

TO NEWSAGENTS.

Will you ask the purchaser of this copy to sign the order form on page 20. Please get him to do so, if possible, before leaving your shop.



BY ORDER OF THE VEHME!

A MAGNIFICENT, NEW, LONG, COMPLETE SCHOOL STORY
OF TOM MERRY & CO. AT ST. JIM'S.

GRUNDY—GRAND MASTER!

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

CHAPTER 1.

Making Gussy Understand.

"OH, it's plain enough—as plain as the nose on your face, Gustavus!"

It was Jack Blake, of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's, who made this polite remark; and it was addressed to Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the swell of the Form.

In justice to D'Arcy's nose, it may be said that it was not plainer than any of the other three noses there—those of Blake himself, George Herries, and Robert Arthur Digby. Indeed, many independent and unbiassed judges might have considered it the shapeliest nose of the four.

"Weally, Blake, you have——"

"Oh, ring off, Gussy!" said Herries.

"The thing's as clear as mud!"

"I uttably wefuse, Hewwies, to have my nasal organ associated with mud!"

"Well, there ain't much mud about after all this fine weather, old chump," replied Herries thoughtfully. "But if you'll remind me, next time you see a patch, you shall find out how far your refusal to be associated with it goes, when once I get my hand to the back of your neck!"

"If you desiah a fealful thwashin', Hewwies——"

"Oh, dry up, you kide, and let's get on with the washing!" said Blake. "We were talking about old Grundy and his giddy secret society—not about the thing which, for the sake of politeness, I will call Gussy's nose, though, really, it's more like a——"

"Blake on the subject of Grundy's secret society!" put in Digby drily.

"And not wandering at all—oh, dear, no!" said Herries.

"I weally fail to see what pwoofs we have at pwsent that anything of the kind comes into the mattah. Those wottahs were waggin' Twimble. I dare say Twimble deserved it, but it was Twimble they were waggin'—not anybody of the vewy least importance, you see. Suahly, not even an absolute ass like old Gwunday would considah it worth while to form a secwet society for the purpose of waggin' Twimble?"

"But it wasn't Twimble they meant to rag, chump—it was me!" said Blake.

"Still, I weally fail to see how that pwoes the existence of a secret society," persisted Arthur Augustus.

Blake turned to Digby.

"Try your hand at explaining to the chump, Dig," he said. "He makes me tired!"

"See here, Gustavus, you remember that afternoon last week when we were riding home from Wayland, and old ass Grundy dropped a parcel from his bike?"

"I wemembah it vewy well, Dig. Theah is nothin' whatever the mattah with my memory, I assuah you!" replied D'Arcy, with dignity.

"His memory's all right; it's only in the department he is supposed to think with that he's got sawdust, instead of brains!" said Herries.

"If you fellows do not give up your

wotten conspiwacy to insult and bwow-beat me——"

"We ain't—I mean, we didn't—there isn't any giddy conspiwacy," said Digby patiently. "Only you are so uncommon slow, Gussy! There was black stuff in that parcel——"

"I wemembah that perfectly, Dig, though, as I remarked at the time——"

"What you remarked at the time, which was pretty middling sure to be silly, ain't evidence, anyway!" said Blake. "Proceed, Dig! I can see a faint glimmering of intelligence on the classical features of Percy Adolphus Algernon Vere de Vere!"

"Blessed if I can!" chuckled Herries.

Arthur Augustus elevated his celebrated monocle, and bestowed upon Blake and Herries a glare of stony contempt.

"Go on, Digbay!" he said. "I don't mind lendin' an eeah to you; but I uttably wefuse to give any furthah attention to those two wibald boundahs!"

"Well, that same stuff was in Nobody's Study, made up into black robes and hoods, when Railton caught those bounders out there," said Digby.

"But how can you be awaah that it was the same stuff, or that it had been made up into wobes an' hoods, Dig?"

"Because we've got eyes in our heads, idiot, and we saw Gunn pick it up, and smuggle it out, and chuck it in their study! Pretty smart of Gunny, too. I didn't think he'd got it in him! Old Railton never twigged."

"But how do you know about the wobes——"

"We don't all snore away like one o'clock till rising-bell goes, Gustavus!"

"I wegard the imputation with contemptewy—I mean, despisewy—oh, you know what I mean! I deny that I am evah guilty of snoahing! I am not——"

"Oh, of course, you ain't, Gussy! Anything you like, old scout! Only I don't want to wait till next century before I can get out the statement that Blake and I trotted down early next morning and had a look at Gunny's bundle, Black robes and hoods—five of 'em! Grundy, Gunn, Wilkins, Gore, and Gibbons were to wear the things. And what can that mean but a blessed secret society?"

"And a pretty scratch one, too!" said Blake.

"I ain't denying that. You see, Gustavus, they sent Baggy to rope in Blake——"

"I weally cannot see how it is poss for Baggy Twimble to be a membah of a secwet society," remarked Arthur Augustus.

"Why not?" said Herries.

"Because, deah boy, the society would be no longah secwet when Baggy had been enwolved as a membah. Baggy always lets the cat out of the bag, to speak in the language of pawables."

"Not always," said Blake. "The rotter sometimes keeps things close if it happens to suit his book."

"But what did the secwet society want with Blake?"

"Don't you remember Grundy's tea-party, Gustavus?"

"I have already told you, Dig, that my memovy is a perfectly weliabie one."

"Well, there you are, then!"

"That is all vewy well; but wheah am I?"

"Do you mean to say that you don't tumble now?"

"I cannot pwetend that I do. All of us were wude to Gwunday on that occasion, though I must say that the boundah asked for it. Why Blake?"

"Well, chump, the giddy secret society couldn't very well handle us all at once, could it?"

"Now, Hewwies, I compwehend. But I would have you to undahstand that I have the stwongest possible objection to bein' called a chump, and I shall wefuse to considah you any longah——"

"That will suit me all right!" said Herries cheerily. "You do take so blessed long considahing, Adolphus!"

"I infer, then, that the ideah was to wope us in one by one, an' that the secwet society was simplay makin' a start with Blake?"

Blake nodded.

"He's getting it gradually," said Herries. "I begin to see that dawn of intelligence you mentioned, Blake. It ain't very plain, but it's there, all right."

"If it were on your countenance, Hewwies, it would be vewy plain indeed," remarked Arthur Augustus.

"Eh?" snapped Herries.

"Or, if not, it would be howbiously out of keepin' with its suwwoodin's," said Gussy serenely.

"Blessed if the image hasn't made a joke!"

"Not at all, Hewwies. I assuah you that I am perfectly sewious. Your face is no mattah for jokin'."

"I should say not!"

"No; watah not! It must be too unuttawbly twagic to have such a face, without unkind persons makin' jokes about it!"

"See here, you cheeky ass!" howled Herries. "It's——"

"We were talking about Grundy's wooden-headed society," said Blake.

"We were talking about my face!" roared Herries. "And——"

"Well, just don't let's," said Blake. "It's an unpleasant subject."

"Wha-a-a-at?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Digby.

"What a heap of difference it makes when it's us, and not poor old Gustavus—eh, Herries?"

"Oh, well—— But that dummy really is—— Never mind; get on with the laundry-work!"

"Why did not Gwunday start in on Cardew?" asked Gussy meditatively.

"Why should he, if you come to that?"

"The payin' him for the gwub we had consumed was Cardew's ideah," replied Gussy. "I do not considah that it was pwecisely an ideah to be pwoud of. But assuahedly it was Cardew's, not Blake's."

"There's something in that," said

Blake. "But it's no great odds. They'd have had Cardew before long, I dare say—it wouldn't worry me a heap if they got him now. I suppose they'll try. You, too, Gussy."

"I should not dream of allowin' myself to be twiced by any wotten secret society! I am supwised that you should think so moanly of me as to suggest such a thing, Blake!"

"My dear, good ass, you wouldn't have any choice in the matter if they once collared you! I shouldn't have had if I hadn't smelt a large rat, and switched them on to Baggy instead. Even then—well, I don't mind admitting that I had simply heaps of luck."

Somebody knocked at the door of Study No. 6.

"Come in, fathead!" shouted Herries. "Thanks; but he's not here!" replied a voice from outside.

"Oh, come along in, Levison!" called Blake. "Herries forgot that our Gussy was already present."

"Weally, Blake—"
The door opened, and Ernest Levison came in.

CHAPTER 2.

The Dread Summons!

THERE had been a time when Levison major would have found no welcome at all in Study No. 6.

It is true that Arthur Augustus had from time to time held out the right hand of fellowship to him when he was struggling to fight his way into better repute; but in doing so Gussy had almost always contrived to put up Levison's back by his somewhat patronising manner. Yet in the series of incidents which had had more to do than anything else with the reformation of the black sheep of the Fourth, Arthur Augustus had played no small part.

Levison had not forgotten that. If ever his chance came to do the swell of the Fourth a really big service, he would take it gladly. Meanwhile, he had become of late on quite good terms with Study No. 6 generally, though Blake, Herries, and Digby had been among the last to hold out against the belief that his change was more than a flash in the pan.

They believed in him now. It would take a good deal to persuade them that he had gone back to his old ways, though to say that nothing could convince them of it would be going too far. An old bad name weighs heavily in the balance when a fellow asks for belief against what seem like indubitable proofs of guilt.

And clouds of black suspicion were soon to darken the sky of Ernest Levison—to leave him with only one faithful believer in all St. Jim's.

That storm was still in the future, however, and at the present moment Jack Blake welcomed Levison in just the same way as they would have welcomed Sidney Clive, his chum, or Kangaroo, or Dick Julian. For Tom Merry & Co., for Figgins & Co., there was reserved an even heartier welcome. But they were chums as close almost as brothers.

"Anything happened?" asked Blake. "Do I look frightened?" Levison asked in return. And he grinned.

"You don't—not more than usual, that is. But you look as though you had news to tell."

"I have. Something's going to happen."

"To—"

"To me. You don't suppose I should worry if it was to anyone else, do you?"

That was just like one of Levison's old-time sardonic speeches. He had not given up making them. But nowadays everyone knew that they were not

intended seriously. One could not have called Ernest Levison specially soft-hearted, but he would do as much for a friend as most fellows, though he might be less ready to forgive an enemy than some.

"You aren't going to be sacked, are you?" inquired Herries.

Arthur Augustus looked shocked. But Levison took the rather broad joke in good part.

"I don't think so, thanks," he said. "On the whole, I've rather a notion of keeping off that just now. No; it's something which I fancy-links up with an event of the night before last, when dear Baggy was put through it by certain persons—to me—unknown."

"How did you know anything about that?" asked Digby.

"Oh, I'm rather in the way of knowing about most things," replied Levison carelessly.

"How much do you know?" asked Blake.

"Weally, Blake—"

"Put your cards on the table, Levison, and we'll show ours. As a matter of fact, we rather meant to keep this to ourselves; but as you—"

Levison had sat down. He rose now, and it was plain that he was a trifle offended.

"Oh, sit down again, old ass!" said Blake. "Don't get on your ear about a thing a fellow never meant seriously."

"Right-ho!" said Levison, and he sat down again.

Then he threw upon the table a half-sheet of letter-paper.

"I table my cards," he said quietly. The four bent over it together. Levison watched their faces as they read.

"Oh, it's old Gruppy all serene!" said Blake.

"Grundy, is it? That's more than I knew. I can't be quite as fly as I thought myself!"

"You're fly enough, Levison. Give



The Levity of Levison.
(See Chapter 7.)

"Not a lot. But I know that Trimble was manhandled by somebody—pretty roughly, too. Not that I mind, as it was Baggy. And that you were somehow in the bizney, though you didn't do the bullying act, I'm jolly sure."

"Any more?" said Blake.

"I came here to ask you things; but you seem to be doing most of the questioning. Never mind! Yes, I know more. There's something in the way of a secret society started. And those two young asses, Mulvaney minor and Tompkins—a few more in our Form, too, I fancy, but I'm sure of them, anyway—are in it."

"How did you twig that?"

"Oh, it was dead easy. But I mustn't put you up to all my sly, low ways. They'd shock D'Arcy no end."

"Weally, Levison—"

"We don't seem to be getting any forwarder," said Blake impatiently.

"And if Gussy's allowed to start chin-wagging we jolly well never shall!"

the rest of us just a little chance," said Herries.

"We had information that couldn't have come your way," Blake said—"unless someone had blabbed, that is. It's a wonder nobody has."

"Especially as Baggy's in it!" remarked Digby, with a grin.

"Baggy a member of the secret society?" said Levison. "Fat lot of secrecy about it then—I don't think!"

"Don't be too sure. It hasn't come out yet. Look here, I'll tell you all we know, Levison!"

Blake proceeded to tell the story, which need not be repeated here. Levison listened attentively.

"I see," he said at length. "Hanged if it isn't quite a notion for old Grundy!"

"Oh, you bet the ass never thought it out himself!" said Herries.

"It's Gunn, I fancy," remarked Digby. "He's the brainiest of those three."

"Which is weally not sayin' much."

said Gussy. "I wegard the whole partay as quite exceptionally cwass idiots!"

"What have they been doing to you?" inquired Levison.

"Nothin' at all, deah boy; an' they had bettah not ttry on any of their wude, wuff japes, that's all!"

"This is a new dodge," said Levison, with a finger on the paper they had all read. "They seem to have tumbled to it that getting Baggy to tell a chap Railton wants him isn't the best way poss of working their schemes."

"Even that strikes me as a bit above the level of this," answered Blake. "Who's going to obey a cheeky summons like that?"

"I am," said Levison, with a cynical smile playing about his mouth.

"But weally, Levison—"

"You'd never be such an idiot, surely?"

"Cheeky rotters! I'd leave them to stew—"

"You've got something up your sleeve, Levison, I'm jolly sure!"

It was Blake who made the remark last quoted.

"An arm," returned Levison.

"Ass! You—"

"I'm going. It will be funnier to go than to stay away. And I find things a bit boring these days, though, of course, there's always cricket!"

"You're going to obey an order like this?" demanded Herries.

And he read aloud from the paper Levison had put down:

"To Levison major, by order of the Vehme.

"You are commanded to be by the lightning-blasted oak-tree on Wayland Moor at five o'clock on the evening of Thursday next, to be led thence to the place appointed for your trial by the Vehme.

"Fail not on your peril!"

"Old Grundy didn't write that!" chuckled Digby. "Why, there ain't a single giddy word in it but what's spelled right!"

"How do you know?" asked Levison. Dig glared at him.

"You really mean you are going?" said Blake.

"Oh, rather!"

"And you want us to help you to give the giddy Vehme a nice little surprise?"

"That's as you like," answered Levison. "Cardew and Clive are game, anyway. I dare say we can find some more—Julian and that lot, or Kangaroo and Dane and Glyn. But I thought I'd come to you first, as you seemed to be already more or less mixed up in the bizney!"

"Right-ho!" said Blake cheerily.

"Trust us to back you up, my son! Any objection to letting Tom Merry & Co. know, and Talbot, and Figgins & Co.?"

"Not if you feel you can't move without them. But we don't want the whole giddy school, do we? Grundy's gang must be a jolly scratch lot!"

"I think we shall need a dozen or so, anyway," replied Blake. "But I won't tell anyone you would rather not have know, of course."

"Those fellows are all right," said Levison. "All I bar is letting that ass Grundy get a notion into his wooden head that it takes a whole blessed army corps to deal with his tripey schemes!"

"We won't tell too many. Lemme see, to-day's Wednesday. Plenty of time to fix up things before to-morrow afternoon. What are you going to do with that giddy paper?"

"I thought of scrawling a line on it to say they might expect me, and putting it under Grundy's door," Levison said.

"Don't do that! It would give the game away frightfully!"

THE GEN LIBRARY.—No. 483.

"Well, yes, so it would. And I see there's no R.S.V.P. on it, after all."

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Arthur Augustus.

But Digby looked puzzled.

"That would come after they had done with you, wouldn't it?" he said. "Requiescat in pace—rest in peace—no, that don't fit!"

"Wespondez si vous plait—weply, if you please—that's what R.S.V.P. means, Digby," said Gussy.

"Glad to hear there's something you know, Algreron!"

Levison turned at the door for a Parthian shot in his old style.

"Don't go letting this out, Gussy!" he said.

CHAPTER 3. Grundy in Council.

"RATS!" said Gore.

Grundy looked at Gore with indignation. That was not surprising. Grundy had made a statement, and Gore had replied to it by a rude monosyllable.

Even at an ordinary time Grundy would have been displeased.

But this was no ordinary time, and Grundy was no ordinary person. He never had been—in his own estimation. But surely no one could deem George Alfred Grundy, Grand Master of the Vehme, anything but a personage quite out of the common ruck!

Gore appeared not to be withered in the least by Grundy's look.

"What did you say, Gore?" asked the Grand Master, with dread slowness and distinctness.

"I said 'Rats!'" replied Gore cheerily. "Not deaf, are you, old scout?"

"What do you mean?" thundered the Grand Master.

"Great Scott, what are you yelling at me like that for? What's a chap generally means when he says 'Rats'?" Why, just 'Rats!' I suppose. That's what I mean when I say 'Rats!' anyway."

Gunn and Gibbons and Wilkins were all grinning. Grundy gave them the stoniest of stares.

Gunn and Wilkins tried to straighten out their faces, but Gibbons did not trouble at all about straightening out his.

Gore and Gibbons, unusual visitors to Study No. 3, were on a very different footing from Gunn and Wilkins.

