig up some tents near the old ruins. Grundy'll be awfully bucked with the idea of looking after real, live Germans. We'll keep him there the whole of the afternoon on Wednesday, and reveal our identity when he begins to crow about it."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What a jape!" murmured Tom Merry, drawing a deep breath. "Monty, old son, come to my bosom and weep! We'll make Grundy sing small yet!"

"But we can't speak German very well," said Manners doubtfully. "I can't, anyhow."

"Neither can Grundy and the rest," grinned Lowther; "so we needn't worry about that. A few 'Hochs!' and 'Gott strafe Englands!' now and again will do the trick."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'll toddle over and speak to Kerr about it now," said Lowther. "Nothing like striking while the iron's hot."

"We shall have to let a few more fellows into the jape," said Tom Merry. "Figgins and Wynn and Kangaroo and Redfern will be all right."

"And what about the tents?" asked Manners.

"We can wangle that part of the bizney with Railton," said Tom. "Tell him we're camping-out for the afternoon. He's got half a dozen bell-tents stored in the tower, and he'd let us have 'em like a shot."

Monty Lowther's eyes fairly danced with delight.

"If this doesn't put the kybosh on our friend Grundy, then I'm a Dutchman!" he exclaimed. "Hang on a minute while I go and jaw to Kerr."

Lowther left the study, and returned shortly afterwards glowing with excitement.

"The New House chaps welcomed the idea with open arms," he said. "They're quite as sore about to-day's match as we are. Kerr's going to make himself up as Colonel Martyn, special representative of the War Office."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Now we must pile in and work," said Manners.

And every now and again, as the Terrible Three proceeded with their prep, a chuckle of merriment arose. The juniors were serenely happy now; happy in the knowledge that Grundy and his precious Volunteers were shortly to be dished, diddled, and done!

CHAPTER 12.
The German Prisoners!

"GRUNDY, old chap!"

"Hallo!"

"There's a military johnny come to see you," said Wilkins excitedly. He had just burst into the orderly-room after dinner on Wednesday.

Grundy did not welcome the interruption. He was engaged in goose-stepping round the room with Gunn. Although not of German descent, Grundy was very much in love with the goose-step. It seemed to him to be decidedly dignified.

"I thought it might be your uncle, or somebody," Wilkins went on. "If it is, he's good for a tip."

"But—but I ain't got a relative in the Army!" stammered Grundy. "Don't he give a name?"

"Yes; Colonel Martyn. He seems to have come down specially from the War Office."

"My hat! Where is he?"

"Down by the school gates."

Grundy whipped out of the study, and made his way briskly across the quadrangle. His eyes positively gleamed with delight. At last, it seemed, the St. Jim's Volunteers had been called upon—perhaps for active service!

Standing in the old gateway of St. Jim's was a man of bronzed appearance, dressed in officer's garb. He was a little man, with a remarkable moustache, that was curled up at each end, though not quite in the approved Prussian fashion.

"You are Commanding-Officer Grundy?" he asked, in a deep, pleasant voice.

Grundy, who was in uniform, saluted respectfully. To be addressed as "commanding officer" by a pompous colonel was fame indeed!

"You wish to speak to me, sir?" said Grundy. "If so, let me conduct you to the orderly-room."

Colonel Martyn glanced warily round, and held up a warning finger.

"I am here on a matter of State," he said, in a low tone. "Let us walk away from this place—into the woods, if you like. Then we can talk without danger of being spied upon."

"S-s-spied upon?" gasped Grundy.

"Yes. There are numerous alien spies in England at the present time, and I have reason to believe that this fair county of Sussex is not immune from them."

"My hat!"

At that moment Mr. Railton was observed to be crossing the quad. Somewhat agitated, the colonel turned sharply away, and motioned Grundy to follow.

"To come to the point," said Colonel Martyn, "I have heard of the smart and efficient Volunteer Corps which you have established. I think it reflects the highest credit on your patriotism, and so does Kitchener."

"K-K-Kitchener!" stammered Grundy.

"Yes. I was having a chat with him at the War Office this morning. He said it was a pity that such a valuable unit as yours should be totally wasted. I agreed with him, and he has now sent me down to ask if you would care to assist our Army by guarding German prisoners."

Grundy's eyes gleamed.

"Oh, how ripping, sir!" he exclaimed warmly. "Our chaps would jump at it."

"Could you commence this afternoon?"

"With pleasure, sir! I'll ask the Head——"

Colonel Martyn turned upon him quickly.

"No, no! You will do nothing of the kind," he said. "This affair has got to be kept a strict secret. Probably your headmaster would not appreciate your running into danger."

"That's so, sir. I didn't look at it in that way," said

Grundy. "But where are the giddy prisoners hanging out?"

"They are in a small encampment close to the old ruins," said the colonel. "There are only a few of them—eight, to be precise. Three of the Territorials from Wapshot are guarding them at present. You and your men will relieve them, and remain on guard until seven o'clock this evening. Then you may return to the school, and the Territorials will take your place."

"I see, sir."

"And now you had better go and muster your men," said the colonel. "Do not let a word slip out as to your proceedings. To do so would be fatal. March your fellows straight to the ruins, and lose no time."

Grundy saluted, and made hurried tracks for the school. He could hardly credit his great good fortune. His—Grundy's own Volunteer Corps—was to guard German prisoners! It was an honour which had fallen to the lot of no other schoolboy in the country. He would be the hero of the hour after this.

Wilkins and Gunn were waiting for him at the school gates. They were thirsting for information.

"What's happened?" asked Wilkins eagerly.

"Don't ask questions, and you'll hear no whoppers!" answered Grundy. "Go and tell Herries to sound the fall-in—sharp!"

Wilkins saw that his chief meant business, and hastened off without delay. In a short space of time the call sounded, and the St. Jim's Volunteers lined up in the quad.

"Squad, 'shun!" roared Grundy. "We've got important work on this afternoon—work of a most vital nature."

"What the dooce——" began D'Arcy.

"Silence, Lieutenant D'Arcy! It is all the better that you should be kept in the dark until we arrive at our destination. Form fours! Quick march!"

The Volunteers tramped out of the gates, to the accompaniment of Herries' cornet and the grunts of Taggles the porter. They turned off from the main road, and Grundy led them along the footpath until the ancient ruins were reached.

Here, in a sequestered little glade, were pitched several tents, outside which sat a collection of sullen-looking Germans. The encampment was fenced round with barbed wire, and three Tommies—apparently Territorials—were keeping guard outside with fixed bayonets.

Colonel Martyn was there, too, and he glanced approvingly at Grundy's Volunteers as they came smartly to the halt.

"A smart lot!" he exclaimed, putting up his monocle. "As smart a lot as served under me at Waterloo—ahem! —in the Boer War!"

"Thank you, sir!" said Grundy, saluting.

Colonel Martyn called to the soldiers who were on duty.

"You may retire!" he said, in his best military manner. "These—er—Volunteers will keep guard until sunset. You will then relieve them."

"Very good, sir!"

The Territorials saluted, and withdrew into the woods.

"I, too, must take my departure now," said the colonel, glancing at his wrist-watch. "You will have no trouble with the prisoners, I fancy. They're only School House fell—I mean, they're unarmed. But you must be careful not to let any of the wretches escape. Kitchener would never forgive me."

"We'll be dead careful, sir," replied Grundy.

"And now I'll be off," said Colonel Martyn. "I will see you again shortly."

He did not add in what capacity he would see Grundy & Co. again. Had the Volunteers known that the man who spoke in such a familiar way of Earl Kitchener was Kerr of the Fourth, they would have slaughtered him on the spot.

The colonel vanished into the undergrowth with swift strides. Then his antics were most peculiar. He flung himself down upon the ground, and howled with laughter.

"Oh, my hat! The silly asses! They've actually swallowed it. Ha, ha, ha!"

The three Territorials from Wapshot suddenly burst in upon the scene. They shared in Colonel Martyn's merriment for some moments, and then proceeded to wrench away at their moustaches and eyebrows, which were apparently false. When the operation was concluded, one would not have required second sight to observe that the "Terriers" were Figgins, Redfern, and Lawrence, of the New House!

"Kerr, old chap, you're great!" exclaimed Figgins, with enthusiasm. "You've done this sort of thing pretty successfully before, but Colonel Martyn caps the lot, I reckon!"

"What a pity we can't stop and enjoy the jape!" said Redfern, with a sigh.

"Can't be did!" said Lawrence. "If we were twigged it would spoil everything."

"That's so," chimed in Colonel Martyn, rising to his feet. "We can't even be lookers-on in Vienna in this act. We've played our part, and it's up to Tom Merry & Co. to play theirs."

And, meanwhile, the Terrible Three and their chums, in the role of German prisoners, proceeded to play it, to the ultimate discomfiture of George Alfred Grundy and his fellow-freaks.

