

A GEM FOR THE NEW YEAR!

The GEM 2^d

LIBRARY
of
SCHOOL AND SPORTING STORIES

EVERY WEDNESDAY.

No. 934.
Vol. XXIX.
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1926.



WHO SAID:—"IT AIN'T GONNA RAIN NO MO' P?"

(An amusing incident in the long complete school story—"GRUNDY, THE VENTRILOQUIST"—inside)



Address all letters: The Editor, The "Gem" Library, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. Write me, you can be sure of an answer in return.

A HAPPY NEW YEAR!

BEFORE I get too far ahead with this chat, I want to wish you cheery Gemites the old, old wish—A Prosperous and Happy New Year! I say prosperous because so many of you are setting out to try your luck in the business world. May good luck attend your efforts, and may 1926 be ever remembered as a year of peace and plenty.

GOOD PROGRAMMES!

I have some extra special treats in store in the way of GEM stories, and I can say in advance that the 1926 programme will beat the successful one you sampled in 1925. Very early in the New Year a brilliant series of complete adventure stories by Cecil Fanshaw will appear. This popular author of boys' yarns has created a splendid character in *Bat Barstow*, a modern Hercules, and I feel certain "*Bat*" will go down with you like hot cakes. Get ready to meet him.

OLD MOORE!

A Gemite from the North wants to know if I have ever made the acquaintance of "Old Moore." I presume he means the gentleman of almanac fame. If he does, I can assure him that "Old Moore" and I have never met—and I don't qualify for the old-age pension, either! If we had met, a forecast of the progress of the GEM would have been recorded in his almanac without doubt, for the success of our paper has been next door to a certainty ever since its inception. And prophets like forecasting certainties!

SAFETY FIRST!

That's a slogan commonly used nowadays—too commonly used, in my opinion. I believe it originated with the omnibus companies solely for the purpose of warning careless travellers to look where they were going. But some "cotton wool" folk have adopted it for keeps. Safety first on the trams and buses is worth remembering, but for Heaven's sake, chums, don't keep it to the forefront of your minds all day and every day. There are times when we have to take a chance, if we are progressive folk, and the fellow who hugs the safety first idea will find himself sliding down the ladder instead of climbing it. These slogans can be overdone and misapplied.

CROSS-WORDS!

A correspondent wants to know if we can have some more "Cross Words" in the GEM. For the moment I ran away with the idea that my reader chum was asking for "stronger" language between Tom Merry & Co., but a second reading of the letter leads me to conclude that my correspondent means "Cross Word" Puzzles. As a matter of fact, several readers have lately asked me for more of these problems for the leisure hour. I'll see what can be done.

THE "SCHOOLBOYS' OWN" LIBRARY!

Two new numbers of this famous 4d. Library are on sale Friday, January 1st. No. 19 deals with the early adventures of Harry Wharton at Greyfriars, and is entitled, "The Taming of Harry Wharton." No. 20, "The Vanished Schoolboys," is a strong mystery story, featuring Jimmy Silver & Co. of Rookwood. Both volumes are well worth reading, boys.

NEXT WEDNESDAY'S PROGRAMME!

"GUSSY'S GUESTS!"

A topping story of Tom Merry & Co. and Arthur Augustus at Eastwood House. Don't miss it!

"OPEN ROAD!"

A special supplement embracing the above-mentioned subject by Tom Merry & Co. Top-hole!

"A LEADER OF THE LEAGUE!"

Another trenchant instalment of this popular Soccer yarn.

DAME TAGGLES!

The kind-hearted proprietress of the tuckshop at St. Jim's figures in our next "Jingle." Order your copy of the GEM early, and make that your New Year resolution.

Cheerio,

Your Editor.



WIRE IN NOW!

You Know A Good Joke? Let's Hear it, Chums!

Delicious Tuck Hampers and Money Prizes
Awarded for Interesting Pars.

All Efforts in this Competition should be Addressed to: The GEM LIBRARY, "My Readers' Own Corner," Gough House, Gough Square, London, E.C.4.

BRAVO, BIRKENHEAD!

JARRED!

Shopkeeper (engaging new boy): "What I really want is a boy to be partly indoors and partly outdoors." Boy: "Good gracious! And what happens when the door slams?"—A Tuck Hamper, filled with delicious Tuck, has been awarded to F. W. Jones, 152, Harrowby Road, Birkenhead.

HARD LUCK!

Small Boy (to cobbler): "Please will you mend these boots, and when will they be done?" Cobbler: "They're done now, son. Take 'em 'ome!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to Raymond Gibson, 141, Parkfield Street, Rusholm, Manchester.

TIT FOR TAT!

Two bricklayers were building up a wall on a country road, when a farmer came along. Thinking to have some fun at the yokel's expense, one of the men called to him. "Hi!" he cried. "How long have you been farming?" "About twenty years," answered the farmer. "Why?" "Oh, I was only wondering if you have ever seen a cockerel lay eggs?" asked the bricklayer. "No," replied the farmer; "but I've seen silly chumps lay bricks!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to R. L. Walker, 22, Matlock Street, Netherfield, Notts.

THE FOOTER FAN!

Village Worthy (watching departure of local footer team for away match): "Ay, they be the lads for this 'ere football. Top o' the West Mudshire League, 'em be. Oi reckons if 'em goes on as 'em's doin' they'll be good enough for that there League o' Nations!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to Tom Briggs, 47, Cooke Street, Ormeau Road, Belfast.

WEIRD AND WONDERFUL!

Circus Man (hunting runaway elephant): "Have you seen a strange animal round about here?" Farmer Jiles: "Oi have. There was an injur-rubber bull round 'ere eatin' my carrots wid 'is tail!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to D. Brooke, Iringa, Green Lane, Norbury, S.W. 16.

GETTING THE BIRD!