They had joined Grundy's secret society, partly because they looked upon it as rather a jape, but chiefly for the feeds which were the chief feature of each meeting. Not the chief feature in Grundy's eyes, of course, but quite unmistakably so in the eyes of everyone else—even of Gunn and Wilkins.

But these two were bound to Grundy by ties that did not exist in the cases of Gore and Gibbons. Once the secret society was dissolved, there would be an end of any sort of close association between Grundy on the one side and Gore and Gibbons on the other. There never had been any close friendliness.

It was far otherwise with Wilkins and Gunn, for they—as Wilkins said, with perhaps unconscious pathos—"had got to live with the chap." Moreover, they really had no wish to cease sharing a study with Grundy. The great George Alfred was open-handed, and since his coming to St. Jim's Gunn and Wilkins had been far better off than ever before.

Last, but not least, they honestly liked the fellow. He might brag and bluster and tyrannise; but his heart was in the right place, and they knew it.

So Gunn and Wilkins forced themselves to look as serious as possible.

But Gore and Gibbons continued to grin.

It was evident that they had not nearly as much respect for the Grand Master of the Vehme as that august individual knew to be his due.

"Look here, Gore—"

"Hang it all, Grundy, that ain't in the contract! Anyway, put the blessed hood on, then it won't hurt my eyes so much."

At that brilliant stroke of humour Gibbons roared. Gunn and Wilkins only sniggered. They could not help that, though they tried hard.

"Do you mean that my face—"

"Do you call it a face?" inquired Gore, who was in a tormenting mood.

Grundy fairly spluttered.

"What do you call it?" he hooted.

"Chuck me the dic., Gunn," said Gore.

"Oh, dry up!" returned Gunn un-easily. "What do you want the dic. for, ass?"

"It might tell me some word for face that means—oh, you know—something that ain't exactly human!"

Grundy got up, breathing hard.

"If you don't apologise in half a jiffy, Gore, I'll put you out of this study, on your neck!"

Now Gore and Gibbons ceased to grin, while Wilkins and Gunn allowed the dawn of a smile to irradiate their faces. On the whole, Wilkins and Gunn would have felt no acute sorrow at seeing George Gore put out on his neck, and would scarcely have mourned had Gibbons been piled on him.

"Apologise?" said Gore, looking not quite easy. "Why, there's no need for that, old chap."

"Oh, isn't there?" hooted Grundy. "I tell you—"

"Of course there isn't! Don't be so blessed touchy! I never meant a word of it. I was only japing."

The great George Alfred was but partially mollified.

"Don't let me have any more japes of that kind, or you and I will be quarrelling, Gore!" he snorted. "But I accept your apology, and I won't wipe up the floor with you this time. Now let's get back to business. I suppose you mean that you don't think Levison major will obey the summons, though I'm hanged if I can see why you shouldn't have said so in a decent and proper way!"

"There's nothing indecent about saying 'Rats!'" said Gore sulkily.

"There is—to me!" was Grundy's majestic reply.

Gore sniffed. Grundy's largeness of manner was getting on his nerves.

"Well, then, I don't think Levison will come," he said. "I'll say more—I'm jolly sure he won't!"

"Why not?" asked Gunn.

"I know Levison—that's all."

"So do we," said Wilkins.

"You think you do," replied Gore darkly.

Grundy was getting more annoyed than ever.

To Grundy it had seemed for some time that the Shell and Fourth took altogether too much notice of Ernest Levison. Grundy had been glad to see Levison reform, though it had taken some time to convince him of the genuineness of that reformation. But he could not see that it was anything to make a fuss about.

Levison had reformed—and walked straight into the footer and cricket e'evens—and here was he, George Alfred Grundy, absolutely certain of his superiority to Levison at either game, kept out! And he had never needed to reform. His record at St. Jim's was clear of any such stains as had disfigured

Levison's. He had been accused of playing the fool—though he had never been able to see any grounds for the accusation—but he had never played the rotter!

"What's Levison?" he asked.
"About the wisest chap at St. Jim's," answered Gore. "I'm not over fond of him; but I jolly well know that. Too giddy wide for you, Grundy, old scout!"

"Rot!" said Grundy, in his most magnificent way. "Levison's over-rated. If a fellow chose, a fellow could be every bit as crafty as he is."

Gore looked at him, and grinned sourly.

"Not if a fellow's name happened to be George Alfred Grundy," he said.

"Levison's got to toe the line," Grundy replied.

"Levison won't. And if he does, it will be to suit himself. And you will find you've caught a Tartar in old Levison, Grundy!"

"Young Watson came," said Wilkins. "A Third-Form sniveller. A fag just out of the nursery!" sneered Gore. "You wouldn't have got Levison minor or young Wally D'Arcy or Manners minor to come. They'd have laughed at it."

Before issuing the command to Levison to come along and be dealt with, the Vehme had "tried it on the dog," so to speak. Watson of the Third had been rude to the great Grundy. The Third had a sinful habit of being rude to Grundy. Watson had been summoned to appear before the Vehme, and had come.

His obedience had pleased Grundy greatly—so much, indeed, that Watson had been let off with a mere reprimand. If Grundy had heard what Watson said about the Vehme later, it is doubtful if Grundy would have been so well pleased—in fact, it is quite certain he would not have been!

"We are not discussing fags just now," said Grundy austere. "Do you want to back out, Gore? There will be plenty of fellows only too pleased to take your place, you know. You've only to say the word."

Gore did not want to back out. He cared very little about the Vehme as a secret society, but he had a full appreciation of its value as a grub club.

"Of course I don't, Grundy!" he said in haste. "But you want a chap to give his opinions, I suppose?"

"There isn't any need for it, that I can see," replied Grundy, with the frankness of the truly great man. "Your opinion don't really matter a scrap. It's mine that counts."

He turned to Gibbons.

"Do you want to back out, Gibbons?" he snapped.

"Oh, I say, Grundy, what are you jumping down my throat for? I haven't said a blessed word!"

"But you've been sniggering and grinning like a beastly—oh, like a beastly polecat!" retorted Grundy.

"I never heard of a sniggering, grinning polecat before," said Gunn.

"Well, you have now, and you've seen one, too," Grundy answered, pointing to Gibbons.

Gunn thought that Grundy's belief in his own infallibility had grown since he became Grand Master of the Vehme—though Grundy had always rather expected Gunn and Wilkins to say red was blue if he chose to think so. But Gunn did not protest. Nor did Gibbons. He smiled a somewhat sickly smile, and swallowed the insult, lest he might have no further chance of swallowing Grundy's spreads.

The meeting in Grundy's study did not go on much longer. Advice seemed the

last thing Grundy desired. When he called a council it was for the purpose of instructing it, and he naturally expected to be listened to with awe and respect.

Gore and Gibbons appeared rather short of those two necessary commodities.

"He's the silliest ass I ever ran against, bar none," said Gibbons, as they left together.

"I smell a rat," said Gore. "I don't a bit mind missing this particular meeting—at least, I wouldn't if it wasn't for the spread. If Levison does turn up there will be ructions, you bet!"

"He can't do anything alone," replied Gibbons.

"He won't be alone," said Gore meaningly.

"But he can't know where we're going to try him."

"He don't need to; though, for the matter of that, it's easy guassing. A score of fellows could hide out there on the moor all serene."

Gibbons looked thoughtful.

"Oh, well," he said at length, "at worst it only means a bit of a scrap—a rescue, and all that. And I should hate to miss the spread!"

"Same here," admitted Gore. "But I haven't any use for the scrap."

CHAPTER 4.

Levison Obeys the Summons.

"IT'S taking a risk, you know," said Tom Merry.

"Did I ever mind taking a risk?" returned Levison.

Tom laughed.

"Well, I don't mind giving you a testimonial in that way, if you want it, Levison," he said. "You have taken a good many risks in your time, and some of them a heap more dangerous than this."

"After all, old Grundy can't quite kill him," remarked Manners.

"Blessed if I'd go, though!" said Figgins. "It's letting that ass get too big an opinion of his own importance. If we had Grundy in the New House we'd jolly soon teach him to sing a bit smaller, I can tell you!"

"You may have him, and welcome," said Digby.

"Declined, without thanks," remarked Kerr.

It was a gathering of the clans; but the gathering was in the study occupied by Figgins & Co. in the New House—held there lest one of Grundy's numerous myrmidons should become aware of a meeting in Shell Study No. 10 in the School House, and, smelling a rat, report to his Grand Master.

Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn were the only New House representatives. Had more been needed, Redfern & Co. would have been called in. But there were enough stalwarts without those three.

For from the School House had come across in twos and threes no fewer than eleven fellows—Tom Merry, Talbot, Manners, Lowther, Jack Blake, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, Herries, Digby, Levison major, Sidney Clive, and Cardew.

Clive and Cardew came as Levison's special chums, of course. Clive was quite at his ease among the rest; but Cardew was not, though there was nothing in his manner to show it.

These fellows did not feel by any means sure of Cardew yet.

There were plenty of good points in him, but mixed up with all the good was much that made Ralph Reckness Cardew still a puzzle to St. Jim's. One could depend on Cardew in a fight. His courage was beyond dispute. But he would do generous things in a way that robbed them of grace, and rotten things, which he redeemed later in some quite

unexpected manner. One never knew when one had him. He was as elusive as quicksilver.

Even Levison, who certainly cared more about him than anyone else there, did not know how to size him up.

And among the rest he was received with mental reservations which did not apply at all to Clive, whom everyone recognised at the right sort, or even to Levison, though it was not long since everyone had reckoned him as being anything but the right sort.

"You don't seem to catch on, Figgy," said Monty Lowther. "Our primary object is certainly not that of magnifying Grundy's self-importance—quite otherwise, in fact. We actually cherish the base and almost treasonable design of taking down the dear Grundy a peg or six!"

"Don't you suppose I know that, fat-head?" said Figgins, with exemplary politeness. "But suppose we slip up? Suppose, after all, our rescue-party fails? Suppose Grundy's too clever for us?"

"If I hear of a daily paper that wants an ultra-pessimist just to keep people from being too beastly cheerful in wartime, I'll recommend you, old scout," Lowther said gravely.

"Chump! It isn't pessimism to—"

"Monty thinks, it's horrid pessimism to fancy our brains have gone off to such an extent that there's any chance of Grundy's licking us there," said Tom, smiling. "But, as a matter of fact, we've left that all to Levison. He says he's worked the whole thing out, and is dead sure he's right. And I must say his arguments seem good enough to me."

"Let's hear 'em," said Figgins, turning abruptly to Levison.

Scarcely yet had Figgins & Co. come to look upon Levison quite as the School House fellows did. They could see the difference in him, of course; but, coming into contact with him less, they saw it less clearly. For it was not so much on the surface.

Levison often spoke in his old, bitter, sardonic way. He was not exactly an easy fellow to make overtures of friendship to. If he suspected the least hint of patronage in them he was apt to bristle up. Talbot had long been Levison's friend. Clive regarded him as a chum. The Terrible Three, and Jack Blake & Co. accepted him on the new footing. But some of the old antagonism persisted in the case of the New House trio.

"It's like this, as I see it," said Levison. "I'm summoned to a certain spot on the moor. Will they try me, and put me through it out there? Not likely!"

"No; I should say it's not likely," said Figgy, and Kerr nodded agreement. Fatty Wynn came out of a beautiful day-dream of pork-pie, and added:

"Oh, not jolly well likely. What's Levison talking about, anyway?"

Levison paid no heed to Fatty.

"There isn't exactly a big choice of places on the moor—eh?"

"Well, if you come to that, the old castle is really the only possible place," admitted Figgy.

"There you are, then! That's how I got at it!"

"You must admit, Figgay, dear boy, that Levison is quite wight."

"Oh, ring off, Gussy! Look here, Levison—"

Figgins hesitated. Levison flushed.

"Go on!" he said, with a note in his voice that only came there when he felt himself distrusted, and resented it.

"No. I haven't any more to say. I think you are right, Levison."

"You've got something more to say, or you had," said Levison. "Out with it!"

"It's nothing."

Levison rose to his feet.
"That's enough!" he said hotly. "I'm going! I said from the first that I wasn't keen on having you New House fellows in it."

"Oh, sit down, Levison!" said Talbot.
"Figgy didn't mean anything."
"Sit down, and don't be an ass!" said Tom.

"Where on earth do you think I should come in in selling you chaps to Grundy, Figgins?" demanded Levison, with the old, defiant look on his face.

"I never suggested any thing of the sort!" snapped Figgins.

"But you thought it!"

"Suppose I did? Thoughts are free, and a fellow can't help what he thinks, anyhow!"

"That's an admission that you did think it! It's an insult, Figgins—that's what it is!"

"Weally, deah boys—"

"Oh, ring off, Gustavus!" said Jack Blake. "See here, Levison, I'm jolly sure that if any such thought crossed Figgy's mind for a moment he didn't let it stay there; and if you ask me, you're too jolly sensitive!"

"Perhaps I am, and perhaps there are reasons for it, Blake. Not very creditable reasons for me, I dare say. But a chap has his pride. I asked you fellows for help; and if there's a single one among you thinks I'd do that just to play a dirty trick on you, then I don't want any of your help, and I won't have it!"

"I don't think it, Levison," said Figgins manfully. He held out his hand. "I apologise if I've hurt your feelings. I'm jolly sure you wouldn't do a rotten thing like that!"

Levison took the hand; but even in taking it he could not keep back one of the old little sardonic speeches, though it was but two words.

"Not now!" he said.

There was a touch of real bitterness in those two words that everyone present understood. Just such a thing as Figgy had for a moment thought of might the Levison of old have done; and Levison himself knew it, and knew that they all knew it. The shadow of the past was not quite lifted yet.

"What's the plan to be, then?" asked Figgins quietly.

Levison had sat down again. So had Cardew, who had risen with him, showing plainly where his sympathies lay. But an angry flush still burned on Levison's cheeks, and there was a queer look in the eyes of Cardew.

"Levison's notion is that we had better hide in the vaults, and wait till they toddle along with him," said Tom Merry.

"But if Figgins—"

"Hang it all, Levison, give a fellow a chance! If you consider that the best plan, I'm on all serene. I haven't an objection to it."

"I have," said Monty Lowther.

"What is it?" asked Levison.

But his tone to Lowther was quite friendly.

"Sort of general objection to vaults. Nasty cheerless places! And we should have to do quite a lot of waiting."

"Why? If you were there twenty minutes or so before the time Levison gives himself up—"

"Tommy, old son, you had better be careful, or you will have Gussy congratulating you on your perspicacity. After which—"

"Oh, weally, Lowthah! As a mattah of fact, I considah Tom Mewwy is absolutely cowweat, an' that twenty minutes—"

"There you are, Tommy! Gustavus

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 463.

agrees. Now you know there's a flaw in your reasoning somewhere."

"I entially fail to perceive, Lowthah—"

"You always do, Gustavus—that's what's the matter with you. Now I perceive quite clearly that the exalted Grundy will leave the task of persuading Levison castlewards to some of his subordinates—possibly a squad headed by the dear Gore, who would not at all mind paying off an old score or two on Levison. The great one himself, with his chief mysmidons, will repair early to the place of meeting, there to enhance his dignity by robing himself for his exalted part. We must be before him, or we muddle up the whole affair. Or we must wait till all are inside, and then work the rescue by an attack from above."

"That wouldn't be half as effective," said Kerr. "Besides, if the rest of you feel at all like I do about it, the thing would be half spoiled unless we saw it through from the first, ourselves unseen, and able to gloat over the surprise we are going to give the dear Grundy."

"I agree," said Tom.

"And there's room for a small army to hide in those vaults," remarked Talbot.

"Right-ho! I withdraw my objection. I'll start now, if you like," said Lowther. "Mine is the spirit of which martyrs are made. Any old thing will do for me!"

"But Lowther's right about one thing—"

"I thank you, Levison! That was a consoling speech. When in a minority of one, a fellow hugs such comforts to his breast, like a hot-water bottle on a December night!"

"Don't be an ass! You're right in saying that the rescue-party must hide in good time. I should say there won't be a minute to waste after classes are over. For it will give the game away horribly if they get even a glimpse of you too soon."

That afternoon, as soon as classes were dismissed, Tom Merry and the rest of the rescue-party cleared off at once. They did not go all together, and they did not all make straight for the path across the moor at the start. But they drew together on nearing it, and had disappeared into the vaults beneath before a sign of Grundy and his liegemen were seen.

A little later Ernest Levison set out alone to obey the dread summons. But he had been on the watch before he started; and more than once a smile had curled his lips as he saw, in twos and threes, fellows whom he knew or suspected of being among the enemy, mizzle out of the gates. They all tried to look as if nothing in particular was in the wind. But they did not take in Levison!

CHAPTER 5.

On the Moor.

ERNEST LEVISON walked along, humming softly to himself.

Anyone who saw him might have taken him for a fellow out for a solitary walk, without a care on his mind.

But there seemed to be no one about to see him.

His eyes swept the moor without perceiving a single human creature in as much of its expanse as was visible to him.

But Levison knew that the enemy was lurking somewhere. There was any amount of cover on the moor.

With the practical certainty of rescue a little later on to keep up his spirits, another fellow who wanted to prepare a surprise and a set-back for Grundy might have done what Levison was doing.

But there was scarcely another fellow

in the school who would have risked as much in doing it. Grundy had his own notions of fair play. But among his very scratch horde were some to whom fair play meant little, and who did not like Levison.

