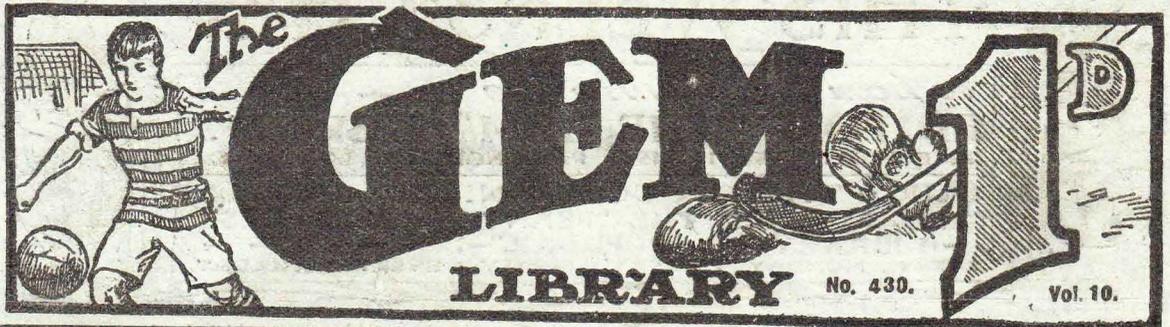


THE CONQUERING HEROES!

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



THE WOUNDED WARRIOR MAKES IT HOT FOR GRUNDY!
(An Exciting Scene in the Magnificent Long, Complete School Tale in this issue.)



THIS WEEK'S CHAT



Whom to Write to — — — — —
EDITOR "THE GEM" LIBRARY.
 THE FLEETWAY HOUSE, FARRINGTON ST. LONDON. E.C.
 OUR · · THREE · · COMPANION · · PAPERS!
 "THE MAGNET" THE "PENNY CHUCKLES."
 — LIBRARY — ; — POPULAR — ; — 1/2" —
 EVERY MONDAY ; EVERY FRIDAY ; EVERY SATURDAY.

For Next Wednesday:

"GRUNDY THE VENTRILOQUIST!"

By Martin Clifford.

The desire of the great George Alfred Grundy to prove to his disbelieving schoolfellows that, given a chance, he is capable of shining in anything he takes up has supplied the theme of more than one of Mr. Clifford's humorous stories in the past. But that this rich vein is far from being exhausted the fine yarn which appears next week proves. Grundy as a ventriloquist is even more screamingly funny than Grundy as a hypnotist. No one can fail to enjoy the account of his early practice, which leads his fellow-juniors to believe him suffering from a fit. Funnier still is his attempt to stop an anti-conscriptionist meeting at Wayland by the exercise of the "power" which he fondly believes himself to possess. Indirectly his ventriloquial practice is the means of his saving Tom Merry from a very dangerous predicament, and when Grundy asks Tom for a place in the cricket team against Greyfriars the skipper does not know how to refuse. Grundy gets his place, with what results you will read. But still he does not cease to believe in himself. Whatever Grundy may not be, he is at least a stickler, and it is quite possible that we have not yet heard the last of either Grundy the cricketer or

"GRUNDY THE VENTRILOQUIST!"

A GRUMBLE.

One of my correspondents objects to what he terms the airing of political views in our stories. He says that there have been many instances of this sort of thing, which are unnecessary to be given; and then he proceeds to pick out an alleged instance which may fairly be said to be quite unpolitical! This particular instance is the remark in that fine story, "The St. Jim's Conscrip'ts," about the accuracy and reliability of the "Evening News."

Why should this be considered to have any political bearing whatever? If I happened to say that I thought the "Westminster Gazette" a very interesting journal, I do not believe this correspondent would take it for granted that I agreed with the political views of that paper. Nor would it be criminal or even desperately improper if I said that I, or if Mr. Clifford said that he, agreed with those of the "Evening News." I don't say that this is the case, and I don't say that it is not. References to political matters are few in my papers, but I have no intention of muzzling my authors to please anyone. Mr. Clifford has in several recent stories dealt with matters of current interest, and it would be absurd if he refrained from any expression of his opinions, or of those which his characters might be supposed to hold in such stories as these. But I am quite sure that nothing which can fairly be taken as offensive by a person broad-minded enough to realise that there is room for opinions other than those to which he himself subscribes has ever appeared.

My correspondent suggests that I shall rename my papers from a list of titles he gives:

- "The Boys' Political Paper," or
- "The Junior Tory Journal," or
- "The Anti-Liberal News," or
- "Weekly Criticisms of the Government."

No, thanks! But I think I may fairly suggest that he might have headed his letter:

"Weekly Criticisms of the 'Gem.'"

A CONVERTED SCOFFER.

Another correspondent writes to tell how he offered a copy of the "Gem" to a soldier billeted at his home who wanted something to read. The soldier replied that he had no use for kids' papers, but took it in default of anything better suited to his great mind. Quiet at first. Then came a low chuckle. Then more chuckles. Then a snigger. Then a

great, roaring burst of laughter, which developed into a positive yell!

The scoffer was converted. The story which worked this change so quickly was that very humorous one in which Baggy Trimble, determined to cut a shine at Glyn's party, to which he had been invited, levied contributions all round upon the other fellows' wardrobes.

REPLIES IN BRIEF.

Daisy C. (Greenock).—A keen reader, indeed, since every line in the "Gem," even the advertisements, interests you!

F. Whiteley, F. Hartley, A. E. Worthington, L. Jackson, Elsie Howard, and G. Shaw have several complaints to make. But they are quite civil about it, and don't use any word stronger than "absurd." They think the Greyfriars strike, in "Schoolboys Never Shall be Slaves," was absurd. (I don't!) They think Bob Cherry a bully. (Poor old Bob!) They are disgruntled because Greyfriars won two cups, and because they don't think Gussy had fair treatment in "School and Sport." (I don't mind owning that I felt a bit sorry for the one-and-only Gustavus myself, having a soft spot in my hard heart for him). They do not like the way I snub budding poets, artists, etc. (I did not know that this was of frequent occurrence, but when a reader asks for a candid opinion, one does not offer him buttered parsnips, naturally). And, in conclusion, they are very loyal Gemites, which seems to be their chief reason for jumping so hard on the "Magnet." (So all's well that ends well!)

"Two Chelmsford Readers" write to say that they thoroughly agree with Malpas. They say, further, that Tom Merry is a prig, that everybody smokes at public schools, and that all the tales are the same, and have the same rubbishy yarns with Gussy, etc. Further, that they don't care (censored) if their names are put on the Roll of Dishonour. Nice kids—what?

"A Salopian Girl Chum."—The "Gem" Christmas Number can be obtained from this office for threepence in stamps. No prospect of Correspondence Exchange being reopened at present.

H. S. (Belfast).—"The person who draws the pictures" in the "Gem" has been duly admonished. He is quite a nice man, so I did not have him executed.

O. K. C. (Wath-on-Dearne).—Tom Merry's guardian is his old governess, Miss Priscilla Fawcett. Cousin Ethel comes into some of the stories. Girls would not fit into them all, you know. No, the boys don't grow any older—and I don't mind prophesying that they never will.

A. S. (London, E.).—Bunter is considerably heavier than Wynn. You must remember that Wynn is an athlete, though he is stout. Cannot give exact weights, but W. G. B. is well over twelve stone. Cannot tell you which of several assorted pairs can beat the other with the gloves. Monteith was up against Kildare at one time, certainly.

F. B. (Huddersdon).—Sorry, but I really cannot give heights. They won't stand still to be measured!

D. N. (Manchester).—Yes, it is generally notoriety the slanderers are after. Some people would not mind being hanged for the sake of public notice, if only hanging were not fatal. Thanks for photo.

"An Admirer of Phyllis Howell" (Woolwich).—No space to print your letter. A bit early to be thinking of the Summer Double Number, is it not? You must look out for announcements.

Your Editor

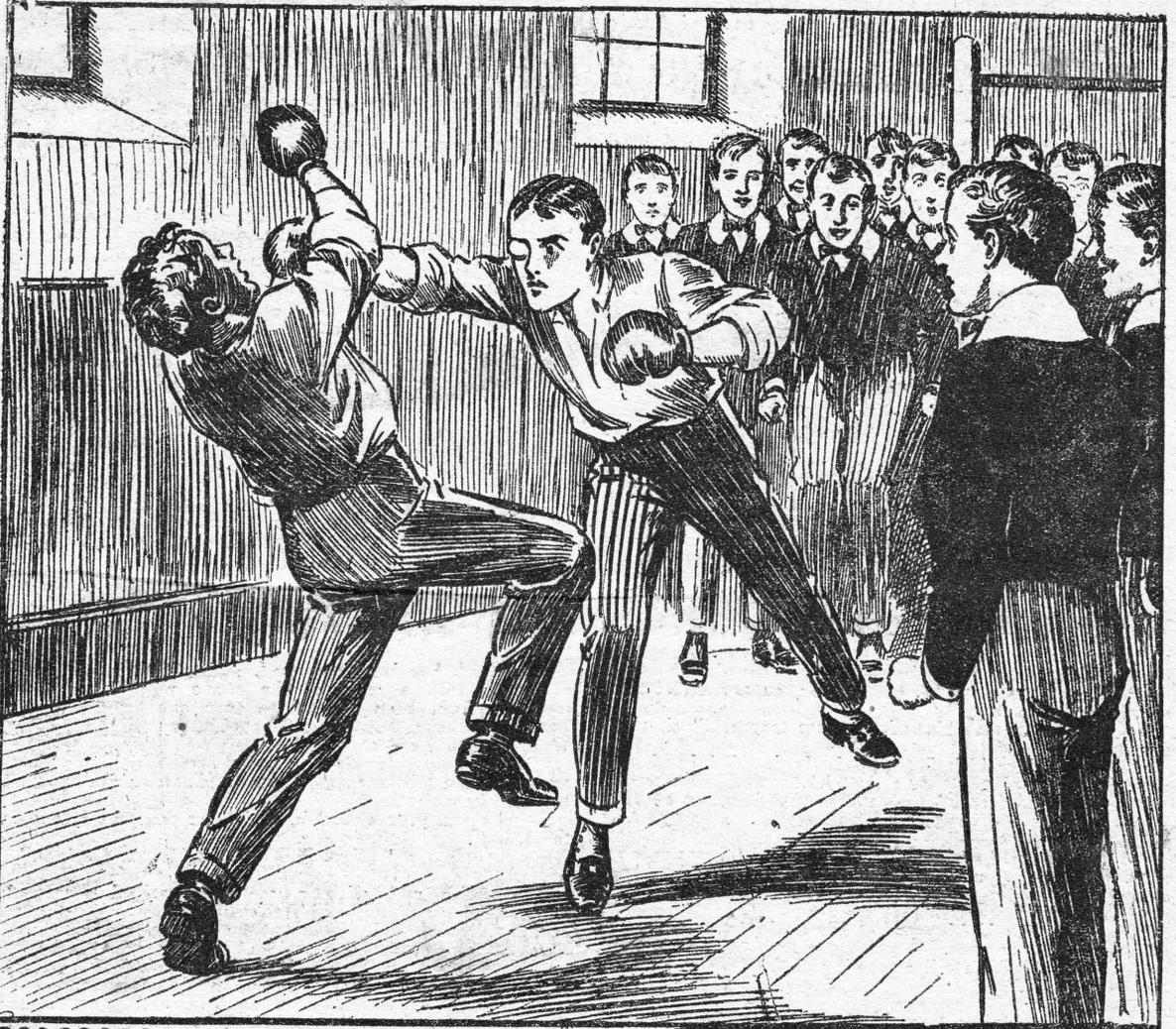
PUBLISHED IN TOWN
AND COUNTRY EVERY
WEDNESDAY MORNING



COMPLETE STORIES
FOR ALL, AND EVERY
STORY A GEM!

THE CONQUERING HEROES!

A Magnificent New, Long, Complete School Story of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's.
By MARTIN CLIFFORD.



The swell of St. Jim's drove out his right like a lightning-flash, and Grundy reeled backwards.
(See Chapter 8.)

CHAPTER 1.

Shoulder to Shoulder.

TOM MEWWY—

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the luminous light of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's, paused in the doorway of the famous apartment shared by Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther—the Terrible

Three.

"Scat!" said Tom Merry abruptly.

"Vamoose!" said Manners.

"Absquatulate!" added Monty Lowther.

The swell of St. Jim's glowered at the speakers through his gleaming monocle.

"Weally, you fellahs, I considah that you are vevy ill-mannahd and offensive! If you persist in your unsociable conduct, I shall have no wesource but to administah a feashful thwashin' all wound!"

"Go hon!" grinned Monty Lowther.

The incensed Arthur Augustus laid down the newspaper he had been holding, and pushed back his spotlessly-white cuffs with a warlike air.

Next Wednesday,

"GRUNDY THE VENTRILOQUIST!" AND "THE PRIDE OF THE FILM!"

No. 430. (New Series.) Vol. 10.

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Monty Lowther promptly fell back in his chair, and rolled over on the floor in mock agony.

"Spare us!" he gasped. "Don't—don't strew the hungry churchyard with our bones, as you love us! Show us the quality of mercy, or we die!"

"Weally, Lowthah, you fwabjous chump! Pway don't make yourself appeah more widge than you are already! I have no desire to hurt you, so long as you wefwain fwom makin' use of oppwobvious epithets."

Monty Lowther leaped to his feet like a jack-in-the-box.

"Thank Heaven!" he panted. "The great Gustavus has seen fit to withhold his hand and spare us! How noble of the mighty Vere de Vere!"

"Don't wot!" said Arthur Augustus tersely. "I have heah a copy of the 'Wylcombe Wecordah,' deah boys, and there's somethin' in it that you ought to see."

The Terrible Three became interested at once.

"Shy it over!" said Tom Merry. "Any news of Cousin Conway from the Front?"

"No; at least, I don't think so. What I wanted to dwaw your attention to was a cwicket challenge."

"Oh!"

Tom Merry & Co. scanned the local paper keenly. The cricket season was about to commence, and, having done battle on miry football-fields for nearly eight months, the juniors were not sorry. A match had already been arranged with Harry Wharton & Co., the Grefyriars heroes; but as it was not due to be played for a fortnight, the St. Jim's fellows were keenly desirous of fixing up a match in the interval.

"Here we are!" said Tom Merry.

And he proceeded to read aloud the paragraph that had arrested D'Arcy's attention:

"The 5th (Wayland) Battalion of the Royal Sussex Regiment require cwicket fixtures with public schools and other clubs in the district. Strong military side.—Apply, Secretary, Hut 14, Wayland Camp."

"My hat!" said Monty Lowther. "Rather a tough proposition, to tackle a team of Tommies! We should get whacked to the wide!"

"Not if we were in training," said Tom Merry. "It's wonderful what fellows can do when they're in form."

"Yaas, wathah! Besides, these military johnnies want to be taught a jollay good lesson for descwibin' themselves as a strong side. I feel quite confident, in my own mind, that we could wipe up the gwound with them. Of course, I should make a thwillin' centuwy—"

"A pair of spectacles, you mean!" grinned Monty Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, deah boys, I see no cause for wibald laughtah!" protested Arthur Augustus, in shrill tones. "Ewewybody knows what a stunnin' cwicketah I am. Some of my stwokes have been compared to W. G. Gwace's, on account of their neatness an' accuwacy."

"Blessed is he that bloweth his own trumpet!" chuckled Manners.

"Wats! I considah I am perfectly justified in classin' myself as a star playah! As a mattah of fact, I have thought vewy sewiously of takin' the cwicket captancy out of Tom Mewwy's hands, an' wunnin' the team myself. Mewwy's only a fifth-wate playah—"

"Why, you ass!" exclaimed Tom warmly. "I was swiping sixers and bowling maiden overs before you went into long clothes!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look here," said Manners. "We ought to snap up this giddy challenge at once. It won't pay to let the grass grow under our feet. Let's call a meeting of the fellows, and tell them the posish."

"Good egg!"

Most of the juniors were in the building, for dusk had fallen, and there was nothing doing out-of-doors. The Terrible Three made everybody rally round, and in half an hour the junior common-room was crowded with a heaving, shouting, trampling mass of humanity.

"On the ball, Merry!"

"Don't be shy, old man!"

"What's the latest?"

Tom Merry made a movement to mount a form, but unfortunately Levison and Mellish wrenched it away at the critical moment. The result was appalling. The captain of the Shell came to the floor with a crash that shook every bone in his body.

"Yaroooh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Order, please!" roared Monty Lowther, who had appointed himself as a sort of master of the ceremonies. "Levison and Mellish, if you don't behave yourselves you will be ejected on your necks, forthwith, and instanter!"

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ARE YOU READING PROSPER HOWARD'S SCHOOL STORIES IN "CHUCKLES," 1st?

The form was righted again, and Tom Merry, tenderly rubbing his injured parts, addressed the noisy multitude.

"Gentlemen, chaps, and fellows!" he began. "We are met together on this suspicious occasion—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"To discuss an important cricket challenge which appears in the 'Rylecombe Recorder.' The Tommies in the Wayland Battalion of the Royal Sussex are eager for matches, and they make out they've a strong side. My idea is to accept their challenge, and wipe up the gwound with them!"

"Bravo!" exclaimed Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn, the celebrated New House trio.

"Half a jiffy!" interposed Talbot of the Shell. "Don't you think a full-blown military team's a bit above our weight?"

"Rats!"

"Nothing's above our weight," said Tom Merry solemnly. "We'd play the M.C.C. if we had half a chance. Now then, who's in favour of the match?"

A forest of hands shot up. It was a most unusual thing for a junior eleven to pit themselves against a team of soldiers; and the novelty of it appealed to the fellows greatly.

"That settles it, then," said Tom Merry. "Every loyal son of St. Jim's is expected to rally round and do his bit towards the success of the side. If he can't play, then he can hang round and shout."

"We shall want plenty of encouragement, I'm thinking," said Talbot quietly.

"Oh, don't be such a dismal Jimmy!" said Tom Merry.

"We've got some topping batsmen and first-rate bowlers, and ought to be good enough for any side in the county."

"Hear, hear!"

The meeting broke up noisily, and for the rest of the evening everyone was speculating as to what manner of team would take the field for St. Jim's. Certain it was that Tom Merry's selection would appeal only to eleven fellows—those immediately concerned. Among the rest there would be seething discontent; and it was unanimously agreed on all sides that there were breakers ahead.

CHAPTER 2.

Grundy on the Warpath.

ON the school notice-board two mornings later the following announcement appeared, in the legible handwriting of Tom Merry:

"STUPENDOUS ATTRACTION!"

"ST. JIM'S JUNIORS v. ROYAL SUSSEX REGIMENT!"

"A match has been arranged, and will take place this afternoon, with a team of the above regiment, and the following have been selected to turn out for St. Jim's: Merry, Manners, Lowther, Talbot, D'Arcy, Figgins, Kerr, Wynn, Blake, Redfern, and Noble.