CHAPTER 13.
A Desperate Chase!

TO guard German prisoners—and a desperate-looking set at that—was a startling and altogether novel experience for Grundy and his merry men. This was serving their country with a vengeance. Drills on the cricket-ground and route-marches through Rylcombe faded into oblivion before this momentous task.

Somewhat to Grundy's surprise, the prisoners were not bound in any way, but sat and conversed with each other in low tones, the only obstacle between themselves and freedom being the Grundy Volunteers. The youthful commanding officer realised, with something like a shudder, what would happen if these desperate delegates of the Imperial poisoner were allowed to get away. In his mind's eye, he saw the peaceful village of Rylcombe being looted, the inhabitants terrorised, and St. Jim's being torn from its foundations. But the prisoners were unarmed, whereas the Volunteers possessed loaded rifles, and this fact reassured Grundy.

The rest of the Volunteers were at a loss to understand why they had been pounced upon so suddenly by the Government to engage in work which was nothing if not hazardous. It was not as if there were no Regular soldiers to undertake the task. Over a million trained men were scattered throughout the country, waiting their call to the firing-line, and yet an undertaking like this had been placed in the hands of a pack of schoolboys!

To such a vain-glorious person as George Alfred Grundy the explanation was simple. It meant that the St. Jim's Volunteers were as efficient a corps as any in Kitchener's vast Army; but Levison and Crooke and Mellish, who were present, could not for the life of them understand it.

Half an hour passed uneventfully before Grundy exchanged conversation with his prisoners. But when he saw a blonde, bearded fellow pull out a copy of a paper familiar to his eye he gave a start.

"Hi, you fellow, come here! What are you doing with that paper?"

The German grinned, and slouched forward.

"It is der 'Friend of Boys,'" he explained, in almost perfect English.

"Bai Jove, fancy a beastlay Pwussian weadin' 'The Boys' Fwiend'!" muttered Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"It is vun excellent paper!" observed the German.

"What is your name?" demanded Grundy.

"Von Lowthenburg."

"And you—you read 'The Boys' Friend'?"

"Ja, ja! Your—what you call him? Terrier, he give it to me."

"Then you'd better hand it over," said Grundy, with a frown. "It's too decent a rag for Prussian looters to read. I should have thought you preferred swallowing Berlin journalisms."

"But the page of Chat," said the prisoner, "is interesting—very! It has a letter from my old comrade, Otto Schomburg."

"What's that? Here, let me have a look!"

The German handed over the paper, with a twinkle in his pale-blue eyes.

"Great Scott!" gasped Grundy. "Here's some rotten Hun running down British boys!"

The Volunteers came up and glanced over their leader's shoulder. They had not seen their favourite paper for some weeks, for the short-sighted authorities, being under the delusion that it was a penny dreadful, had forbidden it at St. Jim's until a circumstance had arisen which gained for the popular Monday journal the respect of the masters.

"What frightful cheek!" gasped Digby. "This fellow Schomburg says he's going to stop chaps from reading the 'Friend.' Says it incites us to hate the German race. And—my hat, what whoppers—the fellow says that Germany was a peace-loving nation until we forced 'em into this war!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But he is right," interposed Von Lowthenburg. "The editor—he would not have published my friend's letter if it were false."

"Wouldn't he, though?" snorted Wilkins. "He wants his readers to see what a cad the Prussian is at his worst. In a few weeks' time there'll be some rasping replies to this letter, you see."

"Bai Jove, I'll wite for one!" said D'Arcy. "We're not goin' to be wun down like this! I'd like to have five minutes with that chap Schomburg!"

"Same here! He'd shout for his tin-god of a Kaiser before two of 'em were up!" said Grundy.

He turned to Von Lowthenburg.

"All right, my beauty!" he said, remembering that he had not read the Rookwood story in that issue. "You can leave this paper with me."

The German shrugged his shoulders.

"As you wish," he said.

At that moment another prisoner came forward, with an appealing gesture.

"We want food," he said, glancing at Grundy.

"But you've got plenty, surely?"

"Nein!"

"Nine what? Loaves? If so, you can count yourself jolly lucky. Some of our own prisoners are starving in your confounded fortresses!"

"Two wrongs do not make a right, as you English say. We have nothing—no food whatever."

"What's your name?"

"Blakenheimer."

"Great Scott!"

"Good English! Merciful English! I pray you not let us starve!"

"You deserve to, for what you did in Belgium!" said Grundy shortly.

"Don't wub it in, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus. "Pewwaps the poor bwutes are in a bad way, you know. Shall I go into the village for some gwub?"

"That's all very well; but who's going to pay for it?"

"I will, with pleasuah! My patah sent me a wemittance this mornin'."

"Go ahead, then!"

Grundy was surprised to find that his prisoners were without food of any description. From what he had heard, captive Germans were fed on the fat of the land almost. This was a staggering exception.

In half an hour D'Arcy returned. He had been spending money on his usual lavish scale, and staggered under the weight of a couple of bulky parcels.

The German prisoners brightened up perceptibly as a couple of currant loaves, four tins of sardines, and some weighty veal-and-ham pies were disclosed to view. A dozen bottles of ginger-pop followed.

"That stuff's no good to them," said Grundy. "Lager beer's more in their line."

Whether Grundy's statement was correct or not, Von Lowthenburg and his companions seemed to relish the harmless schoolboy's drink as it gurgled down their throats. Then they attacked the eatables with a frenzy which suggested that they had tasted no decent food for months.

"Might have got some grub for us while you were about it!" grumbled Levison. "We've got to go without our tea as it is, and stick here till calling-over at seven!"

"You must cultivate the spiwit of self-sacwifice, deah boy," said D'Arcy. "Although these boundahs are nothin' less than bwute beasts, we can't let them starve before our eyes."

The prisoners proceeded to dispose ravenously of the good things. It was gall to some of the hungry Volunteers to watch them eat, but Grundy was for once in agreement with Lieutenant D'Arcy. And Grundy's word was law.

The afternoon dragged out its slow length, and, after their sumptuous feed, a few of the prisoners took forty winks; and some of the Volunteers, growing weary of the inaction, would fain have done likewise.

As seven o'clock approached Von Lowthenburg stirred out of his slumber, and conversed in low tones with one of his comrades. Grundy would certainly have been amazed if he could have heard what passed between the two.

"Getting on for calling-over, Tommy!" whispered Von Lowthenburg.

His companion nodded, and motioned to the others.

"We must make a bolt for it," he said. "My hat, it's nearly seven now!"

The opportunity of escape was a good one. Grundy, absorbed in the adventures of Jimmy Silver & Co., was seated several yards away with Digby and Herries. The prisoners had given absolutely no trouble all the afternoon, and that an attempt to escape would be made was the last thing Grundy thought of.

Levison and Mellish and Crooke had taken French leave and vanished, the yearning for a good tea having overcome all their scruples. The only junior who was keeping strict watch and ward was Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

Suddenly, as if seized with one impulse, the eight prisoners leapt to their feet and sprang over the barbed-wire enclosure. The two leaders laid hold of the unsuspecting D'Arcy before he could cry out, and dumped him down into the long grass. Then they sped away hot-foot towards the school.

The alarm was given at once. Seizing his rifle, Grundy shouted to his men, and started off in pursuit.

"Stop!" he yelled furiously. "Stop, or I fire!"

But Tom Merry & Co. had no intention of stopping. They dashed through the undergrowth of the wood with the fleetness of hares.

Bang!

"G-g-ood heavens!" gasped Jack Blake. "They're firing on us!"

"The silly asses! Better stop and tell them who we are!" panted Noble.

"No, no! They'd shoot before we had a dog's chance!" muttered Tom Merry. "Quick! Get up to the school, for goodness' sake!"

Bang, bang, bang!

Three more shots echoed through the wood. Luckily for the fugitives, however, the markmanship of Grundy and his men were both wild and erratic. Tom Merry & Co. came out upon the main road unharmed.

Quick though they had been, however, Grundy & Co. were quicker. They realised what Colonel Martyn would have to say to them when it became known that eight dangerous aliens had been allowed to escape. It would hardly bear thinking of.

"They're going into the school gates!" gasped Grundy. "Stop 'em, for goodness' sake!"

More shots rang out, and Taggles came out of his lodge with an almost stupefied expression on his face.

"They've come at last!" he muttered, under his breath. "I always said as much! It's an invasion in force!"

Tom Merry & Co. dashed pell-mell through the quadrangle, with Grundy and his warriors in close pursuit. Looking behind them, the fugitives saw that their position was one of grave peril, for Grundy had now posted his men in various positions round the quad with loaded rifles. The only harbour of refuge was straight ahead—in Big Hall.

But what if the school had assembled? No sounds could be heard from the corridors, and seven was booming

out from the old tower. The fellows must be at calling-over!