Racke and Crooke might be among them. Racke and Crooke were not, as it chanced, having been rejected without any unnecessary politeness by the Grand Master. Those two sweet specimens had learned from Mellish that Levison was a destined victim of the society, and, in pursuance of their vendetta against Levison, desired to join it.

But Grundy had no use for Racke and Crooke. He would not touch them with a barge-pole. There was no possible doubt about that, for he had told them so. They emerged from Grundy's study in a state of temper worse than fiendish, even bordering on the Hunnish.

Gore was sure to be among the crowd, and Levison knew that Gore did not love him. Moreover, in spite of the fact that Gore had of late done much to win for himself a better place at St. Jim's, he was not a fellow whose instincts of fair play could be entirely trusted to. And he had a grudge against Levison. Levison had moved far faster than Gore along the road to recognition as a desirable member of St. Jim's junior society. Levison knew well enough that he owed much of that to the fact that he was an athlete above the average, and of course Gore knew it well enough, too, and he would not have been George Gore if he had not resented it.

So that it really needed some pluck and coolness for Levison to walk quietly to what awaited him on Wayland Moor.

He reached the lightning-struck oak, which had been appointed as the place, and still he had seen no one.

But he knew that they were near. His quick ears had caught slight sounds from behind gorse-bushes and in brambly undergrowth, and he did not give even the smallest start of surprise when they broke cover and swarmed around him.

There were a dozen of them at least. They were all supposed to be disguised beyond recognition, for the generosity of the Grand Master had supplied each with a craps mask to cover the upper half of his face. Above the black half-masks the St. Jim's caps looked queer. It had been agreed that it was no good trying to fox Levison that the secret society was anything but a St. Jim's affair.

But Levison was not foxed about the identity of most of them, either. He knew Gore at once by his figure, Mulvaney minor by a big ink-stain on his trousers, Tompkins by his mouth, which Tompkins had never learned to keep shut, even when he was not talking; by various other indications he knew Gunn and Mellish and Boulton and Bates, and others.

He saw at once, too, that Grundy was not there. Wilkins and Gibbons were also absentees. And Baggy Trimble had not been deputed to help in this job. No mask would have begun for a moment to disguise Baggy.

"By order of the Grand Master of the Vehme!"

It was Gunn who spoke, though he made his voice sound deep and unfamiliar. Perhaps Gore didn't care for a speaking part of that kind.

"Right-ho! I'm here!" replied Levison, in a very cool and casual manner.

"You submit yourself to the justice of the Vehme?"

"I don't know about justice; but it looks rather as if I was submitting myself, don't it, Gunn?"

"Call me not by that name!"

"Anything you like, idiot! I can

think of lots of other names to call you if that don't suit, fathead!"

A chuckle came from somewhere in the rear of the crowd. It might have come from Mulvaney minor.

To chuckle when he should have been deadly serious was quite in the way of that irrepressible youth.

But Levison did not think that it came from any of the band of Grundytes. And he was right. It was Clive who had chuckled.

Clive and Cardew had joined the rest at the castle ruins. But then Cardew had proposed a plan of his own—that he and Clive should wait in hiding near the rendezvous, with the notion of going to Levison's aid if he should be roughly handled. Like Levison, Cardew had fancied that Racke and Crooke might be among the enemy.

Neither of them had done Grundy justice in that.

Now, the two were hidden close to the stricken oak. They had been further back, in the rear of Gunn's party, but they had crept up closer when the emissaries of the Vehme broke cover.

"Who's that?" demanded Gunn, facing round.

"Don't ask silly questions, chump!" said Levison. "He musn't give his name, you know, and if he weighed in with anything like I'm calling you, old ass, it wouldn't identify him. You're all the same sort of futile piffing turnip-heads!"

"Oh, let's gag the sarcastic beast!" growled Gore.

"Is that you, George the Third?" inquired the mocking Levison. "I don't spot George the First—which his second name is Alfred—or George the Second, who may be alluded to as Wilkins, as he's not present; but you are George the Third, I know—you must be, because he was the George who went potty!"

"I'll jolly well—"

"Oh, no, you won't!" said Gunn sharply. "We're not going to have the prisoner knocked about—not till after he's been tried and sentenced, anyway."

"I may be found innocent, you know, Gunn—beg pardon! I should say chuckle-head!" remarked Levison.

"Oh, no, you won't! Don't you make any mistake about that!" answered Gunn.

"Looks to me as if I'd been sentenced in advance, funny-face!" Levison said.

"Something like that!" growled Gunn.

"Not sure I should have come if I'd known that, imbecile."

"You just dry up, Levison! I've had enough of your slanging!"

"So I'm allowed to keep my name—eh, tomato-nose? Quite a good notion, that! I haven't any fancy for being called things like sparrow-shanks, you know, sparrow-shanks."

Levison's cool insolence was making Gunn feel quite annoyed. But Gunn had insisted on being put in command of the band, instead of letting Gore lead it, because he wanted to have things done decently and in order. And Gunn did not mean to have the captive ragged too soon, however much provocation he offered.

"Are you coming along quietly?" he snapped.

"Do you mean you don't like my style of conversation? So sorry! I was trying to adapt it to what I thought suitable to your eccentric views, mad-man."

"Are you coming along without any silly struggling?"

"Oh, my hat, yes! Do you suppose I'd have the cheek to struggle against a horde of masked ruffians, who may be Huns for all I can tell, swivel-eye?"

Plenty of Huns not interned yet, you know, little Kaiser-pap."

Gunn fairly gritted his teeth. He was not enjoying all this. His followers were—all but Gore, whose small share of the chaff had made him morose.

It was what they might have expected from Levison. If he came at all he would come in a derisive mood, ready to treat the whole thing as a jape. Gore had known that all along, though on the whole he had not believed Levison would come.

But if he did Gore had intended to put a speedy stopper on his japing. And having Gunn put over his head in this way had not improved Gore's temper.

"Frog's-march the rotter!" said Gore. Cardew stirred in his hiding-place. But Clive laid a hand on his shoulder.

"Don't stir!" he whispered. "It's all serene."

"Not if he'll come without any fuss," answered Gunn.

"You're not half a bad chap, pudden-head!" said Levison cheerily. "There's a fellow I know named Gunn who is a bit like you—uglier if anything. But, then, you only show half your face, so it isn't easy to judge!"

"Oh, come along!" howled Gunn.

The procession moved off. Levison, looking quite cheery, walked among the black-masked emissaries of the Vehme.

Clive and Cardew waited until they had disappeared in a dip of the moor, and then came out.

"We might have gone along with the rest," said the South African junior.

"Not that it matters a heap."

"It would have been another story if the dear Racke and the merry Crooke had been among that crowd, Clive. Even as it was that fellow Gore was disposed to be nasty."

"Racke and Crooke are nowhere near," said Clive. "This sort of thing is not in their line."

But Clive was wrong.

He and Cardew were not fifty yards on their cautious way towards the castle ruins—they had to be careful lest any of Gunn's band should spot them—when two heads appeared from cover in the rear of where they had been concealed.

One of those heads was that of Aubrey Racke, the other that of George Gerald Crooke.

"It wasn't worth the rotten fag," said Racke morosely. "My bags are full of these beastly gorse prickles—thousands of 'em!"

"Oh, I don't know," returned Crooke. "We know what's doing, anyway. Let's follow them up. We may get a chance to score over the whole blessed gang yet."

"Hanged if I wouldn't be nearly as glad to do old Grundy a bad turn as I would Levison!" said the genial Racke. And more than that he could hardly have said.

CHAPTER 6. In the Vaults.

"HERE we are!" said Jack Blake cheerily. "And in good time, too."

"No sign of the great George Alfred and his faithful followers yet, anyway," remarked Herries.

"We shall have an hour or two to wait, and the temperature down here ain't exactly summery," Lowther grumbled. "Up above it was too jolly hot for anything. But I prefer frizzling to freezing. Never say again that I'm not a prophet!"

The party, reduced to eleven by the absence of Clive and Cardew, had made their way down the broken, uneven stone stairs to the great vaults that stretched under the old castle. Here

they were to await the coming of Grundy and the first contingent of his crowd, and then of the rest, with Levison as a captive among them.

That is if everything turned out according to Levison's forecast. He had been so very sure that he had the whole course of events sized up that he had made them believe too.

They felt rather less certain now. But if Levison was wrong, he would suffer, not they. Unless it was to the castle vaults he was brought there would be no rescue for him—though Clive and Cardew might be able to put them on the track in time.

"It's all right!" said Digby, who had been searching with an electric torch. "They're coming! No giddy doubt about that. Look here!"

Digby had found a hamper. The label bore Grundy's name.

They crowded around that certain proof of the accuracy of Levison's forecast.

"Brought here after morning classes, I guess," said Manners.

"The feed is scarcely on the lavish scale of Grundy's tea-party," remarked Talbot. "What that hamper holds won't go far among a crowd that includes the one and only Baggy."

"Perhaps old Grundy has tumbled to it that there's war on," said Blake.

"And that food rationing has been mentioned," added Lowther.

"Mentioned, did you say?" returned Figgins. "Seems to me we've been talking food instead of eating it for weeks past!"

"Grundy's little lot won't be satisfied with talking it instead of eating it," Tom Merry said, grinning.

And Tom was quite right. Grundy had a surprise in store for his liegemen as well as for Levison.

"Weally, deah boys," said Arthur Augustus, "it wathab swikes me that we are not takin' pwopah pwecautions. Gwunday may turn up at any minute, an' yet we stand about heah—"

"Quite right, Gustavus," said Blake. "Go up one for that. It's a real treat to find you showing sense."

"And as a reward of merit," Lowther said, "I move that Gussy be allowed the honourable post of watching at the foot of the stairs for the approach of—"

"Wats!"

"No, not 'Wats,' Gustavus—Grundy! I do not know Mr. Wats. He might or might not prove welcome if he blew in. But he is not expected, whereas Grundy is."

"Somebody ought to keep a weather-eye open," Tom said. "We musn't let them hear us down here."

"I'll do it," volunteered Digby. And he went off to post himself at the foot of the staircase.

Within a minute he was back.

"They're coming!" he said. "I could hear old Grundy's voice. He's asking someone whether he knew who he was talking to."

"That was Grundy, whether his voice was recognisable or not," murmured Lowther. "Grundy is the only person at St. Jim's who suffers from a delusion that the people he talks to are all blind."

"Oh, stop your gassing, and move on!" said Tom.

"Let's take the hamper with us," suggested Fatty Wynn, who had brightened up perceptibly since the discovery of the hamper.

"Won't do," said Talbot. "They'd miss it directly."

So they moved off further into the dark, gloomy vaults, without the hamper. But Fatty went unwillingly. It seemed such a pity to leave the

hamper behind in these days of dearth! And it was lawful spoil, too.

The electric-torch was put out, of course. The vaults were as dark as could be until their blackness was slightly illuminated by the light of a bicycle-lamp carried by Wilkins, behind whom Grundy, looking his lordliest, stalked.

They could see Grundy and those who followed him, though not plainly enough to recognise most of them. But they themselves were quite invisible in the gloom to the assembled members of the Vehme.

Now the squeaky voice of Baggy Trimble was heard.

"I say, Grundy—"

"Haven't I told you that I won't be addressed in that manner during the sittings of the society?" hooted Grundy.

"Oh, rot! You aren't sitting—"

"I jolly soon shall be—on you!" roared Grundy.

"What are they expected to call him, I wonder?" whispered Blake in the ear of Lowther.

"Lots of things one could call Grundy, you know, Blake!"

"Yes, old chap. But they ain't the sort of things Grundy wants to be called!"

It seemed that someone else among the Grundy crowd had more craft than Trimble.

"Grand Master!" said Gibbons.

"Now we've got it!" chuckled Blake.

"Lord of the world, and brother of the sun and moon!" murmured Lowther.

"Yes?" said Grundy, gruffly enough, but evidently pleased.

"While we're waiting, don't you think we might as well have a little snack—just something to be going on with?" asked Gibbons.

"That's just what I was going to say, only Grundy snapped my head off when I started to say it!" whined Baggy.

"If Baggy is speaking the truth—which, being Baggy, he naturally is not—Grundy at least will hardly have an appetite for even a slight snack," remarked Lowther to Blake.

"I should say not, old scout—after Baggy's head! Ugh!"

"There's a hamper here," remarked Smith minor.

"You'll just leave that hamper alone, or you'll have me on your track!" growled Grundy.

"Well," said Lorne, "I hope they'll soon come along with Levison. I can't say I'm dead gone on this unearthy place, and it's going to be precious dull waiting here with nothing at all to do!"

"Where are the other hampers?" inquired Jones minor.

"How many do you expect, you greedy bouncer?" snapped Grundy.

"Do you mean this is all? Oh, my hat! Why, there will hardly be six mouthfuls each among such a crowd!" grumbled Scrope.

"Are you aware," said Grundy, in his severest and most majestic tones, "that there is a war on?"

"Grundy's found that out," said Tom to Talbot. "Everything comes, if you'll only wait long enough, they say!"

"It didn't start yesterday, did it?" asked Smith minor.

"I rather calculate not," said Buck Finn.

There was a buzz among the rest, which told plainly that they did not consider one comparatively small hamper up to the lavish scale to which Grundy had accustomed the recipients of his hospitality.

"I told you the rotters would kick, old scout!" whispered Wilkins.

"Oh, he's kidding us!" said Gibbons.

"There are half a dozen blessed hampers this size hidden away somewhere, you bet!"

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 483.

"He, he, he!" chortled Baggy, in great relief. "Old Grundy was just kidding us! Good old Grundy! There's nothing mean about him!"

"Nothing of the sort!" howled Grundy furiously. "Don't you chaps ever read the papers?"

"Of course we do!" said Scrope.

"I don't mean the racing news, and all that rot! I mean, the things that really matter!"

"The Grand Master, lord of the world, and brother of the sun and moon, has a repartee to his credit!" chuckled Lowther. "He's coming on! That was a score over Scrope!"

"Reading the papers don't fill a fellow's—"

Grundy cut in before Smith minor could finish.

"Perhaps not. But they tell you that this isn't any sort of time for thinking of grub," he said.

Fatty Wynn groaned. Fatty was in keen sympathy with the fellows who found Grundy's notion of a spread disappointing. So keen was Fatty's sympathy, indeed, that he regretted more than ever that the hamper should have been left behind.

According to the St. Jim's code, it was lawful spoil of war. It could have been whacked out quite nicely among the small crowd in the farther vault. Left where it was, it merely irritated the fellows who had been expecting supplies on a so much larger scale.

"I say, you know, Grundy, this isn't quite playing the game," said Gibbons. "There hasn't been any change during the last few days—at least, not that I've heard of. You reckoned then that, as long as the stuff wasn't anything that came under the rations arrangement, a fellow had a right to pile in as hard as he chose, and I quite agree with that notion!"

"So do I," said Baggy Trimble fervently. "In fact, I consider that the whole ration wangle is beastly silly rot! There's something behind it. They want to collar the grub—"

"Shut up, Trimble, you disgusting pig, or I'll scalp you!" roared Grundy. "Look here, you chaps, I don't hold quite the same views as I did a week ago! I've been thinking—"

"Go hon!" interjected Jones minor, in tones of incredulity.

"Grundy's been thinking!" said Lowther to Blake. "This is where we get ready for a shock, old chap! Almost anything may have happened to Grundy if he's actually been thinking!"

"Yes; he may even have had an idea," replied Blake, grinning broadly in the gloom.

"No, no! I don't anticipate any such extreme result as that!"

But it appeared that Grundy really had been thinking to some purpose.

"It's like this," Grundy said, in very serious tones. "Wait a moment, though! I suppose all you chaps reckon yourselves patriotic?"

There was a general hum of assent. Naturally, most of those present regarded themselves as patriots of the purest type. It was easy for them to do so, as neither compulsion for the Army nor National Service touched them.

But one or two were not too ready to agree.

"I'm as patriotic as anybody," bleated Trimble, "but I don't agree with a chap's starving himself for the good of other people! My notion is—"

"You needn't try to take us in with patriotic guff just because you don't like shelling out on the same scale as before, Grundy!" said Gibbons.

"You thumping ass!" hooted Grundy. "I don't care how much I shell out. I sha'n't miss the money. It ain't that. Wilky knows jolly well it ain't that!"

"So I do," assented Wilkins. "Old Grundy really has been thinking, you fellows. You might listen to him for a moment, anyway!"

"Observe the awe-stricken attitude of the faithful disciple, Blake," said Lowther. "Grundy has been thinking, and Wilkins, who knows him better than anybody else except Gunn, is smitten with wonder!"

"They're going to listen, whether they like it or not!" Grundy roared. "I'll teach them who is boss of this giddy show! Look here, if you asses have read the papers, you must know that there may be a scarcity of grub generally before long—not only of bread and meat and so on, but of other things. Well, then! Tuned stuff will keep, won't it? And it will come in jolly handy then. So—"

"My notion is that it would come in a jolly sight more useful now!" grumbled Scrope.

"Rotten notion, us going without now so that other people may mop it up later on!" said Gibbons morosely.

Most of the crowd seemed in agreement with these sentiments.

There was sense in what Grundy had said—more sense than most fellows would have expected from Grundy. His unseen auditors thought rather better of his reasoning powers than they had ever done before—though that really was not saying much.

But they had not come along in the anticipation of assisting at a lavish spread. The members of Grundy's secret society had, and if Grundy's words of wisdom had been spoken before they came, the chances are that they would not have come at all!

"There's going to be a split in the giddy society," said Figgins to Kerr.