"This being the first occasion on which we have encountered a military side, all non-combatants are expected to stand by and shout.

"Roll up in your hundreds, and cheer your champions on to victory!"

"(Signed), TOM MERRY, Captain."

The notice met with a somewhat mixed reception. Figgins, Kerr, Wynn, and Redfern sauntered up to the board, rubbed their hands in ecstatic glee, and retired chuckling. Blake and Noble, cricketers both, nodded with infinite satisfaction as they caught sight of their illustrious names. Then they strolled off arm-in-arm, in high feather.

"Tom Mewwy couldn't have done bettah," was Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's comment when he saw the notice. "He's got more tact and judgment than I've evah given him credit for. Quite a wippin' selection, bai Jove!"

But there were others who didn't seem to think so. Levison and Mellish and Crooke came and went, and muttered fierce imprecations, breathing out threatenings and slaughter against Tom Merry and all his works.

Grundy of the Shell took the affair to heart most. Grundy was the biggest duffer breathing, so far as cricket was concerned, yet he entertained a lingering hope that Tom Merry would include his name in the eleven. But the captain of the Shell wasn't having any apparently.

The great George Alfred scanned the notice keenly for a moment. It took a long time for his dull brain to comprehend anything. When he realised he had been left out, he danced about in the Hall in a state of the wildest rage.

"It's shameful!" he roared. "Simply abominable! I should have thought Tom Merry would have sunk all his



Grundy was dribbled to the doorway like a football, and then half a dozen boots clumped upon his anatomy at once, propelling him clean through the doorway. (See Chapter 11.)

personal jealousy and given a chap a fair chance! My hat! I won't stand—"

"You can sit down, then!" said Monty Lowther, coming on the scene suddenly.

And he gave the great Grundy a shove which sent him spinning.

Bump!

Grundy came to earth with a terrific concussion, and gave a roar of wild anguish.

"Lowther, you funny rotter—"

But Monty Lowther had passed on, and the rest of Grundy's remark was wasted on the desert air.

The fallen junior picked himself up, frowning fiercely. He was maddened by the knowledge that his name had been omitted from the list, and did not mean to accept the situation lying down. George Alfred Grundy could be a very headstrong and determined youth on occasion, and his determination was never stronger than at that moment.

He shook his fist savagely at the offending notice, and stalked away. Wilkins and Gunn, his two right-hand men, met him in the passage.

"You look pretty down in the mouth, I must say," was Gunn's greeting. "What's up? Swallowed your tooth-stoppings?"

"Don't rot!" said Grundy. "It's jolly serious. Tom Merry's put up the team for to-day's match, and I'm not included! What do you think of it?"

"Shocking!" said Wilkins.

"Oh, absolutely!" agreed Gunn.

"And I'm not going to stand it!" protested Grundy. "Merry and his precious pals have ridden the high horse a jolly sight too long for my liking! It's high time we put a spoke in their wheel."

"But how?" asked Wilkins helplessly. "We couldn't possibly forestall them, and get up a team to play in their place. There isn't time."

"Why not form a deep, dark plot to kidnap Tom Merry's eleven, and get 'em stowed away somewhere?" suggested Gunn.

"Couldn't be did!" said Grundy. "Besides, I wouldn't descend to a dirty trick of that sort. My idea is this: Let Tom Merry's team go ahead this afternoon without interference. They'll be whacked to the wide, of course, and that's where we come in. We can challenge the Tommies, and succeed where Merry's lot failed. Twig?"

"Not at all a bad wheeze!" observed Gunn. "But do you seriously think, old man, that you could rake together a team as good as Tom Merry's?"

"Great Scott—yes! There's myself—"

"Ahem!"

"What are you ahemming about?" demanded Grundy suspiciously.

"Oh, nothing!" said Wilkins hastily.

"Nothing at all!" said Gunn. "We both know what a gilt-edged, top-notch, eighteen-carat player you are!"

"Yes, rather!"

Grundy beamed. He loved flattery showered upon him in large chunks, and was glad that somebody at least appreciated his cricketing ability.

"I'm glad I've got you two chaps to back me up," he said. "Of course, you're not star players, like me! But still, it's not your fault. Cricketers are born, not made!"

"Oh, of course!" said Wilkins, with a sarcasm which was completely lost on the conceited Grundy.

"I'll get the team together right away," said Grundy.

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A Magnificent New, Long, Complete School Tale of Tom Merry & Co. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

NEXT
WEDNESDAY:

"GRUNDY THE VENTRILOQUIST!"

"Nothing like striking while the iron's hot. Coming for a tour round the studies with me?"

"Nunno!" said Wilkins hurriedly. "I—I happen to have an appointment with Piggott of the Third."

"And I've got to feed my rabbits," said Gunn. "Sorry to leave you in the lurch, old man, but I know you won't mind."

And Wilkins and Gunn went their several ways. As a matter of fact, they wouldn't have accompanied Grundy on his mission for worlds. He was bound to meet with anything but a cheerful reception in most of the studies, especially those whose occupants were devoted followers of Tom Merry. Wherefore, Wilkins and Gunn promptly washed their hands of the affair, leaving their chief to act upon the old saying, that fools rush in where angels fear to tread.

CHAPTER 3.

Bribery and Corruption.

"COME in!"

Thus Digby of the Fourth, as a sharp rap sounded on the door of his study.

Grundy promptly stamped into the room, looking very pompous and important. Digby and Herries were seated at the table, poring over the recent masterpiece of school life, "Rivals and Chums." They looked up in surprise at the intruder, who carried a list in his hand.

"What's the game?" asked Herries.

Grundy plunged into his subject at once.

"I've got a sporting offer to make you chaps," he said.

"Good! Get it off your chest," said Digby.

"I expect you feel a bit sore at being left out of to-day's team—what?" Grundy went on.

"Just a bit," replied Herries. "Why?"

"Because I'm raising a team, and I thought you would like to come in."

"You raising a team?" gasped the two Fourth-Formers together.

"Yes. Tom Merry's tinpot eleven will get it in the neck this afternoon, as sure as fate. They don't stand an earthly chance against the Wayland Battalion. So my idea is to challenge the Tommies afterwards, and prove to Merry that there's a junior eleven at St. Jim's that can knock his into a cocked hat. What do you think of the wheeze?"

"Rotten!" said Digby promptly.

"Putrid!" agreed Herries.

"Why, you—you—"

Grundy clenched his hands with savage rage.

"Go outside if you want to choke!" said Herries. "We don't want you spluttering about in this study like some old hag!"

"You refuse my splendid offer?" gasped Grundy.

"Absolutely! The best thing you can do is to take it away and drown it!"

"My hat! I—I'll jolly well wade in and slaughter you!" howled Grundy, almost foaming at the mouth with rage.

"Slaughter away!" said Digby pleasantly. "We're quite willing to have our remains sent home to our sorrowing parents in a matchbox!"

Grundy said no more. He was upon Digby and Herries with the spring of a tiger, and the next moment a wild and whirling struggle was in progress.

The Shell fellow was not to be despised as a fighting-man, but he found the two occupants of Study No. 6 a tough handful. He succeeded in holding them at bay for a brief instant, then he was swiftly hustled towards the doorway.

"On the ball!" gasped Herries. "Boot him out!"

"Yow! Ow, ow!"

Grundy roared as a couple of boots clumped together on the rear portion of his person. Like a stone from a catapult he shot out into the passage, and alighted with a terrific concussion upon the hard, unsympathetic floor. Then the door of the study was ruthlessly slammed in his face.

"Oh, the rotters!" he groaned. "I'll make them sit up for this later on! I thought they'd simply jump at the chance of playing in my team; but there's no knowing how some fellows take things. Ow!"

And Grundy limped away down the passage, and knocked at the door of Levison's study. The black sheep of the Fourth was within, talking to Mellish and Crooke.

"Buzz off!" he said tersely, as Grundy entered.

"Rats!" said Grundy. "I've got a good proposition to make. Tom Merry's team's going through the mill properly this afternoon—"

"Tell us something we don't know!" growled Mellish.

"And I'm thinking of getting up a team to play the

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Tommies after they've wiped up the ground with that measly eleven that's stuck up on the notice-board!"

Levison & Co. burst into an uncontrollable roar of laughter.

"This is too rich!" gurgled Crooke. "Grundy—Grundy, of all people, getting together a team to play the Tommies! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Levison and Mellish.

Grundy looked furious.

"What's the joke?" he inquired indignantly.

"Carry me home to die, somebody!" gasped Levison.

"Grundy, you fathead, you want putting into a padded room! You're too dangerous to be at large! What in thunder do you know about cricket?"

"Eh?"

"You can't play for toffee!"

"That's your opinion!" said Grundy loftily. "My own is that I'm the best junior exponent of the game at St. Jim's!"

"Now I come to think of it," said Mellish, "I saw you play last season, and it was a sight for gods and men and little fishes!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Grundy's eyes gleamed, and for the moment he felt like rushing upon the cackling juniors, and smiting them hip and thigh. But he remembered his painful experience in No. 6 Study, and held his hand.

"Now, do go away; there's a good chap!" implored Levison. "You can go ahead with your hare-brained scheme if you like, but you'll get no help from us!"

"Not if there's some money going begging?" said Grundy, struck by a sudden idea.

The three rascals pricked up their ears at once.

"What d'you mean?" asked Crooke.

"Supposing I paid you five bob apiece to play in my team?" said Grundy.

"We'd take it," said Mellish.

"Like a shot!" exclaimed Levison.

"And a free feed to anybody who scores more than a dozen runs in one innings?"

"Now you're talking!"

"You agree to play under those conditions?"

"Rather!"

"Good! Just sign your names on this list, will you?" said Grundy.

"We want our five bobs first!" said Crooke cautiously.

Grundy drew out the necessary money, and handed it over. Fortunately, he was well supplied with funds, for his rosy dreams of raising a team would have been dashed to the ground.

"There you are!" he said. "I'm a generous chap, I am! And if anybody starts asking you questions, don't say I've bribed you to play, because I haven't. That's your pay, as professionals in my eleven!"

"My hat!" gasped Levison.

"Don't forget," continued Grundy, "that you're under my wing now and must turn up at practice whenever I so order."

"Rely on us," said Mellish solemnly.

Grundy nodded to the three juniors, and quitted the study. When he had gone, Levison and Mellish and Crooke stared at each other blankly.

"Mad!" said Mellish.

"Mad as a hatter or a March hare!" added Crooke.

"But we've got our five bobs, and that's all that matters!" grinned Levison. "Let's improve the shining hour by nibbling currant-buns in the tuckshop."

"Good egg!"

And, highly satisfied with themselves and with the world in general, Levison & Co. wended their steps in the direction of the school tuckshop to regale themselves with newly-made buns and foaming ginger-pop.

CHAPTER 4.

Grundy's Eleven.

"SKIMMY, old chap!"

Skimpole of the Shell halted as he heard himself hailed in the sunny quadrangle after dinner. He blinked at George Alfred Grundy through his big spectacles.

"Well, my dear fellow," he murmured, "what can I do for you?"

"Play cricket," said Grundy.

"What!"

"Help us to wipe up the ground with the men of the Royal Sussex!"

"But Tom Merry's team are playing them, are they not?"

Grundy snorted.

"They haven't a dog's chance," he said. "'They'll be smashed to smithereens, and made to look awful fools! Then my eleven will play against the Army chaps, and the result will be reversed. Will you play?"

"I have no time for such dangerous and demoralising games as cricket!" said Skimpole severely. "Other and more elevating topics occupy my mind. I have outlined a splendid scheme for a fleet of two million British airships—a scheme which will be presented to the War Office free, gratis, and for nothing. When it is put into effect, Zeppelin raids will be things of the past!"

"Blow Zeppelins!" roared Grundy. "Are you, or are you not, going to play in my eleven? You see my fist? Well, you'll feel it, too, if you say 'No!'"

Skimpole shrank back in alarm as Grundy brandished his clenched fist in front of the amateur inventor's nose.

"I—I will willingly grant you my services!" he exclaimed. "But I fear I know little about cricket. It is ages since I kicked a ball!"

"You don't kick a ball in cricket, ass!"

"Really!" Then I have been labouring under a misapprehension."

"What you want," said Grundy, "is plenty of hard practice. Be at the nets in half an hour. Hallo, Trimble! What do you want?"

Baggy Trimble, the greediest, oiliest, and most detested fellow at St. Jim's, came rolling up. Conspicuous smears of raspberry jam lurked about his lips.

"I hear you're raising an eleven," he said. "Count me in!"

Grundy eyed the fat junior with extreme disfavour.

"Can you play cricket?" he asked.

"Can I not!" said Trimble, swelling so visibly that he was in imminent danger of shedding several of his waistcoat buttons. "I am one of the finest players who ever got into flannels! They were going to give me a trial for Hampshire, only I—I wasn't old enough!"

"Don't tell such frightful whoppers!" growled Grundy.

"Matter of fact, I don't believe you can play at all! However, I'll put your name down on the list. Mind you turn up to practice regularly!"

"Thanks awfully!" said Trimble. "That beast Merry will be sorry he did not select me when he sees what sort of a show I put up!"

Grundy gave a grunt, and turned away. He still needed three fellows to complete his eleven, and the task of obtaining them was by no means easy. Most of the juniors were not so easily amenable to a bribe as Levison and his cronies.

Reilly of the Fourth was crossing the quad at that moment, and Grundy went up to him.

"Would you like to be a playing member of my team?" he asked.

"Shure, an' I wouldn't touch yer silly old team with a barge-pole!" retorted Reilly.

"But Tom Merry's left you out of his eleven——"

"I know; and he was a silly spalpeen to do it!" said Reilly.

"But that's no reason why I should play for yours."

"Now, look here, old chap, do be reasonable," urged Grundy. "Here's half-a-crown, and it's yours if you will consent to enlist under my banner."

Reilly looked at the half-crown, and he looked at Grundy. Then, before the latter had time to realise what was happening, the Irish junior's fist shot out, catching him fairly and squarely on the point of the jaw. With a wild yell, Grundy toppled over backwards, and measured his length in the quadrangle.

"Shure, an' there's some more where that came from!" said Reilly generously.

"Ow-ow-ow! Hands off, you rotter!"

Reilly sauntered off, chuckling. The captain of the new eleven tottered to his feet, and continued his quest for recruits.

But Grundy's luck was dead out. Nobody seemed anxious to make himself the laughing-stock of the school, and the offer of a bribe was like a red rag to a bull, in many cases. Bernard Glyn and Clifton Dane kicked Grundy out of their study without ceremony when he suggested that they should be paid servants of his; and some of the fellows waxed even more warlike, and gave Grundy a terrific grueling before they had finished with him.

At last, however, Grundy's luck changed. After a good deal of compromising, he roped in Gore of the Shell; and Buck Finn and Blenkinsop made up the eleven.

Had Grundy paused to reflect seriously upon the situation, he would have realised that fellows like Skimpole and Baggy Trimble would be helpless as new-born babes against the hefty, stalwart giants of the Royal Sussex. But Grundy was

not given to weighing the pros and cons of an affair. He acted first, and thought afterwards.

And Tom Merry & Co., when they heard of the great George Alfred's latest venture, were unanimous in their opinion that he would come the greatest cropper of modern times.

CHAPTER 5.

Knocks for Knox!

"OH, my hat!"

"Hold me up, someone!"

"Water—water! I'm fainting!"

These and sundry other exclamations, went up from Tom Merry & Co., as they strolled out to inspect the cricket-pitch. The match with the military side was due to take place in an hour, and meanwhile an extraordinary scene was in progress. Three stumps had been hammered in the turf at a short distance away, and Grundy and his merry men were at practice.

It was, indeed, a sight to see and wonder at. Grundy was batting, and the others were bowling to him in turn.

"Play!" said Levison, preparing to take his run.

Grundy braced himself up, and prepared to smite the oncoming leather.

"My only Aunt Sempronia!" gurgled Monty Lowther. "Don't talk about pantomimes, after this! This knocks Peter Pan and all the rest of 'em into a cocked hat! Ha, ha, ha!"

The great Grundy had swung his bat forward, expecting to see the ball go soaring away into space. But nothing of the sort transpired. Instead, the sphere struck a grassy mound on its way to the wicket, and, shooting up suddenly, caught Grundy on the funny-bone. He dropped his bat with a crash, and danced about on the greensward like a dervish, his face distorted with pain.

"Ha, ha, ha!" spluttered Levison. "Awfully sorry, Grundy, old fellow! Quite an accident, I assure you. Ha, ha, ha!"

Grundy looked almost murderous.

"You did it on purpose, you sniggering lunatic!" he roared. "My hat! I'll jolly soon show you that it doesn't pay to come those tricks on me!"

And Grundy, clenching his big fists threateningly, took a sudden, swift stride towards the cad of the Fourth.

Wilkins and Gunn grasped their chief by the collar and swung him back.

"No good proceeding to assault and battery, old chap!" murmured Gunn. "You'll only cause a rift in the lute, and break the blessed team up. We've only got the bare eleven, and everyone's precious."

Grundy saw the wisdom of this remark, and dropped his hands to his sides. Then he returned to the wickets, and took up his bat.

"Watch me!" he exclaimed. "Then you'll see exactly how it's done!"

"This is where we smile!" murmured Monty Lowther, nudging his comrades. "I'll bet anybody six to one in bull-eyes that Grundy misses fire!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Gore sent down the next ball. To do him justice, he was a clever bowler; much too clever for a clumsy freak of Grundy's calibre. The captain of the new eleven opened his shoulders, and looked as if he were about to dispatch the ball to the uttermost ends of the earth.

Grundy's bat merely circled through the air. It was a blind, haphazard stroke, and the ball came crashing up, uprooting the middle stump and stretching it flat.

Grundy gaped and gasped like a fish out of water. He couldn't understand it at all.

"That—that was a fearful fluke!" he stammered.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'll give you an encore, if you like," grinned Gore. "Anything to oblige."

Grundy tossed the ball to the bowler, and crouched at the wickets, determined to do or die.

Gore took a short, swift run, and delivered the ball. There was an ominous, smashing sound, and when the air had cleared it was seen that the stumps were completely spread-eagled.

"Watch me!" mimicked Monty Lowther. "Then you'll see exactly how it's done!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Grundy's face went livid with fury. He raised the bat above his head, and dashed it furiously to the ground.

"Somebody else can take a turn!" he raved. "I'm fed-up!"

Baggy Trimble waddled up to fill the breach. He looked like anything but a cricketer as he took his stand at the wickets.

"Gimme the ball!" ordered Grundy. "I'll jolly soon settle Trimble's hash!"

And he fairly hurled the leather in the direction—so he thought—of the wicket. Unfortunately, it missed fire altogether, and went straight as a die for Knox of the Sixth, who happened to be crossing the pitch at that moment.

The unpopular prefect saw the danger, and took a goodly leap into the air. Unfortunately, the ball leapt at the same instant, and came with a sickening thud against his shin, causing him to leap higher than ever.