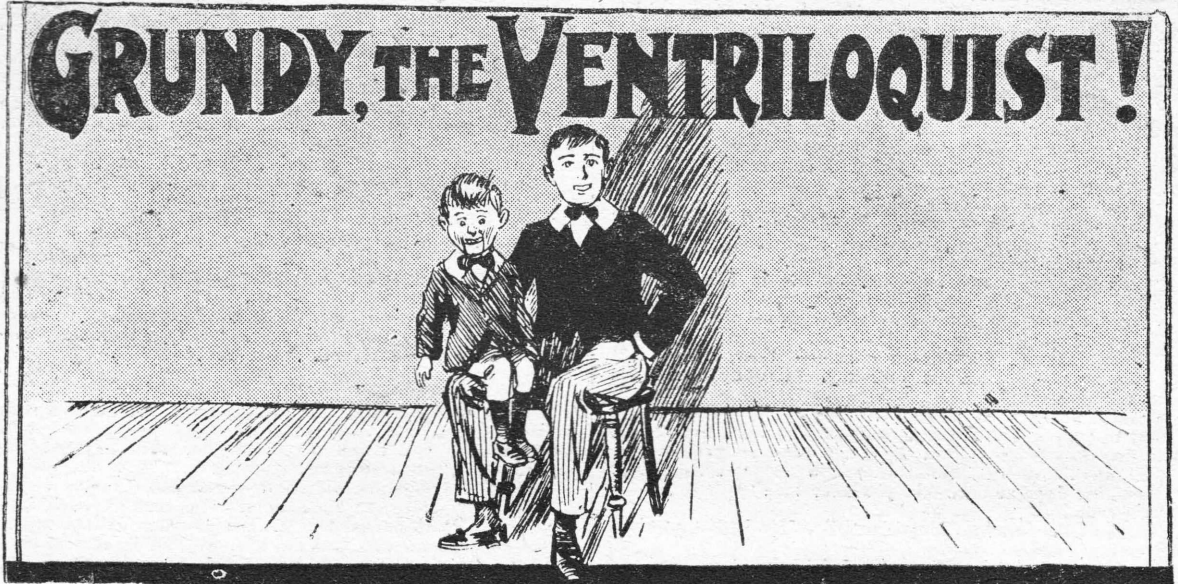
Clever Man: "What wonderful progress has been made in flying. Men can do anything a bird can do nowadays." Bored Listener: "Is that so? Well, when you see an aviator sitting on an egg, tell me, and I'll come over and have a look!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to C. J. Dillien, 43, Trinity Street, Canning Town, E. 16.

TUCK HAMPER COUPON.

The GEM LIBRARY.

No attempt will be considered unless accompanied by one of these Coupons.

BRINGING DOWN THE HOUSE! George Alfred Grundy rather fancies that he can "bring the house down" with his ventriloquial efforts. He does, but not in the fashion he anticipates!



A Screamingly Funny Story of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's, featuring George Alfred Grundy, of the Shell, in a new role.

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

CHAPTER 1.

Nothing Serious!

"A H-A-A-A-A-A—"
 "What's that?"
 "Ah-a-a-a-a-a—gug-gug—a-a-ah!"
 "What the dickens—"

Tom Merry stopped short, as did his chums Lowther and Manners.

The three juniors were strolling along the Shell passage at St. Jim's when that strange sound caught their ears.

They were quite startled.

The queer sounds came from the study owned by Grundy, Wilkins, and Gunn, and they were rather unnerving sounds, to say the least of it; indeed, they could only be described as eerie and dreadful.

Apparently the Terrible Three were not the only fellows to be startled. Outside the study door were standing Wilkins and Gunn, and they had scared looks on their faces.

"What on earth's the matter, Wilkins?" gasped Tom Merry. "Wha-what's that awful noise?"

"That's just what we want to know," said Gunn, in rather a hushed voice. "Listen! Isn't it awful?"

"Ah-a-a-a-a-a—gug-gug—a-ah-ah-ah!"

It certainly was awful!

It was also decidedly alarming!

The noises coming from the closed study were something between whines and moans, prolonged and eerie, and they were interposed with queer gurgling noises as if the person uttering them were choking.

"I—I say," muttered Tom Merry, "something's wrong in there, you chaps! Is Grundy inside?"

"I—I suppose so."

"Can't you get in?"

Without waiting for an answer, Tom tried the door himself. It was locked.

"We're as puzzled about it as you fellows," breathed Wilkins in an awed voice. "Grundy's inside there—must be! He's either ill or—or—"

"Or gone mad!" whispered Gunn. "He—he always was—well, just a bit—you know! But he's been rather strange in his manner for days—since Monday night, in fact. He went with us to that variety show in Wayland, and he never spoke a word to us all the way back—just kept muttering to himself. And he was making a noise something like this yesterday."

"It's come at last!" said Wilkins. "I—I always felt it might, you know!"

"You—you really think that?" breathed Tom Merry.

"Well, it looks like it."

"Phew!"

The scared juniors looked at each other. From within the locked study the strange noises still proceeded.

"Ah-ah! Gug-gug! Groogh!"

"Sounds to me like illness—serious illness," said Lowther, quite grave and concerned for once. "I say, we ought to do something—quick! Supposing he's trying to—to commit—"

Monty Lowther dared not finish.

"Must be very ill to groan and moan like that, anyway," muttered Manners. "Call to him!"

Tom Merry rapped on the door. It was a very nervous rap.

"Grundy! Are you there? Grundy, old chap, what's the matter?"

"What's the matter, old fellow?" called Wilkins shakily.

"Gug-gug! Ah-ah-ah-ah-a-a-a!"

That was the only answer. Tom Merry set his lips.

"Run for Railton!" he said. "Go on! I'll be trying to get in!"

Manners rushed away, and the Shell captain grasped the handle of the door again, and rattled it furiously—desperately. Then he kicked hard on the panels.

Thump, thump, thump, thump!

The door shook and rattled under the blows.

The weird sounds from within the study suddenly ceased. From inside came a voice—a decidedly wrathful, if breathless, voice.

"Here, chuck that—d'you hear?"

"Grundy—"

"Clear out!" bawled Grundy's voice from within. "Is that you, Wilkins?"

"Yes," called Wilkins appealingly. "Grundy, old fellow—"

"Clear out! Scoot! Skedaddle!" came Grundy's gasping voice. "I'm busy! Cerraway from that dashed door!"

"But, Grundy—"

"Clear out!"

"Grundy—"

"Gug-gug—ah-ah-ah-a-a-a—gug-gug—ah!"