"Seems so. And the illustrious Grand Master stands a jolly good chance of getting it where the chicken got the chopper," answered Kerr cheerily.

A storm did indeed seem blowing up. But at this moment there was a diversion. Voices were heard above.

"No need to hold my arms," said Levison's voice, sounding quite cheerful. "Or, if you are going to, let George the Third walk in front of me. I haven't come so far without struggling to finish myself off by tumbling neck and crop down those beastly steps, and if I fall I should like to have something soft and of no value to fall on top of. George the Third would do quite nicely!"

CHAPTER 7.

The Levity of Levison.

NEXT moment Levison appeared. Behind him came his masked captors.

Wilkins produced half a dozen candles, and proceeded to light them.

Grundy took his seat upon the hamper—the only thing there which was of any use as a seat. Then he got up suddenly. The argument about the feed had caused him to forget entirely that he was not yet robbed. It was a dreadful error, and Grundy fairly scuttled to repair it.

"Never mind about putting the clobber on, Grundy, old ass!" said Levison. "I shall know you if you come back toggled up as an archbishop!"

But Grundy paid no heed to the gibe. The concealed rescue-party could hear his heavy breathing quite close to them as he hurried on his back robe.

They stood still, and there was not a whisper among them now. The drama had not yet reached the stage at which they meant to take their cue.

"Someone else, then two or three more—just how many, the hidden juniors could not tell—joined Grundy in the gloom.

"Help me on with this rotten thing, one of you!" said somebody, and they knew the voice of George Gore.

Lowther stepped forward, safe in the darkness, and seized a robe which might or might not have been Gore's, for all he could tell.

But it was, as it chanced. For Gore's voice sounded, muffled and furious.

"Who did that? Clumsy beast, whoever you are! You've put the thing on me with the rotten hood wrong way round!"

"Oh, shut up, Gore!" said Gibbons irritably. "I suppose you're old enough to dress yourself, aren't you?"

"Hang the thing!" snapped Wilkins, also finding difficulty.

"What's the row, old scout?" asked Gunn.

"Can't find the giddy armholes."

"What do you want with armholes to a thing that's got no arms, you utter idiot?" said Grundy politely.

"Oh, I forgot! Ought to have remembered, too, as we made the things!"

"I knew some silly ass must have had a hand in that, for I'm blessed if ever I came across anything so beastly hard to get on in all my life!" growled Gore.

But that may have been on account of the kindly help extended to him by the humorous Lowther.

"Point worth noting," whispered Kerr to Figgins. "No arms to the robes."

"Eh?"

"Oh, use your brains, old chap! If I was going to be rushed, I'd prefer not to have a thing on that prevented me from using my arms—that's all."

Now all five were robed. Lowther, risking much, concluded his attentions to Gore by bringing his hand down with a hearty slap on that worthy's head.

"Was that you, Grundy?" hooted Gore.

"Was what me? What are you talking about, you lunatic?" sounded Grundy's voice from well ahead.

Gore growled some threat, and followed the voice. Out of the gloom into the lighted portion of the vault the five robed figures moved, Grundy stalking ahead with immense dignity.

Those behind were hidden behind the remains of a dividing wall. But they were able to steal out and get a glimpse of the proceedings from time to time, for the light of the bicycle-lamp and the candles, while sufficient to make things near at hand visible, only rendered more utterly black the gloom beyond its radius.

Levison was sitting on the hamper when the five members of the Vehme tribunal reappeared.

"Get up!" howled Grundy, almost aghast.

"Did you speak, Grundy?" asked Levison politely.

"Get up!" repeated Grundy, breathing hard. "What do you think you were brought here for?"

"I understood there was some idea of a feed," replied Levison.

His coolness was too much for the great George Alfred.

"My hat, just listen to him!" he roared. "A feed! Thinks he was invited to a feed! Get up, will you?"

Levison arose without haste.

"Looks like a hamper, too," he said.

"But, of course, there may have been some mistake. Didn't you say something about a feed when you invited me here. George the Third?"

"No, you cheeky ass!" hooted Gore.

"Knows his name, you see. He'll eat out of my hand soon," said Levison blandly. "As this appears to be your royal throne, George the First, I shouldn't think of having the bad manners to occupy it any longer."

"What's the idiot mean, with his

piffling talk about George the First and George the Third?" snapped Grundy.

A good many of the others were grinning. Their sympathies were rather with Levison than with the Grand Master, now that it had become evident that the one small hamper contained all that they could hope for in the way of a feed. Buggy Trimble, looking disconsolately at it, thought that, as a provision for his own personal and private needs, that hamper would just have done nicely. But to be shared with this hungry crowd—why, it was not worth coming for!

The Grand Master's popularity had suffered a distinct slump among those who knew the true state of affairs. Gibbons had whispered the dreadful news to Gore now, and disaffection had spread even to the tribunal.

No one gave a direct answer to the question put by Grundy, and it appeared that he did not particularly want an answer, for he did not repeat it. He sat down upon the hamper, his knees almost up to his chin, and bestowed a baleful glance upon Levison.

Levison smiled cheerily, and then yawned.

"Beg pardon, Grundy!" he said. "Awfully rude to yawn, I know. But the air down here is a bit sleepy, and there really isn't much happening to keep a fellow awake, is there? Shall we get on with the washing?"

"Look here, don't you address me by my name! I won't be called Grundy here!" said the Grand Master severely.

"Same thing Gunn said. No, it wasn't, though. Of course not. He wasn't objecting to being called Grundy—I didn't call him anything so bad as that. But he would have done, no doubt—any chap would!"

"Will you hold your tongue?" hooted Grundy.

"If you like. That will settle the little argument, won't it? For I can't call you anything while I'm doing that. I may be like the parrot, though, and think all the more. But you can't have me hanged, drawn, and quartered for anything I think about you, can you, Grundy?"

Levison was enjoying himself, as the rescue-party guessed. But just in the same way would he have talked to Grundy had there been no rescue-party at hand.

"I say, Grundy, where's my seat?" snapped Gore.

"You can stand, can't you?"

"I can; but hanged if I'm going to stand that! Come here, Buggy!"

"I—I— Oh, I say, Gore, I can't help you, you know! I don't carry chairs about in my pockets."

"Just you come here, you fat lout, or there will be trouble!"

Buggy came. Anything seemed better to him than what he would get from Gore if he disobeyed.

"Go down on your hands and knees, you fat worm!"

"Sha'n't! Yarough— Stoppit, Gore! What do you want— Oh, stop the beast, Grundy!"

But Grundy had no notion of interposing on Buggy's behalf. Gore's idea struck him as quite a good one. The hamper was too low to make an effective and properly dignified chair of state.

Grundy glanced round.

The fellows there were rather a scratch lot; but there were few among them who would submit to this sort of thing, as even Grundy realised.

But his eyes lighted upon Mellish.

"Come here, Mellish!" he said sharply.

"Here, oh, cheese all that, Grundy! I'm not jolly well going to! I'm hanged if I'm putting up with that!"

"You may be hanged if you do—I should think it's likely enough you'll be

hanged anyway! I don't know for certain about that; but I do jolly well know you'll be licked if you don't!"

Mellish had not the pluck of a mouse. He slunk forward.

If he had shown the least sign of fight the rest might have backed him up. But they were not going to fight his battle for him. None of them was fond enough of Mellish for that.

So Buggy, groaning, down on his hands and knees, supported the weight of Gore, while Mellish went down to make a seat of state for the great Grundy.

"You chaps can have one each, if you like," said Grundy generously.

But Gunn had taken the hamper, and Gibbons and Wilkins, not seeing another Buggy Trimble or Percy Mellish among the crowd, did not close with the offer.

"I—I can't stand much of this, you know, Grundy!" groaned Mellish.

"You ain't standing—and I won't be called Grundy here!" replied the Grand Master.

Mellish was mentally calling Grundy lots of other things, but he dared not speak them.

"Bring the accused forward!" commanded the Grand Master.

Levison looked round.

"Don't you hear, you fellows?" he asked. "Where's the giddy accused? Trot him out!"

"You're the accused!" howled Grundy.

"Am I? I say, Grundy, this isn't the way to treat a visitor, you know!"

"Visitor be hanged!"

"No, no! That would be still more inhospitable. Besides, it might hurt."

"You're the accused, I tell you, you thumping idiot!" howled Grundy.

"Then it ain't decent to talk about hanging me until after I've been tried, anyway! And I really should like to know what the merry dickens I'm accused of?"

"Cheek! Confounded, beastly cheek—to me!" hooted the Grand Master.

"To—to— Speak louder, Grundy, please! I can't hear what you say when you whisper like that!"

"To me—me!" roared Grundy.

"Oh! Quite a new notion to me, you know. It hadn't entered my head that it was possible for me to be cheeky to you!"

Grundy spluttered incoherently.

"You don't twig? Well, I'll explain— simply because I know what an effort it means for you to understand anything."

"You—you—"

"I could be cheeky to Lathom, of course. He's a master. Or to Kildare—he's the skipper. Perhaps even to Tom Merry—I don't say he's of real importance; but he's junior captain, and boss of the cricket and footer. But how can I be cheeky to anybody who isn't anybody, so to speak—who's nobody in particular, I mean?"

Grundy's wrath was beyond words. He motioned to his myrmidons. But they only stood and gazed stupidly at him. They saw his arms flung up wildly, but did not understand the least in the world what he required of them.

At last he found his voice.

"The trial will begin at once!" he said sternly.

CHAPTER 8.

An Interrupted Trial.

THE announcement that the trial was to begin at once seemed to fall a trifle flat.

No one knew what Levison was to be tried for, though Gunn and Wilkins had some sort of glimmering of what was in Grundy's mind. The real offence, they realised, was the failure to take Grundy seriously.

It was scarcely to be wondered at that the rest did not trouble. For they were no more inclined to take Grundy seriously than was Levison. They were in this secret-society business for the loaves and fishes, so to speak. And it looked as though the loaves and fishes were not to be provided in bountiful measure this time, which had a dampening effect upon their keenness.

"I— Oh, I say, Grundy, I can't stand much more of this!" groaned the unfortunate Mellish.

Grundy did not even deign him an answer.

"Gerroff, Gore! You're breaking my back!" bleated Baggy.

"Serve you jolly well right, you fat worm!" snapped Gore.

"It's weally too bad!" murmured Arthur Augustus to Talbot. "Mellish an' Twimble are wretched specimens, I gwant, but—"

"They let themselves in for it," answered Talbot. "If they'd had the nerve to kick against it the other chaps would have stopped it. I've no pity for them."

"Stand forth, accused!" roared Grundy.

Levison looked round.

"What are you gaping at, you ass?" asked the Grand Master, quite forgetful of his dignity.

"The other three," answered Levison, still looking round.

"What other three, you lunatic?"

"First, second, and third, of course! If I'm to stand fourth—"

A howl from Grundy cut him short.

"I'm glad you've got the better of that shy, whispering habit of yours," remarked Levison coolly. "If it will save time—and your valuable breath—I don't mind standing first. Anything to oblige, you know!"

Grundy turned to Gunn.

"Look here, you know, Gunn, you'll have to do the chin-waggery. It's beneath me," he said loftily. "Besides, I can't think of the rotten, silly sort of way it ought to be wrapped up. You can do that—it's just your line."

Gunn was not offended by this very doubtful compliment.

He got up from the hamper. Wilkins immediately sat down, anticipating Gibbons by only a fraction of a second. Gibbons seemed inclined to dispute possession; but a look from Grundy reduced him to sulky silence.

"Silence and order in the precincts of the Vehme!" said Gunn, in a loud and sonorous voice.

"That's the style, old chap!" said Grundy approvingly.

"The most noble, high, and magnanimous Grand Master, assisted by the inferior judges, will now proceed to the trial of that notorious malefactor, Ernest Levison!"

"Here, I say, Gunn, you may be all that inferior to old Grundy; but I'm jolly well hanged if I am!" said Gore hotly.

"Nor yet me!" put in Gibbons.

Grundy paid no heed to them.

"Keep it up, Gunn!" he said. "That bit was jolly good!"

"Accused, you have been summoned hither to meet the judges of the Vehme!"

"Pleased, I'm sure," replied Levison affably. "Though, if you don't mind my saying so, they're rather a scratch lot. Why are they dressed as old women, by the way?"

"Silence, accused!" howled Grundy.

"Did you speak, Grundy? A delicate chap like you ought to steer clear of these vaults, you know. They're damp. You've lost your voice now, and once or

twice I have almost thought you seemed like losing your temper."

"Such contumacious conduct as this will but serve to increase your sentence, accused!" said Gunn, in his deepest voice.

"Think so, Gunn? But you're a bit previous with that sentence notion. I may be found 'not guilty,' you know."

"Let the witnesses stand forward!" said Gunn solemnly.

But the witnesses appeared to have lost their train. No one stood forward.

"Now, then, you silly 'cuckoos!"

hooted Grundy.

"Sure, an' what was it you were after wantin' us to testify?" asked Mulvaney minor innocently. "I'll not be mindin', whatever it is, as long as it's thrue, bedad!"

"Have you ever heard the accused speak disparagingly of the Grand Master?" said Gunn.

"The Grand Master is old Grundy, I know, but who's the other gentleman, Gunn, dear?"

"What other gentleman, you frajbious idiot?"

"Sure, then, Mr. Dispar— Oh, it's beyond me entirely, so it is!"

"Did you ever hear the accused call me names?" Grundy bellowed.

"Faith, plenty of times. If that's all, it's your own witness you might be, Grundy, for he's been after callin' you names to your face, as bould as brass."

"That's not the thing. What names have you heard him call me?"

Grundy could not leave the interrogation to Gunn. Gunn's style was high-sounding. But it was not direct enough for Grundy.

"Sure, then, 'silly cuckoo' was one, and 'flat-footed lout' was another. And there were lots more, if I can be let think a moment. Och, yes— Bull of Bashan—and 'the biggest silly ass in St. Jim's'; and 'a chap with a face like a boiled codfish, and a brain like an underdone suet pudding.' But, sure, that wouldn't be precisely a name—that's only a description."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The cackle of laughter was so general that there was small risk in the concealed rescue-party's joining in it. And, whatever the risk had been, they could not have helped laughing.

The hollow vaults reverberated the peal. Mulvaney minor stood there looking as innocent as a cherub; but everyone knew that Mulvaney was getting at the Grand Master.

"That's enough!" howled Grundy.

"Stop that silly chortling! You chaps seem to think this is a joke, but—"

"It's no joke for me, I can tell you!" wailed Mellish. "You're frightfully heavy, Grundy, you know. Oh, get off, do!"

"Have you anything to say in your defence, accused?" asked Gunn.

"Oh, you haven't got to that part yet," answered Levison. "You can scrape up lots more witnesses. There's Scrope, if you want thumpers, Mellish and Trimble being otherwise engaged. But there's no need for anybody to invent things, so you needn't call Scrope. I've said scores of worse things about old Grundy than anything we've heard yet. I don't mind telling the court some of them myself, if the court likes."

If the court was Grundy—and, in Grundy's eyes, the rest were of small account—the court did not like. Indeed, the court appeared badly on its ear at the suggestion.

"If I have much more of this sort of thing—"

"Sorry, old top! Thought you were asking for it," said Levison coolly.

"Faith, an' so did I," said Mulvaney minor.

"Cut all that out!" hooted Grundy. "The sentence of the court on you, prisoner, is that—"

"Don't have me hanged, Grundy! I might never get over it, you know."

"Will you shut up? The sentence of the—"

But no one ever heard what the sentence of the court was. It is very doubtful indeed if Grundy himself had any clear notion how Levison was to be punished. Hanging, was hardly on the cards.

No one ever heard, because at that moment someone yelled:

"Yarooogh! Oh, you idiot!"

The yell did not come from any of the members of the secret society. Nor did it proceed from the rescue-party, hidden further back in the vaults.

It was from the stone staircase which led into upper air. And as it sounded there came the thump of a falling body.

Some of the Grundytes rushed forward as Sidney Clive sprawled flat on the floor.

"Seize him!" yelled Grundy.

"Here, hold on! Give a chap time to get his breath and see how many of his bones are broken!" gasped Clive.

"Seize him! He's a spy!" bellowed the Grand Master.

Clive was yanked roughly to his feet. No one seemed to be worrying as to whether he really had any broken bones. But he had not, and he did not really think he had. The distance he had fallen was no great one.

He and Cardew had stolen down the staircase to within a few steps of the foot. There they had waited, enjoying Levison's cool replies to the majestic Grundy, ready to bear their part whenever the rescue-party moved.

But a sudden movement of Cardew's had disturbed Clive's balance, and he had tumbled down, with a yell of surprise that he could not keep back.

Now, as the Grundytes swarmed round Clive, Cardew leaped out, and thrust in roughly among them. His fist caught Boulton under the chin, and sent him flying. Then Scrope felt its weight.

"Oh, pile in on him!" yelled Gore, trying to get his arms free.

"To the rescue! Sock them!" shouted a voice hitherto unheard—the voice of Tom Merry.

And out from the gloom of the further vault poured the rescue party!

Then did confusion fall upon the scratch host of the Grand Master. In the gloom they could not tell the numbers of their attackers; and even if they had known that the odds in their favour were nearly enough two to one, it is doubtful whether they would have put up any very stern resistance.

Grundy struggled frantically to get out of the hampering armless robe. Gunn and Wilkins and Gore also did their best to disencumber themselves and bear their part in the fray.