"Ye gods! We're getting our fill of sport this afternoon, and no mistake!" said Tom Merry. "Grundy's broken the bowling record, and now Knox is treating us to a unique demonstration of the high jump!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Knox was not very badly hurt, but badly enough to make a song about it. He glared at Grundy as if he would eat him.

"Come here!" he roared.

Grundy did not budge.

"Do you hear me?" raved Knox.

"Rats!"

"Why, you—your cheeky young cub!" hissed the irate prefect. "I'll jolly well tan your hide for you!"

There was a cricket-stump in the vicinity, and Knox, white with passion, picked it up and rushed pell-mell into the midst of the froaks, causing tremendous havoc. The heavy weapon rose and fell again and again with relentless regularity; and the recipients of the blows fled for their lives, yelling at the top of their voices. Knox was a very undesirable person to come into close contact with just then.

Two minutes later the cricket-ground was deserted. Grundy & Co. were glad to make themselves scarce after such a chapter of accidents; and they mentally resolved to hide their diminished heads for the next half-hour, at the end of which time Tom Merry & Co. would do battle with the regimental team whose name and reputation were household words throughout the county.

CHAPTER 6.

Soldiers v. Schoolboys.

THIS is St. James' School—eh, what?"

A smart-looking young subaltern paused in the old gateway, with a cricket-bag grasped tightly in his hand. Behind him came ten sturdy sons of the Empire—officers, non-commissioned officers, and men, who gazed upon the massive walls of the old school with keen interest.

"That's right, sir," said Jack Blake, who was standing in the gateway. "You're the regimental side?"

The officer nodded. He looked at Jack Blake rather curiously.

"Why are you in flannels, young 'un?" he asked. "Is there a junior match on this afternoon as well?"

"I don't understand you," said Jack Blake, looking puzzled. "There's only our match with you."

The subaltern started.

"Why, what's the little game, begad?" he inquired. "You surely don't mean to say that a little potted shrimp like you is playing for St. Jim's?"

Blake gave a grim chuckle.

"You'll find that even little potted shrimps know how to wield the willow," he said. "We'll give you a jolly good game, anyway."

"You muddleheaded little maniac! Do you know we have two ex-county men playing for us?"

"I don't know, and I don't care. All I say is you'll find us a tougher nut to crack than you seem to think."

"Are the rest of the St. Jim's players about your own size?"

Jack Blake nodded.

"Then what d'ye mean by challenging us to a match?" demanded the officer warmly. "We were under the impression that we were to play a senior eleven."

"You'll find you've got all your work cut out to beat us," said Blake, with conviction.

"Why, you cheeky young cub! I'll scratch the match, by thunder!"

A tall, fine-looking sergeant, with twinkling blue eyes, stepped forward.

"I shouldn't do that, sir, if I were you," he said. "We shall probably beat 'em up hill and down dale, but it'll be a bit of practice for us."

Lieutenant Ray—that was the officer's name—reflected for a moment, tugging at his moustache.

"Pr'aps you're right, Sergeant Wilson," he said, at length. "The better plan will be to teach these young

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lunatics a lesson which they won't forget in a hurry. Come on!"

The soldiers were watched by an interested crowd as they crossed the quadrangle, and made their way to the cricket-ground. Tom Merry & Co., who were practising at the nets, looked mere Lilliputians against the giants of Kitchener's Army.

"They'll be whacked!" was Kildare's comment.

"Whacked to the wide!" agreed Darrel. "It was like their cheek to arrange a match of this sort. Serves 'em jolly well right if they're licked by an innings and unlimited runs!"

"Rather!"

The Sixth-Formers were by no means the only fellows who predicted the downfall of Tom Merry & Co. Grundy and his satellites were unanimous in their opinion that the presumptuous junior eleven would be wiped off the face of the earth.

Tom Merry shook hands with Lieutenant Ray, and spun a sixpence into the air.

"Heads!" called the officer.

"So it is."

"Then we'll put you in first. If you're not all out within twenty minutes or so I shall be vastly surprised."

Tom Merry laughed, and beckoned to Talbot to open the innings with him.

An ironical cheer greeted the two Shell fellows as, in all the glory of their pads and batting-gloves, they sauntered down the pavilion steps.

"They'll be back again in under a minute," was Grundy's opinion.

Lieutenant Ray prepared to bowl. Tom Merry, undaunted by the grim expression on the officer's face, stood up fearlessly.

Whack!

With a report like a pistol-shot, the ball was returned to the bowler, who fielded it with a curious expression on his face.

"There's talent here," he muttered. "This infant seems to be determined to defy me, by jiminy!"

Tom Merry stuck to his guns well. He didn't make any runs off the first over, but he kept his wicket intact, and that was something.

Talbot fared even better. Corporal Jim Kennedy, reputedly a fast bowler, was operating at the other end; and one of the greatest pleasures in life, in Talbot's opinion, was fast bowling. He snicked the first ball through the slips for a couple, and repeated the process with the second. The next three balls were too good to hit, and Talbot contented himself by simply putting his bat in the way. But when he sent the last ball of the over—a weak half-volley—clean out of the ground for six, the field rang again and again with wild cheering.

"That was topping!" said Kildare. "Of course, the youngsters haven't an earthly chance of victory, but they're shaping a lot better than I thought."

"If only Talbot were a couple of years older!" said Darrel, with a sigh. "We could do with him in the first eleven, I'm thinking. Hallo! Tom Merry's on the warpath now! Look at that!"

Tom had got the full face of the bat to one of Lieutenant Ray's swiftest, and the ball soared out to the long-field, where, fortunately for Tom, no one was fielding deeply enough, the soldiers having imagined that the ball would never be hit so far.

The batsmen ran three, and the score proceeded to mount up steadily. Twenty runs were registered on the board before Tom Merry fell an easy prey to cover-point.

"Good man!" muttered Jack Blake, as he passed Tom Merry on his way to the wickets. "We've got a start, anyway."

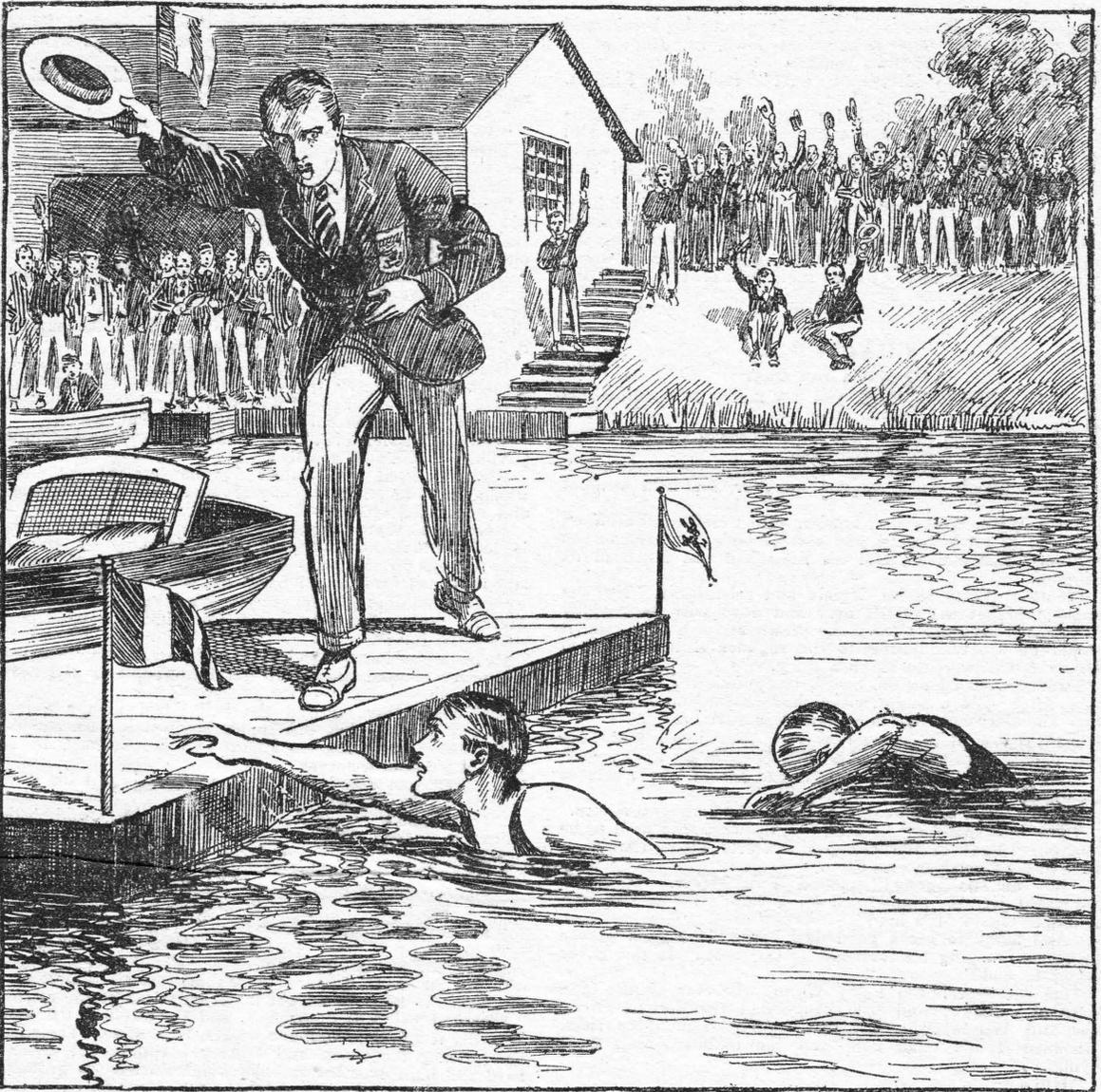
"Mind you keep it up, Blakey!" said Tom. "Look out for that fellow Ray. He's a wizard in human shape. The other chap, Kennedy, isn't so bad, but he gets a dangerous pitch sometimes. Go in and prosper, old scout!"

With his leader's words of encouragement ringing in his ears, Jack Blake strode on to the crease. He looked a fine, upright figure in his flannels, and Lieutenant Ray made a mental resolve to bowl his level best.

But Jack Blake's defence was impenetrable, and Talbot, at the other end, was in fine form. He smote the ball in all directions, and was still going strong, with Blake backing him up loyally, when fifty went up on the board.

The superiority of the military team, however, asserted itself at length. Jack Blake began to take liberties, and the wicket-keeper, stumping him when he was a yard out of his crease, put a stopper on his magnificent innings.

A complete collapse followed. Man after man came in, padded and gloved, and looking capable of mighty things. But Ray and Kennedy bowled with such deadly purpose that the wickets went down like skittles. Figgins and Kerr and Redfern amassed between them the anything but imposing



With a last supreme spurt, Captain Dick Mason overhauled his rival of the Royal Sussex, winning the contest for St. Jim's in champion style. (See Chapter 15.)

aggregate of two, and Fatty Wynn's middle-stump was sent flying before he had scored.

"After our ripping start, too! In you go, Gussy!" said Tom Merry, with almost a groan.

"Wely on me to stop the wot," said Arthur Augustus, adjusting his celebrated monocle. "I have more than once remarked that I am a wippin' cwicketah."

"Yes, I believe you have, now I come to think of it," said Monty Lowther, with crushing sarcasm. "I'll bet you six to one in dough-nuts that you get a duck's egg!"

The swell of St. Jim's made no response to this tempting offer. Instead, he put on his batting-gloves with an exceedingly elaborate air, and sauntered out to the wickets amid a storm of ironical cheering.

Lieutenant Ray grinned at the immaculate figure at the other end.

"Play!" he said tersely.

And then, with a sly wink at Sergeant Wilson, he took his run.

Arthur Augustus looked positively fierce as he prepared to smite. The bat whirled through the air, missing the ball by inches. There was a terrible smashing sound, and the next moment the wicket-keeper was engaged in measuring the distance between the stumps and the farthest bail.

"How's that?" smiled Ray.

"Out!" said the grinning umpire.

"Oh, weally, you know! How vevy extwaordinary! I suppose I must abide by the verdict?"

"I suppose so!" said the umpire. "Good-bye, Bluebell!"

And Arthur Augustus started on the slow, seemingly unending, walk to the pavilion, thinking with the poet:

"Thou wast not made to play, infernal ball!"

His face, flushing crimson, Gussy retired hurriedly into the pavilion, solacing himself with the knowledge that there was such a thing as a second innings.

Monty Lowther went in next. He remained in partnership with Talbot for nearly half an hour, and the faces of the St. Jim's supporters brightened up perceptibly. With the score at 75 for eight wickets, Monty Lowther was clean bowled, and Harry Noble, the Australian junior, followed on.

"They'll probably reach the hundred, after all," said Kildare. "The tail's not wagging at all badly."

Talbot was still in excellent form, and he and Noble took the score to 90 before the latter was bowled. Then Manners, the eleventh man, came in, and scored a boundary off the first ball sent him.

A few minutes later, however, Manners attempted the

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impossible. He struck wildly at a dangerous leg-break, and paid the penalty. The wicket went down, St. Jim's being all out for 99 in their first venture.

"Talbot's made fifty—not out!" exclaimed Figgins. "Give him a giddy cheer!"

It was a proud moment for Reginald Talbot when he received that unanimous ovation, and a prouder one still when Marie Rivers, his girl chum, put out her little white hand impulsively and breathed a sincere message of congratulation.

Tom Merry & Co. had fared much better than had been expected; and it remained to be seen whether the officers and men of the Royal Sussex were capable of exceeding the useful total of 99 runs. If they did, then the Saints would have to go all out in the second innings in order to taste the sweets of victory.

CHAPTER 7. Grundy's Joy Day.

LIUTENANT RAY and his merry men astonished the natives when they went in to bat. The spectators had expected to see them score, but not quite so freely as they did.

Figgins and Fatty Wynn went on to bowl for St. Jim's, and they were slogged all over the field without ceremony.

Fatty Wynn was a fine bowler. He usually came off on any sort of pitch against any sort of odds; but the season had only just started, and his hand had lost much of its cunning.

Lieutenant Ray smote fiercely and relentlessly. He was anxious to get the match over and done with as speedily as possible. Stumps were to be drawn at six o'clock, and it would be too humiliating to the regimental team if Tom Merry & Co. were to make a draw.

Twenty went up on the board, thirty followed, then forty, then fifty. Not a single wicket had fallen, and Lieutenant Ray and Sergeant Wilson remained in partnership.

Tom Merry, at mid-wicket, was sweating like a bull. He saw now how presumptuous he had been to fix up a match with a team of Tommies with whom cricket was a sort of second nature.

But the worst was to come, according to Sergeant Wilson. "The next man in," he said, "is Browne, who used to be a shining light in the Hampshire eleven some time ago. He's still as good as ever!"

"Pile on the agony!" panted Tom Merry. "Oh, my hat! I'd give my right hand for a vanilla ice or a lemon-squash! Groo! It's hot!"

"And likely to get a good deal hotter!" groaned Monty Lowther, mopping his forehead. "Oh, dear! Is this never going to end?"

Tom Merry relieved Fatty Wynn, who was almost in a state of collapse; and the change had the desired effect. Sergeant Wilson, who had been taking tremendous risks, mistimed Tom's third ball, and the middle stump went flying.

"Hurrah!"

The cheering was terrific, and the sergeant turned to Tom Merry as he left the pitch.

"That was a splendid ball, young 'un!" he said. "Keep it up, and you won't get such a frightful licking, after all."

But Captain Browne, who followed on, gave the impression that he could remain at the stumps until Doomsday. The bowling was so much chaff to him. He hit out hard and true, and a groan of disappointment went up from the watching St. Jim's crowd as the hundred was registered. The soldiers were leading, and only one wicket had fallen.

Tom Merry bowled for a solid hour, and he sent down the best balls he knew, too. But Ray and Browne were simply immovable. They defied anything and everything, and were enjoying themselves immensely.

"Take a turn with the ball, Reddy, for goodness' sake!" said Tom Merry. "I'm fed up! Won't Grundy and his pals cackle when we've been licked?"

"We're not licked yet!" was Monty Lowther's comment.

"Why, you fathead, how in the name of thunder could we possibly avoid it?" demanded Tom. "It's five o'clock, and we've only got one man out. Then there's a second innings. Oh, crumbs! I jolly well wish the ground would open and swallow me up!"

The runs were registered at an almost uncanny rate. Lieutenant Ray was entirely ignoring singles and twos, and scoring nothing but boundaries.

The farcical situation was relieved at length. At half-past five, with the score at 170 for one wicket, the military team declared the innings closed. Most of the St. Jim's fellows

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were sound sportsmen, and they cheered Captain Browne and Lieutenant Ray heartily as the two warriors went into the pavilion.

"There's only one thing to do now," said Tom Merry, sucking at a vanilla ice with savage frenzy.

"And that is?"

"To keep our end up, and make a draw of it."

There seemed to be quite a robust chance of doing this, for the soldiers would have to bowl very well indeed to dismiss St. Jim's in half an hour.

Tom Merry and Talbot looked very grim as they walked out to the wickets. Runs were of little account now. All that was required was sufficient pluck and patience to last out until six o'clock.

But the soldiers had no intention of letting Tom Merry & Co. achieve their object. Corporal Kennedy was given instructions to bowl like a demon, and Captain Browne, at the other end, was also resolved to flash down his hurricane deliveries to the best possible advantage.

Disaster followed disaster, so far as the Saints were concerned. Tom Merry spooned up a simple catch to point before a single run had been scored. Then Jack Blake, who followed in, was run out in attempting the impossible.

"Two down for nix!" exclaimed Monty Lowther in the pavilion. "Isn't it ghastly?"

Figgins stayed with Talbot five minutes, at the end of which period he got in the way of one of Kennedy's expresses, and was voted lb.w.

Kerr and Wynn proved hopeless. Dismayed by their leader's ill-luck, and suffering visibly from nerves, they fell easy victims to the wiles of the bowlers. Twenty minutes still remained for play, and half the side was out!

"Do something, Reddy, for mercy's sake!" implored Tom Merry. "Why, even Grundy & Co. could put up a better show than this!"

Redfern was just the right sort of fellow for an emergency. He never allowed himself to get flustered, and had nerves of cast-iron.

Lieutenant Ray whizzed the ball down with a velocity that was truly terrific, but Reddy stopped it with confident assurance. Employing an almost rocklike defence, he survived the rest of the over.

"Quarter-past five," said Manners, glancing at his watch. "If only they can stick it out!"

"There's no ground for unseemly wowwy," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, who had been improving the shining hour by chatting to Marie Rivers. "I shall be able to keep my end up in a highly creditable manna!"

"Like you did last innings?" suggested Monty Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There goes Reddy's wicket!" said Tom Merry. "Ducks' eggs are cheap to-day! In you go, Gussy!"

Arthur Augustus strode out to the wickets, determination stamped in every feature of his aristocratic countenance. He meant to keep his wicket intact or perish in the attempt.