But there was no help for it. Big Hall was the only place to flee to with safety. Grundy & Co. would hardly dare to shoot in the presence of the Head—German prisoners or no German prisoners.

"Come on!" hissed Tom Merry, seizing Lowther by the arm. "Into Big Hall—quick!"

Bang!

"Oh, crumbs!"

Even as Tom Merry flung open the door, a bullet whizzed by his ear, and buried itself in one of the panels. The next moment the bogus German prisoners had dashed into the crowded Hall, with their pursuers hot on the trail!

CHAPTER 14.
The Chopper Comes Down!

"MY hat!"

"What on earth——"

"Bedlam let loose!"

Such were the muttered exclamations arising on all sides at the unparalleled interruption. Of the two hundred boys present, the only fellows who realised the true identity of the German prisoners were Figgins & Co. of the New House. To the rest of the school the whole affair seemed part of some strange and startling dream.

"Bless my soul!" gasped Dr. Holmes, who stood at the big desk, ready to call the roll. "W-what does this mean?"

Even as he spoke, the St. Jim's Volunteers, panting and breathless, burst into the Hall. Tom Merry and Lowther leapt upon the dais, and dodged behind the Head's desk. They had reason to dodge, for Grundy's rifle had been levelled point-blank at them! Now that they had taken shelter, so to speak, the weapon was turned full upon Dr. Holmes!

"Grundy!" gasped the Head, growing pale in spite of himself. "Boy! Are you demented? Do you realise that you are levelling a loaded firearm at your headmaster? Put that rifle down instantly!"

"But—but they're desperate men, sir!" panted Grundy. "They'd kill you as soon as look at you! Lemme get at them!"

Kildare and Knox and Rushden sprang forward, and grasped the warlike Grundy in a grip of iron. The rifle was snatched out of his hand, and, after a brief struggle, he was helpless.

"Lower those rifles, all of you!" came the strong, deep voice of the captain of St. Jim's.

Somewhat abashed, the Volunteers obeyed. It went against the grain to allow a set of German prisoners to run amok in Big Hall; but they began to realise at last that there was a ghastly mistake somewhere.

Dr. Holmes leaned over, and grasped one of the aliens by the collar.

"Who are you?" he demanded, in a voice of thunder.

"Lowther, sir!"

"It's a lie!" bellowed Grundy furiously. "He's Von Lowthenburg, sir—an escaped German prisoner!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Silence!" The Head's voice rang out sternly. "This—this is disgraceful! What are you doing in this ridiculous attire, Lowther? And who are your companions?"

Tom Merry stepped forward. The fat was in the fire now with a vengeance. Unless he made a clean breast of the whole affair to Dr. Holmes, it would mean the "sack" for somebody. Even now, it looked as if a hefty flogging was in store for the bogus Huns.

"If you please, sir," began Tom, colouring beneath his disguise, "I'm Merry, sir—er, that is to say, we did this for a joke, sir."

"I do not approve of jokes of this kind, Merry," said the Head, compressing his lips. "It is almost without parallel in the history of this school. I demand a full explanation at once, or things will go hard with you."

At this juncture, Grundy wrenched himself away from the grasp of the seniors, and approached the dais. It dawned at last, even upon his slow brain, that he and his Volunteers were the victims of one of the most gigantic japes ever played.

He saw it all now. Colonel Martyn could have been none other than Kerr, whose impersonations were a by-word at St. Jim's. But Grundy was a sportsman at heart. He did not want Tom Merry & Co. to get it "in the neck," and spoke up like a man.

"The fact is, sir," he said, "we—that is, the St. Jim's Volunteers—mucked up a big cricket-match a few days ago, and got the fellows' backs up. So these chaps played a little prank on us in return. They togged up as German prisoners, and we have been guarding them all the afternoon."

There was a titter of laughter in the crowded Hall. Even Kildare and the mighty men of the Sixth could scarce restrain their merriment.

"Is Grundy's statement correct, Merry?" asked Dr. Holmes.

"Yes, sir. His chaps weren't to blame at all. We felt mad because they spoilt the match of the season, and couldn't resist such a fine chance of taking them down a peg."

The Head's face cleared a little. The affair was far less serious than he had at first been led to believe.

"Grundy," he said, with a stern glance at the unfortunate commanding officer, "I shall punish you severely for carrying loaded firearms on the premises. You have committed a serious breach of the rules, and I should not for one moment have sanctioned the use of such weapons. You will come to my study after the school has dismissed, and I will endeavour to bring your folly home to you. The rest of the boys concerned in this disgraceful affair will write me a thousand lines of Virgil, and their half-holiday on Wednesday next will be cancelled. Moreover, the Volunteer Corps must cease to exist; it has done decidedly more harm than good."

"Oh, sir!"

"You are a ridiculous and foolish boy, Grundy! Your schoolfellows have, I fear, been put to considerable inconvenience on your account. You will hand in your rifles to Mr. Railton, and refrain from organising any such movement as this in future. I consider you are being leniently dealt with. Merry, you and your fellow-conspirators will kindly remove those absurd clothes at once!"

"Yes, sir."

"And now, let us hear no more of this disgraceful affair. The school will dismiss!"

And the fellows filed out of Big Hall, chuckling hugely at Grundy's discomfiture.

The St. Jim's Volunteers had had their day, and had fallen foul of the authorities at last. The chopper had come down, and nothing remained but for George Alfred Grundy, commanding officer, to hide his diminished head.

. . . . . .

When, later on that evening, Grundy came into the Shell dormitory, he seemed to be trying to fold himself up like a pocket-knife. The Head had kept his word, and had laid it on with surprising vigour for a gentleman of his years. Grundy's palms were tingling so much that he found it difficult to undress.

Tom Merry & Co. were jubilant. They had not got off scot-free, it was true, but the jape had, on the whole, been very successful, and the wrecked cricket-match with Greyfriars had been amply avenged.

It was a long, long time before Grundy of the Shell ceased to be chipped on the subject of his latest failure; and to rouse the ex-commanding officer to a state bordering on frenzy, it was only necessary to whisper softly in his ear the words:

"St. Jim's Volunteers!"

THE END.

"THE HONOUR OF A JEW!" is the title of next Wednesday's grand, long, complete story of St. Jim's, by Martin Clifford. There is bound to be a big demand, so order YOUR copy to-day!)

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The previous instalments told how:—

NORRIS BRENT, a young Englishman, agrees to accompany his unworthy cousin, GUY MELVILLE, on an exploration tour in China for a rare plant only to be found in that part of the world. Misfortune dogs their footsteps, and a crisis is reached when the Chinese pack-carriers, who are with them, mutiny. Stranded in a wild, inhospitable land, there is nothing for it but to return to civilisation, and the cousins, together with YEN HOW, Norris Brent's faithful servant, set out on the weary journey.

The little band is overcome by thirst, and Melville, refusing to share his water with the others, pushes onward through the desert, leaving his companions to their fate. Fortunately, however, Yen How lights upon an oasis, and the danger is averted.

After a week's tramping the couple come upon the residence of a wealthy mandarin, and a fight ensues with the servants in the courtyard. Norris Brent is only saved from death by the timely intervention of Silver Pearl. An attachment springs up between Norris Brent and the beautiful Chinese maiden, who is the ward of Ming Yung, the mandarin.

Norris Brent returns to England, and is walking through the grounds of the old family mansion, Eagle's Nest, when he comes face to face with his cousin, Guy Melville.

Guy Melville pretends to be pleased at meeting his cousin again, and informs him that through the death of their uncle he is now owner of the estate, Eagle's Cliff. He then offers Norris a position on the estate, which he accepts.

One day Yen How surprises his master by informing him that he has witnessed the arrival of Ming Yung and his ward at Eagle's Nest.

In a hut on the estate Brent and Yen How surprise a gipsy intruder, Karl Marrok, who murderously attacks Brent.

When the gipsy is brought by Brent before Guy Melville, he (Melville) dismisses his cousin, befriends Marrok, and tells him to take lodgings at the local inn, as he is likely to be of use to him.

Brent, in order to find out what object Ming Yung has for staying at Eagle's Nest, hides himself in a room in which the Chinaman is working.

(Now go on with the Story.)

The Hidden Witness—The Violet Ray—For His Sake.

In a low-ceilinged recess of the Magicians' Room was a large oak chest, wherein Norris Brent knelt and gazed at Ming Yung through a double row of tiny spy holes, bored in the carved woodwork, that had no doubt often served a similar purpose of espionage in days of long ago.

The room had the appearance of a laboratory equipped for scientific research. Part of it, however, was fitted up with what looked like a wireless telegraphy installation, and it was to this that Ming Yung was giving his close attention.

A bright ray of electric light, shining down from an overhanging bulb, was the sole illuminant that he worked by, and in the midst of the surrounding shadow his face and figure were massed and outlined with a vivid distinctness of feature and detail. His body scarcely moved. His hands alone worked with the ordered method and quickness of machinery. Long, supple hands they were, with fingers that seemed to sense everything they came in contact with, and they flew and hovered over the complicated mechanism of the equipment with a sure, unfaltering mastery of touch.