The sounds started again with redoubled vigour. And at that moment Mr. Railton, the Housemaster of the School House, came rustling up, alarm on his features.

"Boys! What is the matter? Ah!"

Mr. Railton stopped short as he heard the moaning whine from within.

"Bless my soul!" he ejaculated. "Were those the sounds you heard, Manners?"

"Yes, sir."

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"Dear me! Something is certainly wrong! Grundy—Grundy, my poor boy!"

"Will you clear out?" came a hooting voice from within the study. "Dash it all, leave a fellow alone!"

"Grundy!"

"I'll Grundy you if I come out!" bawled Grundy. "Shove off, you burbling idiot!"

"Wha-at?"

Mr. Railton almost fainted at being addressed thus. It was clear that Grundy—ill, or mad, or otherwise—was not aware that it was his respected Housemaster who had called to him.

"Ah-a-a-a-a-a-gug-gug-ah!"

The sounds started anew. Evidently George Alfred Grundy had taken it for granted that the fellows who were disturbing him would go after that threat.

"Bless my soul!" repeated Mr. Railton in faint accents. "There is certainly something very much amiss with Grundy, or he would never dare to address me thus. Merry, will you run and bring Taggles here? Tell him to bring a hammer in order to break open—Stay, though! I will try to reason with the poor boy. Grundy! Do you hear me, Grundy?"

Grundy heard that all right. He could scarcely have failed to hear it, for Mr. Railton gave his voice full power. The dreadful noises within the study ceased abruptly.

"Grundy!" called Mr. Railton, a trifle breathlessly. "Open this door at once—do you hear me?"

"Oh crumbs!"

Grundy's tone was no longer wrathful. He had recognised the master's voice at last.

The next moment footsteps sounded in the study, and the key turned in the lock. Mr. Railton fairly flung the door open, almost damaging Grundy's nose as he did so.

Grundy fairly jumped back, and then he stared at the crowd behind Mr. Railton. In their turn the crowd stared at Grundy. And Grundy certainly did not look his usual self. His face was red, and flushed, and his eyes were bulging more than a little. He looked as if he had been doing his utmost to burst a blood-vessel and had nearly succeeded.

Tom Merry & Co. and Wilkins and Gunn, though not a little reassured since hearing Grundy speak, gazed at him in some apprehension and trepidation. They looked as if they were ready to bolt at the first sign of movement from Grundy.

"Grundy," exclaimed Mr. Railton, grasping the burly Shell fellow by the shoulder, "what is the matter with you? Are you ill?"

"Eh? Me ill? Of course not, sir!" stuttered Grundy, gazing blankly at the crowd.

"Then what is the meaning of that extraordinary noise you were making?" demanded Mr. Railton, his voice rising a trifle.

"Eh? Noise? Was I making a noise?" stammered Grundy. "I—I—I— It was nothing, sir. I—I was just practising—I mean, I was just making a—a noise, sir."

"Then you are not ill, Grundy?"

"Certainly not, sir," snorted Grundy, glaring at the juniors behind. "I suppose these silly kids—"

"Grundy!" thundered Mr. Railton. "Am I to understand, then, that you were merely making that extraordinary and alarming noise to amuse yourself?"

"Hem! Well, you see— Yes, sir. Just to—to amuse myself, sir. Exactly," stammered Grundy.

It was plain—to the juniors at all events—that Grundy did not wish to explain more fully than that to the Housemaster.

But Mr. Railton did not seem to note that. He was angry now—very angry. He naturally concluded that Grundy had been "acting the goat," and had been making the strange noises in order to frighten his schoolfellows.

Mr. Railton did not approve of practical jokes of that nature.

"Grundy," he snapped with withering scorn, "you are a buffoon, sir—a stupid, idiotic, blundering dolt! You have caused a disturbance! You have alarmed your schoolfellows and myself by your senseless buffoonery!"

"But—but, sir—" stuttered Grundy.

Mr. Railton waved his hand.

"Silence! Your motive in causing this disturbance is perfectly plain to me. It is your idea of a practical joke, Grundy. It is the sort of practical joke I should have expected from you. You will take five hundred lines of Virgil, Grundy!"

"But—but, sir—"

"That will do. I shall expect the lines by Saturday morning at nine o'clock, Grundy."

With that Mr. Railton whisked away. He felt he had been the victim of the "joke"—that he had been tricked into rushing to the scene—and he felt very humiliated and

sore in consequence. It was really a wonder that Grundy had escaped with a mere five hundred lines of Virgil.

"Well, upon my word!" gasped Grundy. "What d'you fellows think of that for injustice—eh? Sheer, rotten injustice!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Now Mr. Railton had gone the juniors could laugh—and they did laugh. It was a great relief to find that, after all, Grundy was not mad, or ill, or contemplating suicide.

Grundy glowered at them.

"You're not ill, then, Grundy?" laughed Tom Merry.

"Eh? Look here—"

"Nor potty?" inquired Lowther sweetly.

"Nor about to commit suicide, Grundy?"

"I want none of your dashed cheek!" roared Grundy.

He was justly irate now. Mr. Railton's words regarding a "buffoon" and a "stupid, blundering dolt" had not pleased the great George Alfred at all. On top of that, five hundred lines was no joke. And now the juniors' remarks put the finishing touch to his fury. "Why, I'll smash you—the lot of you!" he roared. "Get out!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Why you—you—"

Grundy dropped words for actions then. He made a rush at the juniors, and they scattered, laughing uproariously. Only Wilkins and Gunn stayed behind, and they put the table between themselves and Grundy.

"Look here, Grundy, old chap—" began Gunn.

"You—you rotters!" snorted Grundy, turning back into the room, breathing hard. "This is all your dashed fault! Made me look an ass, and brought Railton to me! Five hundred dashed lines of Virgil! Bah! You make me ill, Gunny—and you, too, Wilkins!"

"Look here, old chap—"

"Call yourselves pals?" hooted Grundy, glowering at his chums. "Bringing old Railton to me like that! Called me a—a buffoon and a dolt—me, mind you!"

"Look here, Grundy, old man," urged Wilkins. "No need to take it like that. We thought you were really ill, didn't we, Gunny?"