Gibbons did not. He could not perceive anything worth fighting for—certainly not that small hamper, which meant a mere snack each. The attackers might take that as the spoils of war for all Gibbons cared, and much good might it do them!

As for Trimble and Mellish, they seized the opportunity afforded them by the rising of their tyrants to roll away into dark corners, where they lay, charitably hoping that everybody concerned would get as much hurt as possible—themselves excepted, of course. But, for that matter, Mellish made no exception in favour of Trimble, or Trimble in favour of Mellish.

"Sit on him!" yelled Digby, as he and Manners and Kerr dragged the Grand Master to the ground, floundering and struggling in his wretched armless robe.

"Wight-ho!" responded Arthur Augustus cheerfully, and took a seat upon the waistcoat of the prostrate dignitary.

Digby plumped himself down upon Grundy's legs.

"Gerroff! D'Arcy, you cad—Digby, you rotter—gerroff! Oh, I'll give you Fourth-Form kids something to remember this by when I get up!" hooted Grundy.

"If you ever do," replied Dig coolly.

Grundy had had no chance of putting up a real fight; but it had taken three to bear him down. It did not take three for anyone among the rest, robbed or unrobbed.

Gore was down, and Gunn, and Wilkins, and Levison had Scrope by the ears, pinning him to earth; and there was little fight left among the rest, though Mulvaney minor and two or three more still kept up some show of resistance.

"Pax!" cried Boulton, just as the last candle was kicked over, leaving only the bicycle-lamp to illuminate the scene. "It's no good keeping it up, you fellows! We chuck it! It was a rotten scheme of old Grundy's at best!"

"Sure, an' it was that!" said Mulvaney. "But who are yez, anyway?"

"Oh, it's Merry and that gang, of course!" growled Gore.

Figgins proceeded to relight some of the candles, and the hapless members of Grundy's secret society could see who their conquerors were.

"I told you how it would be, Grundy, you idiot!" snapped Gore. "I knew jolly well Levison wouldn't come unless he had something up his sleeve!"

"Which, in my humble opinion, is a better thing to have than no sleeve to put anything up, Gore!" chuckled Lowther.

"The silly asses who invented these beastly robes ought to be made to wear them for the rest of the term!" said Gore savagely.

"Oh, rats to you, Gore!" snapped Gunn.

"The whole biznez was a beastly wash-out!" grumbled Gibbons.

"That was because we let such specimens as you and Gore and Scrope into it," returned Wilkins.

Neither Gunn nor Wilkins was quite satisfied that the secret society had proved a tremendous success, of course; but they were loyal, at least.

"Do you give in, Grundy?" asked Tom Merry.

"Not jolly well likely!"

"I don't see what else you can do, ass!"

"What did you ask me for, then, idiot?"

"Peace, children—peace!" said Monty Lowther. "Let me suggest a friendly way out. We will reorganise the secret society, with Tommy as head executive, and Grundy as head cook and bottle-washer! We will— What on earth's that?"

Everyone jumped to his feet. Something had crashed down—something of great weight, for the noise was truly alarming. Then followed a succession of crashes. With them came a rolling and rumbling sound, which continued for some seconds after the crashes had ceased.

And there came a cloud of dust, too—dust that set half the fellows in the vault coughing and spluttering.

"I do believe the roof of the staircase has fallen in!" said Talbot.

Grundy scrambled up, tearing off his robe, and started for the opening to the stairs.

But Tom Merry caught him by the shoulder and held him back.

"Hold hard, old chap!" he said. "It's not safe! You don't know—"

And again there came a rumbling, rolling sound, drowning the rest of Tom's words.

CHAPTER 9.
Crooke's Dodge.

"WE may as well follow them up," said Racke to Crooke.

The two outsiders of the Shell had seen Levison led away among the black-masked emissaries of the Vehme, and had also caught a glimpse of Clive and Cardew as they followed.

"I suppose we may," replied Crooke, "though there don't seem very much in it. They're going to the castle ruins, of course. Silly, piffing kids, playing at secret societies down in the vaults!"

Crooke spoke with huge contempt.

Perhaps Grundy & Co. deserved it, though it must be confessed that a

"Well, there ain't one," returned Crooke. "There's no door we could fasten up. I'd be on it like a shot if there was! I can't even think out a scheme for giving them a fright—not without risking ourselves too jolly close to them!"

"Don't be too plucky!" jeered Racke. "No; I shouldn't like to show you up," answered Crooke, with unusual readiness.

Crooke was using his brains. Perhaps that repartee—if it deserved the name—was the first fruits of his unusual mental activity.

He did not say much as they made their way towards the castle. Racke was also silent. He scowled. Crooke frowned. The effort of thinking was apt to corrugate Crooke's brow.

They were very near the ruins, when Crooke said:

"Hanged if I don't believe I've got it!"



Tom Merry and Grundy to the rescue!
(See Chapter 12.)

majority of them had been moved by a motive with which Crooke ought to have felt far more sympathy than he would have done with a desire to play at anything boyish—namely, greed. Crooke was greedy enough, though less needy than most of Grundy's followers.

"There's something in this we haven't quite got on to yet," said Racke. "Levison wouldn't have gone off tamely unless there was more behind it!"

"His dear chums Cardew and Clive are going to do the heroic rescue act—didn't you twig them?" sneered Crooke.

"Oh, rot! Healthy chance those three would have against Grundy's gang, wouldn't they? No; there's more than that in it, though I'm not sure what!"

"I dare say we shall find out if we trot along. And there's nothing else in particular to do, so we won't be wasting time!"

"I wish I could think of some dodge to shut the sweeps up in the vaults for the night—the whole crowd of them!" said Racke viciously.

Grundy's rejection of the two outsiders rankled with both.

"Got what?"

"A dodge to frighten that crowd. If it can be worked it will put them in no end of a blue funk!"

"What is it?"

"You know what a rocky state the old place is in?"

"The castle, you mean? Can't say I really know anythin' about it," replied Racke indifferently. "Ruins, an' that sort of old tommy-rot, never interested me. What's the merry game? Not to bring the whole contraption down on their silly heads, I suppose? I'm not on if it is. I owe Levison a score or two—an' Grundy, too, confound him! But I'm not goin' in for anythin' that a coroner's jury would give nasty names to, you know, old man."

"Oh, rot! Neither am I, of course! I'm as careful of my neck as you are of yours."

"More so," yawned Racke. "Look here, I don't want any of that sarcastic guff!" snapped Crooke. "Are you on, or aren't you?"

"To give the potters a fright—yes."

replied Racke. "For anythin' in the merry manslaughterin' line — most decidedly not."

"Oh, there's no giddy fear of that," said Crooke confidently. "They won't be on the stairs, you can count on that. This is my dodge. All the masonry is in a pretty rummy state. There are parts of the wall you could pull to pieces with your hands."

"No, th-a-a-anks!" drawled Racke, who took a good deal of pride in the whiteness and softness of his hands.

"If we can find a stone loose in the roof of the staircase, and work the giddy thing out, and send it clattering down, it will give them no end of a nasty shock," went on Crooke gloatingly.

"So it would. I suppose it can't crash down among them? That might be awkward—for us as well as for them."

"The thing's clean impossible. They wouldn't be near enough to the staircase for that."

"Well, you know all about it, Crooke," Racke said slowly. But his eyes were glinting. Even the playing of such a poor trick as this on the fellows he hated appealed to the bitter malice in him. It was something to be going on with, anyway.

"It might block the staircase so that they were kept prisoners down there till someone cleared it away," Crooke said.

"I haven't the slightest objection to that. And they might stay there a dashed long time before I'd help to clear it away!" replied Racke.

The evil glint in his eyes was brighter.

Crooke might consider that possibility an objection to the sweet scheme.

Racke did not.

"Here's a bit of luck!" said Crooke, as they passed inside the ancient ruins. "Just the thing we need!"

It was a long and strong stake of tough wood, with a tapering point.

"Needn't say we. You don't expect me to handle that confounded thing, do you?" returned Racke.

"It would be too much like work, I suppose. But that's all right. I can provide all the muscle that's needed."

They descended a few steps of the old, worn stone staircase, and peered through the gloom. Somewhere down below were Grundy and his crew, and Levison and Cardew and Clive, and

more of whom they did not know. But no sound came up to them.

"Here's the very thing!" chuckled Crooke.

It did not occur to him that the displacement of one stone in the roofing of the staircase was likely to lead to some of the others falling. It did to Racke, but Racke said nothing about it.

Time had played havoc with the solid masonry of the old castle. There was from the start of Crooke's operations a distinct possibility of the thing which actually occurred, though he may not have realised it.

He worked with a will, prising the sharp point of the state into a gap between two great stones, and then using it as a lever. The sweat stood out upon his forehead, and his arms ached with the unusual exertion.

Racke stood by, watching, smiling his unpleasant smile, keeping cool.

A small fragment of masonry was detached. It went rolling down the steps, and smote Cardew on the legs. It was to this the sudden movement which brought down Clive was due. But Cardew did not know in the least what had hit him, and even if he had looked up he would not have seen Crooke, for the stairway curved.

Crooke went on. He never asked Racke to lend a hand, though the perspiration was pouring down his face now. He was getting into a very pretty state with the dust which fell, too.

Then, with a mighty crash, a great stone fell from its place, and went bumping down the stairs.

"That's the style!" said Crooke.

Even as he spoke he knew that more had happened than he had counted upon. Other crashes followed the first in quick succession, and it was evident that the loosening of the stone upon which Crooke had worked must have so affected others that the shock of its fall was enough to bring them down.

Crooke went white to the lips. Racke laughed evilly.

"You've done it now!" he said. "It will take them all they know to get that little lot out of the way!"

"I—I— You were in it, too!" panted Crooke.

"What's the odds? Nobody's going to know. But we'd best clear out of this!"

Crooke hardly felt easy about going. He was in a state of terror at the

possible consequences of what he had done. But Racke jeered him into something like composure, made him brush himself down, and got him away. When they were once clear of the castle, Racke said that he was going into Rylcombe. Crooke had better get on back and have a wash and clean-up.

Racke did not mean to enter the gates with Crooke in that state.

CHAPTER 10.

Grundy Makes a Claim.

MELLIISH darted past Tom and Grundy, and had reached the foot of the staircase before anyone realised what he was at.

Talbot's voice rang out: "Stop, you idiot!" "I'm going before any more falls!" howled Mellish.

It was a madly foolish thing to do, the kind of madly foolish thing which a coward sometimes does in a critical moment. Mellish thought only of his own safety. Talbot and Tom and others, thinking of the rest, were more cautious than he because they were braver.

He was darting up the stairs before he could be stopped.

Fragments of masonry had reached the very foot now. But on the lower steps they were not so thick that it was impossible to make one's way over them.

Two or three more would have followed Mellish. But Tom and Talbot, Figgins and Blake and Grundy, barred the way.

"Wait!" said Tom. "More may fall yet."

And even as he spoke there sounded another crash, and then a wild shriek from Mellish.

Then silence. A silence in which heartbeats could almost be heard.

All waited—waited to hear Mellish shout. But no shout came!

Then, with a sudden wriggle and a dodge that would have done credit to a Rigger half, Ralph Reckness Cardew was past those who would have barred his going, and on his way up the fragment-strewn staircase!

"It's no odds, Merry!" he called from above. "No one is likely to miss me much, anyway!"

Tom Merry bit his lip in anger. Cardew was as foolish in his courage as Mellish in his cowardice. Someone must have gone to the rescue in any case; but

FREE SEND NO MONEY. WE TRUST YOU.

As an advertisement we give every reader of this paper a special offer. We will supply or sell you or in 12 beautiful Postcards to you, each. (Gold Morn ed, Emboss d, Patriotic Real Photo, Glossy, etc.) Our New Price List contains hundreds of different kinds of free gifts, including: Ladies' and Gent's Cycles, Gold and Silver Watches, Periscopes, Feathers, Chains, Rings, Fur Sets, Pocket Lamps, Gramophones, Air Guns, Tea Sets, Toys, &c., etc.

All you need do is to send us your Name and Address in Postcard with 2d. and we will send you a selection of lovely cards to sell or use at 1d. each. When sold send the money obtained and we immediately forward gift chosen according to the Grand Illustrated List we send you. (Colonial post offices 1d. only.) Send a postcard now to—**THE ROYAL CARD CO. (Dept. B), KEW, LONDON.**



MONTHLY PAYMENTS.—Buy by post Privately. Boots, Costumes, Raincoats, Bedding, Blankets, Suits, Luminous Watches, Gold Rings, Cutlery, from 6/- monthly. List Free. State requirements.—**MASTERS, LTD., 4, Hope Street, B'ny.** (Estd. 1869.) P.S.—We take old watches, etc., in exchange.


BLUSHING! This miserable complaint cured for ever in 7 Days! Guaranteed Permanent Cure. Don't suffer any longer—send 2d. stamps to John E. Dean, Ltd., 12, All Saint's Road, St. Annas, Lanes.

80 MAGIC TRICKS, Illusions, etc., with Illustrations and Instructions. Also 40 Tricks with Cards. The lot post free 1/-.—**T.W. HARRISON 239, Pentonville Rd., London, N.1.**

IF YOU WANT Good Cheap Photographic material or Cameras, send postcard for Samples and Catalogue **FREE—S. HACKETT, July Road, Liverpool.**

ARE YOU SHORT?

If so, let the Girvan System help you to increase your height. Mr. Briggs reports an increase of 5 inches; Driver E. F. 3 inches; Mr. Ratcliffe 3 1/2 inches; Miss Davies 2 1/2 inches; Mr. Lindon 3 1/2 inches; Mr. Beck 3 inches; Miss Ledell 4 inches. This system requires only ten minutes morning and evening, and greatly improves the health, physique, and carriage. No appliances or drugs. Send 3 penny stamps for further particulars and \$10 Guarantee.—**ARTHUR GIBVAN, Ltd., Dept. A.M.P., 17, Stroud Green Rd., London, N.4.**



BLUSHING CURED quickly, permanently. Guaranteed remedy which never fails in the severest case. Send only 2d. stamps to **July J. Edison, Ltd., 27, Great George St., Leeds.**

THE "TITAN" AIR PISTOL. A Magnificent Little Weapon. **BRITISH MADE FROM START TO FINISH.** Guaranteed to be the strongest shooting and most accurate Air Pistol on the market. Will shoot any kind of No 1 Pellets, Darts, or Round Shot. Just the thing for indoor or outdoor practice. 1000 chas gas may be fired with "Titanic" force at a cost of 1/6 only. Trains the eye and cultivates the judgment. Packed in strong box, with supply of Slugs and pellets, price 12/6 each; postage 6d. extra. May be obtained from any Gunsmith or from our agent, or direct from the maker—**FRANK O'ARKE, Gun Manufacturer, 6, Whittall Street, BIRMINGHAM.**



FUN FOR SIXPENCE. Sneezing Powder blown about since every body sneezing. One large sample packet and two other wonderful and laughable novelties, including Ventriquist's Voice Instrument, lot 6d. (P.O.). Postage 2d. extra.—Ideal Novelty Dept., Cleveland.

it was best to wait a minute or two first. Best every way. And then Tom had meant to go himself!

It was not true that no one would miss Cardew much. The grasp of Ernest Levison on Clive's arm hurt, though the South African junior did not feel the pain of it till later; and Sidney Clive himself felt a sudden tightening at the heart as he realised how much he would miss the wild, wayward fellow with whom he and Levison shared Study No. 9. They had seen the best as well as the worst of him, those two, and had learned to care about him more than they knew—till now!

"Let me go, Tom Merry!" pleaded Levison, springing forward.

Talbot pushed him gently back.

"No!" said Tom resolutely. "No one else shall go for a few minutes. By that time we may be able to tell pretty well whether there's likely to be any further fall. I should think not if it holds up till then."

Levison saw the sense of that, and stood back; but his face was white and drawn, and his lips quivered.

"It's all serene, Levison! I'm going in a moment."

Grundy was the speaker, and Grundy's heavy hand was laid on Levison's shoulder in a way that had comradeship in it, if it had not patronising protection as well.

Levison shook it off.

"Hanged if you shall!" he said savagely. "If he's killed it's all your fault, you bumptious ass!"

It was an unfair speech, and the speaker knew it to be unfair, and did not care. But it hit Grundy hard. His lips moved as he stood, hanging his head, among them; but no words came.

They listened for a call from Cardew. His progress seemed to be slow. And it was evident that the greater part of the fall had been pretty high up the staircase, for only those nearest to the foot of it were now able to discern any sound of his passage, though in the dark he stumbled at almost every step.

"He's here! I think he's— Oh!"

Cardew's voice broke off in an exclamation of pain. Something was heard to rumble down. It was not a fall from the roof, for there was no such loud crash as must have accompanied that. More likely it seemed that, in trying to lift Mellish in the darkness, Cardew had brought a fragment of masonry tumbling upon him from a higher step.

A few seconds' silence. Suspense that tried them all. They waited to hear the voice of Cardew again.

Instead, they heard the voice of Baggy Trimble.

"Oh, I say, you know, you fellows, you've got to do something, you know! If we're shut up here we shall all starve. That mean rotter, Grundy, only brought—"

Without a word, George Herries smote Baggy hard upon the head, and Baggy, whimpering, ceased his selfish reproaches.

"Give me one of those candles," said Tom Merry.

"What for?" snapped Levison, eyeing him in most unfriendly fashion.

"I'm going up there, and I must have a light."

But Tom was not going to move from his place to get a light for himself. There must be no more such recklessness as Cardew had displayed.