There was a growing fascination in what he beheld that made Brent oblivious to all thought of his own danger. In ordinary circumstances, his frank and open nature would never have allowed him to play the spy on anyone, but in his own mind he was persuaded that the secret reason for Ming Yung coming to live at Eagle's Nest was a dark and evil one.

Some inner voice whispered to him that though he risked his life and lost it, he must find out the mystery of the Chinaman, whose formidable and compelling personality he never ceased to ponder over and marvel at.

Taking the opportunity that he had watched for, he had entered the Magicians' Room while Ming Yung was absent, and secreted himself in the oak chest.

The belief that death would be the penalty of his daring, should he be discovered, did not terrify him. Young though he was, Norris Brent had too often risked paying that penalty, to fear it now.

Unceasingly Ming Yung continued at his task. Upon it he concentrated all his powers of mind and imagination. Even as he worked, he anticipated the moment when success would triumphantly crown his efforts.

Now he moved to a fresh position, and Brent could not see what he was doing. It was worse than tantalising to the lad. The minutes passed, seeming to him like hours, and his impatience and curiosity increased to an unbearable pitch.

Convinced that, unless he made a bold move, he would miss discovering the very thing he had set out to find, Brent suddenly resolved to leave the shelter of the oak chest for a position more favourable to the carrying out of his purpose.

Cautiously raising the lid, he put out his head and right arm. At that moment Ming Yung turned his head, and Brent experienced a sickening conviction that the Chinaman was looking straight into his eyes.

The unnerving sensation passed as Ming Yung looked away, and, noiselessly lowering the lid of the chest, he breathed a fervent sigh of relief at his lucky escape.

He was now able to watch again what went on. Ming Yung, facing him, held in his hand an object resembling a large magnifying-glass.

A coil of thick wire attached it to an electric battery. There was nothing in the look of the thing calculated to excite more than a faint show of interest in anyone. Far more complicated pieces of mechanism are to be seen in plenty in any engineering shop of the poorest kind.

Holding it by the long, straight supporting rod, Ming Yung focussed the rounded face of the instrument in line with a shapeless mass of metal placed at the end of a high bench some distance away.

The bench and the wall immediately behind it were covered with a thick layer of some darkish substance that Brent thought must be rubber, although he was not at all sure on this point.

Cool, calm, and deliberate, Ming Yung held the instrument

in line with the distant lump of metal. Then, with the thumb of his left hand, he pressed on a movable attachment fixed in the base of the supporting rod.

A violet ray of light darted from the eye of the mechanism. It flashed down the long bench to the far end of the room, and was gone.

Just a flash of violet-coloured light, and nothing more, but a phenomenon of tremendous import.

For it had turned the mass of metal placed on the stand at the end of the bench into a little heap of dust.

The effect produced by the violet ray conveyed no meaning to Brent at first. He was startled and amazed by the disappearance of the metal immediately the light touched it; but the true significance of what had happened failed to impress itself upon his wondering mind.

Then he saw Ming Yung stride swiftly to the end of the bench, and bend down to look at the powdery particles which had been a block of steel shortly before.

The Chinaman remained intent on his scrutiny for several moments. Then he slowly raised his head, and his yellow, sphinx-like face, with its dark, burning eyes, was transfigured by an expression of proud triumph such as it had never worn before.

The success he had so long toiled for had come to him at last. He had discovered the great secret whereby such power as no other human being had ever attained to would be his.

The realisation of his every hope was now his to command. He looked at the figure of the dragon, carved out of a solid block of silver, that stood on a shelf at his elbow, and its jewelled eyes seemed to meet his in a flash of sinister understanding.

The dragon was the legendary guardian of the Chinese race. As it had been in the past, so it would continue to be the symbol for the future. And under it should be brought the white men whose proud sway in the world was now nearing its end.

So dreamed Ming Yung in the hour of his victory. He was intoxicated by an insane pride. Science, he told himself, had nothing more to teach him. For generations men had striven to find and harness to their will the invisible power that he now possessed in the wonderful violet ray that, in the fraction of a second, turned the thickest metal into dust.

From his dream of unlimited power the yellow wizard was brought back to the realities of the moment with disagreeable abruptness. His glance was arrested by the oak chest, which, it suddenly dawned upon him, lacked something of its usual appearance.

What was it? An answer came to the self-asked question at once. The bronze figure of Apollo that he himself had placed on the chest, so as to be out of his way, several days before was no longer there. It stood now against the wall.

Instantly Brent, who could see all that was happening, divined the nature of Ming Yung's discovery. To open the lid of the chest, he had removed the bronze Apollo; and now, when too late, he realised that by doing so he had planned his own discomfiture.

The look and attitude of Ming Yung told him that the Chinaman suspected someone of being hidden in the chest. To remain where he was inevitably meant an ignominious exposure. That was not to be thought of so long as there was any way of avoiding it.

Pushing back the lid, Brent rose to his feet and stepped boldly out from his place of concealment.

"Pardon the surprise!" he said to Ming Yung. "The space was too cramped in there to endure any longer. Ah, that's better!" he added, as he stretched his limbs. "Now I'm beginning to feel alive again."

The superb insolence that marked both the speech and bearing of the lad took Ming Yung aback, and he stared at the other with the faintest trace of admiration mingling with the set look of cold, bitter fury in his face.

"You hid yourself in there," he said, "on purpose to spy on me. Do you deny it?"

Brent shook his head.

"Not at all!" he answered coolly. "Being suspicious, I made it my business to try and discover your motive for coming to live here."

"Ah!" said Ming Yung, his eyes glittering. "And have you succeeded in doing so?"

"Not yet," Brent replied; "but I believe that I'm on the right track of it. There is little fear, in such a quiet and secluded place as this is, of your scientific experiments meeting with any unwelcome interruption."

"What have you seen?"

The question came from Ming Yung with menacing directness.

"Seen?" echoed Brent. "Why, I saw something that beat all the conjuring tricks I've ever witnessed, when you flashed that coloured light and the lump of metal on the bench was swept away into space. That was a performance worth seeing."

"Just so!" Ming Yung remarked. "But you may have to pay dearly for seeing it. You have no right here. It is dangerous to venture unasked into such a place as this is."

As he was speaking, he raised the instrument attached to the battery in his right hand. Neither anger nor malice showed in his face, but a look of cold calculation that was as inhuman as it was merciless.

"I understand," said Brent, without a tremor in his voice. "You would like to kill me—to turn the violet ray upon me? Well, do it! You have me here at your mercy."

Ming Yung swung the instrument to and fro by the handle. He did not mean to use it, for he had determined in his own mind that he had nothing to fear from the discovery the other had made.

Had he believed that danger threatened him thereby, he would have flashed the annihilating violet ray on the lad who had found out his secret without the slightest compunction.

"Why should I not kill you?" he asked, his eyelids blinking slowly. "This is not the first time you have set yourself at variance with me."

Before Brent could answer, there was a rustle of light draperies, and a beautiful girl, her face pale, her eyes bright with excited emotion, came into the room.

It was Silver Pearl. One quick glance she threw at Brent, and then looked at Ming Yung, who gazed at her in cold and angry surprise.

"Did you call me?" she inquired. "I thought I heard your voice, but was not sure, so came to see."

Ming Yung pointed to the door.

"No," he said sternly; "I did not call you. Now go!"

With a slight inclination of her head, Silver Pearl turned and walked away, but near the door she looked back at her guardian, and in her look there was an unmistakable challenge. Then she disappeared into the gallery beyond.

"You are free to depart," said Ming Yung to Brent; "but do not ever come here again." he added. "If you do, you will not find me in so lenient a mood."

With folded arms, he stood and watched the other out of sight. Then, dismissing all thought of what had happened from his mind, he once more turned his attention to his work.

Out in the gallery, Norris Brent looked everywhere for Silver Pearl, but she was not to be seen. His disappointment at not finding her was keen, but, nevertheless, his heart was light with gladness, for he knew that the girl had entered the Magicians' Room meaning to share the danger that she believed him to be in.

And she would not have done that, he reasoned, had she not still cared for him. It was a proof of her love that nothing could explain away.

The next morning, watching for his opportunity, he met Silver Pearl as she was returning to the house from the garden, where she had been gathering roses.

The fresh, lovely blooms filled a basket that she carried in her hand, and as she came along the path between the trees she looked an enchanting picture of youth and beauty.

Seeing Brent, she paused, flushing prettily, and then hurried on with the intention of passing him.

"Silver Pearl," he said, stepping up to her, "are you going to pass me without a word? It's unkind of you to treat me so coldly."

"There is nothing for me to say to you," she answered, with averted gaze. "You know what I told you the other day? We must be strangers to one another."