"Yes, rather, making an awful row like that!" said Gunn indignantly. "What on earth were you up to, Grundy?"

"Up to?" repeated Grundy, with a sniff. "Call it an awful row, eh? Cheek! I told you fellows I wanted this room to myself for an hour after dinner—before we started for Wayland. Then you come butting in just when I'm practising!"

"Eh? Practising? Practising what?" ejaculated Gunn.

"Why, the bee-drone, of course!" snorted Grundy. "I was just practising the bee drone—"

"The—the whatter?"

"Bee drone!" hooted Grundy impatiently. "Are you deaf? It's the foundation of the vent— But there, what's the good of trying to explain anything to you idiots? None at all! In any case, I'm keeping it a secret until I'm perfect. I'm explaining nothing yet. I'm going to make things hum when— Well, what the thump are you asses staring at now?" Grundy broke off to inquire.

There was need to inquire that. Wilkins and Gunn were staring blankly and in some alarm at their study leader. Once again their fears regarding Grundy's health—or sanity—were returning.

"Look here, Grundy, old fellow," murmured Wilkins gently. "Are you—you sure you don't feel ill?"

"Don't talk rot, Wilkins!" snapped Grundy. "And don't start any silly games again! Now, what about Wayland? If you chaps are ready we'll start out. Performance starts at three, and I don't want to be late for it."

"But we're not jolly well going to Wayland," said Gunn warmly. "We're going to bike-ride—"

"You're doing nothing of the sort!" said Grundy, in his usual autocratic manner. "You're coming with me to the Theatre Royal at Wayland! Got that?"

"But we went there on Monday!" hooted Wilkins. "And a beastly rotten show it was, too!"

"Eh? Rotten, you say?" gasped Grundy. "What rot! It was ripping, I tell you! I went myself last night as well as Monday night, and I'm jolly well going to the matinee this afternoon! And you fellows are coming with me, or I'll want to know the reason why!"

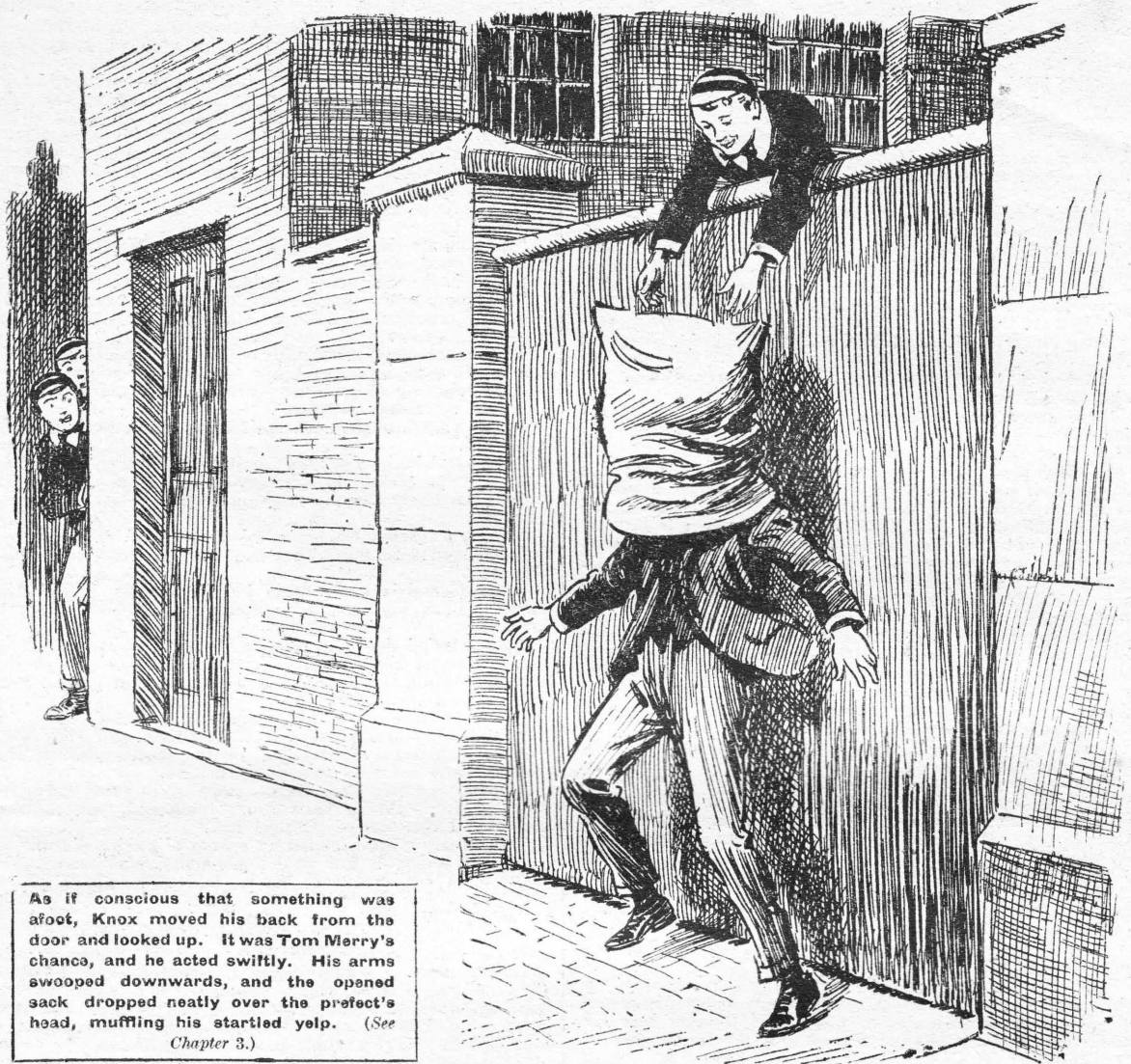
"We're not coming—that's flat!" said Wilkins. "Are we, Gunny?"

"Rather not!" growled Gunn.

"Aren't you?" snorted Grundy. "We'll see about that. There's a good reason why I want you fellows to come this afternoon, I might tell you. I've got an appointment with a fellow after the show at the Bull's Head—"

"The—the Bull's Head?" articulated Wilkins faintly.