"You're not!" shouted Levison. "I'm going!"

"Better let me, Tom," said Talbot quietly.

"I've a better right than you, Merry," spoke Clive. His voice was not raised, but it sounded resolute.

"If it comes to a matter of rights; I don't see that mine isn't as good as any other chap's," put in Figgins.

"And mine a bit better!" snapped Blake.

"Weally, deah boys, I considah that I—"

Gussy's voice was drowned in a chorus of volunteering.

Kerr was quiet, but as insistent as anyone. Digby and Manners shouted. Herries pushed the crowd aside to get to the front. Lowther was not behind the rest. Fatty Wynn saw no reason why his stoutness should bar him, whatever others might think.

Nor were volunteers wanting from among the rest. Gunn and Wilkins were ready. Mulvaney minor was eager. Gore did not hang back.

"Let's draw lots," he said. "I'm willing to take my chance."

Then Grundy's voice was lifted.

"It's all silly rot!" hooted Grundy, as sure as ever that he was right, even while he made confession of error. "None of you chaps has half the right I have, and I'm going. And I'll jolly well make mincemeat of any chap who tries to stop me! If it wasn't for me, not one of you would be here now. So it's up to me to go, and the fellow who denies that is a potty ass!"

A very Grundyish speech; but, for all that, it rang true. And, as Grundy turned to Tom Merry, Tom saw a look on his face that somehow made him remember the waters of the Ryll and a plunge to his own rescue. Old Grundy might be all kinds of an ass; but no one at St. Jim's was his superior in pluck!

"I'll let you go with me, Merry," said Grundy condescendingly.

Tom would rather have had Talbot or Blake or Figgins for a companion. But he could not deny that there was reason in what Grundy said: It was really due to him that the rest were there. That made no difference to the feelings of most of them. They were not mean enough to blame Grundy.

But it naturally made quite a heap of difference to Grundy's own feelings.

Tom spoke quietly, and his coolness had its effect upon the rest.

"Grundy and I will go," he said. "You don't mind, you fellows, do you? I promise you we won't run any foolish risk, like poor old Cardew did."

Some of them did mind. But only Levison rebelled, and somehow Talbot quieted him. No one else could have done it—not even Clive.

CHAPTER 11.

Rescue Work.

TOM MERRY and Grundy each took a lighted candle, and started up the staircase. The uneven stone steps needed some caution at any time; now every step was strewn with fragments of masonry.

The two picked their way carefully, and Grundy was as careful as Tom. In this emergency he seemed to have put aside his usual bull-like tactics.

The suspense was pretty hard for some of those below to bear. Fully half of them would far rather have had the peril than the waiting while others walked into it.

Levison quickly pulled himself together, and something of the old, hard, cynical look came back to his face—it was almost as if he were ashamed of having shown strong feeling. But he would gladly have been in the place of Tom or Grundy.

So felt plenty of others—Clive and Talbot, Manners and Lowther, Blake and D'Arcy, Herries and Digby, Figgins and Kerr and Wynn, Gunn and Wilkins—ay, and more of Grundy's scratch crew,

for some of them had pluck enough. To the stout-hearted the waiting was worse than to the more timid and selfish, for these were in no present danger.

Now came Tom's voice, from well above—so far up that the light of the candles was but a glimmer to those below.

"Not as bad as it might be!" he called cheerily. "They're both insensible; but I don't think very serious damage has been done. Come along up, Talbot! There's room for one more!"

Several would have liked to contest Talbot's right to be that one; but none did. He went up without a light, moving faster than Tom and Grundy had done, for he knew that there was no big obstacle in the way—a thing they could not be sure of.

There was a curve in the staircase, and here the debris had piled up in a mass. Just below that mass lay both Mellish and Cardew.

It was easy to see what had happened to Cardew—easy to guess how it had happened. He must have been trying to lift Mellish when a great stone from the mass above had become dislodged, and fallen, only just missing his head, which it must have crushed had it struck. Perhaps a corner of it—perhaps some smaller fragment—had hit his temple. His face was dabbled with blood, and he must have been struck senseless at once.

"But it's different with Mellish," said Tom. "There's nothing to show that he's hurt at all. But he's fainted, all the same."

"Sheer funk!" growled Grundy.

And, indeed, Grundy was not far wrong. The only injury which Mellish had sustained was a slight one—a lump of stone had bruised his left foot, a bruise just a trifle worse than might have resulted from Grundy's stepping heavily on it. He had run up in the darkness, full of fear, had come suddenly upon the piled-up mass of debris, had felt the fall of the lump upon his foot, and then he had shrieked and fainted.

"We must see if we can get Cardew up into the fresh air," said Talbot. "It would be easy enough to take him down, of course; but the vaults wouldn't be good for him in that state."

"You're right, old man," Tom said. "The way can't be totally blocked. I guess I can squeeze in between the roof and the pile of stuff that has come down."

But there was danger of the gravest kind in doing that, as all three knew. Much of the masonry which formed the roofing to the higher part of the staircase had fallen. Some was still left. No one could tell when more might fall. Wriggling one's way over the mass, with the chance at any moment of getting upon one a stone heavy enough to break one's back, was not exactly an enviable task.

All three were ready for it, though. Talbot had just opened his mouth to say that it was his turn, when Grundy shouldered him aside without ceremony, and began to mount the mass.

"I say—"

Talbot's protest was stopped by Tom. "Oh, let him go, old chap! After all, it's riskier here than up there, with a blundering old ass like that on top! I don't mind owning that I'd feel safer in his place, with him in mine!"

But Grundy seemed less the blundering ass than usual that day.

He disappeared from their sight in the dark aperture above; but they could hear him moving, and he was moving carefully.

Down below Baggy Trimble suggested that it was about time grub was served out.

"I suppose we shall have to go on rations," he said mournfully. "That little hamper won't give us a real whack each, even for one meal. Oh, it's awful! We may be shut up here for days!"

"Gag the fat toad!" snapped Figgins. "I say, Blake, I'm going up! Those three can't expect to take all the risk; and if Cardew and Mellish are to be got down here, I fancy the best plan will be to line the staircase, and pass them along."

He started up. Blake followed. Then Kerr and Manners, Herries and D'Arcy, Digby and Gore, Gunn and Lowther, Clive and Levison followed also; and behind them more pressed on. They were too impatient to think much of the risk, but a risk there still was, and a grave one.

Before Tom and Talbot heard them upon the stairs the sound they were waiting for came to those two. Grundy called.

"It's all right!" he said. "A way over—'tain't easy though. You fellows had better wait till I've pulled some of the stones out of the road a bit."

"Not me!" said Tom. "Catch me waiting here while old Grundy messes about that pile! We should have those poor beggars smashed—not to mention being smashed ourselves—before he'd been at it twenty seconds. You stand by, old man; I'll go up on top, and put a stopper on Grundy."

"No need for me to stay," replied Talbot. "Take these fellows down, you chaps; we must have them out of danger of another fall, anyway."

Tom turned, to see Figgins and the rest. But he did not snap at them for coming. They had come in the nick of time. Next moment he followed Grundy; and Talbot only waited to see Mellish and Cardew taken up for the difficult passage down before he followed Tom.

Beyond the big fall of stone there was light. It came through the section of the roofing which had fallen in—quite a big section. Everything had rolled and rumbled down the steps till the curve in the staircase made a halting-place for it, and there it had piled up in an apparently firm and solid mass. But the danger of that mass was that its firmness might be only apparent. Very little might serve to start it on its travels downwards again.

Grundy had risked that; Tom and Talbot risked it after him. But the danger was also a danger to those below.

"Hold hard!" gasped Tom, wriggling out over the top of the heap.

"Whaffor?" demanded Grundy, already puffing with his Herculean labours.

"Till the stair's clear, that's all. We shall have to shift some of this; but we must let everyone get out of the way first."

Grundy grunted, and stayed his hand.

Up the stairs came Figgins' call. "All clear below!"

Then they started in, the three of them, working their hardest. But both Tom and Talbot admitted later that the brunt of the work fell upon Grundy. He could lift lumps that they could hardly stir. They had known old Grundy was strong; but they had never before realised quite how strong he was.

The voice of Figgins floated up to them again.

"Can't we come and help?" Figgy yelled.

"No room!" shouted back Tom. "Keep clear of the stairs, in case anything comes tumbling. That's all you can do."

And almost before he had finished, a THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 483.

great lump went rumbling down. But Figgy was warned in time.

The three had scanty room enough, and Grundy did not hesitate to elbow his companions aside in a manner that would have raised their ire in other circumstances.

But they could not grumble at him now. Old Grundy worked like a Trojan, the perspiration pouring down his rugged face. Crooke's labours, which had produced all the damage, had been puny compared with Grundy's.

"That'll do, I think," he said at length. "And I must say you chaps haven't spared yourselves. Do your backs ache?"

"Rather!" replied Talbot fervently. "Mine don't," said Grundy.

"I ache all over," admitted Tom. Grundy snorted contempt. But it wasn't very real contempt. For Grundy really ached a good deal, too.

Now Mellish was brought up, and lifted over the still big pile, and Figgins and Kerr and Manners carried him up into the fresh air. Grundy did not demand a share of the carrying, and Tom and Talbot were past such labour. Never had they gone through a more taxing half-hour.

Then Clive and Levison and Lowther brought up Cardew, a blood-stained handkerchief bound round his head, his face very pale. There were strong suspicions that Mellish's condition was now one rather of feint than faint. But there was no doubt about Cardew. He looked deathly as he lay there in the sunlight, and more than one who saw his face felt afraid that there would be at least one tragedy that day.

Now the rest began to come up, some of them treating the whole affair as a joke, though they ceased their japing when they saw Cardew. But some came up unwillingly, afraid of what might happen as they clambered over the pile. And one refused to come up at all until every stone had been removed.

That was Baggy Trimble, of course. Baggy also refused to stay below alone.

Jack Blake and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy dealt with Baggy, each after his kind.

"Buck up, Baggy! There's weally nothin' to be afraid of," said Gussy. "Pluck up your courage, deah boy!"

"Oh, rats! He don't know what the word means! Come on, you rotten funk!" growled Blake.

"I—I daren't! I know it will fall on top of me! I'm not going to stand an awful death like that—being squashed to a beastly jelly. I won't go, I tell you!"

"You're nothing better than a beastly jelly now, and a little more squashing"

"Don't wag him, Blake! I suppose the poor beast can't help bein' afraid. Come on, Twimble! All the west have gone, you know. It's as safe as can be."

So between them they got Baggy up and over, with many dismal groans. Baggy would not soon forget that day.

Cardew and Mellish were both sitting up when Blake and Gussy, leaving Trimble in a collapsed heap at the top of the staircase, joined the crowd around them.

"What's all the fuss about?" were Cardew's first words.

"Oh! Am I still alive?" bleated Mellish.

"Yes, worse luck!" snapped Gore. But he did not quite mean that.

Cardew persisted that there was nothing in his condition to make a fuss about, and disclaimed even the need of any help in getting back to the school. But he was glad enough to let Levison

and Clive give him some help before he got there.

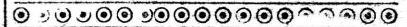
The affair never came to the knowledge of the authorities. Those concerned managed to keep it dark even from the other Forms for a day or two, though Cardew's condition needed some explaining away. But it was not the first time that Ralph Reckness Cardew had come in with a damaged head, and Mr. Railton accepted an excuse for it which perhaps he hardly believed. Yet it was true—in part, at least. It was certainly not the whole truth, for Cardew did not mention where he had been when a stone had grazed his temple.

Some of the fags had seen Crooke come in, looking dusty and dishevelled; but it was not until the story of what had happened in the castle vaults was beginning to go the rounds that suspicion fastened upon him. Even then direct proof was lacking, and Racke was not even suspected, no one having seen them go out together. Crooke got the cold shoulder for some time, but that did not matter much to him. He confessed nothing, and those concerned were sure that, rascal as he was, he had not intended anything worse than a rotten and spiteful practical joke. But they did not doubt that much, though at first they had taken the fall to be an accident.

As for Grundy's secret society, that was no more. A story was current that Baggy penetrated the vaults a day or two later and attended to the hamper which had been left behind. But that could hardly have been true. A dozen hampers would not have taken Baggy Trimble into those vaults again!

THE END.

(Don't miss next Wednesday's Great Story of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's —"LOOKING FOR TROUBLE!" by MARTIN CLIFFORD.)



The Editor's Chat.

For Next Wednesday:
"LOOKING FOR TROUBLE!"
By Martin Clifford.

Cardew is a prominent figure in this story, which centres around a feud which he wages against Monsieur Morny, the French master. The wayward and puzzling dandy of the Fourth is utterly in the wrong, and gets no support from anyone worth considering; but, in his own wilful, foolish way, he goes on—looking for trouble, and finding it!

A GREAT STORY!

I am sure that this will be the verdict of every one of you upon

"AFTER LIGHTS OUT!"

Mr. Martin Clifford's splendid yarn in the "Boys' Friend 3d. Library," which will very soon be out now. The famous author has done no end of tip-top work in the past; but I really don't think he has ever done anything better than this. The two Levisons play strong parts; and Cardew, Clive, our old friends, Tom Merry & Co., and others all come well into the story, of which Racke is the villain. But I am not going to give away the plot. All I have to say further is this:

ORDER IN ADVANCE

or it is very unlikely indeed that you will be able to get a copy at all, for only a limited number will be printed.

EXTRACTS FROM

"Tom Merry's Weekly" & "The Greyfriars Herald."

THE CASE OF THE CURRANT BUN!

An Adventure of Herlock Sholmes. :: By PETER TODD.

I FOUND Herlock Sholmes in a very thoughtful mood when I came down to breakfast in our rooms at Shaker Street.

He was sitting in his usual graceful attitude, with his feet on the mantelpiece, and his hands driven deep into the pockets of his celebrated dressing-gown, which hung in elegant folds about his knees.

"You are busy, Sholmes?" I asked.

He glanced up, and absently knocked the ashes of his pipe out on the back of my neck.

"Yes, Jotson. A curious case. Have you come down to breakfast?"

I nodded.

"From certain facts within my knowledge, Jotson, I deduce that you will have no breakfast this morning," said Sholmes.

I started.

"Sholmes!" I murmured.

"I think you will find it will prove to be so, Jotson."

"From what data, Sholmes, do you draw this very remarkable deduction?" I could not help inquiring.

Sholmes smiled.

"I do not mind explaining, my dear fellow. The food restrictions cause only a certain amount of provender to be placed upon the breakfast-table—"

"True!"

"The portion allotted to me did not satisfy my appetite, Jotson, and I therefore ate your breakfast as well as my own. There is nothing left for you, my dear fellow. To the trained mind the conclusion is obvious. You will have no breakfast this morning."

I could only gaze at my amazing friend in silent admiration. I need not say that Sholmes' deduction proved to be perfectly correct.

"However, to come to more important matters," resumed Sholmes. "A very curious case has been placed in my hands. I am requested to take up the defence of the Honourable Algernon de Smythe, now under arrest for a breach of the Expense-to-the-Royal Act. His guilt appears to be established, but I could not resist the entreaties of Lady Gloxiana Whiffkins, his betrothed. You know my weakness, Jotson. For Lady Gloxiana's sake, I must see what can be done."

Sholmes knitted his brows, and lighted a couple of pipes.

"The facts, Jotson, are these. Since the appointment of the Muffin Controller, you are aware that it is verboten—I mean forbidden—to consume muffins, crumpets, buns, or doughnuts, without a special permit signed by the Muffin Controller, countersigned by the secretary of the Crumpet Department, and passed for publication by the Censor. Anyone found in possession of a currant bun without this permit, is guilty of a summary offence under Regulation 101,111,888, Section 223,479, Schedule 457,692, of the Expense-to-the-Royal Act. The Hon. Algernon de Smythe was seen by several witnesses in possession of a bun contain-

ing, according to the evidence, at least one currant. He was arrested at his dentist's shortly afterwards."

Sholmes paused.

"The case seems to be clear," I remarked. "Does the Hon. Algernon deny the possession of the bun?"

"It was found in his possession, Jotson. The marks of a chisel were found upon the bun itself, and a chisel was discovered in De Smythe's pocket."

I reflected deeply.

"The bun must have been an exceedingly stale one, Sholmes," I replied, after a pause.

Sholmes nodded approval.

"You are improving, Jotson. But your reasons?"

"The fact that De Smythe was forced to use a chisel upon it, Sholmes. His object can only have been to dismember the bun."



The Hon. Algernon's Visitors.

I was silent.

I could understand how my friend's tender heart had been moved by the tears and entreaties of the beautiful Lady Gloxiana. But it seemed to me that even Sholmes had been set a task beyond his powers. The guilt of the unhappy young man appeared to be established beyond doubt.

"However, I am not wholly without hope," went on Sholmes. "There are certain peculiar aspects in the case which have escaped the notice of the regular police."

"Naturally!" I said.

"Naturally!" assented Sholmes. "Scotland Yard, as usual, is satisfied with the superficial facts of the case. What strikes you most about the matter, Jotson? Come, let us see with what result you have studied my methods!"

"True."

"The circumstance, too, that he was arrested at his dentist's," I went on, encouraged by Sholmes' evident approval. "This seems, to my mind, to indicate that he had attempted, in the first place, to dissect the bun in the usual way, with disastrous results to his teeth."

"My dear fellow, you have not studied my methods in vain!" exclaimed Sholmes, "I shall be proud of you, Jotson, if you keep on like this."

Praise from Herlock Sholmes was praise indeed. I could not help purring with satisfaction.