"You don't mean it!" said Brent impulsively. "I'll never believe that you mean it. If you do, why, then, did you act as you did last night? I'll tell you why," he continued, as she made no response. "You overheard Ming Yung threatening me, and, believing that I was in great danger, you came to me, with the object of averting it from me. That is the truth, and you know it."

"It is true," Silver Pearl admitted; "but I should have done the same for anyone placed in your position. How you came to be there with my guardian I do not know, but you were rash and foolish to run into danger by incurring his displeasure; and if anything had happened to you, no one would have been to blame but yourself."

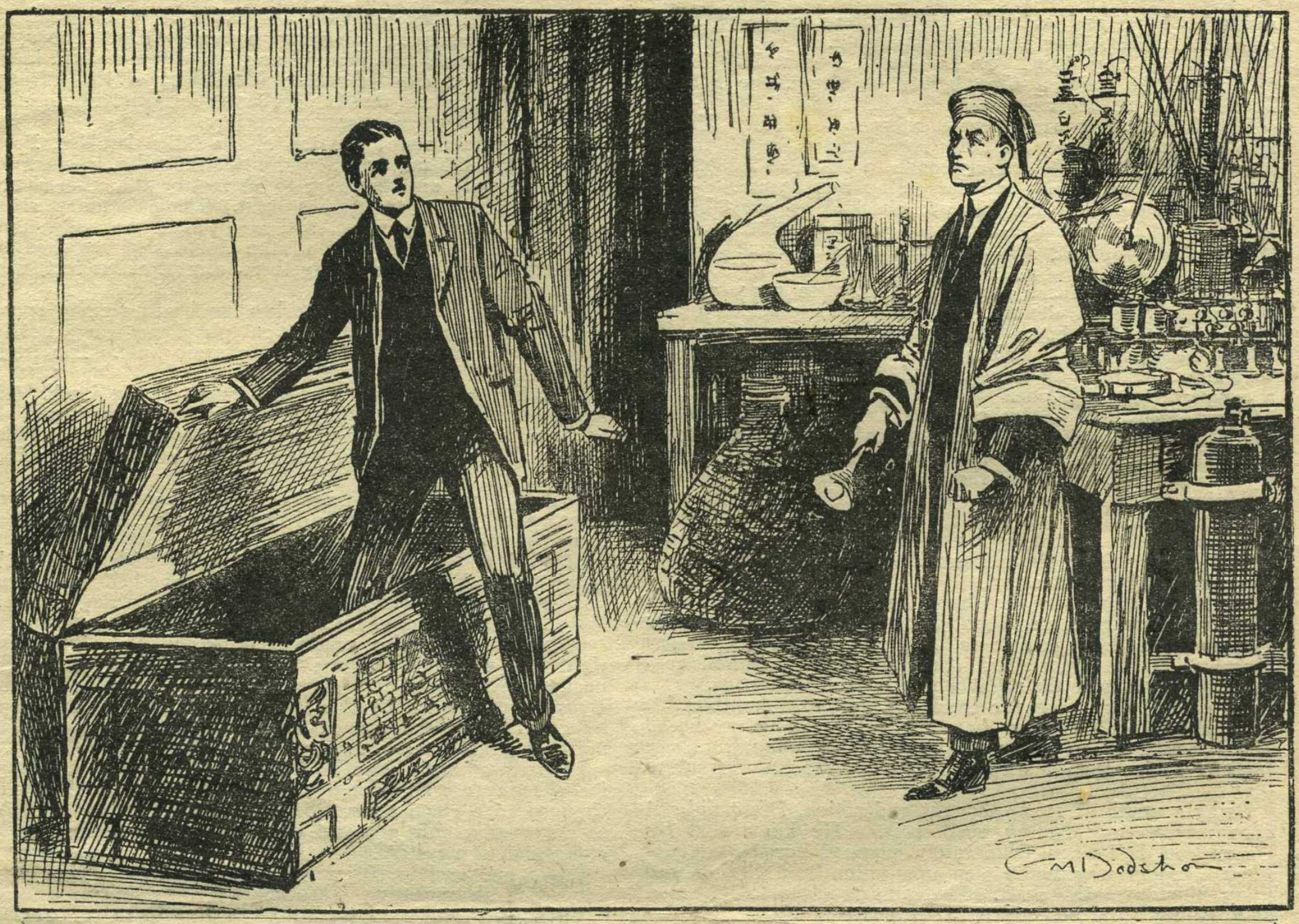
A hot flush rose to Norris Brent's face.

"Do you defend Ming Yung?" he asked, in hurt amazement. "The man is a danger to everyone around him—to you as much as anyone else."

Silver Pearl shook her head.

"You speak in ignorance," she said coldly. "Ming Yung is kind to me. I am in no danger from him. It is you who are in danger, and that is your own fault, the result of your own folly. You were warned last night, as you have been before, and you will be wise to act on the warning."

As she uttered the last word, Silver Pearl, without so



Pushing back the lid, Brent rose to his feet and stepped boldly out from his place of concealment. "Pardon the surprise!" he said to Ming Yung. "The space was too cramped in there to endure any longer." *(See page 24.)*

much as a parting look at the other, moved away down the path.

Puzzled, angered, and humiliated, Norris Brent stared after the girl. Could he have seen her pale face, her trembling lips, and the unshed tears shining in her eyes, the disillusionment that he was experiencing might have given place to a far different feeling.

"I fooled myself last night," he muttered, as he walked hurriedly away from the spot. "She doesn't care twopence for me!"

A few moments later some bushes rustled, and Guy Melville stepped out into the path, a hard, set look in his face.

He had been an unseen witness of the meeting between Norris Brent and Silver Pearl; had overheard their conversation, and had drawn a conclusion from it that was to him anything but a pleasing one.

"Curse him!" he said aloud. "The girl would risk her own life for him again and again, though he is fool enough not to know it. Why did he ever turn up here, to spoil all my plans for the future, when I believed that he was out of my way for ever? How I wish that he was dead and under the ground!"

The dark frown on his face suddenly vanished before an evil smile. He had remembered the Hungarian sailor, Karl Marrok, the man who was pledged to work harm to Norris Brent whenever he was given the word to do so.

"I must see Marrok about it," he murmured. "It's time he got down to business."

Hurled to Death—In the Tunnel—At the Smugglers' Tavern.

In the deep shade of the great trees, whose swaying branches made murmur that mingled with the music of the sea, Norris Brent, returning to Eagle's Nest from Rocksbay, where he had been on business for his cousin, suddenly paused, and looked back along the path.

He thought that he had heard the sound of a footstep, but, seeing no one, he went on again

Yet he had not been mistaken. Someone was behind him, and had been following him from the moment he set out from home—someone who dogged him like an evil shadow. Swift, stealthy, and persistent, the figure pursued the lad, yet careful to remain unseen, taking no chance of discovery.

Nearer and nearer it drew to Brent, who, coming to a level stretch of ground in the upward path, stopped to take a breather before going on. There was a heavy growth of bush and coarse grass about here, so much so that a wide rift in the earth not far from the path was almost hidden from sight by it.

Years had elapsed since Brent had last made use of this path from Rocksbay, and he turned aside to look down the hole, remembering how, as a small boy, he had often leaned over the edge and peered into its darksome depths in terrified fascination.

Something of that same sensation stole over him now as he stared into the well of blackness. Was it the warning of instinct? There was a terrible danger at hand.

Gliding forward like a shadowy wraith came Karl Marrok, the man who had followed Brent from Rocksbay, who now meant to give a full receipt for Guy Melville's payment of blood-money.

There was a look of animal enjoyment in the gipsy sailor's sunburnt face. The deed he was about to commit was one that he revelled in. His wild and lawless forebears had slain for money as for revenge, and he himself was prompted by this double motive.

The dagger he had used to attack Brent with in the hut in the wood had been a dearly-cherished possession of his, a kind of family heirloom that had been handed down from father to son for generations.

In striking with it he had driven it with great force against a log-post, and the blade had broken. The loss of the dagger was in itself sufficient to inspire Marrok with an unreasoning hate of the lad who was now at his mercy.

Creeping onward another step or two until he was close behind him he sent Norris Brent headlong into the hole with a single push of his powerful arms.

A cry rang out, some bushes crashed and crackled as the falling body struck and parted them, and then silence again.

Lighting a cigarette, Marrok coolly puffed the smoke from his lips. He bent his head and listened for some moments. Hearing no sound he stood upright, stretched his arms lazily

above his head, and, retracing his footsteps to the path, set off back for Rocksbay at a leisurely walk.

"It was a long drop!" he said, with a chuckling laugh. "It would be quite a time before he struck the bottom. Pouf! He'd never know when he did strike it!"

But Karl Marrok was wrong in being so confident. Hurled into the chasm, Brent, his limbs spreadeagled by the frantic movement that he instinctively made to clutch at something, fell through space with ever-increasing momentum.