"Didn't I say so? I shall want you fellows to stay outside and keep cave," said Grundy calmly. "I don't want any silly prefects or masters to come butting in. See?"



As if conscious that something was afoot, Knox moved his back from the door and looked up. It was Tom Merry's chance, and he acted swiftly. His arms swooped downwards, and the opened sack dropped neatly over the prefect's head, muffling his startled yelp. (See Chapter 3.)

"But the Bull's Head is a beastly, low-down pub, you awful ass!" gasped Gunn.

"Of course it is! That's why I want you fellows to come and keep cave," explained Grundy. "I shall be inside about an hour. You fellows just stand about outside and keep cave. See?"

Wilkins and Gunn gazed at him blankly. They were more certain than ever now that Grundy was "potty."

"And you want us to come to do that?" gasped Wilkins.

"Yes—just that!"

"You—you awful idiot!"

"Eh? What?"

"Of course we won't come!" snorted Wilkins. "We'll see you in a strait-jacket first, Grundy."

"Yes, rather!" growled Gunn.

Grundy started to push back his cuffs in a grim sort of way.

"Not coming, eh?" he said darkly. "Well see about that, my pippins. I'm going to whop you both until you do agree to come, then. I'll teach you to— Here, where are you going? Come back!"

But Wilkins, after one swift glance at Gunn, was already outside the study, and Gunn simply followed him. Grundy rushed to the door.

"Come back!" he howled. "Come back, you cads! I'm going to smash you!"

But evidently Wilkins and Gunn had no desire to be smashed. They vanished along the passage at a record pace, and Grundy came to a standstill, breathing hard. It was plain that if he wanted to visit the Theatre Royal in Wayland that afternoon, he would have to go himself. Which Grundy did.

CHAPTER 2.

Assistance Wanted!

"ROTEN show!" said Tom Merry.
"Wretched!" agreed Jack Blake with a sniff.
"The worst show I've seen at Wayland. Let's get to the bunshop."

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I am wathah disgusted with that performance, deah boys. It was weally too vulgah for words!"

"That ventriloquist chap was pretty smart," said Monty Lowther, shaking his head. "But his patter was rather low-down. And his jokes were as low-down as they were stale."

"Grundy seemed to be enjoying it, though," grinned Manners. "Did you spot him in the stalls? His eyes were fairly glued to the stage, especially when that ventriloquist was performing."

"That was rather queer," said Tom Merry. "Grundy isn't the sort of chap to enjoy a show like that boozey boulder of a ventriloquist gave. Anyway, come on, and blow Grundy."

The chums of St. Jim's started to walk away from the Theatre Royal precincts. They were not sorry to get away from the variety show they had witnessed, as a matter of fact. There being no footer on that afternoon, the Terrible Three had decided to visit the theatre, and Blake & Co. of the Fourth had joined them there. But it was generally felt that the afternoon had been wasted. For the variety show had certainly been disappointing, to say the least of it.

As the juniors started to walk away along the High Street they almost bumped into two juniors. They were Wilkins

and Gunn of the Shell, and both seemed rather anxious and disturbed.

"You fellows seen that awful idiot Grundy?" asked Gunn eagerly.

"He's inside there now," said Tom Merry, nodding back to the Theatre Royal entrance. "I don't think he's come out yet."

"Oh, good!" breathed Wilkins in relief. "I say, you fellows, you might lend a hand. The fact is we're rather upset about the ass. He's up to some silly ass-game or other."

"That's nothing new for Grundy."

"Wathah not!"

"But this is serious—jolly serious," said Gunn. "Look here, chaps. The awful idiot says he has an appointment with a blighter at the Bull's Head this afternoon. We want you fellows to help us stop the silly madman."

"Wha-at?"

Tom Merry & Co. and Blake & Co. looked startled at that.

"But—but the Bull's Head is a low, riverside pub," ejaculated Tom Merry.

"We know that, of course. The silly burler is asking for the sack if he does go there. We're going to stop him, if we can. Listen, and I'll explain."

Wilkins proceeded to explain, keeping an eye on the entrance to the Theatre Royal as he did so. As a matter of fact, both Wilkins and Gunn were very disturbed and anxious indeed on behalf of Grundy. After all, Grundy was their pal and their study-mate. Mad as Grundy was, they could not forget that. They had certainly forgotten it when they had bolted from their study earlier on in the afternoon. But they had remembered later on—had remembered Grundy's words with a great deal of alarm.

They had also realised that it was their duty, as Grundy's bosom pals, to stop Grundy. They had rushed back to their study, only to find Grundy gone. They had thereupon rushed off to the station, only in time to see the Wayland train go out with Grundy aboard. They had then waited for the next train, and followed on.

And now, here they were, anxiously looking for their headstrong study-mate.

"He's potty, no doubt about that," said Gunn, when Wilkins had finished. "You fellows heard him this afternoon make that awful row. Well, if Railton treats it as a joke we don't. We always felt it would come to this sooner or later."

"Great pip!"

"Bai Jove! Poor old Gwunday!"

All eyes turned towards the entrance hall of the theatre—seared eyes, as if their owners half-expected to see George Alfred Grundy came rushing out with rolling eyes and gibbering mouth.

The fact that Grundy spoke of visiting a low-down riverside public-house, after what had already taken place that afternoon, seemed conclusive proof that Grundy was not as he should be mentally. There were, certainly, one or two chaps at St. Jim's who were not above that sort of thing. But Grundy, with all his manifold faults, was not of their number. It was the very last thing that Tom Merry & Co. would have expected Grundy to dream of doing.

Hence there was something wrong with Grundy.

"I say, I'm thundering sorry about this," said Tom Merry seriously. "We must stop him, of course. We'd better wait here until the ass comes out, and then we'll collar him and take him back home safely."

"Some job!" said Herries rather cynically.

"Well, that can't be helped. There's bound to be a rumpus."

"Yaas, wathah! Gwunday is a tewwah!"

With grave looks on their faces the juniors waited, scanning the forms of the people hurrying out of the theatre doors. They had a rather long wait. The crowd gradually thinned out until the last stragglers came out. The juniors waited some minutes longer, and then, as nobody else emerged, they gave it up.