"You have, in fact, hit upon the kernel of the matter," said Sholmes. "Upon the outstanding fact of the staleness of the bun depends De Smythe's chance of acquittal."

"My dear Sholmes!"
 "You do not follow me, Jotson?"
 "I confess that I do not see the connection."

"Natural enough, my dear fellow," smiled Sholmes. "In the deductions you have already made you have exhausted your mental powers. It would be advisable to give your brain a rest, Jotson."

"My dear Sholmes," I replied, somewhat nettled, "I fail entirely to see how the staleness of the currant bun affects the matter one way or the other."

Sholmes smiled indulgently.

"Upon that circumstance, however, Jotson, depends whether the Hon. Algernon de Smythe is restored to the arms of Lady Gloxiana without a stain upon his character, or whether he is dragged before a stony-hearted magistrate, and sentenced to the maximum penalty of ninepence three-farthings. Come, Jotson, I have permission from the Secretary of the Stone-jug Department to visit the Hon. Algernon in his cell. If you can neglect your patients this morning—"

I smiled sadly.
 "My patients no longer require my care, Sholmes. The general shortness of cash caused them to dispense with my services for a time, with the result that they recovered from their maladies. I am entirely at your service."

"Then come, my dear fellow!"
 A few minutes later a taxi-cab was bearing us away from Shaker Street.

II.

HERLOCK SHOLMES was shown into the cell of the Hon. Algernon de Smythe, and I followed at his heels. The Hon. Algernon rose from his plank bed to greet us. I gazed with silent sympathy at the extensive mouth, the strikingly-hooked nose, the wandering and unmeaning eye, that were so plainly indicative of the most noble descent. The noble youth gave a watery smile as Herlock Sholmes introduced himself. He seemed slightly surprised when Sholmes knocked out the ashes of his pipe upon the bridge of his

nose. He was not so well acquainted as myself with Sholmes' somewhat eccentric habits.

"You will kindly give me the details of the case," said Sholmes. "You may speak quite freely before my friend, Dr. Jotson."

"Save me, Mr. Sholmes," said De Smythe hoarsely. "To you, I will tell all. In a moment of reckless indulgence, I purchased the currant bun. It was but the act of a thoughtless youth. At the moment I had forgotten Regulation 101,111,888, Section 223,479, Schedule 457,692, of the Expense-to-the-R Realm Act. I was never good at mathematics. "Where did you purchase the bun?" asked Herlock Sholmes.

"At a railway buffet."
 I gazed at my amazing friend inquiringly. It was evident that Sholmes attached the greatest importance to this circumstance. He did not, however, explain.

"Save me!" implored the Hon. Algernon. "If the maximum penalty is inflicted, Mr. Sholmes, it means ruin to an ancient and noble house. Already the financial resources of the De Smythes have been strained to the uttermost by the rise in the price of margarine. Save me!"

"Rely upon me," said Herlock Sholmes reassuringly.

Herlock Sholmes was very thoughtful as we returned to Shaker Street.

But I could see by the glimmer in his eyes, and by the fact that he executed a hornpipe on the doorstep, that he was satisfied with the result of the interview.

He was absent for the rest of the morning, and had not come in at lunch-time. Mrs. Spudson brought in the lunch, and as Sholmes was not present, I decided to dispose of his lunch as well as my own. Following Sholmes' own methods of deduction, I deduced from this that my amazing friend would have no lunch.

Sholmes returned later in the afternoon in great spirits. He smilingly threw his hat at me, and hooked his umbrella upon my left ear, in the playful way I know so well.

"Success, my dear Jotson!" he said. "The Hon. Algernon has been restored to his friends and creditors, without a stain upon his character."

"My dear Sholmes! And you—"

"Alone I did it, Jotson."
 "But—but you amaze me, Sholmes! You will furnish the usual explanation, of course?"

"Certainly, Jotson. The whole case depended upon the staleness of the bun," Sholmes explained. "The fact that the Hon. Algernon had damaged his teeth upon the bun and attempted to dissect it with a chisel, put me on the track. I elicited from him that he had purchased it at a railway buffet. The rest was simple."

"Sholmes!" I murmured.
 "You are aware, my dear Jotson, that Regulation 101,111,888, Section 223,479, Schedule 457,692, of the Expense-to-the-R Realm Act, refers only to muffins, crumpets, buns, and doughnuts, manufactured since August, 1914."

"True!"

"The bun was purchased at a railway buffet. The inference was, therefore, that it was more than three years old," explained Sholmes. "On investigation this proved to be the case. The actual bun purchased by the Hon. Algernon proved to date from the year 1912, as a matter of fact long before the war, Jotson. The purchase does not, therefore, come within the scope of the Expense-to-the-R Realm Act. The Hon. Algernon is therefore cleared, and his marriage with Lady Gloxiana will take place as soon as the necessary seven-and-sixpence can be raised."

"Wonderful!" I ejaculated.

"Merely elementary, my dear Jotson. And now," added Herlock Sholmes, "I will have lunch."

I explained to Sholmes that the lunch had been disposed of, and the deductions I drew from this circumstance. So far as I could see, my deductions were framed absolutely upon his own methods of reasoning. But, from some cause not apparent to me, Sholmes did not seem satisfied.

THE END.

THE MYSTERY OF THE MIRROR.

A Holiday Yarn. By One of the Crowd.

IT was a crowd, too! Greyfriars chaps and St. Jim's. Colonel Wharton had told his nephew to invite as many of his friends as he liked for the Easter holidays. And a note went along to the Sussex school from the old place in Kent, and St. Jim's rallied—rallied nobly.

The colonel himself, being at the Front, could not be at Wharton Lodge, naturally. But Mrs. Best, the old housekeeper, was there to look after the comfort of Harry's guests. Some of the pre-war attractions were cut out. No motor-car, no horses—not an able-bodied man left to attend to such things, Harry said. But plenty to do, for all that.

From St. Jim's went the Terrible Three, Talbot, the chums of Study No. 6, Levison major and mirror, D'Arcy mirror, and Figgins & Co. Baggy Trimble proposed adding himself to the party, but the offer was declined without thanks. Being repeated, it was declined with a bumping. After that, Baggy

dried up, and decided, I suppose, that Trimble Hall really could not spare him.

We outnumbered the Greyfriars contingent; but that was merely a matter of chance. A good many of them had fixed up for the holidays before Harry Wharton got his uncle's letter. And it really did not make much difference, for the juniors of the right sort at the two schools have long been on the best possible terms.

Manners took his camera, of course; and Herries took Towser.

I fancy the dear old housekeeper was just a little bit nervous about the invasion. But she thought no end of Wharton, and as friends of his, she was quite prepared to find us all that we ought to be. I won't say we reached that standard of perfection; but Mrs. Best had no cause to complain of our behaviour, I think.

"Welcome to Wharton Lodge, you fellows!" said Harry's ringing voice as we arrived. "If you don't have a good time, it shan't be my fault, and I'm jolly sure it won't be the fault of Mrs.

Best, who is even better than her name!"

The old lady stood by him as he spoke, and she blushed quite like a girl, and said nice things to us—nicer things than any girl could be expected to say—for a start, anyway.

I should think the old house can never have held a more jovial crowd. With so many good cricketers gathered together, cricket was naturally one of the first things thought of, though, of course, it was a bit early for that. But it would be possible to fix up some matches, Wharton thought, and he set about doing it at once.

The fine old dining-room echoed to the sounds of lively chat and happy laughter as we discussed high tea. The weather was chilly enough to make a fire acceptable, and its cheerful glow made things jollier.

"I suppose we may relax a little of our wartime frugality, Wharton; and weally this is wippin', you know!"

"Don't worry, old chap. We grow all our own fruit, and lots of other things,

and Mrs. Best will only do all she knows my uncle would wish her to do for his guests," was Harry's smiling assurance.

After tea our crowd grouped itself around the fire. Tom Merry, Lowther, and Manners all sat astride their chairs, their chins resting on hands clasped over the backs, their eyes watching the dancing little flames flickering between the piled logs. Gussy reclined gracefully in a big easy-chair, and carefully polished his monocle. Harry Wharton was smiling happily as he lay on his back, his hands behind his head. Even Wally D'Arcy, and his special chum, Frank Levison, were quiet for the moment.

But a little quiet went a long way with D'Arcy minor. He commanded a plate of chestnuts, and he and Frank started to roast them, to a running accompaniment of "Oh's" and "ah's" as fingers shared the fate of the nuts.

Mrs. Best entered the room to tell Harry of her arrangements for the Easter holiday. D'Arcy jumped up from his big chair, and, taking Mrs. Best by the arm, gently insinuated the old lady into its cushiony depths.

Figgins perched himself on one of its broad arms, and the Honourable Arthur Augustus on the other.

"Now, Mrs. Best, we want you to tell us all you know about the Wharton Lodge ghost," said Figgins.

"Pway do so," Mrs. Best! We shall all be most interested," smiled Gussie.

"Well, Master D'Arcy, it's really very little. I have never seen it, and, though I have heard some of the maids say they have, it has never done them any harm."

"But where is it seen, Mrs. Best? I have never seen it," said Harry Wharton. "I have heard that a white lady is seen in one of the bed-rooms, but I don't know which one."

"Oh, Master Harry, I'm sure it's only a tale. A long while ago a young lady staying here was frightened by a tall lady dressed in white, who pointed at her, and disappeared without a word. The young lady ran in fear, and was found by a young gentleman in a faint on the floor of the larder. The young gentleman fell in love with her, and married her later on. Quite a romance, of course, but it doesn't really prove there's a ghost, does it?"

"Which room is it, Mrs. Best?" asked Talbot.

"Well, Master Talbot, I believe it is the one you and Master Merry and Master Cherry share, and Master Frank and Master Wally have the middle dressing-room. The dressing-room, you know, is large, and on the other side of it is the room which Masters Figgins and D'Arcy and Nugent and Master Harry share. The other young gentlemen have two rooms on the other side of the corridor. Your three rooms communicate, and, of course, each has a door opening on to the corridor."

After a little more chat Mrs. Best glanced at the clock, and a move upstairs was made.

"All very fine while we are all together, but a bit off when we are separated and lights out," remarked Wally, and Frank, with a quick look over his shoulder, agreed.

"I wonder which woom is weally the haunted one?" said Gussy, as he carefully folded his cherished waistcoat.

"Oh, what does it matter? I don't suppose the lady spook will trouble about us," laughed Talbot.

"Well, I must say I've never seen her," said Wharton. "The house is very old, and so is all the furniture, and there are legends about some of it. Tomorrow I will show you the big mirror in the dressing-room. It is quite a curiosity."

II.

THE night passed uneventfully, and we assembled at breakfast on Good Friday in church parade kit, as Levison remarked. The afternoon was devoted to exploration of the grounds and boat-house, and a walk along the banks of the river.

As they strolled homewards, the younger boys racing with Towser, Wharton, Talbot, Merry and Levison major found themselves together. Nugent, Cherry and D'Arcy were lingering by the boats.

"I say, Harry, how long have your people had that girl who helped the old butler wait at dinner?" asked Levison. Both he and Talbot had looked rather thoughtful that afternoon.

"I don't know. I have not seen her before. All our men of military age have gone to the Front, and we have filled up with girls. Why do you ask, Levison?"

"I don't like her eyes, and she moves in a sneaky way, and looks as though she was watching us all the time."

"Have you been giving the glad eye?" laughed Tom Merry. "Now, if it was our susceptible Gussy—"

"Oh, don't rot! Didn't you notice her, Talbot?"

"Yes; and, like you, I have a queer feeling of dislike to her."

"There ought to be pwiests' hidie-holes, and secwet passages and things in your place, Wharton," said D'Arcy, catching up those ahead.

"I have heard there are. Perhaps we shall find some in our foxhunt after tea," answered Harry. "You know before I came to Greyfriars I had only my tutor here, and never thought of such things. But the house is really old, and it is more than likely there is some secret room or passage."

After tea the party divided, half to hide and the rest to seek. All those found were to join the hunt, and finally to meet in the great hall.

Five minutes were allowed for the foxes to find hiding-places, and then the hunt began. Talbot and Wharton went to their own room and looked round, but decided there was no place good enough.

"Come here, Talbot! I'll show you that old mirror." And Wharton passed into the dressing-room. He drew aside a velvet curtain from a large panel-mirror let into the oak panels of the wall opposite the big fireplace.

"You see, Talbot, the mirror distorts your face in curious ways. Sometimes it is quite all right; then, just a little movement, and you are fat-faced, or long, or squatty. Aunt objected to it, and so had this curtain hung before it. Let's get behind it now and hide."

With wild yells the hounds spread over the house, and soon all the foxes were run to earth, except Wharton and Talbot. But, with a "Yoicks! Tallyho! Found!" Wally, Frank, and Herries burst in, led by Towser, who fully entered into the game. Too heartily, indeed, for as Talbot was pulled down by Herries, and Wharton by Frank Levison, Towser caught the curtain and tore it bodily from its hooks, and D'Arcy minor tumbled over the excited beast as he dragged his prize away from the mirror. Wally had risen to his knees, when he gave a startled cry:

"Oh, crumbs! Look, Wharton! Did you see her? And the youngster gazed round with quite a dazed look.

"See whom? There's only us here. What do you mean?" Wharton asked, while the others rescued the curtain.

Talbot stooped to take the curtain from Towser. But suddenly he rose,

and looked round in rather a queer way.

"Scée here, kids! You first scoot down to the hall! Herries, take your beast with you, while Wharton and I put the curtain back!"

"But I tell you I saw—"

"Nonsense! It was fancy!"

"No, it wasn't fancy, you chump! She looked at me and pointed, just as Mrs. Best said she did at the lady."

"Ah, that's it! You have been thinking of that story. Now be off, and take that clumsy dog with you!"

The indignant Wally retired, protesting that they were fatheads not to look for the ghost. But in the big hall, where the fire burned cheerily, and the rest of the juniors were helping themselves to refreshments after the excitement of the hunt, Wally decided to await a favourable opportunity, and then, with the help of his chum, investigate for himself.

Left to themselves, Wharton and Talbot looked at each other.

"What is it, Talbot? Did you see anything? You looked startled," said Wharton.

"Yes, Harry. I saw a woman in white pointing over my shoulder. I did not want to frighten the kids, so I did not let on. But Wally saw her, too—no doubt about that."

"It's jolly odd. But you were both stooping down when you saw it. Try again. She does not seem a spiteful ghost, anyhow. She did no harm."

"No. Well, let's try. There! Do you see?"

"No; not a thing!"

"Well, come here and look in the mirror."

Wharton did so, and the shadowy form of a woman in a long, hooded white gown appeared to be pointing a long, bony hand over his shoulder.

"What is she pointing at? It's not at us. My hat, the thing's painted somehow in the mirror, and can only be seen at just one particular angle. Go backwards—there—this cluster of carved roses!"

Wharton passed his fingers over the beautifully carved cluster, pressing here and there. Talbot excitedly ran his fingers just above Wharton's, and suddenly the whole of the wide, carved jamb slid silently back, leaving a dark cavity, into which the two peered with wondering eyes.

"My hat, Harry! Is this really the first time you've twigged this mysterious thing?"

"Yes! And we have not time to examine it now. We must go down, or the whole crowd will be up here. We can make a thorough examination tomorrow."

Everybody was a little excited when bed-time came, and Wally and Frank had no great relish for saying good-night and switching off the electric light. The doors of the communicating-rooms were left open as a matter of course, so that we might chat till sleep came to us.

That night the occupants of the two rooms across the corridor had arranged to visit the three rooms and treat them to a pillow-fight. So a little after midnight, Blake, followed by Levison, Herries, Manners, and Lowther, all armed with pillows, quietly entered the middle room and moved towards the bed. Lowther touched the switch just inside the door, and was opening his mouth to yell, when he was stopped by the uplifted hand of Levison and a jerk of Blake's head towards the fireplace.

The juniors halted, and drew together.

"That isn't rats, Lowther! What is it?" said Levison, in a low tone.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 483.

"No, certainly not rats; but I don't know what it is," replied Lowther. "We had better wake Wharton and Merry. You two stay here, and if the kids wake, keep 'em quiet!"

Levison went into Wharton's room, switching on the light as he went in. He gently shook Wharton. "Rouse up, Harry, old man, and don't make a noise!" he warned him.

"What's the matter? Anyone ill, or burglars, or what?" asked Wharton, blinking sleepily at Levison.

"I don't know what it is. But we were raiding you for a pillow-fight, and we heard queer sounds in the wall by the fireplace—rustling, whispering, chuckling sort of noises. I think you fellows had better turn out. Lowther has gone to call Merry, and I expect Blake has roused the kids. We must see what's up. I don't believe in Wally's ghost."

"It wasn't a ghost, Levison. Talbot and I have seen what Wally saw, and it pointed to a secret spring that opens an entrance to a staircase. It is by the fireplace, and we meant to tell all of you to-morrow and explore it. But someone knows of it evidently, and we will soon find out who it is."

Wharton and Talbot told the excited juniors all about the figure in the glass. Every ear was alert for the peculiar sounds from behind the wall.

"Look here, Talbot, you know how to get this panel thing open. Merry and Lowther and Piggins and I will go down to the basement. You remember Mrs. Best said the lady was found in the larder? Well, I believe she went down those stairs"—pointing to the chimney-jamb—"and came out in the big passage where all the offices are. We will watch out down there, while you try to find out who is on the secret stairs. I am sure someone, or something, is there!"