The first ball was a scorcher, and the swell of St. Jim's, knowing it was inches off the wicket, let it slide. The second ball pitched too short, and D'Arcy, stepping out, lifted it hard and high over the railings which skirted the ground.

"Bravo!" roared the excited throng of onlookers. "Good old Gussy!"

"Well played, indeed!" cried Marie Rivers, clapping her hands ecstatically.

Arthur Augustus fairly purred with pleasure. He played the remaining balls of the over in heroic fashion, and the spirits of the Saints rose perceptibly. There was still a chance to draw, and a draw, even with the haunting knowledge that the soldiers had made 170 for one wicket, would be infinitely better than a crushing defeat.

But another tragedy happened at this juncture. Talbot slogged the ball into the long-field, where it was caught by a lanky private.

The situation was black as midnight now. Ten minutes remained before the drawing of stumps, and only three players had to be disposed of.

Manners succumbed to his first ball, but Monty Lowther managed to hang on like grim death for five minutes, when he was caught and bowled by Captain Browne.

The excitement was acute when Harry Noble, the last man in, went to join D'Arcy. There was a sporting chance that the Australian junior would survive the ordeal, and last out; yet when the fellows looked at Captain Browne's grim, set face, their hearts sank to zero.

"Play up, Kangaroo!" came in a tumultuous roar from the spectators. "Strong and steady does it, old sport!"

Harry Noble had an exceedingly narrow escape at his first ball, which he mistimed completely. The leather missed the leg-stump by a hair's breadth, and the crowd breathed freely once more.

The second ball was not so difficult, and Noble snicked it through the slips for a single. Then Arthur Augustus D'Arcy prepared to face the music once more.

By what seemed an extraordinary miracle, the swell of St. Jim's kept his wicket intact throughout the over. He scored no runs, but simply put a straight bat in front of every delivery.

"Two more minutes;" panted Tom Merry. "Play up, Kangaroo!"

Noble stopped the first ball dead, likewise the second; but the third brought about his undoing. It was far and away the best ball of the match, coming in with a swerve which would have deceived many a county batsman.

It certainly deceived Noble. He made a gallant effort to meet it, but it grazed the edge of the bat, and crashed into the wicket. Then, whilst the School looked on, spellbound, half-past five chimed from the old clock-tower.

The match was fought and won—and victory rested with the men of the Royal Sussex!

It was a terribly bitter pill for Tom Merry & Co. to swallow. They had tried really hard, only to be overwhelmed by a much older and more experienced combination.

"Hard cheese, kids!" said Lieutenant Ray. "You're a plucky lot, but I think you'll admit, now, that you bit off more than you could chew."

Tom Merry grinned ruefully.

"That's so, sir," he said. "You've taught our pride a lesson, and I suppose we ought to give you a vote of thanks."

Kildare strolled up to the cricketers as they stood chatting by the pavilion entrance.

"Congratulation!" he said to Lieutenant Ray. "Now that you've licked the juniors, pr'aps you'd like to consider a challenge from the St. Jim's first eleven?"

The subaltern smiled pleasantly.

"We should be pleased to do unto you as we've done to these kids," he said.

"We shall see," retorted Kildare, feeling a trifle nettled. "You'll find us tougher nuts to crack than Tom Merry's team. What date would be convenient to you?"

"We have next Wednesday open," said the Army skipper.

"Good! That'll suit us down to the ground!"

And Kildare strode off to impart the news to his fellow-seniors.

Meanwhile, Grundy and his followers gloated and chuckled without mercy over the humiliation of Tom Merry's eleven.

"I told you fellows what to expect," said Grundy, with an air of superior wisdom. "You would go and run a giddy halter round your necks in spite of my warning!"

"Rats!" growled Tom Merry.

"Wun away an' play, deah boy!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

But Grundy stood his ground.

"You're a set of hopeless differs!" he said contemptuously.

"Licked by an innings, just as I expected! Now, if you'd put me in the team—"

"I'll put you in the pond, in a minute!" growled Jack Blake.

"You'd have simply romped home if I'd been playing!" went on Grundy, unheeding. "As it was, you asked for trouble, and got it! Fancy playing a monocled freak like Gussy!"

"Weally, you wottah! I feel bound in honah to inflict a most feahful thwashin' for those wude wemarks! Put up your hands!"

Tom Merry and Jack Blake laid violent hands upon the exasperated swell of St. Jim's, and swung him back.

"Bad form to scrap in front of the soldiers," said Blake.

"Welease me! Welease me at once, and let me deal with that wottah, Gwundy!"

But the two juniors didn't release D'Arcy. Instead, they bumped him down and sprawled on him, so that he was completely hidden from view. It would look decidedly bad form if a free fight occurred whilst the officers and men of the Royal Sussex were still at the school; and Arthur Augustus was kept captive until the brake which had called for the soldiers rattled away.

"Now," said Monty Lowther solemnly, "the great All-Highest, Gussy, has been insulted! He has suffered an indignity which can only be wiped out in blood!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Let 'em fight it out," said Manners.

"Good wheeze!"

"Look here!" said Tom Merry, a sudden thought striking him. "If you lick Gussy, Grundy, you can have his place in the eleven. Do you agree, Gussy?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

But Tom Merry could have bitten his tongue out the next moment. He had spoken thoughtlessly, carelessly; had he paused to consider he would have realised that D'Arcy stood

very little chance in the boxing-ring against a hefty fellow like Grundy.

But the fight had been arranged now, with the consent of both parties, and there could be no retracting.

"Come along to the gym," said Tom Merry. "You've got a stiff, uphill fight in front of you, Gussy, old man, but with a bit of luck and pluck, you ought to pull it off."

D'Arcy nodded. His eyes were gleaming, and, come what may, he resolved to render a good account of himself in the forthcoming assault-at-arms.

CHAPTER 8.

Grundy v. Gussy!

"SECONDS out of the ring!"

Wilkins and Jack Blake, the respective seconds of Grundy and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, promptly obeyed the referee's sharp order.

"Time!"

With lowered head, Grundy rushed in, as if he meant to end the affair inside a minute.

But Gussy was ready for him. He kept his feet, and, what was more important still, his head, and met his opponent's opening attack calmly and courageously.

It was to be a ten-rounds contest, with a minute rest in between each round; and Tom Merry was officiating as referee.

"Break away, there!" he exclaimed.

The combatants, who had been locked together in a loving embrace, came apart, and Grundy put in a great attack, which, however, had very little effect upon the impassive Gussy.

"Go it, ye cripples!" chuckled Monty Lowther. "Put it across him, Gussy!"

"Rats! Grundy's the man!" said Gunn excitedly. "He's winning all along the line!"

"Looks like it, doesn't it?" grinned Jack Blake, as Arthur Augustus, dashing in, landed a straight drive full in his opponent's chest.

"Fluke!" growled Gunn. "He wouldn't do it again in a hundred years!"

But Gussy, though he did not do it again in that round, had the best of the argument when "Time!" was called. He sat down on Jack Blake's knee, with the light of battle showing strongly in his eyes.

Jack Blake set a perfect gale blowing with his big towel.

"You're standing up to him splendidly, old man!" he said.

"Keep it up, and we'll give you such a stunning feed in the study afterwards that you'll think you've got into Buckingham Palace by mistake!"

Gussy grinned breathlessly.

"Gwunday's not exactly a feathah-weight," he said; "but I think I shall knock him out of time all wight. It means losin' my place in the eleven if I don't—and that wouldn't bear thinkin' of!"

"I should think not!" said Blake. "Go for him bald-headed in the next round, old man!"

"Wathah!"

"Time!"

Once again Grundy led off with a vigorous attack, and once again Arthur Augustus staved off his fierce offensive. The fight was a great one from a spectacular standpoint, and the fellows standing round the ropes kicked up such a terrific din that the gymnasium resembled a miniature Tower of Babel.

"Buck up, Grundy!" urged Wilkins. "Bottle him up before he gets dangerous! Oh, good shot!"

Even as Wilkins spoke, Grundy landed a straight left which was likely to disfigure D'Arcy's nose for days. It was a great hit, and caused the water to rush to Gussy's eyes.

But the swell of the Fourth speedily rallied. He swept Grundy's guard aside, and thudded him furiously in the ribs, causing the Shell fellow to blow and gasp like a pair of very old bellows.

"Hurray!"

"Give him socks, Gussy!"

"Pile in, old scout!"

Arthur Augustus warmed to the attack, and Grundy experienced a very painful and uncomfortable two minutes. He suffered casualties in all directions. One of his eyes seemed to have temporarily shut up shop, and the claret streamed profusely from his nose. In short, he was a perfect wreck.

Gussy had shown up much better than even his most sanguine chums had imagined. The transformation of the usually dainty and immaculate aristocrat to a Trojan of a boxer bordered on the marvellous. D'Arcy seemed a different fellow altogether in the boxing-ring. He seemed to be trying to outplay Sergeant Billy Wells at his own game.

"Time!"

Grundy was very glad of the brief respite. He sank down like a limp rag on his second's knee, and Wilkins looked anxious and concerned.

"Do you think you can stick it out, old chap?" he asked.

"Stick it out? Of course I can stick it out! I'm not goin' to let myself be beaten by the idiotic son of a tuppenny-ha'penny peer! Just you wait! You'll see fireworks presently!"

Wilkins tenderly sponged the bruised and battered face of his chief, and sent him up for the third round.

Then the tide of battle began to turn. Either D'Arcy was tired or feeling inclined to slack off. Anyway, his attack lost much of its sting.

Biff!

Grundy's right shot out suddenly when it was least expected. The blow caught Gussy clean in the chest, bowling him over like a skittle. There was a loud murmur of excitement from the dense throng of onlookers.

Bending over the fallen junior, Tom Merry commenced to count.

"One, two, three——"

There was no need to proceed further. Arthur Augustus was on his feet again the next instant, and upon his assailant with the spring of a tiger. The sound of hard body-blows resounded through the gym, and the boxers kept up a terrific pace.

"This is glorious!" said Monty Lowther. "Who'd have thought our tame Gussy would play up like this? He deserves the Iron Cross, by Jove! Just look at him!"

D'Arcy had broken free, and his gloved fists shot out again and again. But Grundy was not a weakling. He could stand a good deal of heavy punishment, and it seemed hopeless on the face of it for D'Arcy to attempt a knock-out. His best way to win would be to go the whole of the allotted ten rounds, and gain the verdict on points.

But this Gussy hadn't the remotest intention of doing. He meant to make sure of his man if possible. Whatever happened, he must preserve his sacred and inviolable place in the junior cricket team.

Round 4 gave D'Arcy his opportunity. Grundy was boxing haphazard, thinking the fight would be a long-winded affair; and he had the surprise of his life when the swell of St. Jim's, moved by a sudden instinctive impulse, drove out his right like a lightning-flash straight from the shoulder.

The result was appalling. Grundy, staggered by the utter unexpectedness of the attack, reeled backwards, and his opponent, following up, dealt him such a terrific upper-cut that he went to the floor with a crash that shook the gym.

Tom Merry started to count. It was not such a painful ordeal to him this time.

"One, two, three, four, five——"

Grundy lay prone. All the fight had gone from him now, and he possessed that feeling not uncommon to defeated boxers that he would like to crawl out of the ring and die.

"Six, seven, eight——"

"Back up, old man!" called Wilkins, in a voice tense with anxiety.

Grundy made a great effort to rally. He actually managed to lurch to his feet, and stood blinking out of his half-closed eyes—a pathetic, exhausted figure.

D'Arcy waved him back protestingly.

"Weally, deah boy, you're whacked!"

"I—I'm going on!" muttered Grundy thickly. "Lemme alone! I'm going on, I tell you!"

But even as he spoke, his extreme weakness caused him to topple back on to the floor of the gym; and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was thus acclaimed the victor in that hard-fought fight. He would retain his place in the eleven, and henceforward, to quote the words of Monty Lowther, everything in the garden would be lovely.

CHAPTER 9, Nothing Doing!

GRUNDY felt the effects of his encounter with D'Arcy for quite a long time, but the bumps and bruises he had sustained failed to deter him from his purpose so far as the cricket challenge was concerned.

"There's only one drawback," he confided to Wilkins and Gunn, in his study. "That lout Kildare's been and fixed up a match with the Royal Sussex, to be played on Wednesday."

"Then we're done!" said Wilkins. "No good putting our ear in when the first eleven are on the war-path."

"Unless you ask Kildare to be a sport and withdraw, letting your team play in place of his," said Gunn.

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Grundy leapt to his feet.

"That's a jolly good wheeze!" he exclaimed. "Kildare can hardly ignore the claims of a side which is ten times better than anything he could put out. I'll tackle him at once, and talk to him like a Dutch uncle. Coming along, you chaps?"

"Ahem!" said Wilkins. "I—I've got an appointment with——"

"The Tsar of Russia, I suppose?" said Grundy, with crushing sarcasm. "Why don't you say quite plainly that you haven't the stomach for the bizney?"

"Well, to tell the truth," said Wilkins, "I don't think Kildare will be best pleased if you ask him to take a back seat."

"It'll be for the good of the community," said Grundy. "I'll point that out to him. You're not going to be a traitor, are you, William Gunn?"

"Nunno! But I simply can't come along now, old chap, really! I've got to get a hundred lines polished off for Railton."

Grundy snorted angrily.

"You're a precious pair of funks!" he said. "Hang it all, I don't want your beastly company! I'll do the thing off my own bat!"

And, highly indignant, Grundy stalked out of the study.

He proceeded straight to the Sixth Form passage, and rapped at Kildare's study door. A deep voice bade him enter.

The captain of St. Jim's was seated astride the table, chatting to Darrel and Rushden. He looked up impatiently at Grundy's approach.

"What do you want?" he asked sharply.

Grundy smiled affably.

"It's about the cricket, Kildare," he said.

"Well?"

"I've raised a team, entirely by my own effort and enterprise, that'll knock those Royal Sussex chaps into a cocked hat; and we want to play 'em on Wednesday."

"Oh, you do, do you?" said Kildare grimly. "Is this your distorted idea of a joke?"

"I'm dead serious," was the reply. "My eleven is a dozen times better than Tom Merry's, and would make even the first eleven look rather small."

"Indeed!"

"Yes; and I came here to ask if you'd withdraw from your fixture next Wednesday, and let my team play the Army fellows instead."

"Well, I'm blessed!" gasped Kildare.

"What a nerve!" exclaimed Darrel.

"It's the absolute giddy limit!" said Rushden.

"Can I consider my request granted?" asked Grundy.

"No, I'm hanged if you can!" roared Kildare. "You impertinent young cub! Do you think we're going to cancel an important match, simply in order to make you and your precious pals look bigger asses than usual? If so, let me tell you that you're quite offside!"

"Rather!" said Darrel.

"What earthly chance would you possibly have against the Royal Sussex?" said Rushden. "They licked Tom Merry's lot to a frazzle, and we shall have all our work cut out to avoid a licking ourselves."

"Of course you will!" said Grundy. "That's what I've said all along. Look here, Kildare. You might as well do the decent thing!"

The captain of St. Jim's slipped off the table. He seemed to be thinking deeply.

"You hear him, you chaps?" he asked. "He wants me to do the decent thing. Do you think I ought to?"

"Certainly!" chuckled Darrel.

"Most decidedly!" grinned Rushden.

"Then please be good enough to hand me over that cricket-stump!"

Darrel promptly obeyed.

"Here, I say!" began Grundy, backing away in alarm. "What's the little game? Hands off! Yaroooooh!"

Yelling and kicking and struggling, the luckless George Alfred was seized in the firm grip of the three seniors, and slung over the study table. Then Kildare got to work with the stump.

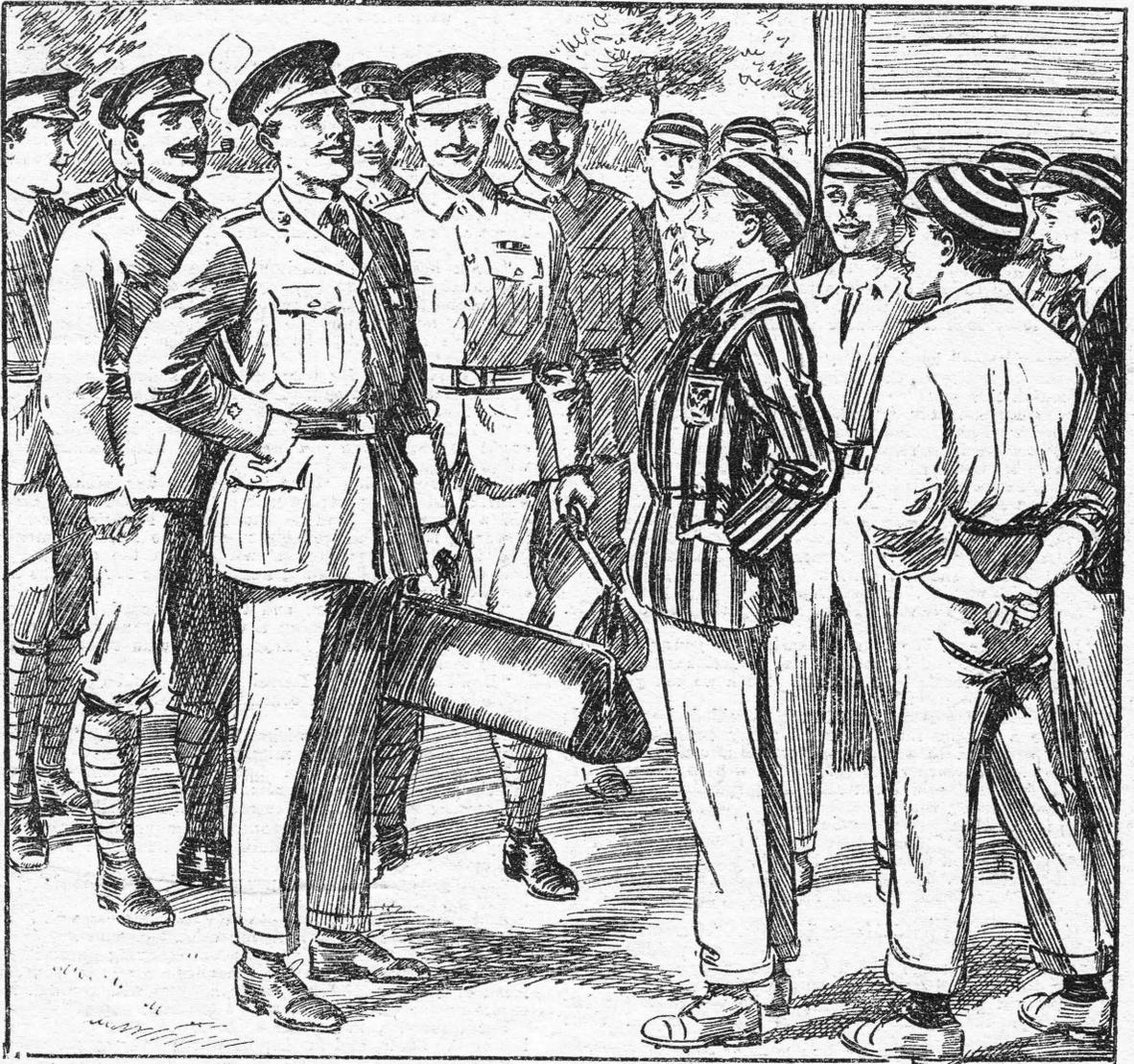
Whack! Whack! Whack!