"We've missed the ass somehow," grunted Tom Merry. "I'm certain he didn't come out before us, though. It's queer."

"Better go along to the Bull's Head and look out for him there," suggested Blake.

"We'd better," said Tom grimly.

The juniors turned and hurried away, anxious and apprehensive now. For all his faults, Grundy was not a bad sort, and none of them wanted to see him get himself into trouble, especially if he was not himself, as Tom Merry considerably put it. They had often and often called George Alfred Grundy "potty," but they did not like calling him that now, when they actually feared that he was in that sad state.

Rounding the corner of the theatre buildings the juniors turned down the side street that led towards the river—

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and the Bull's Head. They had scarcely done so when two forms emerged from the stage door of the theatre and went walking rather quickly down the side street away from them.

One was undoubtedly George Alfred Grundy, and the other—The juniors gasped as they glimpsed him. He was a tall, rather frowsy-looking gentleman, with a decidedly red nose, and dissipated features. He wore a loud, check-pattern suit, and very stained and dirty spats over cracked, patent-leather shoes, and he wore a wide-brimmed hat at a rakish angle.

Certainly he was a queer companion for any St. Jim's fellow.

"M-mum-my hat!" gasped Wilkins. "Oh, the awful ass!"

"Who is the merchant?" grunted Gunn.

"I fancy I know him," said Tom Merry, frowning. "If I'm not mistaken, it's that ventriloquist chap from the show we've just seen."

The juniors stood stock-still and blinked after Grundy and his rakish companion. What a fellow like Grundy wanted in the company of such an individual was a mystery too deep for them to solve as yet.

But it only brought back their fears for Grundy a thousand-fold.

"Phew! I believe you were quite right, Wilky," said Tom Merry. "That chap is a boozey-looking bouncer, and it's more than likely Grundy is going with him to that beastly pub."

"Yaas, wathah! Bai Jove, what an awful duffah!"

"Come on!" snapped Tom Merry. "We certainly must stop this."

What Grundy's game could be the juniors hadn't the faintest idea, but they were determined to stop it at all costs.

They hurried down the narrow street. It was not a long street, and at the end of it was the Bull Head's public-house, fronting the street, and with a ragged garden running alongside down to the river's edge.

But as if Grundy and his companion suspected they were followed, they also hurried their footsteps, and they both vanished through a side door of the hostelry, while the juniors were some twenty yards behind.

"Done!" grunted Tom Merry, stopping in great exasperation. "We ought to have run, or shouted, you fellows. Anyway, I vote we— Oh, my hat!"

Tom Merry's words ended on a note of sudden alarm.

And no wonder! For at that moment the juniors caught sight of a figure—a well known and well hated figure—standing a few yards ahead of them.

"Knox!" breathed Jack Blake.

"And he's spotted Grundy!" groaned Wilkins.

It certainly looked as if it had "done it." Knox was, in addition to being a Sixth-Former, a prefect, and the most detested prefect at St. Jim's. And Knox had obviously seen Grundy, whether he had recognised him or not. He had, apparently, just emerged from a branching side street in time to see the St. Jim's junior vanish inside the disreputable hostelry.

"Keep back!" breathed Tom Merry, pushing his companions into the shelter of a nearby doorway. "Knox hasn't seen us, and I believe he hasn't recognised Grundy—just spotted the cap, I expect. He's going to wait for him to come out."

"Bai Jove! Gwunday is done this time."

It looked very much like it. Knox had stepped back into the shelter of a gateway, with his back pressed against the double doors as he watched the side door of the inn. As a matter of fact, Tom Merry was quite right in his surmise. Knox, while taking a short cut to the station, had come from the narrow side street just in time to see a boy wearing a St. Jim's cap enter the inn. But he had not recognised who the junior was.

But from the grim, rather gloating look on the prefect's ill-natured face, it was apparent that he expected very soon to do that.

"It's the sack for Grundy!" groaned Gunn. "Oh, if only we could save the awful duffer! He—he's not a bad sort, and he can't help being what he is."

"We're going to try to save him, Gunny!" snapped Tom. "Don't you start worrying yet. I've got a wheeze, I think. Listen!"

And Tom whispered hurriedly to his scared chums, and then he slipped away like a shadow. He halted at the open door of a warehouse a few yards away.

CHAPTER 3.

Saving Grundy!

THE warehouse belonged to Sankey's, the Wayland corn merchant; and it was the sight of a tousled-headed youth in a dingy white apron, lounging in the doorway, solemnly chewing a straw, that had given Tom Merry inspiration.

Tom Merry knew the youth well. He was Billy Brent, a chum and henchman of Grimes, the grocer's boy, from Rylcombe. Grimes and his chums were great friends of Tom Merry & Co. And Tom Merry intended to make good use of that friendship now.

Crouching against the door behind them, Blake and the rest anxiously watched as Tom Merry reached the youth and spoke to him. Then both vanished into the dim interior of the warehouse.

Nothing happened for some moments after that, and then suddenly Blake gave a warning hiss as a figure rose silently, almost like a ghost, above the double doors against which Knox was leaning.

It was Tom Merry, and that junior was evidently standing on a packing-case behind the doors in the yard of the corn merchant's warehouse.

For an instant Tom stood up beyond the double doors, motioning his chums to be silent. Then he stooped, and when he reappeared again he had a sack in his hand.

Breathlessly Blake & Co. watched the drama that followed.

Slowly, and with infinite caution, Tom raised the sack aloft, his eyes fixed upon the head of the unconscious senior below him. Then he waited.

Suddenly, as if conscious that something was afoot, Knox moved his back from the doors and looked up.

It was Tom Merry's chance, and he acted swiftly and surely.

His arms swooped downwards, and the opened sack dropped neatly over Knox's head, muffling his sudden, startled yelp even as he uttered it.

Then Tom Merry scrambled on to the doors and dropped down into the street like a flash of lightning.

At the same instant, as if moved by the same spring, Blake & Co., with Wilkins and Gunn at their heels, rushed up to his aid.

Eager hands gripped the sack and wrenched it down until it came almost to the wriggling, yelping prefect's knees. Then Tom Merry whipped a cord from his pocket, and ran it round and round the bundle containing Gerald Knox.