Then the speed of his fall was checked by some bushes growing out from the side of the rift, and he crashed through them, to be caught by more of the same kind some distance farther down.

These held him for a second or two, then gave, and he continued his swift descent. Again a bush crackled under the impact of his body, and this time, throwing out his hands, he secured a tenacious hold of some strong branches that bore him up long enough for him to make his position a comparatively safe one.

Sharp pains, caused by cut and bruise, tingled through him from head to foot. Holding on to his perch, he waited until the dizziness in his head had passed before looking up towards the mouth of the chasm.

A tiny patch of blue sky was all that he could see with distinctness, and by this fact he realised that he had fallen a great distance. Striking a match he held it up, and the dim, flickering flame showed him that the nearest bush above was some thirty feet away.

Impossible to climb the hard, rocky wall of the rift. Lighting more matches, Brent inspected what was beneath him as far as he was able to. As a result of this cursory examination, he ascertained that the shaft narrowed considerably from near the point where he was stationary.

"I can't be so very far from the bottom," he thought. "Wonder if I could drop there without breaking my neck? Yet it would do me no good to get farther away from any hope of rescue than I am now. It's hard to know what to do."

Being a youth of ready thought and action, Brent did not give way to any feeling of despair. He knew that his destruction had been deliberately planned for by an unknown enemy who had stolen upon him from behind and flung him down the shaft. That was as clear to his mind as anything could be.

A natural desire to survive and punish his enemy, whoever it might turn out to be, stimulated Brent to an excess of energy and determination that caused him to almost lose sight of the desperate nature of the fix he was in.

His position becoming hard and wearisome to maintain, he made a laborious search with his hands for chinks, or depressions in the side of the shaft by the help of which he might attempt an ascent.

The search was in vain. There was no cleft large enough for him to put finger and thumb into. Thus debarred from finding an upward way of escape, he made up his mind to descend to the bottom of the chasm.

"At any rate, it'll be safer there than here," he said, "and in any case I can't remain indefinitely where I am. For one thing this bush wouldn't hold me. It's feeling the strain an uncommonly hard one as it is."

Hanging on to a branch, Brent slid from off the bush, and one of his feet touched something hard. Leaning all his weight upon it, he found that the support did not give. It was a piece of jutting rock, and a few moments later Brent was clutching it with both hands.

Then he let go, and dropped several feet, falling upon a lot of sand and rubble stone that sent up clouds of suffocating dust. He had reached the bottom of the shaft. That was a great deal to the good considering all the circumstances.

A match flame showed him that at its base the shaft was far smaller than he had expected to find it. Moving from point to point, he examined the steep walls of rock that, streaming with moisture, seemed in their overhanging immensity ready to close in and crush him in a terrible embrace.

Then something that he saw brought an eager look into his face. It was a large, circular opening in the rock.

"It's an underground passage," he exclaimed. "My luck's in still. It must lead out to the open somewhere."

In darkness, for he had to be sparing of the few matches left to him, Brent made his way into the tunnel. The air was damp and unwholesome, and creeping things that had never seen the light scurried awkwardly away at the lad's approach.

After proceeding for some distance, Brent found further progress abruptly stopped by a huge rock that completely blocked up the passage. This was disheartening. There was no removing such an obstacle.

At the cost of most of his precious matches, however, the lad discovered that the rock had fallen from the roof, the place it had occupied being now a huge cavity. The upper edge of the rock, too, had been worn down several inches by the constant drip of water, for it was of the soft and friable kind of stone that is peculiar to localities where caves are a common physiographical feature.

Catching hold round the top of the fallen boulder, Brent dragged himself up, and found little difficulty in worming a way across it, and dropping to his feet on the other side.

There he paused to strike a light. The pale gleam shone across the narrow passage, and Brent held the match until it had burnt out, heedless of the flame that scorched his finger and thumb. For, lying there, almost at his feet, were two human skeletons.

In the bony grip of one fleshless hand was a rusty sword. By the side of the other an ancient pistol was lying, not far away from a second weapon of the same kind. The tragic spectacle told its own moving tale.

Here in the tunnel two men had fought to the death. One had pursued the other along the underground way, and the fugitive, finding his way unexpectedly barred by the fallen rock, had, perforce, to turn and meet the attack of his infuriated enemy.

Both had perished, the age in which they lived had long since passed away, and it had remained for Norris Brent to learn the mystery of their fate.

Startled and shaken in nerve, carrying with him in the sepulchral darkness a vivid picture of what he had seen, Brent hurried away from the gloomy spot, silently owning to a fear that half robbed him of his courage.

When the impression produced on his mind by the grisly sight had worn off, he was more hopeful than before, for he was certain now that he would soon be out of his plight. Buoyed up in spirit by this feeling, he pushed on as fast as he could along the tunnel, which, although of a winding nature here and there, maintained a fairly straight course.

It narrowed at last to a little passage, scarcely large enough for a man to walk along in comfort. The level ground changed to a steep ascent that continued for some sixty or seventy yards, this gradient ending abruptly at the foot of a flight of stone steps.

Eager and excited, Brent ascended the steps. They were slippery with moisture, worn deeply away in places, and covered here and there with a thick growth or rotting fungus.

"Hallo!" muttered Brent, as the steps ended on the level. "Where am I now?"

By the light of a match, he discovered that he was in a large cellar. Rows of barrels, piled up to the ceiling, were everywhere. Threading his way between them, he came to some more steps, ran quickly up them, pushed open the door at the top, and entered a long, dingy passage, at the far end of which an oil-lamp, hanging on the wall, gave forth a sickly light.

Walking down the passage, Brent paused at the doorway of a side room, from which came the sound of noisy snoring. The door was slightly ajar. Pushing it open wider, the lad looked into a room that had a solitary occupant.

This was an old man, with a red, flabby face, who was sleeping in an easy-chair drawn up to the fireplace. A strong smell of spirits and stale tobacco-smoke impregnated the atmosphere.

"It's Dan Morgan!" said Brent, recognising the sleeping man, whom he knew well by sight. "And this is the Smugglers' Tavern. Well, of all the funny experiences I've ever had, this is the funniest!"

His first impulse was to awaken Morgan, but on second thoughts he decided not to, for the other was a violent-tempered individual, who would doubtless resent being aroused from his drunken slumber, and give vent to a torrent of foul abuse.

Like his house, Dan Morgan had an evil and sinister reputation, and whatever custom he might once have had in years gone by, he had lost long ago.

Scarcely anyone ever called at the Smugglers' Tavern, which was falling into ruin as fast as it could do, and how Morgan lived was something of a mystery to the Rocksbay people.

It was whispered by one or two old fishermen, though, that Morgan had made money at one time by dark and lawless practices, and these reports met with general acceptance.

Turning away, Brent moved on, but he had not taken many steps when he paused again. The murmur of voices, one of which he was electrified to recognise as his cousin's, came to his ears. A light streamed through the partly-curtained glass panelling of a door, and Brent looked into the room beyond.

Seated at a table, smoking and drinking, were Guy Melville and Karl Marrok. So amazed was Brent that, carried away by his excited curiosity, he pressed his face close against the glass. As he did so, Marrok, laughing

coarsely at some remark Guy Melville had just made, happened to glance across the room.

A startling change immediately overcame the expression of the gipsy's face. Uttering a hoarse cry, he rose tremblingly to his feet. The glass he held in his hand fell with a crash to the floor, and was shivered to pieces. With eyes that seemed to be starting from their sockets, he glared at the spectre he had seen.

"Curse it all, man!" exclaimed Melville angrily. "What are you doing? You look like a raving lunatic!"

Marrok pointed towards the door with trembling forefinger.

"Look!" he cried. "The boy—your cousin!"

A snarled curse bursting from his lips, Melville sprang to his feet, and looked where the other pointed to.

"There's no one!" he exclaimed. "Is this a joke you are playing on me? You'll rue it if it is!"

Muttering incoherently, the Hungarian rushed across the room, flung open the door, and darted into the passage and out into the open. He could neither see nor hear anyone.

"Well," viciously snarled Melville at his elbow, "are you convinced now that you've made a wretched fool of yourself?"

Marrok, steadying himself with an effort, shook his head.

"I'm as certain as that I stand here," he answered, "that your cousin, Norris Brent, was looking at us through the glass door in the passage. I saw him as plainly as I see you now. Then he disappeared."

There was no mistaking the conviction with which the man spoke; and a fury of angry passion swept over Melville as he realised that once more had his young cousin escaped from the net spread for his destruction.

With a gesture of impotent wrath, he directed the other to follow. As soon as they were back in the room they had so hurriedly vacated a few moments before, he turned on Marrok, with a dangerous look in his eyes.

"Is this true what you tell me?"