"Hellup!" roared Grundy. "Lemme alone! Beasts! Cads! Rotters! I tell you—— Yarooop!"

"What an ungrateful little worm!" said Kildare. "He implored me to do the decent thing, and now I'm doing it he throws it in my face!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Darrel and Rushden, who were enjoying the scene immensely. "Keep it up, old man!"

And Kildare did keep it up. He didn't desist until his arm ached, and then Grundy, having gone through the mill for the second time that day, went squirming towards the door.



"Are the rest of the St. Jim's players about your own size?" Jack Blake nodded. "Then what d'ye mean by challenging us to a match?" demanded the officer warmly. (See Chapter 6.)

"Ow-ow-ow!" he groaned. "I'll get even with you for this, you bullying beasts! I'm going ahead with my team, and all the first elevens in the world won't stop me! Groo!"

And, stiff and sore, the discomfited Shell fellow limped painfully away, slamming the door after him with a bang that resounded the whole length of the Sixth-Form passage.

The seniors looked at each other, grinned, and then plunged once more into their previous topic of conversation, clean forgetting George Alfred Grundy and his threats.

But Grundy did not forget!

CHAPTER 10.

The Pantomime Match!

WHATEVER his faults, George Alfred Grundy was a fellow of his word. He had said that he would proceed with his eleven, and he meant it. Nothing should shake his iron resolution to meet and defeat the famous military side on the following Wednesday.

Grundy did not beat about the bush. He pitched straight into his task, and Levison & Co., though they grumbled and groused at having to devote a good many of their leisure hours to practice, had to toe the line.

Tom Merry & Co. viewed the situation with profound astonishment.

"Grundy must be rotting," said Manners. "After seeing

us whacked by an innings, he ought to know jolly well that his team of freaks will be wiped off the face of the earth!"

"The silly ass wants a sound bumping!" growled Tom Merry. "Gussy's licking didn't have the effect we thought it would."

"He'll have to stand out of it on Wednesday," said Monty Lowther. "Kildare will see to that."

But Wednesday came, and Grundy showed no sign of retiring from the position he had taken up. His team turned out after dinner, looking bigger freaks than ever in their ill-fitting flannels.

Fortunately for Grundy and his followers, Kildare and the rest of the first eleven were in their studies changing. They little dreamed that Grundy had any serious intention of putting his threat into effect.

Punctually at two o'clock, a brake rolled up to the cricket-ground, bearing the genial, good-humoured cricketers of the Royal Sussex Regiment. Lieutenant Ray, springing down first, gaped at Grundy in astonishment.

"Good gad!" he exclaimed. "Surely this isn't your first eleven?"

Grundy grinned.

"The first eleven," he said, "can go to Jericho! They're dead in this act. We want you to play us, if you've no objection."

The young officer burst into a roar of unrestrained laughter.

"You!" he spluttered. "Play you? Why we should put the kybosh on you in next to no time! Don't be insane, kid! Run away and find some kindergarten or girls' school that'll give you a game!"

Grundy opened his mouth to reply, when there was a sudden interruption. Kildare, with a pack of seniors at his heels, came striding on the scene.

"What the merry dickens!" gasped the St. Jim's skipper. "Grundy, you—you cheeky young brat! What is the meaning of this?"

"I've kept my word, you see," said Grundy. "I told you it would be a lot wiser for you to let us go ahead. Now you can trot along to the pavilion, like good boys, and watch us annihilate these soldier johnnies! Twig?"

Kildare clenched his big fists convulsively. Dearly would he have loved to hurl himself upon the unspeakable Grundy, and smite him hip and thigh. But in the presence of the visiting team such a procedure would have been rank bad form.

"You—you—" he choked. "Lieutenant Ray, I trust you will take no notice of this imbecile, and ignore his request for a match with you?"

The young subaltern smiled, and, drawing Kildare aside, conversed with him in low tones for several moments. When he had concluded his remarks, Kildare was smiling, too.

"All right, Grundy," he said. "You can go ahead." Grundy's eyes sparkled.

"Do you mean that?" he exclaimed. "Honest Injun!"

"Hurray!" Kildare's chums spun round upon him with savage fury.

"You idiot!" shouted Darrel. "You prize maniac!" raved Monteith.

"Shush!" said Kildare. Then, waiting till Grundy & Co. were out of earshot, he exclaimed:

"It's all serene! We want to teach these young sweeps a jolly good lesson, and Lieutenant Ray undertakes to see that they get licked inside half an hour. Then we can go ahead with the genuine game."

The seniors understood now, and chuckled hugely. It would be a roaring farce, to see Grundy and his satellites literally squashed to a pulp, and would afford an amusing prologue to the sterner struggle which was to come.

"Call to this!" said Lieutenant Ray, spinning a coin. "Heads!" said Grundy.

"So it is. What are you going to do?" "Bat, of course!" beamed Grundy. "Come on, Gunn!"

And Grundy and Gunn walked out to the wickets. Half-incredulous, half-amused, the St. Jim's fellows looked on. Then a sudden roar of laughter went up from the assembled multitude.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Monty Lowther. "Carry me home to die, somebody! Grundy's got his pads on upside-down!"

But the great George Alfred had been so excited about the innings that he had no eye for such a minor detail.

Lieutenant Ray was laughing, but he was none the less determined that Grundy's innings should be of short duration.

"This is where we smile!" said Tom Merry.

The bowler ran and the leather shot from his hand like a stone from a catapult. Grundy did not even see it. He swung his bat over his shoulders with a do-or-die expression on his face, missed both the ball and his balance, and toppled with a crash to the ground.

The ball sped on its way, and the wickets went down with a crash and a clatter.

"Ha, ha, ha!" "Out first ball, bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"How fwightfully humiliatin' for Gwunday!" The victim of the catastrophe spun round, and surveyed his wrecked wicket.

"I—I—" he stammered. "That was a—a trial ball!"

"Trial ball be hanged!" said Sergeant Wilson. "Out you go!"

"I—I wasn't looking!" gasped Grundy feebly. "It ain't fair!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" "Better hop it, old man!" said Gunn, from the other end. "You're out, right enough!"

"I protest!" hooted Grundy. The wounded soldier who was officiating as one of the umpires brandished his crutch in the air, and commenced to chase Grundy off the pitch, while the onlookers almost went into convulsions.

"Ow!" panted Grundy, throwing himself down on one of the seats. "Cricket's the rottenest game that ever was! There ain't a spark of fairness in it!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" "Look here," said Levison, as he fastened on his pads preparatory to taking Grundy's place at the wicket. "do I understand that I get a free feed if I make a dozen?"

Grundy nodded. "That's all right," he said. "Pile up the runs, for goodness' sake!"

But Levison, so far from notching a dozen, retired with an inglorious duck's egg. Lieutenant Ray clean bowled him at the first venture.

"Do the hat trick, sir!" said Corporal Kennedy. "You ought to soon settle the hash of the weedy-looking jesser who's coming in now!"

The weedy-looking jesser in question was Mellish of the Fourth. Mellish sported a pair of pads, an elaborate blazer, and a gaudy cap. Had he known what his fate was to be, however, he would probably never have left the pavilion.

The first ball, breaking in swiftly from the off, sent the bails spinning, and Mellish, flushing to the roots of his hair, slouched back to the pavilion.

"Three wickets down, and the score-board blank!" said Kildare, who was watching the farcical scene with the rest of the First Eleven. "I hope this isn't an omen of what's going to happen to us!"

"Don't worry," said Darrel. "We should deserve to be publicly pulverised if we couldn't put up a better show than that!"

"There goes Crooke's wicket!" said Langton. "And they haven't been playing five minutes yet!"

The procession to and from the pavilion continued. Wilkins joined Gunn, and after surviving a few balls, without scoring any runs, he was caught at short-slip.

"Five wickets down!" growled Grundy. "Skimpy, you bony image, if you get a duck you'll be flayed alive after the match! Got that?"

"Really, my dear fellow, you may rely upon me doing my best," said Skimpole.

And he journeyed out to the wickets—a weird and wonderful figure in his ill-fitting cricket costume.

"Ye gods! I didn't know we were playing ghosts!" said Corporal Kennedy. "I shall have to go easy with this freak of Nature. If I happen to hit him with the ball he'll expire on the turf! Here, what's the little game?"

For Skimpole, in his eras ignorance, was gripping the bat by the blade, and the handle was trailing on the ground.

"Help!" gasped Captain Browne. "The fellow must be mentally deficient! Don't you know how to hold a bat, you scraggy lump of iniquity?"

Skimpole blinked down at his weapon in surprise. "Dear me!" he murmured. "I must be making a mistake!"

And he righted the bat at once, and took guard. Corporal Kennedy sauntered up to the bowling-crease with his left hand plunged deeply in his pocket, and bowled an underarm. The sphere trickled along the turf like a marble.

Skimpole hit out with all the force of his skinny arms. There was a loud thud, but it was not the thud of bat meeting ball. Skimpole scraped up a considerable chunk of turf, and the ball rolled on with becoming indifference, and gently collided with the middle stump, causing the bails to jump off.

"Oh, crumbs!" gasped Skimpole, in dismay. "Do I understand that I am out?"

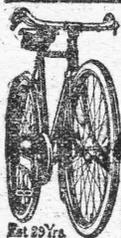
"It looks rather like it!" said the grinning umpire. "That is most unfortunate! Grundy will rend me limb from limb!"

And the wretched Skimpy limped away, his place at the wickets being taken by Trimble.

The fat, podgy junior was looking unusually pleased with himself. No one had scored yet, and he was determined to set the ball rolling, so to speak.

And, wonder of wonders, he achieved his purpose. When Corporal Kennedy delivered his next ball Baggy Trimble shut his eyes and smote wildly. As luck would have it, the ball encountered the full face of the bat, and went soaring away over mid-on's head.

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"Hurrah!" came a mighty roar from the grinning spectators. "Run it out, Baggy!"

But Trimble carried a good deal of overweight, and it took him an age to traverse the distance between the wickets. Gunn urged him to buck up, but only two runs resulted from Trimble's mighty swipe.

The next ball played havoc with the fat junior's wicket; but Trimble didn't care a rap. He had made two, and that was more than anybody else could say, even the great George Alfred himself.

Gunn left shortly afterwards. Although he had gone in first with Grundy, he had not broken his duck.

The innings flickered out like the light of a particularly feeble candle. A couple of byes were run, and that was all. Grundy's eleven had been dismissed for 4, and the onlookers were in hysterics.

It had been arranged that the match should be one innings only. All that remained, therefore, was for the soldiers to score five to win.

Lieutenant Ray went in to bat with Sergeant Wilson, and the former, stepping out to meet Grundy's first ball, lifted it high over the heads of the fieldsmen. Away and away it soared, clear over the railings for 6! The extraordinary match was won in the first stroke!

Grundy and his discomfited followers staggered, rather than walked, off the pitch. After all their bombast, all their swank, all their colossal conceit, they had been dished, diddled, and done in less than twenty minutes!

Grundy went into the pavilion and said things. Fortunately for him, no masters or prefects were at hand to hear him. And Grundy swore that he would never again, under any circumstances whatever, challenge the heroes of the Royal Sussex Regiment to a tussle on the cricket-field.

CHAPTER 11.

Makers of Mischief.

"GRUNDY, you dummy!"

"Grundy, you prize idiot!"

"You clumsy, confounded son of a long-haired maniac!"

"Same to you, and many of 'em!"

The captain of the freaks' eleven was being roundly abused in the pavilion by his own cronies. Even Wilkins and Gunn, usually loyal to the backbone, had wasted no time in telling Grundy what they thought of him. As for Levison & Co., their fury at having been made the laughing-stock of the school knew no bounds.

"Call yourself a skipper?" howled Levison.

"I did my best!" said Grundy sullenly. "It was the poor material I had to work with that caused all the trouble!"

"Why, you rotter—"

"You slab-sided cuckoo!"

The atmosphere was getting warm—very warm indeed. The pavilion was occupied solely by the members of the defeated team, the soldiers having wended their way to the tuckshop for light refreshments.

"The fellows will never let us forget what's happened this afternoon!" growled Crooke. "We shall be chipped about it till we're old jossers with the gout!"

"And all through Grundy," said Wilkins.

Grundy's wrath fairly bubbled over at this.

"So you've turned traitor on the old firm, what?" he stormed. "I've been nursing a viper in my bosom, and now it's turned and stung me! Put up your hands, George Wilkins!"

"I'll see you to Jericho first!" snarled Wilkins.

"What's that? Too proud to fight? I'll soon cure you of that!"

Smack!

Grundy's open palm came with a crack like a pistol-shot across Wilkins' cheek, leaving a visible red mark.

That blow was the signal for general hostilities to commence. A moment later, the pavilion was alive with tramping, swaying forms; and gasps of pain arose from time to time as some young but strenuous fist found a billet.

The worst of it was, from Grundy's point of view, that he was the nucleus of the attack. Heavy blows rained in upon him from every side, causing him to emit growls like a wounded lion.

But Grundy was resolved that, if he went under, he should go under fighting. With all his whims and eccentricities, Grundy was no coward. Had the odds been twenty to one, he would have fought with the same tenacious, bulldog pluck.

Time and again his fist shot out, doing great execution. Levison received a smashing, straight left on his somewhat prominent nose; and Mellish, smitten full in the chest, collapsed to the floor with a wild yell.

But numbers soon began to tell. Grundy was simply over-

whelmed, and was presently borne to earth beneath a mass of struggling forms.

Levison, clasping his injured nasal organ, pushed his way forward, and planted a buckskin cricket-boot in Grundy's ribs.

"Yaroooooh!" roared the unfortunate Shell fellow. "Play the game, Levison, you cad! Don't kick a fellow while he's down!"

"Rats! Chuck him out on his neck, you fellows!"

The rest of the incensed cricketers willingly obeyed. Grundy was dribbled to the doorway like a football, and then half a dozen boots clumped upon his anatomy at once, propelling him clean through the doorway. With a wild howl of anguish, Grundy rolled down the pavilion steps.

"So much for that madman!" said Levison, slamming the door. "Now we can proceed to bizney. I've got a wheeze!"

The others became interested at once.

"Get it off your chest, old man!" said Mellish.

"It's up against Kildare and the rest of 'em," explained Levison. "They've been chucking all the afternoon at our expense, and it would be ripping if we could make 'em sing small!"

"But how?" asked Wilkins helplessly.

Levison lowered his voice, and a sly look came into his eyes.

"We'll muck up the match!" he muttered.

"What!"

"It's easily done," Levison went on. "Nothing could be simpler than to hide all the bats, and prevent them from having their innings."

Wilkins gave a jump.

"You're rotting, of course!" he gasped.

"No, I'm not. I'm dead serious. What do you fellows think of the idea?"

"I think," said Wilkins deliberately, "that it's the dirtiest trick I've ever heard of! Moreover, I think you're a rank outsider!"

Levison started back in alarm. He had not expected such a scathing reception of his scheme.

"If you haven't the pluck for the job," he said, "you know your remedy. Get out!"

"Thanks!" said Wilkins. "I will! I sha'n't be able to keep my hands off you if I stay here!"

And he swung out of the pavilion, followed by Gunn and several others who could not see eye to eye with Levison in the matter of putting the First Eleven in a fix.

But Levison was not to be deterred so easily. Contempt, the Eastern proverb tells us, will pierce the shell of a tortoise; but it didn't affect Ernest Levison just then. He remained in the pavilion with Mellish and Crooke, deep in discussion.

The rascals spoke low and earnestly for some moments, and then they passed out, chuckling quietly. They congratulated themselves that they would be able to put an effective spoke in the wheel of the First Eleven; and Kildare and his fellow-seniors would have been considerably put out had they known the nature of the deep, dark plot which had been formed by three of the most unmitigated rascals within the walls of St. Jim's.

CHAPTER 12.

The Real Thing!

THE afternoon was still at an early stage when the genuine match began. A brake-load of wounded soldiers had arrived from the local hospital, and everything augured well for a good game. The sunshine streamed down upon the pitch, and the birds warbled and chirruped in the branches of the old elms.

The St. Jim's First Eleven were star players, every man jack of them. Kildare loved cricket, and few could wield the willow to better advantage than he; and Darrel, Rushden, Webb, Monteith, Langton, Gray, Dudley, and Baker, were all foemen worthy of their steel. Knox and Sefton completed the eleven. They were not so good as their colleagues, for secret smoking in studies prevented them from being smart in the field; at the same time, Knox had been known to knock up an occasional fifty, and Sefton was a useful change bowler.

Ray won the toss for the military team, and the game started in spirited style. Rushden and Darrel were entrusted with the bowling, and they found the pitch distinctly to their liking.

Sergeant Wilson only survived two overs, and then a fast delivery from Rushden scattered his stumps. Captain Browne, who followed in, was caught at the wicket, and retired to the pavilion looking considerably crestfallen.

"By Jove!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Our fellows have got

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A Magnificent New, Long, Complete School Tale of Tom Merry & Co, By MARTIN CLIFFORD,

off the mark well, and no mistake. Let's hope they can keep it up!"

"Yaas, wathah! Wushden an' Dawwel are touchin' the top of their form," said D'Arcy. "It's my idea the military johnnies will be all out for under fifty."

And, for once in a way, Arthur Augustus spoke truly. Soldiers came and soldiers went, at intervals of two or three minutes. They found the bowling much too good for them.

When the last wicket went down, the score was at 48—quite a moderate total. The Saints were overjoyed, though they took care not to look upon the affair as a walk-over. There was the second innings to be reckoned with yet.

"You're hot stuff," remarked Captain Browne to Kildare. "I think you'll find us pretty tough nuts to crack, though. We seem to be stronger at bowling."

And so it proved. Corporal Kennedy, in particular, went great guns. He captured three wickets in a couple of overs, and things looked black as midnight for the home side.

Kildare had had the misfortune to be run out for an inglorious duck's egg, and Knox and Rushden fared little better. Monteith and Baker, of the New House, managed to take the score to twenty, and then the fourth wicket fell, Baker being skilfully caught in the long-field.

The side was dismissed under the hour, having, curiously enough, amassed precisely the same total as their opponents.

The players then adjourned for tea. Tables had been set out under the trees, and the most appetising dainties graced the festive board. The very sight of a feed attracted Fatty Wynn like a magnet, and he was early on the scene.

"May I pile in, please, Kildare?" he asked. "I've been keeping the score, and it's famishing work!"