He had just finished when the grinning features and tousled head of Billy Brent appeared above the doors.

"Got him?" grinned the youth. "Good egg! Bring 'im round, young gents!"

The youth spoke in a whisper, but none of the juniors answered him by words. They were risking nothing. Treating a prefect in such a decidedly high-handed manner was no joke—to the school authorities, and to Knox, at all events!

The next moment Knox, with muffled howls and wildly thrashing legs, was rushed to the door of the warehouse and flung inside like a sack of corn!

He dropped on to some empty sacking, and then, with a grinning nod to show that he understood what to do, Billy Brent followed the juniors out.

"All serene, you fellows!" he grinned. "The boss won't be 'ere until five o'clock, an' I'll let this merchant loose afore then. Leave it ter me."

"Good man!" breathed Tom Merry cautiously. "We won't forget this, Billy."

Billy grinned again, and closed the door on the juniors. In the street the juniors blinked at each other breathlessly. They wanted to roar with laughter, but they daredn't yet.

"Worked like a charm!" grinned Tom Merry. "Knoxy couldn't possibly have spotted one of us, and he can prove nothing if he does choose to make a fuss about it. But I fancy he won't do that. He's been done down, and he won't want to be the laughing stock of St. Jim's by letting this out. Now for that awful ass Grundy."

And, with a hasty, cautious glance round him, Tom Merry hurried forward towards the Bull Head's Inn. Outside the front entrance—closed at that hour of the day—a fat man, wearing a stained, green-baise apron, was lounging, smoking a pipe.

It was the innkeeper, and Tom Merry hurried to him after another sharp glance round.

"There's a schoolboy in there," said Tom, pointing to the window near the side door. "We want him urgently. Please tell him to come out of there at once. Tell him there's danger."

The man took his pipe slowly from his mouth and blinked at Tom.

"Ho!" he grunted. "Is there? My heye! Well, what abart it?"

"Tell him to come out," said Tom, his voice showing his anxiety. "Please tell him at once."

"Ho! All right."

Evidently the innkeeper was aware that he had a schoolboy visitor inside. He replaced his pipe, and, opening the door, vanished into the inn. He had not been absent a minute when the side door opened abruptly, and Grundy marched out.

He came out quite openly, as if he were just emerging from the School House doorway at St. Jim's. He jumped

as he sighted Tom Merry and the group of juniors a few yards away.

"Hallo!" he snorted. "What the thump do you fellows want here? I'm surprised to see you fellows hanging about a place like this, I must say!"

"Well, I'm hanged!" snorted Tom.

To be spoken to like that by Grundy, in the circumstances, was rather astonishing. But Tom was used to Grundy's little ways, and he soon got over his astonishment.

"You—you awful idiot!" he hissed, in concentrated tones. "What about you, Grundy? In that beastly—"

"Oh, me!" sniffed Grundy. "That's all right! It's different with a fellow like me, you know. Now just you kids clear out of this before someone comes along and spots you. D'you hear me—clear! Cheek, I call it, sending for me like this!"

"Yes, I hear you!" snapped Tom, beckoning to his waiting chums. "Now, you burbling, potty, hare-brained madman—come on! Out of this you come—sharp!"

"Eh—what? You talking to me?" said Grundy, his voice rising. "Look here, I've already told you once— Here, what the— Leggo! What the thunder— Yoop!"

Grundy's voice ended in a bellow, as Blake and the rest rushed up, and, in response to Tom's grim nod, grasped Grundy on every side. Then Blake planted a hearty kick behind Grundy, eliciting a yell of fury.

"March!" rapped out Tom Merry. "Now, you chaps!"

"Yaas, wathah! March, Gwunday!"

"Why, you rotters! Here, I won't march—"

But Grundy did march—or, rather, ran, his feet scarcely touching the ground as he went.

With numerous strong grasps upon him, and with numerous boots helping him from behind, Grundy went past the Bull's Head with a rush, and on to the towing-path at the bottom of the inn garden. Then the juniors turned him, and away the party went along the towing-path, Grundy fairly bellowing with astonished fury.

For a hundred yards, the party went at top speed in a breathless rush, and then Tom Merry gave the order to halt.

"Sit on the duffer!" he snapped.

"Yaas, wathah, bai Jove!"

It was done. Grundy was whirled over, and sat down hard on the cindered towing-path. Then he was rolled over, and Herries, Digby, Wilkins, and Gunn sat on him where they could.

"Now," said Tom Merry grimly, and a trifle breathlessly, "I don't know what your silly game is, Grundy, and I don't particularly want to know. But it's a game that's got to stop. Understand that?"

"Oh, you—you rotters!" spluttered Grundy, glowering up ferociously at his captors. "Oh, just wait until I get loose! I'll—I'll smash you all; I'll pulverise you all! Lemme gerrup, and I'll whop the lot of you together!"

"Not yet, old top!" said Tom. "Look here, Grundy, don't you realise what you're doing? You're risking certain sack by entering that beastly place. Have you gone suddenly mad?"

"Eh?" Grundy glared up at Tom. "Don't talk rot!" he snorted, his voice trembling with wrath. "Why shouldn't I go in that place if I want to? I know it would be the sack if you silly kids went in there; of course, it would. I'd whop you myself if ever I caught you going in there, in fact. But it's different with me."

"Oh, is it? You silly duffer—"

"I want none of your cheek!" roared Grundy. "Why, I might have been going to that place for some shady game, the silly way you talk! I tell you it's all right. Why, if you dare to suggest I went there to smoke and play billiards, and all that rot, I'll—I'll mop the dashed towing-path up with you!"

"Look here, you maniac—"

"I won't look anywhere!" roared Grundy. "You rotters! You got me outside there with a false message—said there was danger! Danger! Rot! Bosh! Bunkum! Danger for me—eh? Rubbish! It was spoof!"

"It wasn't spoof, Grundy," said Wilkins earnestly. "Do listen to me, you ass! Knox saw you go in there—Knox of the Sixth."

"Wha-what?"

Grundy was interested at last. Whether he really felt himself safe in entering the Bull's Head or not, he certainly was startled to hear that.

"Knox saw me?" he gasped. "Oh, crumbs!"