Wharton and his comrades hurried quietly away, and Talbot waited a minute or two to give his chums time to get downstairs. Then he stooped before the mirror. After two or three failures, he got again the shadowy form pointing over his shoulder to the carved roses on the jamb of the chimney, and watched by the wondering juniors, he walked backwards till he saw the pointing finger trained on the cluster which hid the spring.

"Now, then, you chaps, stand by, and you will see the panel slip back!" he said.

Then he pressed hard, and the panel slid back.

The excited juniors pushed forward. Herries had rushed back to his room, and brought his electric-torch.

"Good! Come on, Herries!"

And Talbot and Herries, followed by Gussy and Levison, moved cautiously forward.

"Gweat Scott! Hewwies, deah boy, I weally think 'owser would be wathah useful heah!" whispered D'Arcy.

"Of course he would! But Wharton said I'd better send him out to sleep."

The four descended several steps, and then sent the beams of the torch down the flight. They could not see far ahead, but after a few more steps Levison cried:

"Look out! There are two of them, and they are coming up!"

"My hat! It's getting thick!" remarked Wally.

"I say, you folks down there," called Talbot, "you had better come up quietly! You can't get away, you know. We are too many for you!"

But instead of coming up, the couple

below turned and ran down the last few steps. They seemed to stumble on the last one, to blunder forward, and then to disappear.

Talbot and Herries hurried after them, uttering excited ejaculations.

"My only aunt! Come on, you chaps," sang out Levison.

"Rather!"

"Huwwy up! Gweat Scott! Look at that!"

There was a flounder at the bottom of the stairs, and Talbot and Herries vanished, leaving their chums in total darkness.

"Bai Jove!"

"Oh, kim on, let's get after them!" cried Blake.

"Go steady, though," advised Manners. "No sense in rushing, and falling in the dark."

Suddenly the leaders felt the step under them subside, and then found themselves in the midst of an excited little crowd in the larder. They were speedily joined by the rest of us, and clustered round Wharton and Tom Merry. Wharton held by the arm a stout, fair, youngish man of decided German appearance. Tom Merry held, gently but firmly, a girl, in whom all of us recognised the young housemaid who had waited upon us at dinner!

III.

"TALBOT, will you please rouse Jimson, and ask him to come to the dining-room?" said Wharton. "Come on, Merry, bring your captive! And stop cackling, you kids. We must get to the bottom of this. But it's no use all talking at once."

And Wharton moved off towards the dining-room, where he was met by the astonished butler.

"Oh, please, please, Mr. Jimson, we didn't mean any harm!" cried the girl.

"Fritz is a German, but quite friendly, sir. Only he had to hide, because he's run away from an internment camp. I found the way to the staircase when I was cleaning out my cupboard. I found it out by accident, and I could not find the way out at the top of the stairs. I thought Fritz could hide on the staircase, and I could bring him food at night. I did not think the young gentlemen would wake and hear us talking. That is all, really and truly, Mr. Jimson!"

Fritz nodded, and said: "Ja, ja, das ist soh, mein herr."

"That's all very well," said Wharton; "but we can't have Germans hiding in this house. Jimson, you had better telephone to the police and state the facts. We will take care Fritz does not escape. Levison, will you see the kids to roost, and then come down here and help guard these two?"

"Rats!" gasped Wally indignantly.

"Do you suppose we are going to be hustled off like that?"

"We will all wait till the escort comes for Fritz," said Lowther.

Jimson, followed by an inspector and a constable, came along presently. And after a brief explanation, Fritz was marched off.

Then Jimson turned to the girl.

"Now, Matilda Brown, I hope you feel ashamed of yourself! You have given us all a lot of trouble, and disgraced the house by bringing a German alien into it. You had better get off to bed, and I will tell Mrs. Best about you in the morning."

"I ain't ashamed of bein' fond of Fritz. He ain't done no harm, nor wouldn't. I will go home to my aunt in

the morning, and not trouble Mrs. Best or you. Young gentlemen, I am sorry I disturbed you, but we could not have got in your room, even if we wanted to. We could not find the way out at the top."

"How long has that German been hiding here?" asked Harry.

"Only a day or two, sir," the girl answered. "And directly you young gentlemen came you began to talk about the ghost and secret passages, and that made me afraid for Fritz. I couldn't help watching you. I didn't mean any harm, though, truly!"

At breakfast next morning Mrs. Best told us Matilda had gone.

"And a good riddance, too!" said the dear old lady emphatically.

Well, it was. The sort of housemaid who introduces German fugitives would not be much in request, even in these days of registry office difficulties, I should say. But, all the same, I don't think the girl meant any harm. I would not answer for Fritz, though, or for any Hun!

We made a thorough examination of the secret passage that day. It was a queer contrivance, and, to my mind, had its drawbacks, even for anyone who knew its workings. I can't quite see why it needed to deal with you as it did after your feet were on a certain step; but once you got to that step, you were somewhere else—in the larder, to be exact—before you could guess what was happening. Still, you might have got to places a lot worse.

But it must have been above a bit alarming to the young lady of Mrs. Best's little romance, and I don't wonder she fainted. It all turned out well—at least, I suppose so. But as I don't know her husband, I can't be dead sure even about that!

THE END.



YOU NEVER KNOW YOUR LUCK!

By HARRY NOBLE.

I remember a day when I felt in form: in the pink of condition, ne'er fitter! But all went awry, and Tom's language was warm at my third miss—an absolute sitter.

He took me in first. I went for a duck, but first managed to run out our great man.

For there's nothing so queer in this world as luck, and it's no use to buck against Fate, man!

You never know your luck— A century or a duck!

For chance plays havoc with form at its best,

And a Jessop may score a pair in a Test—

You NEVER know your luck!

And I think of a day when the veriest muff or anyone's aged grandmother Seemed likely to be of as much use as I. "Stuff!" said Tom. "We can't get another."

The pitch was a brute, and we suffered a slump; but we won, for I hit like a good 'un!

Which proves, to conclusion, you mustn't jump, and that eating's the proof of the pudden!

You never know your luck— A century or a duck!

There's no such thing as a cert in the game

For you or me or the player of fame—

You NEVER know your luck!

GREAT POPULAR SUCCESS OF "HARLENE HAIR-DRILL"

Enthusiastic Praise from All Branches of the National Services.

London Hair Specialist's Offer of Free Public Distribution of 1,000,000 Complete Hair-Growing and Hair-Beautifying Outfits FREE.

OUR Fighting Men on both Land and Sea, Nurses, Munition Workers, as well as practically all our famous Actresses, Queens of Revue and Cinema Artistes, are all full of praise for what has now become the great national toilet practice — "Harlene Hair-Drill."

Letters of thanks are pouring in from all parts of the Kingdom — indeed, from practically all parts of the world — where the writers express the greatest gratification at the success achieved in the practice of "Harlene Hair-Drill."

So necessary is it today that men should preserve a fresh and smart appearance, and that women should look to their appearance, in which the hair forms so conspicuous a part, that the Inventor - Discoverer of "Harlene Hair - Drill" wishes it to be publicly known that he is prepared to despatch to any reader a complete 7 Days' "Harlene Hair-Drill" Outfit entirely free of charge.

This Free Offer is one that no one can afford to miss. If you are a man who suffers from ageing baldness, or if your hair is getting thin, weak, or impoverished, this offer is open to YOU. If you are a woman whose youthful looks are gradually disappearing as a consequence of the hair looking dank, dull, lifeless, and thin, or combing out daily when you use the comb, this Free Offer is also open for YOU to accept. There are no conditions—no obligations—nothing to pay except the actual cost of the return carriage on the Trial Parcel to your own door.

There is, therefore, now no necessity for any man or woman to suffer from :

- | | |
|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1. Scalp Irritation. | 6. Over-greasiness of the scalp. |
| 2. Complete or partial Baldness. | 7. Over-dryness of the scalp. |
| 3. Straggling or weak hair. | 8. Scurf or dandruff. |
| 4. Thin or falling hair. | 9. Unruly, wiry hair. |
| 5. Splitting hairs. | 10. Hair thinning at temples. |

All readers of this notice are cordially invited to avail themselves of the generous offer of the Proprietors of "Harlene" to learn of the most successful method of regaining, restoring, and preserving hair health and hair beauty, Free of Charge.

CONTENTS OF FREE HAIR-HEALTH PARCELS.

Test "Harlene Hair-Drill" free, without any obligation on your part—merely send 4d. in stamps to defray cost of carriage, and as soon as his Majesty's Post Office can deliver it, you will receive the following valuable Gift :

1. A Bottle of "Harlene," the true liquid food for the hair, which stimulates it to new growth. It is Tonic, Food, and Dressing in one.
2. A Packet of the marvellous hair and scalp-cleansing "Cremex" Shampoo Powder, which prepares the head for "Hair-Drill."
3. A Bottle of "Uzon" Brilliantine, which gives a final touch of beauty to the hair, and is especially beneficial to those whose scalp is inclined to be "dry."
4. A Copy of the new edition of the "Harlene Hair-Drill" Manual, giving complete instructions.

You can always obtain further supplies of any of the preparations from your local chemist: Harlene at 1s. 1½d., 2s. 9d., and 4s. 9d. per bottle (in solidified form, for soldiers, sailors, travellers, etc., in tins at 2s. 9d.); "Cremex" Shampoo Powders at 1s. per box of 7 shampoos (single packets 2d. each); "Uzon" Brilliantine at 1s. and 2s. 6d. per bottle. If you have any difficulty in obtaining supplies, any or all of these prepara-

tions will be sent to you post free on receipt of price direct from Edwards' Harlene, Ltd., 20, 22, 24, and 26, Lamb's Conduit Street, W.C.1. Carriage extra on foreign orders. Cheques and P.O.s should be crossed.



All classes of Society are now regularly practising "Harlene Hair-Drill." Men in both our Army and Navy, abroad and at home, Nurses, Munition Workers—indeed, all classes are able to banish the "too-old at 30, 40, or 50" appearance. Everyone is to-day invited to accept the Free Gift Offer made in this announcement. Simply sign your name and address on the Coupon Form below, and by return you will receive without any charge or obligation the complete "Harlene Hair-Drill" Outfit.

FREE "HAIR-DRILL" COUPON.

To EDWARDS' HARLENE, LTD.,
20, 22, 24, and 26, Lamb's Conduit Street,
London, W.C. 1.

Dear Sirs,—Please send me your Free "Harlene Hair-Drill" Gift Outfit as announced. I enclose 4d. in stamps, cost of carriage to any part of the world. (Foreign stamps accepted.)

NAME

ADDRESS

GEM, May 12th, 1917.

A RARE WASH-OUT.

By PATRICK MULVANEY (Mulvaney Minor).

TOMPKINS has not worried his powerful head much about French lately, but he takes French leave occasionally.

Tompkins says it enlarges the mind to mix with all sorts, and that's why he broke bounds, so as to have a chat with old Jack Keats, who lives by the lock a good way up-river.

Tompkins got very chummy with the old chap. I believe Tompkins thought Keats had a lot of money, and that he might get into Keats' will. Anyway, when Tompkins first asked me to go along with him I saw at once that Keats was a miser. He gave us tea, certainly, but there was only margarine, and the bread had seen a bit of life.

Tompkins said he liked the local colour. There was certainly plenty of local smell, for Keats lived in a pensioned-off railway-carriage. He had bought it cheap. He told us all about it. As you ate your margarine and crusts you could read the notices on the walls about fining passengers, and Keats used to put his pipes and odd things in the racks.

He said it was the next best thing to going travelling. Also, he paid no rates, only helped the lock-keeper and grew potatoes. If there were no rates, there were plenty of rats. Still, it wasn't altogether so bad, though rather in the way of pigging it. I used to wonder where the old chap kept the money he was saving up. So did Tompkins. But we did not like to ask. It might have looked inquisitive.

Apart from his being so mean, I liked old Keats all right. He had a lot of funny stories. He used to say he was as happy as a king with his parrot and cat, though as far as I can make out kings don't seem bursting with happiness.

What happened that day was all due to Tompkins' monkeying about with the levers at the sluice-gates. You chaps know the ass's dreamy way. He said he would just show me how the levers worked, and then we would drop into the railway-carriage for tea. Somehow the levers did not work quite as Tompkins thought they were going to, and he got tired of the game, and left them as they were, and we dropped in to see Keats. The old man was sitting in the first-class part, where there are enough microbes in the cushions to hold mass meetings on each of the buttons—so Tompkins says.

Keats was very pleased to see us.

"I was just thinking of you young gentlemen," he said as he set to making the tea.

He kept his pipe in his mouth as he worked, though just overhead it said that there would be a fine of forty shillings for anybody who dared to smoke.

Tompkins sat down at the piano while the kettle thought about boiling—well, it was something in the shape of a piano, but you had to go piano with it. I expect it was that instrument which lost the chord one hears about. Some of the keys were tired out and generally bored with life; but old Keats, who had given as much as ten bob for it at a sale, was no end proud of it.

Keats was saying something about potatoes, when suddenly I felt a bump, and then I heard a rushing sort of sound, just like what happened one day at home when I let the bath-tap run for a few hours by mistake, and our cook was

swept off her legs as she was coming downstairs. Keats looked round, but he did not seem to think it important, though the cat bristled up and passed a remark to the parrot.

There was another bump. Keats knew things were wrong now, for the kettle was jerked out of his hand, and went flying through a window, where he had pasted a portrait of the Kaiser. That didn't matter, as it was the Kaiser. "Sakes alive!" cried Keats.

There was a wild yell from the bank of the canal, and I caught sight of Jenks, the lock-keeper, working like mad at the chains by the sluice-gates. But the next moment he faded away, for somehow the railway-carriage had broken loose from her moorings, and was being swept into the canal, owing to a flood of water hitting her on the port side.

Keats was saying all sorts of violent things. Tompkins did not lose his presence of mind. He was quite frank about the matter. Keats was frank, too—you bet!

We sloshed into mid-stream, and one half of the railway-carriage broke away, as if it were fed up with the whole business. Keats' face was a perfect picture, and the rich purple tints looked wonderfully well against the green banks we were floating past.

Then another bit of the coach became unhinged, and we were all left clinging to what remained. That wasn't much—just a section of vestibule and the piano, which I must say stuck it very well for such a cheap piano.

Tompkins saved the cat, and it bit him after he had dragged it out of the water, looking like a boiled rabbit. If Monty Lowther had been there he would have said it was a most unfeline thing to do. The piano had broken loose now. Keats was clinging to a hat-rack, and being carried down the river. The parrot accompanied him on the piano. Tompkins laughed, and that made Keats say such bitter things that he forgot to hold on, and splashed right in. I grabbed his whiskers—to save him, you know—but he did not seem to be grateful.

Tompkins and I got Keats out of the water. He looked a perfect wash-out, and he must have swallowed a heap more water than he was used to, for he sat there gasping in the fragment of gangway, and seemed afraid now even to try and say what was in his mind.

There was nobody to help us. All we could see was an old cow in a meadow, which did no more than look up from its grub and stare at us for about five seconds. The parrot was very wet, for the piano had sunk a lot lower.

It was as well Keats was too damp and miserable to hear what Tompkins said

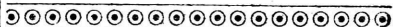
about the piano listing, and people liking to list to it.

We did get to ground round the bend. It is a dangerous part, dotted with snags, and after we had scrambled on to "terror firmer," the rest of the railway-carriage sank clear out of sight.

Tompkins says that it served the old man right, for folks have no business to live in railway-carriages when they have not paid their fares. But I was sorry for Keats. We got him and the parrot and the cat to a cottage, and Tompkins gave him five shillings. Tompkins was feeling a bit sorry, too, though he was laughing like a donkey most of the time. I had only got sevenpence-halfpenny, but Keats accepted that as well, and didn't bother to thank me.

Tompkins wrote to his father, who is a wholesale dealer in pickles, and old Tompkins was really very decent about it. He bought Keats a cottage and fixed him up all comfortable, and the affair never came to the ears of the Head at all, which was just as well, for Tompkins was a silly ass to try and work the gates in the way he did. But what can you expect of a chump like Tompkins?

THE END.



"T. M. W."

CORRESPONDENCE COLUMN.

B. T.—You are in the Fourth, and can hardly be under the influence of the Prophet Curly. Yes, soap certainly is dearer. But the school authorities have not yet asked us not to use so much. Your proposal seems to go the whole hog—very appropriate expression, if not too classic—and suggests the complete disuse of the article mentioned.

A. R. (Shell).—G. G. C. says he did not write to me on the subject of war profits, you tell me. I am not aware that I said he did—if by G. G. C. you mean your dear pal Crooke. G. G. C. also stands for Grunting Growling Complainer. If this explanation is not considered perfectly satisfactory, I shall be delighted to discuss the matter further with either you or Crooke in the gym.

"Admirer."—The question of the continuance of this column has been settled. The settlement took place in strict privacy and forty-five rounds. The Editor-in-Chief at this stage announced his intention of "chucking up the whole blessed bisney," rather than continue the argument further. Being told that he could chuck up the sponge, and so avoid any more trouble, he hailed the alternative with evident delight, and now eats out of my hand.

A. A. D'A.—Quite a good idea for you to supplement the food rations with plenty of fish! Fish is understood to be a brain-forming food.

R. B.—My dear fellow, everything can't go into one number. I mean—that is, we mean—to print your story about Uncle Joe's tiger-hunt one day. But we don't believe it!

To Mr....., Newsagent.

Please keep for me a copy of the
GEM LIBRARY each week until further
notice.

(Signed),