The captain of St. Jim's laughed. "Fire away!" he said genially.

The Falstaff of the New House needed no second bidding. The next moment he was munching away as if for dear life, and the soldiers regarded his extraordinary display with great curiosity, as if Fatty were the eighth wonder of the world.

The St. Jim's seniors ate sparingly. They knew that they would require every ounce of skill and stamina to pull off the match, and even the finest pastries of Dame Taggles failed to tempt them. Fatty Wynn accounted for more tuck than the whole of First Eleven.

The game was resumed shortly afterwards, and the visitors did much better on this occasion. Captain Browne especially was in fine form. He had the strength of a Samson, and the cricketing skill of a John Hobbs. Everything came alike to him, and he batted away industriously for a solid hour, at the end of which time the score stood at 70 for five wickets. Captain Browne's contribution was 45.

"Looks like being a race against time," observed Kildare. "There's only two more hours in which to get the remaining five men out and have our own innings."

"We shall manage it all right," said Darrel cheerfully.

Darrel was by way of being an optimist, and would have taken a cheery view of things under any circumstances.

The remaining batsmen gave a good deal of trouble, especially Corporal Kennedy, who stayed with Captain Browne till the hundred went up. But Rushden and Darrel never lost heart. They bowled a good length, and the side was eventually dismissed for 119, thus leaving the Saints to get 120 runs in the space of an hour and a half, which would be very quick work.

"We must go all out for the gloves without mincing matters," said Kildare. "It would be unsportsmanlike, to say the least of it, to deliberately play for a draw."

"Yes, rather!" said Darrel, who was to open the innings with his chief. "Anybody seen my bat?"

"In the pavilion, most likely," said Langton.

Darrel went to look, and came out again with a puzzled expression on his face.

"It isn't there," he said; "neither are any bats at all!"

"What!"

"It's a fact," said Darrel. "Go and see for yourselves." In great surprise, the seniors went into the pavilion. Not a bat of any description was to be seen. They had vanished as completely as if the earth had opened and swallowed them up.

"This is awful!" said Kildare, with a clouded brow. "What ever can have happened?"

"Somebody boned them for a lark," suggested Monteith.

"I'll lark him if I get hold of him!" said Kildare grimly. "He'll find that I haven't forgotten how to hit straight from the shoulder."

"What's the trouble?" inquired Lieutenant Ray, coming up.

"There's not a bat in the place!" said Darrel. "Some giddy practical joker's been at work."

The officer whistled.

"That's a bit thick, begad!" he exclaimed. "Have a look in my bag. I think you'll find a couple in there. I brought 'em along in case of emergency."

Monteith opened the bag, and gave vent to a sudden started ejaculation.

"They've gone!" he said.

"Well, I'm jiggered!"

"This confounded hanging about will rob us of our chances of victory!" said Kildare. "Run round to my study, Darrel, there's a good fellow. You'll find a couple of bats there. They're last years, and one's cracked right up the blade; but we shall have to make 'em do for want of something better."

Darrel streaked away to the study like a champion of the cinder-path. Every minute was precious now, and to delay might be fatal. But although the senior hunted high and low for the bats of which Kildare had spoken, he failed to find any trace of them.

The cricketers received the news with glum faces. Cricket without bats was a sheer impossibility. What could be done?

Whilst a knot of seniors stood discussing the unanswerable problem, a tall, athletic-looking officer, with the familiar badge of the Loamshire Regiment affixed to his hat, came striding up.

"Why," said Kildare, his face lighting up with pleasure, "it's Dick Mason—Lieutenant Dick Mason!"

"Captain Dick Mason, if you please!" said the new-comer, with a merry laugh. "Promotion comes quickly in the Army these days. How are you fellows getting on?"

Dick Mason had only left St. Jim's a year before. He had signalled his departure by scoring a grand century in the annual match against Greyfriars; and Mason's last match would be a topic of conversation at St. Jim's so long as the great summer game endured.

"To tell the truth, we're in the dickens of a hole just now!" explained Kildare. "Some silly idiot's been and collared all our bats!"

"You don't mean to say so? Why, I saw three juniors—"

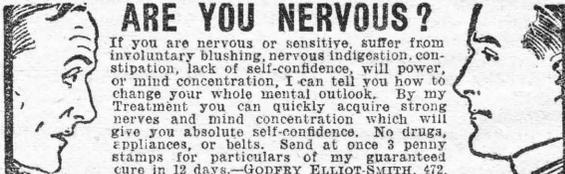
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Levison and Mellish and Crooke, I think they were—carting a collection of bats into the Cloisters only ten minutes ago." "My hat!" ejaculated Darrel. "That's where they are, right enough! Come along, you fellows!"

The entire First Eleven rushed off full pelt for the Cloisters. There, in the corner of the dark and dingy recesses, they discovered the purloined property.

The three cads who were responsible for the outrage were not there; but Kildare and his companions made a mental vow that they would make matters unpleasantly warm for Levison & Co. after the match.

"And now," said Rushden, "we'll get on with the washing! There's an hour and a quarter to go, and a hundred and twenty to get. We shall have to smite like giddy Jessops!"

The excitement was at fever-heat as Kildare and Darrel strode out to open the St. Jim's second innings. With Captain Dick Mason's presence to inspire them, they had a sporting chance of bagging the honours after all; and all eyes were on Eric Kildare, the sturdy son of the Emerald Isle, as he took up his stand at the wicket.

CHAPTER 13.

Close of Play.

"WELL hit, sir! Oh, well hit!"

Kildare started off strongly. He lifted Lieutenant Ray's first ball clean over the railings for 6, and the field rang again and again with wild cheering.

"Play up, deah boys!" shrilled Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Stwong an' steady does it, you know!"

Kildare and Darrel went great guns. They slogged the bowling to all parts of the field with scant ceremony.

Ten went up on the telegraph-board in a twinkling. Twenty followed shortly afterwards, and then 30, and still the two seniors remained in partnership.

"This is great!" said Dick Mason, tugging playfully at his slight moustache, of which he was very proud. "Looks as though St. Jim's will have just as successful a season as they did last year."

"Rather!" said Tom Merry who was standing near. "They've bottled the bowling up completely! Oh, crumbs!"

As if in mockery of Tom's words, Darrel's wicket fell at that moment. He had made a dozen in as many minutes. It was not a great score, but Darrel had backed up Kildare right loyally, and well merited the ovation he received on reaching the pavilion.

Knox went in next, and lost no time in getting to the wickets. He helped materially in taking the score to 50, and then mistimed a yorker of Kennedy's, and had the mortification of seeing his middle stump fall flat.

"Good man!" said Rushden, as he passed the retiring senior. "You've done your bit, and now I'm going to have my whack. What's the bowling like?"

"Dead on the wicket!" said Knox. "You can't afford to run any risks."

And Rushden didn't. He contented himself by stopping every ball dead, and leaving the slogging to Kildare, who made mincemeat of the bowling.

The score rose with delightful rapidity, and when Rushden spooned up a simple catch to mid-off, it stood at 85. Thirty-five more runs were required for victory, and there were seven wickets to fall. Visions of success began to take shape in the minds of the army of St. Jim's supporters.

But cricket is a queer game. The only certain thing about it is its uncertainty. Sefton and Baker and Webb were dismissed by Corporal Kennedy inside five minutes, and the score remained unchanged.

Then Monteith came in to partner Kildare, and he brought about some sort of a revival. The scoreboard registered exactly a hundred when he left, the victim of a particularly fast ball from Lieutenant Ray.

Langton came in next, and began to smite with feverish energy, for the time was flying fast. He made a couple of fours, and in attempting to secure a third was smartly stumped.

"It's touch and go now," said Tom Merry. "There's only two more fellows to go in. Play up, Dudley!"

Dudley was a quiet, reserved sort of fellow, who never allowed his equilibrium to be upset at any time, no matter what were the circumstances. He was just the sort of batsman wanted in a crisis of this sort—steady and reliable, but a hard hitter when occasion demanded.

He took his guard at the wicket, and faced Lieutenant Ray fearlessly. The ball came speeding along, straight and true for the wicket.

But Dudley was all there. He cut it away past cover-point for two, and treated the next delivery in like manner.

Seven to tie—eight to win!

"Keep it up, old man!" called out Kildare.

But misfortune overtook Dudley at this juncture. He played too far back at the next ball, and knocked his own wicket down. Bemoaning his bad luck, he walked slowly back to the pavilion.

Amid a tense, strained silence the last man in—Gray—sallied out to the wickets. Playing with skill and caution, he survived the remaining balls of the over.

Then Kildare came into the picture again. The first ball sent down was too good to hit, and he let it pass. The second was a beauty. It pitched short, and enabled the batsman to drive it straight as a die to the boundary.

"Hurray!"

The air was rent with cheering.

"Four more wanted!" muttered Monty Lowther. "Will they do it?"

"Hang it all!" said Captain Dick Mason. "It's on the stroke of six. If Kildare doesn't—"

But Kildare did. He stepped out at the next ball, and opened his shoulders to it like a giant. Away and away it soared, higher and higher, till it landed with a crash and a clatter, clean on the pavilion roof, for six.

The match was over and won. By luck and pluck, and in spite of Levison's rascally plot, the First Eleven had triumphed; and the exuberant St. Jim's fellows swarmed on to the pitch, raised Kildare on their shoulders, and bore him back to the pavilion in becoming majesty.

And the captain of St. Jim's, though he had been the recipient of countless honours in the past, valued none so deeply as this.

CHAPTER 14.

From Strength to Strength.

LIEUTENANT RAY singled out Kildare after the terrific ovation had subsided, and put out his hand impulsively.

"We give you best," he said. "Your fellows are jolly hot stuff at cricket, begad!"

"It was only by a fluke that they won," said Corporal Kennedy, half-amused and half-annoyed. "They wouldn't do it again—not in a thousand years!"

Kildare laughed.

"You can have a return match at your pleasure," he said. "Or, if you'd like to demonstrate your abilities in any other direction, we'd be pleased to entertain you."

"Hallo!" exclaimed Captain Browne, striding up. "Who's talking about entertaining?"

"I am," said Kildare. "Some of your fellows don't appear to be satisfied with events as they stand. Like Oliver Twist, they want more."

The captain rubbed his well-manicured hands briskly together.

"I'm game for anything else that's going," he said. "Any suggestions?"

"Why not a boatrace?" asked Lieutenant Ray.

Captain Browne shook his head.

"We don't want anything of a one-sided nature," he said.

"Eh? What's that?" asked Kildare. "There wouldn't be anything one-sided about it."

"Why, my dear fellow," said Captain Browne, eyeing the captain of St. Jim's with profound pity, "we should leave you miles behind, don't you know? Our regiment has some of the finest oarsmen that ever sat a boat."

"If you were a full-blown Varsity crew, we'd tackle you just the same," said Kildare.

"Bravo!" interposed Dick Mason. "That's the spirit, my bonnie boy! Go in and win!"

News of the forthcoming event spread swiftly, and a move was at once made for the banks of the shining Ryll. The light still held good, and there was ample time for the event to take place.

Eight good men and true were selected to row in the St. Jim's boat. Kildare and Darrel and Baker, Monteith and Rushden, and Langton and Webb were all skilled oarsmen, and the eighth place was offered to and accepted by Captain Dick Mason. Wally D'Arcy of the Third was to act as cox. Curly Gibson occupied the same position for the soldiers.

Mr. Railton, always keenly interested in anything connected with the men of Kitchener's Army, consented to officiate as starter, and there was tremendous excitement as the rival boats rowed out into midstream.

The oarsmen were still in their cricketing costume; but a minor detail of that sort didn't matter.

Crack!

The pistol sounded, and the two boats leapt off the mark. For the first dozen yards or so there was nothing to choose between them; then, to the infinite delight of the pressing,

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surgings, swaying crowd on the bank, Kildare's boat began to forge ahead.

"What a remarkable pace they're puttin' on, deah boys!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, dancing about in an ecstasy. "I wish Cousin Ethel was heah to see the wace!"

"Same here," said Tom Merry. "I say, isn't it simply glorious?"

Talbot, who was standing by, smiled slightly. "They won't keep it up," he said. "Kildare's setting much too quick a stroke. Look at poor old Darrel! He's done up already!"

The senior in question certainly did present a groggy appearance. His face was haggard, and the swing of his oar slightly irregular.

At the first bend, St. Jim's enjoyed a capital lead, being no less than six lengths to the good of the soldiers. The latter, however, rowed in a steady, swinging manner, which suggested that they had plenty of energy in reserve.

With two hundred yards to go, Kildare's boat slowed down, and it was obvious that several members of the crew were in difficulties. But Captain Mason and Kildare still rowed strongly, and nobody dreamed—excepting perhaps Talbot, who was possessed with wonderful foresight—that the military crew could possibly make up the leeway.

"They'll be whacked to the wide!" was Monty Lowther's emphatic opinion. "Stick to it, St. Jim's! Put the pace on, there!"

But although St. Jim's stuck it as requested, their rivals stuck it a good deal better, and the Army boat began to creep up in little jerks—imperceptible at first, but presently obvious to everybody who was watching.

"Buck up, St. Jim's!" There was tense anxiety in the voices now. No longer did the supporters of the Saints imagine that the race was to be a walk-over for their heroes.

Kildare kept his men up to the scratch as much as possible; but the strain had been too severe for many of them, and the boat did not make such brilliant headway as it had done in the first instance.

The two crews had rounded the last bend now, and Lieutenant Ray began to spurt violently. Closer and closer crept the men of the Royal Sussex, till, when only ten yards from the winning-post, the two boats were dead level.

"Spurt, St. Jim's!"
"Pile in, you fellows!"
"Lam her through!"

With a last desperate effort the Saints responded to the repeated appeals of their partisans. But the burst, though a plucky one, came too late. Still rowing at top speed, the well-trained military crew forged ahead, and shot past the winning-post half a length to the good.

Disappointed though they were, the crowd did not forget to cheer. It was always a maxim with them to cheer their opponents when the latter merited it.

"Phew!" panted Captain Browne, leaning back in his seat. "That was warm while it lasted! I take back all I said about St. Jim's not being up to our weight. If only they hadn't exhausted themselves at the outset they might have won."

Darrel and one or two of his comrades were considerably done up, but they revived after a few minutes' rest.

"Good man!" said Lieutenant Ray, joining Kildare on the bank. "That was splendid! The score's one each now. You've won the cricket, and we've come out top dogs on the river. Can't we have something else as a sort of decider?"

"But you've got to get back to Wayland Camp, haven't you?"

"The train doesn't leave Rylcombe for an hour, so there's tons of time. What price a swimming contest?"

"A team-race, do you mean?"

"That's it!"

Kildare's eyes sparkled. He held a hurried consultation with the rest of the seniors, and the event was fixed up there and then.

The crowd was on the point of dispersing, but Mr. Railton announced the news through the megaphone, and everybody surged towards the boathouse, where the contest was to commence.

"Another triumph for the Tommies, you see!" said Monty Lowther. "We seem to be losing our laurels this journey."

"Rats!" was Tom Merry's prompt retort. "If Kildare and his merry men don't bag the honours this time, I'll eat my hat—with Gussy's topper thrown in!"

The next moment the juniors lapsed into silence, for the third great contest between soldiers and schoolboys was about to commence.

CHAPTER 15.
Sportsmen All!

"ARE you ready?"

Mr. Railton rapped out the fateful words from the river-bank. A raft had been floated in the water, and from it the swimmers were to take off. Thirty yards lower down, a cord had been stretched across the river. The first man on each side was to swim from the raft to the cord and back; then the next swimmer was to start; and so on, until two teams of four had completed the distance.

"Go!"

At Mr. Railton's brisk command, Lieutenant Ray and Kildare each took a header into the sparkling water. The next instant they were speeding along side by side.

"Go it, Kildare!"

"St. Jim's for ever!"

Their arms sweeping through the water in unison, the rival swimmers kept on. They reached the cord at the same time, and turned about together.

Kildare knew all there was to be known about swimming. He possessed a speedy side-stroke, which he utilised to excellent advantage. But he had met his match in Lieutenant Ray, and they touched the raft almost simultaneously. Then Darrel and Sergeant Wilson sprang in.

"My hat! This is some race!" said Jack Blako admiringly. "What a pace they're putting up! Go it, Darrel, old scout!"

Darrel commanded a fine stroke, but he was not quite up to the weight of Sergeant Wilson. The latter finished up several yards ahead, so that the third man on the military side had a good start. Darrel touched shortly afterwards, and Rushden plunged in and gave chase to Corporal Kennedy.

But the corporal wanted some catching. He was a sort of second Burgess, and put up a capital pace. The distance between him and Rushden was not increased; at the same time, it was not lessened, much to the dismay of the St. Jim's supporters on the bank.

It seemed a sure thing for the soldiers when Captain Browne, a fine-looking figure in his well-fitting costume, dived in as the last military representative.

"It's all UP," said Monty Lowther dolefully. "Who's our last man? I feel sorry for the joker, for he hasn't a dog's chance!"



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"It's Mason," said Tom Merry—"Captain Dick Mason! Give him a cheer, you fellows!"

"Hurrah!"

The old boy waited till Rushden touched, then he went in hot pursuit of Captain Browne, who had at least ten yards' start.

A hot struggle ensued. The watching crowd seemed to imagine it was a forlorn hope. But Dick Mason didn't seem to think so. He flashed through the water with all the old dexterity and skill he had shown when swimming for the seniors of St. Jim's a year before.

Yard by yard he gained upon Captain Browne. The latter touched the rope, and turned swiftly for the return journey, and Mason was scarcely a second behind him. A moment later, and they were swimming along neck-and-neck.

"Mason! Mason! Good old Mason!"

Kildare and the others were gesticulating wildly, their eyes glued on their champion, who was making meteoric progress.

Captain Browne saw the danger, and spurred for all he was worth. But his rival was younger and fresher, and better able to bear the strain of a race calling for top speed.

Only half a dozen yards remained now, and Dick Mason was smiling. It was the smile of anticipated victory.

"He's winning, bai Jove!" exclaimed D'Arcy, in a shrill treble. "Winnin' hands down! Bwavo, Mason! Thwee moah stwokes! Stick it out, deah boy! Huwway! He's wen!"

And so he had. With a last supreme spurt Captain Dick Mason overhauled his rival of the Royal Sussex, winning the contest for St. Jim's in champion style.

The river-banks were alive with a frenzied mob of shouting schoolboys. For the time being everybody seemed to have gone mad. Even Mr. Railton was skipping about like a fag in the Third.

The rival teams strolled back to the school, when dressed, in great good-humour, and a tremendous feed was held in the senior common-room in celebration of the many exciting events of the day. Tom Merry & Co. were present, and took good care that they played a prominent part in disposing of the dainty sweetmeats and foaming ginger-pop.

CHAPTER 16.

The Final Reckoning.

LATER on that evening, when the glorious company of guests had taken their departure, Kildare of the Sixth strode down the Fourth-Form passage, in search of Levison & Co.