"True enough—worse luck!" replied the gipsy, who seemed now to have regained all his customary assurance. "It was your cousin without a doubt. Drat the young cub! How he managed to escape beats me!"

Melville shook his clenched fist in the other's face.

"You bungler!" he cried. "You precious fool! I believe you've been lying to me, and that you planted a made-up story on me on purpose to get some more of my money!"

"That's false!" Marrok replied, apparently more amused than angered by the reproaches showered upon him. "I threw the youngster down the pit, as I've told you, and as he would tell you if you asked him about it."

"It's a pity you didn't fling yourself down!" declared Melville, with a malignant scowl at his companion. "It would have been better for you to do so than to fail so miserably a second time!"

The taunt stung Karl Marrok to the quick. His eyes gleamed with a light that made Melville shrink back with a sudden fear that the other was going to make a spring at him.

"Have a care for yourself!" said the gipsy menacingly. "I'm not a dog for you to bully! Offend me, and you will regret it to the last day of your life! Remember that a word from me would ruin you!"

"Ah!" sneered Melville, pale and trembling. "So you threaten me with exposure?"

"Not so long as you treat me as I mean to be treated," Marrok answered. "You employed me for a certain purpose, which I've done my best to carry out; and in the end you'll have no cause to complain. Great heavens! Don't I hate the cub as much as you do? Perhaps more! If you never gave me another shilling I should never rest until he was out of my way!"

"But how did he escape?" asked Melville, biting sullenly at the end of a cigar. "And what the dickens brought him here? He must have seen you just before you attacked him."

Marrok shook his head.

"No," he replied, "I'm certain he never caught sight of me. The reason for his coming here is as much a mystery to me as it is to you. Perhaps Morgan can tell us something about it."

They went and roughly awakened Dan Morgan from his sleep. He abused them vigorously, and it was some time before he consented to listen to them.

"Haven't seen him," he growled, when Guy Melville was at last able to make an inquiry respecting his cousin. "Neither he nor anyone else has been near this room."

"But he was in the tavern," Melville persisted. "Marrok saw him."

"Then he's not here now," said Morgan—"or if he is, he's in hiding somewhere. You'd better both of you go and look for him. I give you leave to."

The exasperated exclamation that Guy Melville gave vent to was drowned by the loud banging of a door at the end of the passage.

"That's the wind at the cellar door!" said Morgan, a dull gleam of interest showing in his face. "Now, I closed that myself not an hour ago. Who can have been down into the cellar since and left it open?"

The three men stared at each other; and then, moved simultaneously by the same thought, went out into the passage.

Taking a lighted lamp in his hand to show the way, Morgan descended the steps into the cellar, closely followed by Melville and Marrok, who were eagerly hoping to find Brent in hiding there.

"He'll be crouching behind some of these barrels," said Morgan, "if he's here at all. Come out of it!" he shouted roughly. "You'll have to show yourself sooner or later!"

No response answered the summons, and Guy Melville and Marrok began a systematic search of the place.

Suddenly an excited cry from Dan Morgan's lips interrupted them.

"Look here!" exclaimed the landlord of the Smugglers' Tavern. "Your cousin, Mr. Melville, found his way into this house up these stone steps that lead down into the underground tunnel that the old smugglers used to escape by when the Revenue officers were hot on their track. See! Here are his footmarks!"

Hurrying to where Morgan stood at the head of the steps, the other two looked down at the footprints clearly marked in the fungus that overgrew the mouldering stone.

In silence Guy Melville and his associate glanced at each other. The mystery of Norris Brent's escape was now explained to them.

(Another thrilling, long instalment of this splendid serial story next Wednesday. Order your copy early.)

THIS·WEEK'S·CHAT

Whom to Write to — — — — —

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For Next Wednesday:

"THE HONOUR OF A JEW!"

By Martin Clifford.

For sustained dramatic effect, next Wednesday's story will surely rank as one of the finest popular Martin Clifford has yet produced. As its title suggests, the story centres around Dick Julian, the good-natured Jewish junior, who is also the nephew of Mr. Moses, the Wayland moneylender, and a man whose reputation is not of the best. As Julian owes his berth at St. Jim's to the monetary assistance of Mr. Moses, he naturally has recourse to pay him frequent visits; and when the fact comes to light—through the agency of Levison of the Fourth—Julian is promptly sent to Coventry by his schoolfellows. Things come to such a desperate pass that the Jewish lad feels he must throw up the life which is so dear to him, and go forth to work his own way in the world. Happily, however, the good that is in Mr. Moses comes to the surface, and he makes it possible for the boy to resume his school career, thus proving

"THE HONOUR OF A JEW"

to be inborn even in the hard heart of a moneylender.

"NOTHING DOING" AT NORWICH.

The letter I am printing below will interest all lovers of the "Gem" Prize Storyette Competition:

"69, Goldwell Road, Norwich.

"Dear Editor.—It is a strange thing, but nevertheless true, that I hardly ever see a joke in the 'Gem' from a Norwich reader.

"I have been a reader of the 'Gem' and 'Magnet' ever since I can remember, and that was when each copy cost a halfpenny; but I admit I have never written before, because I had no need. My mother, two brothers, sister, and myself have never missed either of the papers a single week. Although one of my brothers is in Canada, I do not fail to send him the copies regularly.

"We have all sent in several good jokes on postcards, but not one has passed. Perhaps you don't regard Norwich as a 'joky' city? I am determined to keep on sending in until a joke from Norwich appears.

"I must say the stories have been excellent so far. Let us hope they will continue to be as good as ever.—I remain, your sincere friend, TADPOLE."

Well, Master "Tadpole," I have instructed our tame office-boy to look through the back numbers, and he tells me that since the innovation of the Weekly Prize page, there have been four winners hailing from Norwich. This is a very small number indeed, when one compares it with Birmingham's three hundred and Glasgow's two hundred and fifty.

The Storyettes are judged entirely on their merits, irrespective of the towns in which competitors live; so Norwich should have made a much better show than it has done up to the present.

It is "up to" readers in the famous Norfolk city to prove that they *are* a "joky" people; and I shall look out with interest for the name of the next Norwich winner. He will deserve a putty medal in addition to the usual cash prize!

The fact that the Storyettes you have sent in so far have failed, "Tadpole," need not dishearten you. "Nothing gained is lightly won," and you and your chums should stick to it. If only you go about it doggedly enough, I feel sure you will reap a rich reward before you are many months older.

A BROAD-MINDED CLERIC.

I have received the following interesting little note from an Australian chum:

"Hindmarsh, South Australia.

"Dear Mr. Editor,—I have taken the 'Gem' and 'Magnet' for nearly five years, and I think they are both real good, sound papers. I think they deserve the support of every true British boy and girl. There is nothing unwholesome about the stories; and as for the caustic remarks of certain narrow-minded folk that they are 'penny dreadfuls'—well, nothing could be more absurd! My father, who is a minister of the church, was a bit doubtful about my reading them until he read one himself. Now he says I may always get them, as he found nothing wrong with them; and he recommends them to those who want a real good paper for their children to read.

"Wishing you every possible success, I am, yours truly, "MINISTER'S DAUGHTER."

My best thanks go out to my girl chum and her father for the good work they have done on behalf of this journal. I only hope that other parents who are considerate for their children's reading matter will follow the excellent example of the Australian clergyman, and give my books the fair play they deserve by glancing through their contents before deciding to condemn them. It will be a good thing for the 'Gem' and 'Magnet' Libraries, and still better for the hundred of boys and girls who are at present debarred from reading my papers because of foolish and narrow-minded prejudice.

REPLIES IN BRIEF.

"Geelongate" (Victoria).—Marie Rivers is seventeen years of age.

A. Green (Belfast).—Tom Merry is a finer footballer than Talbot. Skimpole is fifteen years of age.

R. G.— Greyfriars triumphed over St. Jim's in the last cricket match. The return game is described in this issue of the "Gem" Library. A threepenny book dealing with the chums of St. Jim's will appear when Mr. Clifford is less busy.

Spencer Gardener (20th Battalion Welsh Regiment).—Good luck to you in your campaign.

H. E. Gardiner (Brockley).—Tom Merry is the better sportsman of those you name.

K. Hargreaves (Leicester).—Thank you very much for your loyal letter. The characters you mention are each fifteen years of age, with the exception of Kildare, who is seventeen.

Sam Herbert and R. S. (near Sunderland).—If it is decided to establish "Tom Merry's Weekly" as a monthly book, you will derive from it a good many hints on the running of an amateur magazine.

Rifleman F. A. Jones (Cambridge).—So sorry to hear you have been plugged by the Huns. Hope the treatment you are now undergoing will put you right. Keep smiling!

"A Loyal Gemite" (Pontypool).—Your chum is very foolish to smoke at his age. You should take him in hand.

"Ammonite."—I will try and act upon your kind suggestion.