Had the affair of the bats been a trivial matter the captain of St. Jim's would have been quite prepared to forgive and forget; but, in the interests of common justice, Kildare decided that the young rascals who had attempted to wreck the match should be duly punished.

Kildare proceeded straight to Levison's study, but drew blank. The room was deserted, though a faint odour of cigarette-smoke came to the senior's nostrils. His lips tightening, Kildare swung out of the study and continued his search.

He entered the junior common-room, but although a noisy throng occupied the place, discussing the recent sports with the soldiers, neither Levison, Mellish, nor Crooke were present.

"Hang it!" exclaimed Kildare, greatly exasperated.

"Where can the young rascals have got to?"

"Who are you hunting for, Kildare?" asked Tom Merry.

"Levison, Mellish, and Crooke. Have you seen them?"

The captain of the Shell shook his head.

"Not even their shadow," he said. "We tried to rout 'em out ourselves, to make 'em sit up for their dirty trick in hiding the bats; but they're not to be found."

"That's curious. Have you searched everywhere?"

"No; only the most likely places."

"Then would you mind renewing the hunt? I'm going to make things warm for the young scamps."

"Yaas, wathah!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "They want flayin' alive, or boilin' in oil. Nothin' would be too thick for the wottahs."

A horde of juniors spread themselves out over the building. They ransacked every nook and cranny, but met with no success.

"It's pretty obvious what's happened," said Tom Merry. "The cads are lying low, knowing what's in store for them. They're out of gates, you bet!"

"Then they've broken bounds," said Manners. "No master or prefect would have given 'em a pass out, after what they did this afternoon."

The search continued right up to bedtime, but there was no sign of the delinquents. Where they had stowed themselves away was a complete mystery.

The juniors of both Houses retired to their respective dormitories in a state of seething excitement. They could under-

stand Levison & Co. wishing to absent themselves from public view until the storm had blown over somewhat, but that they would carry their action to such lengths as this was totally unexpected.

"They're not in the building anywhere, that's certain," said Tom Merry. "How ripping if the Head would let us scour the countryside for the rotters!"

"I can see the Head doing that—I don't think!" grinned Monty Lowther. "He'd be more likely to give us a jolly good looking if we asked him."

"Oh, rot! Nothing venture, nothing win! I'm going to speak to Kildare."

The captain of St. Jim's came into the dormitory a quarter of an hour later to see lights out. He stared at Tom Merry & Co. in blank surprise. They had made no movement towards undressing.

"What's the little game?" asked Kildare. "Why are you not in bed?"

"Ahem! We were wondering, Kildare," said Tom Merry, "if we could go and hunt for Levison and Mellish and Crooke in the villages round about."

Kildare elevated his eyebrows.

"Do you mean to say they haven't returned yet?" he asked.

"We haven't so much as smelt 'em," said Monty Lowther.

"Then I must speak to the Head on the subject at once!"

"And you'll put in a word for us, Kildare?" ventured Tom Merry.

"I'll see."

Kildare was absent twenty minutes. When he returned he was smiling, and the hearts of the juniors bounded high with hope.

"Any luck?" asked Manners breathlessly.

"Six of you may assist in the search," said Kildare.

"Merry, Manners, Lowther, Talbot—that's four—"

"Count me in, Kildare!" exclaimed a score of voices.

"Faith, an' I'm entitled to chase the spalpeens, entirely!" said Reilly.

"Glyn and Noble will make up the six," said the captain of St. Jim's, after due reflection. "A storm has arisen, and it will be necessary for you to bring your raincoats. Anyone who doesn't care to get a wetting may yield his place to someone else."

But nobody wished to back out, even though, at that moment, the driving rain beat against the window-panes of the dormitory with tropical violence.

To the envy of their less fortunate fellows, Tom Merry & Co. quitted the dormitory with Kildare. Darrel and Monteith and Rushden were waiting for them at the foot of the stairs.

Seniors and juniors made their way along the dusky corridors, and came out into the quadrangle.

"Phew! What a night!" ejaculated Monteith. "We shall be pretty well blown away by the time we get into the road!"

"It seems almost hopeless to search," said Kildare, buttoning up the collar of his rain-coat. "Still, we can make inquiries at the railway stations, and see if we can pick up any information. My hat! Those young rascals are leading us a lively dance, but it'll be their turn to go through the mill when we lay our hands on them!"

Buffeted by the fierce, unrelenting wind, and with the driving rain beating right into their faces, the search-party made its way into Rylcombe. Few people were abroad at that hour of the night, and the noise of the elements rendered it almost impossible for the searchers to hear each other's voices.

At length a dark form loomed up out of the night, and the rays of a powerful bullseye lantern were flashed upon the St. Jim's fellows.

"Alt!" came the firm, unmistakable tones of the worthy P.-c. Crump.

"It's all serene, Crumpy!" sang out Monty Lowther. "We're not the Prussian Guard advancing, or anything like that. It may seem so to you, because I expect you can see double or treble."

"Which I hain't standin' no hipmerence!" shouted the constable. "Wot I says is this 'ere—wot are you young rips doin' hout of your beds hon a night like this! I'll harvest yer!"

Kildare strode up to the pompous, excited man.

"Three boys are missing from the school, Crump," he said.

"Have you seen anything of them?"

Mr. Crump chuckled.

"Ho!" he snorted. "You don't come none o' them games with me! Boys missin', be blowed! You're the honly boys as is missin', I'll warrant! I'll aul yer hup before yer 'cad-master pretty smart!"

Thoroughly exasperated, Kildare gave the constable a

violent charge, of the kind administered in Rugger matches. Unfortunately for Crump, Tom Merry & Co. shoved at the same moment, with disastrous results to the victim of the charge. The bullseye lantern descended with a crash into the roadway, and Crump went sprawling into the ditch, which at that part was extremely muddy and a decidedly uncomfortable resting-place.

"Gerooooogh!" spluttered the frenzied minion of the law. "Which I'll take yer to gaol for this 'ere! Hassaulted by a pack of young rips—hey? I'll learn yer!"

But the search-party left Crump to waste his threats on the desert air.

"Serve him jolly well right," said Harry Noble. "Old Crump's always shoving his nose in where it isn't wanted!"

Despite their rain-coats, the trackers were soon drenched to the skin, for the rain was coming down with pitiless force.

Inquiries were made at the railway-station, but the solitary sleepy porter who was on duty there had seen nobody answering the description of the truants.

"We must give it up as a bad job, that's all," said Kildare. "Perhaps the morning will bring fresh developments."

Wearied of their battle with the fierce elements, the search-party made its way back to St. Jim's.

Tom Merry & Co. were deeply disappointed: They had hoped to acquaint their schoolfellows with the news of a capture; instead of which they would probably be held up to ridicule for making a fruitless tour of the district.

Kildare rang the bell, and after an almost interminable pause, Taggles hobbled slowly out to unlock the gates.

As the little party passed through the quadrangle, Talbot suddenly gave vent to a sharp exclamation.

"Look!" he ejaculated. "What's that light shining up yonder?"

The rest of the fellows followed Talbot's gaze. From the roof of the main building gleamed a stationary light, not very powerful, but quite sufficient to attract attention.

"That wants investigating," said Monteith grimly. "There's mischief of some sort going on, I'm thinking!"

The thoughts of the watchers instinctively turned to those demons of the night, the Zeppelins. It was as though some one was making ready to signal to the cowards who flew by night.

But it seemed incredulous that the Huns could be contemplating a raid, with the weather conditions so unfavourably opposed to them.

"Can't be anything to do with Zepps," said Kildare, after a long pause. "Will two of you kids go and fetch a ladder, the longest you can find?"

Tom Merry and Manners were off like the whirlwind. They returned in a few moments, bearing between them a couple of ladders strongly bound together.

"These'll reach to the top!" said Manners.

"Rear them up, then!" rejoined Kildare.

The ladders were placed in position, and a startled cry came from up above. Smiling grimly in the darkness, the captain of St. Jim's rapidly ascended.

A moment later he was heard remonstrating with several others: and then, to the unbounded astonishment of those below, three juniors started to swarm down into the quadrangle. They were Levison, Mellish, and Crooke!

Kildare followed them down, and the others urged round him for an explanation of the extraordinary proceeding.

"It was beautifully simple," said Kildare. "The young demons had made themselves comfortable up aloft, in a crevice between two of the roofs. They had plenty of grub up there, and a big sheet of tarpaulin slung across to keep out the rain. How long they intended to stick up there I don't know."

"We—we were coming down in the morning, honour bright!" faltered Levison.

"Why in thunder did you stow yourselves away like that?"

"We were afraid of what you would do to us!" whimpered Mellish.

"Well, you were only putting off the evil day, you silly young cub! As it is, I shall take you before Dr. Holmes!"

"No, no! Don't do that, Kildare! Please d-d-don't!"

"Dry up!" said the captain of St. Jim's contemptuously. Then he turned to his companions.

"What shall we do with the precious crew?" he asked.

"Leave 'em to the tender mercies of the other fellows!" grinned Darrel. "They'll get a punishment twice as effective as the Head would give, or I'm a Dutchman!"

Kildare at once fell in with this proposal. The delinquents were hauled up to the dormitory, and then the seniors departed, wet and weary, to seek the grateful warmth of a study fire before retiring for the night.

Most of the juniors were awake, and they greeted the sudden appearance of Levison & Co. with the profoundest amazement.

"Faith, an' where did ye pick 'em up?" inquired Reilly.

"On the roof," replied Tom Merry. "The blessed funks had hidden up there, out of the way. But they're not going to dodge us this time!"

"Rather not!" exclaimed Manners. "What shall we do to 'em, you chaps?"

"Toss 'em in a blanket!"

"Make 'em run the gauntlet!"

"Give 'em something lingering, with boiling oil in it!"

"Lam 'em with a cricket-stump!"

"Pitch 'em out of the window!"

Of these spontaneous suggestions, two were adopted. It was decided that Levison and his cronies should be forthwith and instanter tossed in a blanket, and afterwards thrashed with a cricket-stump.

"Don't you dare lay a finger on me!" panted Levison.

For answer, half a dozen indignant juniors laid violent hands on the cad of the Fourth. A blanket was stretched out on the floor, and into this Levison was pitched with a bump and a yell.

At Tom Merry's sharp command, a crowd of juniors ranged themselves at the corners of the blanket, and Levison shot upwards with the velocity of a pip from a gooseberry. He clutched frantically at nothingness, gave a terrified yell, and then came hurtling down into the blanket again.

The process was repeated, the victim soaring higher each time, until at last he bumped against the ceiling.

"Yarooooooh!"

"Bump!"

As Levison fell, the blanket was lowered suddenly to the floor, on which the wretched junior alighted with a crash that made his teeth rattle.

"Mellish next!" said Tom Merry.

Percy Mellish grovelled on the floor at the feet of the captain of the Shell.

"Lemme off!" he moaned appealingly. "I had nothing to do with it, really! It was Levison's idea!"

"Up with the cad!" was Tom Merry's curt answer.

And Mellish was hurled into the blanket, to share the same fate as his unhappy comrade-in-crime. He yelled so much on being shot upwards for the first time that it became necessary to gag him, lest the noise penetrated to a master's study.

The prefects, as Tom Merry & Co. were aware, would be only too pleased to close an eye to the disturbance.

Crooke gave the most trouble of all. He was a hefty fellow, and fought tenaciously. But he was overpowered in a matter of moments, and sent whirling into the air with greater gusto than ever.

Then Tom Merry ordered the captured truants to be held face downwards over his bed. The command was briskly obeyed, and then Tom proceeded to wield the cricket-stump with tremendous vigour.

Levison & Co. had the licking of their lives. Again and again, with severe relentlessness, the stump rose and fell, until at last, feeling decidedly more dead than alive, the victims were allowed to crawl into bed, moaning and groaning incessantly.

"Serves you jolly well right!" said Tom Merry. "And the next time you sink to such a shabby trick as hiding the bats, you'll find it more to your advantage to face the music, and not hide yourselves away like a pack of white-livered cowards!"

"Just you wait!" groaned Levison. "I—I'll—"

A slipper, aimed unerringly by Monty Lowther, cut short the threats of the cad of the Fourth, and he opened his mouth no more that night. Neither he nor his comrades was likely to forget for whole terms the terrible punishment which had accrued from their caddish efforts to check the victorious course of The Conquering Heroes!

THE END.

NEXT WEDNESDAY.

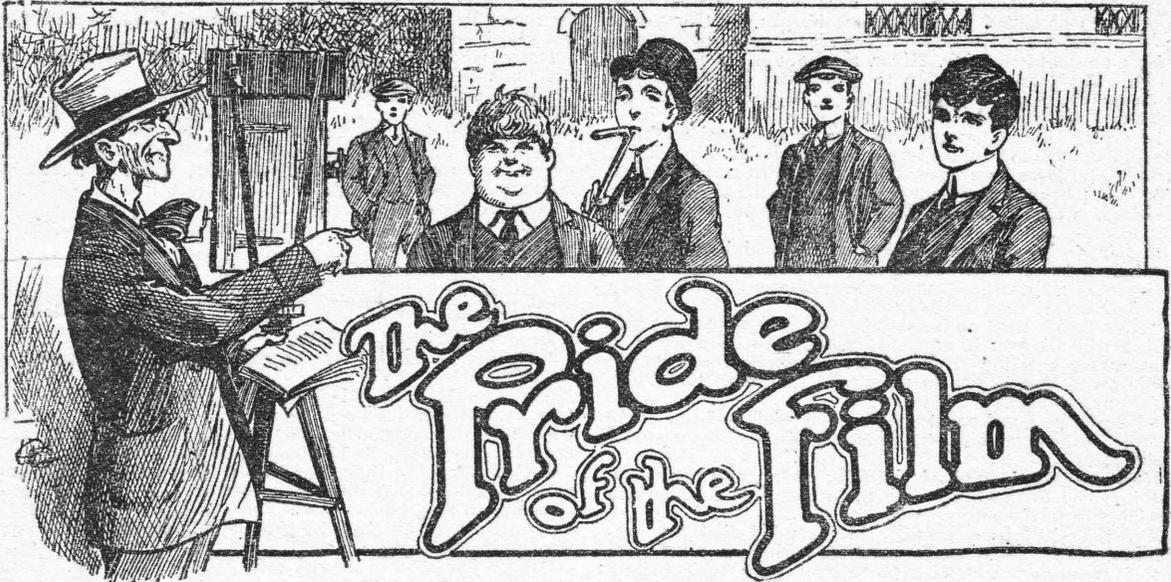
GRUNDY THE VENTRILOQUIST!

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The First Instalments:

REGGIE WHITE, an orphan, is befriended by Mr. ANTHONY DELL, a millionaire film-producer, and given a position as actor in his company. Mr. STARTLEFIELD, a neighbour of Mr. Dell's, whose real name is Rankin, introduces to Reggie a boy who professes to be his son, and the boy proves to be Hubert Nixon, an unscrupulous youth whom Reggie has met before.

Johnson Sprague, a gardener employed by Startlefield, is killed by an explosion, and the fact that he was wearing an old suit of his master's at the time leads people to suppose that the dead man is Startlefield.

Being suspicious of foul play, Startlefield disappears, and the verdict at the inquest is accidentally killed.

Reggie, however, hears the truth from Mr. Startlefield, who gives him a key of his house, and asks him to keep watch on its occupants—Hubert Nixon and his friends.

On entering the house to make investigations, when he supposes it to be empty, Reggie finds Silas Shock, Mr. Dell's film operator, there on the same errand, and Silas tells him that he has taken some records of the conversations between Hubert and his colleagues.

Suddenly Hubert returns, and dashes upstairs after the intruders. Silas and Reggie lock themselves in a bed-room, and the operator hides a cylinder on top of the wardrobe.

(Now read on.)

Cornered.

It was just after Silas Shock had hidden the phonograph record that he and Reggie started to change their prison into a fortress. An endeavour that turned out to be a rather foolish endeavour, as it happened.

Reggie was for showing fight, but Silas opposed him.

"No, no, my boy," he said; "we'll put the washstand and a few other trifles against the door. I am certain it is better to have all the fun of the fair while we are here. I'm no more afraid of them than you are, but I want to see what the beggars will do."

They discovered very quickly; for no sooner was the door thoroughly barricaded with a heavy chest of drawers, a washstand, and a few other trifles of furniture than the unexpected happened.

A curtain at the side of the apartment, which neither had noticed in the haste and confusion of the scrimmage, was suddenly thrust aside, and there stood Hubert Nixon and Henry Walkingdean

That curtain covered a door leading into a dressing-room, and, by suddenly remembering this second entrance, the conspirators had stolen a march upon the disturbers of their peace.

"What are you doing here in my house?" asked Hubert, bold as brass.

"Planning a moving picture," replied Silas, undismayed. "Some of these rooms would be quite splendid as interiors, and the oak staircase is one in a thousand. Why, Master Nixon, you ought to know it. You've been in our trade."

"My name is not Nixon," retorted the young hopeful. "I am the late Mr. Startlefield's only son, and this house is now my property."

"Then Whiskers over there is trespassing," retorted Reggie, pointing to Mr. Walkingdean. "Shall we turn him out?"

"You are trespassing!" retorted Hubert.

Just then the older Nixon and Stancombe, the blackmailer, appeared behind the other two.

"Bless me," cried Reggie, "here is your honoured daddy! We'll put the case to him. Mr. Nixon, how do you do?"

Reggie was suddenly feeling in one of his buoyant and humorous moments. He felt somehow that their presence must be very bewildering to the four conspirators, and that it might serve a good purpose to make it even more so by the use of a little badinage.

Mr. Nixon met his overture scornfully.

"Get all the humour out of it you can, my boy," he said. "I strongly advise you to be quite merry as long as you feel like it, because there are some wise people in this country who take a rather serious view of burglary."

Here Silas Shock broke in.

"It is nothing to do with you, Mr. Nixon," he said. "This isn't your house."

"No," retorted Nixon; "but it's my son's house."

Silas Shock broke into a peel of laughter.

"Oh, you idiot! You idiot!" he cried. "If it's your son's house it can't be Master Hubert's house, because he isn't your son. And if he is your son, it can't be his house either, because it belongs to Startlefield's son. You double-dyed donkey! That little tongue of yours—"

"Stop this nonsense!" said Nixon. "You know what I mean. Why are you two here?"

"As I told you," said Silas, joining in Reggie's mood, "we're planning a 'movey,' entitled 'The Villain's Son; or, the Plot that Fizzled.'"

Here Stancombe took a hand.

"I am young Mr. Startlefield's tutor, and I represent his

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father's executor," he said, "and I warn you that neither I nor that gentleman, who is a very important City man, is going to be trifled with. You are burglars in the eyes of the law, and we could make things very unpleasant for you. I have no doubt that Mr. Nixon here would not hesitate to do so. But I am not going to adopt that line unless you force me to do so. I purpose letting you go. Only, first, I want to know how you got in."