D. S. (Bantry).—The first story of St. Jim's which appeared in the "Gem" was entitled "Tom Merry's Schooldays," and the first adventure story was entitled "Scuttled!" Dick Penfold is at Greyfriars. I am sorry I cannot value the coin you mention.

Continued on page iii of cover.)

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REPLIES IN BRIEF—*continued.*

G. P. H. (Partick).—Herries and Manners are a well-matched pair, but I think the latter could win in a boxing contest, if he chose to exert himself.

"An Ambitious Gemite" (Barnsley).—You can, of course, submit your stories to editors in ordinary handwriting, but typewritten manuscripts are preferred, and make a better impression. Of course, there is nothing to pay for submitting stories, barring the cost of the stamped, addressed envelope for return if unsatisfactory.

D. Hayes (Lancaster).—If you looked out for your reply the week after you wrote your letter, I am afraid you were disappointed. I receive so many letters from readers all over the world that many of them have to wait even seven or eight weeks before they see their answer. In reply to your query, Bernard Glyn has all the tools necessary for the making of his inventions.

Harry H. (Birmingham).—Many thanks for verses. They were good, but hardly up to publication standard.

W. N. Charlton (Toronto).—Your camping-out experiences interested me very much. Best wishes for your success.

"Three Middlesbrough Readers."—The suggestion for a book dealing with the adventures of Reginald Talbot is already under way.

Charles Alder and Chums (Leytonstone).—The forming of a cycling club is simplicity itself. Get your chums together one evening, and talk things over. You ought to be able to fix up one spin a week. Levison had been at Greyfriars just over a year when he was expelled.

H. Furminger (Folkestone).—You must send in your jokes on postcards, sonny.

J. Houston (Johnstone).—Fatty Wynn is the only Welsh junior at St. Jim's. I think he takes up quite sufficient space.

Norman Partington (Woodford Green).—The next "Gem" serial will be entitled "Cousin Ethel's Schooldays," and if I am anything in the nature of a prophet, this journal will be in great demand while such a stirring yarn is running. Better place a standing order with your newsagent.

Kathleen F. (Northampton).—Your suggestion for a "Gem" competition shall be borne in mind.

"A Satisfied South African" (Natal).—I wish there were a few more fellows of your stamp knocking about. It did me good to read your letter. Always stand by the "Gem," and the "Gem" will stand by you.

"Nine Loyal Readers" (Bolton).—Thank you for your kind suggestions, which shall have my early consideration.

William L. G. Harris and R. A. Scott (Southsea).—I was wondering when I should get a letter from Southsea again. I know I have a large number of loyal Gemites in that town, but the bounders never write. Still, I suppose that deeds are better than words. In reply to your questions, Harry Mayne is fifteen years of age, and the headmasters of St. Jim's and the Grammar School are between fifty and sixty. The "Gem" is not published in volume form, but you could get binding cases from Messrs. Holbrook, Queen Street, Portsea. Patronise the connections of V.C.'s, you know!

"A Sincere Follower" (Hull).—I think the advertiser in question is genuine enough. If there is any hitch, write to me.

C. J. Rooney (Victoria).—I hope before long to hold a competition for Colonial Gemites only.

J. Staveley and Chum (Bridlington).—The stories you submitted weren't bad for first attempts, but you've got a long way to go yet. Let me see more of your work from time to time. I am always interested in budding authors.

G. C. H. (Woking).—Very many thanks for your letter and loyalty.

J. C. Dransfield (Oldham).—There is now no Correspondence Exchange for readers of the "Gem."

"An Italian's Friend" (Manchester).—Many thanks for your suggestion, which shall be duly considered.

W. Barnes (Stockwell).—When will the boys of the Shell be removed into a higher Form? Never, sonny! It wouldn't pay.

A. C. S. (Hillsborough).—That's right; "pile in" with the Storyettes until you do bring off a prize. It's dogged as does it! You can purchase the articles you mention from Messrs. A. W. Gamage, Ltd., Holborn, London, E.C.

Robert Minns (Willington).—"Tom Merry's Schooldays" was the title of the first St. Jim's story written. "Brought to Book" is out of print, and has been so for some time.

Sergeant E. G. Read (7th Royal Sussex Regiment, British Expeditionary Force).—Very many thanks, sergeant, for your cheery note. My staff and I cordially reciprocate your good wishes, and hope you will continue to read and enjoy the "Gem" for many years to come.

L. Thompson (Melbourne).—I am afraid I could not put you into communication with the boy you mention. Many thanks for helping to spread the fame of the "Gem." You're a brick!

John K. (Alberta).—The Christian name of Manners is Henry. Yes, there is a First Form at St. Jim's.

James Hodgkinson (Sydney).—So you think the Chat Page is a trumped-up affair, do you, and that no letters I reply to are genuine? Then why in the world, Jimmy dear, am I replying to yours?

"A Patriot of the 'Gem'" (Freshwater, I.O.W.).—The Christian names of Darrel, Kerruish, and Sefton are George, Henry, and Ernest respectively.

Private F. C. Gladman (Bury St. Edmunds).—I am very sorry I cannot accede to your request. The military authorities would raise Cain about it.

L. Thomas (Bristol).—Eat light suppers, and the nightmares should disappear. You are evidently in a state of "nerves."

James Watson (Adelaide).—I quite see your point, but it would be impossible to hang out competitions in order to accommodate Colonial readers, especially as the mails are disorganised. One of these times I will institute a competition for Colonials only.

"A Hampshire Reader."—I am very sorry indeed to hear of the death of your chum. Although he did not perish in actual warfare, the Roll of Honour would not be complete without his name.

"An Australian Chum" (Victoria).—I think the Australian contingent are doing great work at the Dardanelles. Britain will ever have cause to remember their gallantry.

"An Australian Lassie" (Victoria).—The tone of your letter touched me very much. May the good work which you are doing on behalf of the "Gem" Library be amply rewarded.

"A Constant Reader."—Can't you think of some more original nom de plume, sonny? I think you are a bad lad to smoke cigarettes, and your dad would be perfectly justified in spanking you. Whatever is the world coming to when a boy of your age becomes a victim of the weed? We shall have infants-in-arms smoking fat cigars soon!

"Gem in Excelsis" (Leicester).—I see nothing absurd in the fact that Tom Merry, the Shell hero, was knocked out in fistic encounter by Bob Cherry, of Greyfriars. The best of boxers must taste defeat sometimes, and certainly there was no disgrace in being beaten by such a virile champion as Cherry. Your last surmise is correct.

"Leytonstone."—Thank you for your loyal remarks. Cousin Ethel has left school.

Arthur Briggs (Earl's Court).—You're another johnny who smokes, are you? Better chuck it; it will only stunt your growth and ruin your wind. Try sucking an acid-tablet occasionally, when the craving to smoke sets in.

"A Jewish Reader" (South Africa).—"The Jew of St. Jim's" was "some" tale—what? Don't forget to recommend a course of Dick Julian to all your chums.

A. C. H. (Plumstead).—A good suggestion, and one which I will bear in mind.

Frank Bird (Farringdon) bursts into song, as follows:

"Hip, hip, hip, hip, hurrah for the 'Gem,'
Three cheers for the 'Magnet,' too;
And may you always take them,
And read them through and through."

Loyal sentiments these, but the actual poetry, when weighed in the balances, is found wanting. There are too many "hips" about it, and I don't think my friend Frank will turn out to be another Kipling. But there is no knowing what will happen in this world of ours.

M. E. Smith.—I am unable to tell you the derivation of "Cut the cackle and get to the hosses." Can any "Gemite" oblige?

"Suggestion" (Accrington).—I am looking to all my loyal readers to back me up in the production of "Tom Merry's Weekly."

Hilda Ponter (Lower Edmonton) writes: "I sent you three Storyettes. I understand that you give 2s. 6d. each for them. I sent them up to you last week on postcards, but have not received payment. You have got the jokes, and I want the money." I should like to point out to Hilda that if I paid half-a-crown for every joke submitted I should be expending something like £200 a week!

"Miss Inquisitive" (Muswell Hill).—There is no such place as that you name. Thank you for your kind suggestion, which I will do my best to adopt.

"A Loyal 'Gemite'" (Liverpool).—I have not the addresses of the readers in question; and even if I had, I should not be at liberty to divulge them.

Harold F. Clark (Hull).—Hard luck, old chap! I can well imagine the feeling of disappointment which assailed you when you saw a Storyette prizewinner named Clark, and then found it wasn't you! Never mind; you must keep pegging away.

H. H. R. (Ormskirk).—Glad to hear you are "gone" on Jimmy Silver & Co., "The Boys' Friend" heroes, and hope you will try to make them better known in your town.

"A Loyal 'Gemite'" (Blackburn).—Wally D'Arcy is twelve years of age. More will be heard of him shortly.

I. Simm (Liverpool).—I have received no previous letter from you. What was it all about? Please write and let me know.

THE EDITOR.

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