In saying this Stancombe was true to his usual methods. He did not believe in making a fuss or losing his temper. Reggie and Silas he regarded as two suspicious busybodies, who didn't believe that young Hubert was the rightful heir, and who were on a bungling endeavour to prove their suspicions.

As far as he was concerned, the plot had been far too carefully built up to make him fear any such amateur work.

In reality he was much more afraid of some unwise action on Nixon's part than anything else.

"Now then," went on Stancombe, "I shall prepare a paper that I will ask you to sign. It will simply be a letter of apology for entering these premises uninvited, and I will promise you that if you do not repeat the offence we won't make any use of it."

"Very proper and moderate," added Walkingdean. "As a professional man, I always demur at being mixed up with police cases."

Here Reggie, instead of clutching at an easy way out, felt impelled to make the case more complicated and more bewildering to the conspirators.

A feeling had been growing in his mind that the conspirators were not in entire harmony with each other, and that it would be a good idea to play upon their mutual distrust and suspicion. Plainly they were in at least two, if not three, separate camps.

The Nixons, father and son, were working their own game, and it seemed clear that they were working loyally together. Stancombe was plainly suspicious of both, trusting neither their honesty nor their caution, and playing a single hand. But the real mystery-man in Reggie's eyes was Walkingdean, who seemed to be listening very eagerly to the whole conversation, in a half-hopeful and half-frightened manner.

So it was for Walkingdean's benefit that Reggie made his next remark.

"I think, Mr. Nixon," he said, "that we had better talk this case over some time to-morrow. It would take too long now." Here he looked at his watch. "And it would be awkward for Mr. Walkingdean to be caught here when the police make their entry in a few minutes time."

The sentence staggered them all, especially Walkingdean. Stancombe, Nixon, and they all commenced to speak at once, and, although their first words were only a confusion of eloquence, three separate characteristics showed themselves.

Nixon became the vindictive threatener, the desperado who would not hesitate to go to any length in self-defence or for revenge. Stancombe remained the doubting sceptic, regarding Reggie's words as mere bluff. But Walkingdean showed fear.

Reggie ignored Nixon and Stancombe, and addressed himself particularly to Walkingdean.

"They have fooled you nicely, Mr. Walkingdean," he said. "Oh, it is no good staring at Mr. Nixon! He isn't the chief sinner in the matter. It is Stancombe who has done it. Nixon is almost as much a tool as you are, only Stancombe can't afford to fling him aside as he can you."

In this one sentence Reggie set them all by the ears. He saw that Stancombe was reading the real truth about his words, and that only blind rage on Nixon's part prevented his doing the same. And here his effort was unexpectedly endorsed by Silas Shock, who replied to an expression of doubt and wonder from the lips of Mr. Walkingdean.

"Yes, Mr. Walkingdean," said Silas, "you are to be victim. You are the first to be flung to the wolves, and I'll tell you why. If you had been content with the thousand pounds that was promised you, and had waited till the money came in, they would have paid it, and perhaps a bit more."

All four of the conspirators were staring open-eyed at Silas, for the man of cameras was not now drawing on his imagination. He had listened at his ingeniously-hidden speaking-tube many times, and Reggie's "bluff" played nicely into his hands. He had no occasion to ask for attention as he went on.

"But you weren't content," resumed Silas. "You bullied them when they couldn't pay, and grumbled when they gave you five pounds a week to keep you quiet, and then you raised your price to two thousand pounds."

Stancombe's face was a picture. Here were quotations from actual conversations, with the right sums mentioned. This was no bluff.

"They knew what you meant," resumed the accuser.

"They saw that your greed would never be satisfied, and they decided that the plunder wasn't enough to be divided by four. In consequence, there is a snug little plot already cut and dried to deal with your case."

Here Stancombe laughed sarcastically. But the laugh was not convincing. Reggie saw a new opening.

"If you really want to know our opinion of you, Mr. Walkingdean," he said, "we both think you are a fool to threaten men like Stancombe and Nixon, and then come here late at night, and put yourself in their power. At all events, you can go home safe this time, which is what one might call a narrow escape."

Here Nixon's temper gave way.

"But will you go home safe this time?" he cried, in a threatening manner.

Stancombe kept his head and checked his fellow-conspirator. "Don't be a fool, Nixon!" he said. "Violence is no good in this case. These two know something, and they want their price."

Here Walkingdean broke in.

"What was that about the police coming? I want to know!"

The two Nixons and Stancombe suddenly appeared to take an interest in words which they had hardly noticed when they were first spoken. It was clear that they no longer regarded the intruder's words as mere bluff.

Before Reggie or Silas Shock could satisfy the conspirators as to the subject that was now troubling them an unexpected interruption took place. A stranger, dressed in a huge bear-skin motor-coat, an immense pair of goggles, and a fur cap, strode into the room.

Reggie stared at Silas, and Silas returned his look. Here was an addition to the ranks that puzzled them both.

The next moment showed that the enemy were equally puzzled, for Stancombe addressed Reggie and his companion with vehemence.

"Who's this?" he demanded. "We want to know who we are treating with!"

Up went the stranger's hand, and off went cap and goggles.

"Mr. Startlefield!" gasped Stancombe.

Startlefield Speaks.

"You are quite right," replied the new-comer. "I see, Nixon, that you think I am a ghost. But if you felt the weight of my hand you would know it was solid bone and muscle!"

Then Hubert tried to be affectionate. Hubert was not wanting in quick wit at times, and a chance like this was one that, if not seized at once, was likely to be difficult to overtake.

"Oh, father," he cried, "and I have been mourning your loss ever since the accident! How glad I am to see you are still alive! You can't tell what a relief this is to me!"

Startlefield turned and looked at him.

"I wish I could be sure you mean that, Hubert," he said.

"Oh, I do—I do!" cried the youth.

The new-comer spoke very slowly.

"Then the newspapers treated you very badly, Hubert," he said quietly. "In the account of the inquest they made a strange muddle of your evidence, especially when they made you speak about explosives."

"Yes, I know! Of course, that wasn't my evidence at all!"

"I suppose this gentleman here," went on Startlefield, pointing to Walkingdean, "is the 'great explosive inventor'?"

"I don't want to have anything to do with you, sir," said Walkingdean nervously.

"My dear man," said Startlefield, "I am not the one you will have to deal with! There are people in England better qualified to treat your case than myself. Policemen, gaolers, magistrates, judges—in fact, all kinds of unpleasant people! Come in, Mr. Weir!"

Everyone looked at the door, and in walked Harvey Weir, the detective, whom Reggie had met when Tony Dell had employed him on a previous case. Weir was not a showy nor a particularly brilliant private detective, but he was a very sound man, and quite capable at times of doing effective work where more dashing men might fail.

As Weir entered the room Walkingdean shuddered visibly. This was not because he feared the detective, but because he saw two men behind him, one of whom unmistakably displayed blue cloth and brass buttons.

"I had Mr. Weir's report to-day," said Startlefield. "Mr.

(Continued on page iii of the cover.)

THE PRIDE OF THE FILM!

(Continued from previous page.)

Weir is a private detective, and we came right over here. By the way, that window is too brilliantly lit, considering the lighting restrictions. We saw several of you from outside, and knew exactly where to come."

"What are you driving at?" asked Stancombe. "I don't want any more of this tooling!"

"I am aiming at landing out several interesting facts," answered Startlefield. "Among them, who killed that poor lunatic Sprague?"

"Eh?" gasped Stancombe. "Was he the victim?"

"You may well say 'victim,'" replied Startlefield. "I was in the garden, and recognised the man who fired off the explosive!"

"So did I," added Silas Shock. "I was on the roof of Dell's factory."

John Nixon went white as a sheet, and made some slight movement. The two men in the dressing-room stepped forward into the room with very suggestive abruptness.

Walkingdean looked wildly at Nixon, and then at Mr. Startlefield, as if he thoroughly understood the last words that had been spoken, and even more thoroughly understood the meaning of the two men's movement.

"I swear," he cried, with a kind of tearful energy—and he was almost crying with terror—"I swear that I wasn't in that part of the plot! I swear I wasn't! I was assured that there would be no bloodshed! I swear it! I really thought it was an accident all the time!"

"Yet you vowed at the inquest that you supplied the explosive," said Startlefield.

Walkingdean drew back, horrified.

"Yes—yes, I know," he said; "but that was because they wanted me to! And then I only swore that I gave it to you. Besides, I made it all up. I don't know anything about explosives. I am a phrenologist and lecturer on hygiene, really."

Here the plain-clothes policeman spoke.

"You're in charge of this case, Mr. Weir, and I've come with you at your request," he said. "You must know that all this is very irregular. From what I've heard, there must be arrests—"

"There are warrants issued," replied Harvey Weir.

"I thought so," went on the official. "And I would point out it isn't fair to let these men talk without warning them."

"Hang your warnings!" broke in Walkingdean. "I'm as innocent as a babe. I'm not in it. Besides, I turn King's evidence! Take note of that, all of you! I turn King's evidence!"

"And I'm not in it, either!" added Hubert. "I don't turn King's evidence, because I don't know anything about the whole affair, excepting that I am glad my father isn't really dead, after all!"

"Well, gentlemen," broke in Silas Shock, "as there seems to be a good deal of ignorance about, perhaps you will let me help you all out. I shall only be a few moments, as I want to run over to the factory to get a few things."

"This is all very irregular!" protested the police-officer again.

But Harvey Weir overcame his objections, and Silas was bidden to go and get what he wanted.

"If Mr. Dell is there still," said Silas, "I'll bring him along, too."

The Case Develops.

Mr. Dell was there, and in a few minutes Silas returned, bringing his employer with him.

"Good heavens!" gasped Tony, as he saw Mr. Startlefield. "Now, gentlemen, if you will all come downstairs, I've got the whole bag of tricks," said Silas. "Excuse me!"

With that he moved a chair over to the wardrobe, and, standing upon it, produced a circular object from above the article of furniture. Stancombe and the other conspirators stared at him in amazement, but seemed to be unable to make anything of his action.

Downstairs in the room that the occupants of the house had been using the manoeuvres of the man became even more mysterious. Even the chief police official showed by his manner that he didn't wish to use his pet word "irregular" again if he could avoid it.

"A gramophone!" suddenly ejaculated Stancombe.

"A phonograph!" corrected Silas. "One ought to be precise. Now listen!"

They listened.

And out reeled the terrible truth. There is no accuser so deadly as a man's own voice, especially when that man is quoting his very crimes as a reason for getting more money.

Evening after evening those four had sat in that room and quarrelled about the division of the spoils, and as they

did so Silas, listening at his speaking-tube, had heard every word. His ingeniously-contrived machine had been used sparingly, but with deadly purpose, as if an unfailing instinct had warned him just the right time on each occasion to switch on the machine.

Often the record began in the middle of a sentence, but always the speaker's identity was undeniable. Here was a part of one record:

John Nixon's voice:

"... have to wait. You get five pounds a week, and we can't get hold of more at present. You're a bloodsucker!"

Walkingdean's voice:

"It's your cheating I'm afraid of. You promised cash on the nail. Besides, Stancombe has money; let him advance it."

Stancombe's voice:

"Not me! I've paid out enough. I'm going to get some in. Besides, it was my plan. Don't forget that."

Nixon's voice:

"But I did the daring part. I fixed the dynamite under the study table, and I exploded it. Why, I might have been seen in the garden!"

And so on. The whole terrible plot against Mr. Startlefield was unfolded with simply amazing clearness, and the criminals were convicted out of their own mouths.

Among the voices that were occasionally heard was that of Hubert Nixon, who only acted as an echo of the older Nixon, but every time he spoke Mr. Startlefield stared at him reproachfully. Hubert did not seem able to endure this, and kept his eyes turned away.

"I should think you had got enough now to hang the whole crowd," said Tony Dell.

"There is one more," said Silas Shock. "It is last night's record—the one I had upstairs on the top of the wardrobe."

"Does Hubert speak in it?" asked Startlefield. "I don't feel I can stand any more of it if he does."

Silas reassured him. It appeared that Hubert had no part in this recorded conversation.

So the machine was set working again, and the interested bystanders listened.

This time the chief speaker was Mr. Walkingdean, and some of the things he said were undoubtedly heartfelt.

"I tell you what it is," said that worthy's voice on the 'phone. "I'm about fed up with my deal with you. I'd have done better if I had told all I knew to Mr. Startlefield. I think he would have paid out a goodish sum to get his son back."

"You use that as a threat!" broke in Stancombe's voice. "I say it because I know who Startlefield's son really is—"

Mr. Startlefield looked amazed.

"Stop it!" he cried.

But the machine went on:

"I do know. I have the proofs at my lodgings. He is a young fellow called Reginald White, a kinema actor."

Here there was frank amazement for everyone excepting the actual conspirators and the man who had so dexterously fooled them.

But when the record ceased, a man came forward. It was Weir, the detective.

"There, Mr. Startlefield," he said, "that is the bit of surprise that I was promising you! That was the news that I had up my sleeve. And now this old squeakophone chips in and gives away my precious secret."

"Is this true?" gasped Startlefield.

"Quite true," replied the detective. "Hubert isn't your boy at all. Your son is Reginald White."

"Thank Heaven for that!" said Startlefield.

The discoveries of the next few days proved Reggie's position to the hilt. It was scarcely necessary even to rely upon any evidence from the conspirators, though Walkingdean showed startling eagerness to include the establishment of Reggie's identity in his "King's evidence."

The detective had followed up the case very carefully, and his story to Mr. Startlefield and Reggie was extremely convincing.

"You see, Mr. Startlefield," he said, "what made Nixon's claim appear so convincing was that most of it really was the truth. He traced the actual history of your son, Master Reggie here, till the boy was adopted by a married couple now both deceased. The forged papers he used, blurred over the real names of the adopted father and substituted his own. But I suspected the whole case as soon as it was told me, and though the question of Hubert's being your son was not the subject I was retained to investigate, it clearly became, to my mind, a part of that case."

"How?" inquired Startlefield.

(The concluding instalment of this fine serial next Wednesday. Order your copy early.)

A Cash Prize for Every Contributor to this Page.



A TICK-LISH SITUATION.

Conjurer (to small boy on stage): "You saw me put your watch in the handkerchief?"

Small Boy: "Yes."

Conjurer: "You can feel it in the handkerchief?"

Small Boy: "Yes."

Conjurer: "You can hear it ticking?"

Small Boy: "Yes; but—"

Conjurer: "But what?"

Small Boy: "There are no works in my watch. I took them out last week at school!"—Sent in by H. Dickie, Glasgow.

THE SAFEST PLACE.

"Herbert! Herbert!" whispered Mrs. Townley. "Wake up! There's a burglar downstairs! I heard him!"

Herbert was out of bed in an instant.

"Hist!" he whispered.

Quietly he slipped on his shoes and trousers, and stole softly from the room.

The minutes sped silently past. His wife, listening intently, heard nothing. At last anxiety overcame fear, and she crept to the stairway, leaned over the balustrade, and called:

"Herbert!"

"Well, what is it?" came her husband's voice from above.

"What on earth are you doing in the attic?" asked his wife.

"Why," murmured Herbert, "didn't you say the burglar was downstairs?"—Sent in by A. Brooksbank, Huddersfield.

THE PRICE OF ARROGANCE.

The blustering old gentleman leant out of the window of the first-class carriage.

"Guard," he said, "I'm going to Glasgow, and I want you to look after me well. I'll make it worth your while, of course. Now, do you understand?"

"Quite, sir; but—"

"Now, I don't want any 'buts!' You just listen, my man. I want this carriage to myself, and you must keep any other passengers out. Get me a warm rug, and wake me when we arrive. I want—"

"Yes, sir; but—"

"A little more attention and not so much talking!" snapped the passenger. "I like to do the talking myself. What you have to do is to carry out my instructions. Here's half-a-crown. Now—"

The whistle sounded, and the train began to move; but the guard was still on the platform.

"All right, sir!" he shouted, pocketing the half-crown. "You can keep on talking, but I'm not going out on that train!"—Sent in by N. Randon, Hathern, near Loughborough.

LED THEM A CHASE.

The explorer was spinning some yarns about his travels, and the youngsters were hanging on his words.

"There we were," he said, "only two white men against fifty savage natives." But, my word, didn't we make them run!"

Then he gazed round thoughtfully at the eager faces.

"Yes," he said, "we made them run, all right; but they couldn't catch us."—Sent in by S. Stroud, East Dulwich.

HARDLY A COMPLIMENT.

"Things are really very bad in our line," said the young doctor. "Unless you are prepared to work night and day, it is almost impossible to make even a bare living!"

His listeners at the club echoed the same sentiments, whatever their line of business. One bluff old medical man, however, was quite optimistic.

"Pooh!" he said, with a sneer. "You're talking rubbish, my young friends. There's as much money to be made now as ever there was. Look at me, for instance; I'm doing well. But do I look overworked? Have I not plenty of leisure?"

"You certainly seem to take life easily!" someone answered. —Sent in by H. Whittington, Rotherham, Yorks.

BANG WENT SIXPENCE!

It happened during one of the air-raids on the Eastern Counties.

Isaac, just emerging from a chemist's shop, got in the way of an exploding bomb.

Later, when he recovered consciousness in the hospital, he found that both his feet had been amputated.

"Just my luck!" he murmured. "I've just bought sixpennyworth of corn-plaster!"—Sent in by N. Heppell, North Shields.

HE FELT SMALL.

Johnson: "My wife calls me a model husband, you know."

Blobson: "Oh, is that so! What does it mean?"

Johnson: "Well, I looked it up in the dictionary, and it read: 'Model—mod-dell—a small imitation of the real article.'"—Sent in by F. Barraclough, Hearn Hill, S.E.

SATISFIED HIS CURIOSITY.

Like a flying dumpling, Uncle Flopwit propelled himself from the moving motor-bus to the pavement.

But mud was everywhere. Poor old Flopwit's feet touched the paving-stones for the fraction of a second, and then he proceeded for the next ten yards of his journey face downwards, after which a lamp-post brought him to a sudden halt.

He was still prostrate, and gasping, when a Samaritan's voice exclaimed:

"Poor old gentleman! Have you hurt yourself?"

Now, Flopwit objected to being called old; and he considered the rest of the question ridiculous.

"Hurt myself?" he answered. "Of course not! That sliding act was the first figure of a new dance—the Walrus Glide. I was supposed to be a walrus gliding off a block of ice into the sea. Did it rather neatly, didn't I?"—Sent in by James Dobson, Edinburgh.

COMPLIMENTED.

The new superintendent of the lunatic asylum was strolling among the inmates in the grounds a few weeks after his appointment.

One of his charges suddenly addressed him:

"We all like you better than the last boss, sir," he said.

"Thank you!" said the new official pleasantly. "And may I ask why?"

"Well, sir," was the answer, "you seem more like one of us."—Sent in by H. Jackson, Burnley, Lancs.

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