"Yes, he did!" snapped Tom Merry, in great exasperation. "It was thundering lucky for you that we were at hand, too. But I don't think he spotted you—recognised you, Grundy. In any case, he's out of the way—we saw to that. We shoved him in a sack, and he's lying in Sankey's warehouse."

"Oh! Then it's all right," said Grundy, recovering him-

self quickly. "Good! Then you fellows clear out, and I'll get back there."

"Will you!" snorted Tom Merry. "I don't think you will, you utter jabberwock! You're coming with us—back to St. Jim's, you chump!"

"I jolly well won't!"

"Then you'll be carried back. Up with him, you fellows! If he won't give us his word to come quietly, we'll frogs-march him through the streets of Wayland to the station. Up with him!"

"Come on, Grundy!"

Numerous hands gripped Grundy again, and he howled with rage as he was swung face downwards. Then the procession turned off the towing-path, taking a short cut up a narrow entry towards the town again.

By this time, Grundy realised that the juniors really meant their threat, and he howled with alarm now.

"Here, lemme down!" he yelled. "Great pip! You can't yanik me through the streets like this, you fools! Lemme down!"

The party, at a nod from Tom Merry, stopped again.

"For the last time, Grundy!" said Tom Merry grimly. "Unless you want to be frogs-marched through Wayland like this, you'll give us your word to come with us quietly. Sharp, now!"

"Rotters!—Oh, you—you cheeky rotters!" gasped Grundy. But a glance at the grim faces of the juniors showed Grundy that they were in earnest, and he caved in then. Grundy was the last fellow in the world to want to be frogs-marched through a town like Wayland. Grundy had a great idea of his importance and dignity, and the very thought of such a humiliating ordeal made him shudder.

"All—all right, you rotters!" he gasped. "I'll give you my word! I'll come quietly! But—but I'll smash—I'll pulverise you all to a jelly for this, you see if I don't!"

The terrible threat left the juniors unmoved. They grinned.

"Let him down, chaps!" said Tom Merry. "We can take Grundy's word."

"Yaas, wathah! Let Gwunday down, deah boys!"

Bump!

"Yoooooop!"

Grundy was let down—rather suddenly, and he howled. He scrambled up again, red with towering wrath. But remembering himself in time, he dropped his great fists, and scowled at the grinning juniors.

"Oh, you—you rotters! You cheeky rotters!" he gasped, glowering ferociously at the juniors, especially at Wilkins and Gunn. "All right, Wilkins; all right, Gunn! I'll remember this! Nice pals you are—I don't think!" he added bitterly.

"If we weren't pals, Grundy," said Wilkins, "we should have left you to stew in your own juice, you burbling idiot! As it is, we've saved you from the sack. And this is all the thanks we get!"

"Rot! Bunkum! Rubbish!"

That was, apparently, Grundy's view of the danger he had been in. But he said nothing further after that, but accompanied the juniors in bitter, morose silence to the station. Grundy's feelings were, apparently, too deep for mere words.

CHAPTER 4.

Only Ventriloquism!

"**W**OW-wow-wow!"

"What the thump—"

"Wow-wow-wow! Gur-r-r-r-r-rrr!"

"Great pip!"

"Bai Jove!"

The juniors were astonished, as well they might be.

It came so suddenly, so unexpectedly.

Tom Merry & Co. and Wilkins and Gunn had caught the Rylcombe train just in time, and they had boarded it—with Grundy.

Grundy had not boarded it willingly—far from it. But he had given his word to his captors, and he had kept it to the letter. He knew just what to expect if he failed to keep it.

The St. Jim's juniors had managed to get a carriage to themselves—a crush for ten juniors—and they had left the great and indignant George Alfred to himself in one corner of the compartment.

Then they had dismissed him from their mind to some extent. Tom Merry & Co. had other things to think about than Grundy—footer, for instance. And leaving Grundy to his own devices, they had started to discuss footer.

As a general rule, when footer was being discussed Grundy was all there—very much all there. And usually, the juniors allowed Grundy to talk footer with them. What Grundy did not know about the grand winter game would have

filled dozens of volumes. Yet, for all that, Grundy talking footer was very entertaining, and the juniors usually listened to him with chuckles and grins.

Grundy, however, did not seem to want to discuss footer this afternoon. While the buzz of cheery voices filled the compartment, he remained silent, as in a garment of lofty dignity, his brow puckered in deep thought. Several times Tom Merry had glanced at him smilingly, and he had been rather puzzled at Grundy's face. At first the Shell junior had been obviously sulking, but gradually his expression changed—a change apparently due to his deep thoughts.

And then, quite suddenly, those extraordinary noises had come from the corner where he sat, quite startling the juniors.

"Wow-wow-wow! Gur-r-r-r-r-rrrr!"

It was something like the barking and growling of a particularly ferocious dog. And it obviously—very obviously—proceeded from George Alfred Grundy.

The juniors ceased their rather heated discussion regarding footer, and blinked at Grundy. They were quite alarmed at the extraordinary expression on his face. It was twisted up, as if Grundy were trying to tie his features into a knot.

"Gur-r-r-r-r-r! Wow-wow-wow! Grr-r-rrrr!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Oh dear!"

Wilkins was seated next to Grundy, and he edged away nervously. On the opposite seat to Grundy was Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, and that junior blinked through his monocle in great distress at Grundy.

"Oh, bai Jove!" he murmured. "Gwunday, whatevah is the mattah?"

"Gur-r-r-r-r-r-r-r! Gurrrrrrrr!"

This time it was a truly terrifying series of growls and snarls, and they all came from Grundy.

"What—what—"

Wilkins' voice tailed off weakly. Considering Grundy's strange behaviour that afternoon, it was, perhaps, no wonder that Wilkins was badly scared now. Grundy's face, indeed, was enough to scare anyone.

A tense silence fell upon the compartment. Grundy ceased to screw up his features, and ceased to make those extraordinary noises.

He seemed quite disappointed and disgusted at something—evidently at the fact that all the juniors were looking at him. He had apparently expected them to look somewhere else for the cause of the sounds.

"Well?" he grunted rather disgustedly. "You fellows heard that, didn't you?"

"Eh? Of course we heard it, you ass!" said Tom Merry, a trifle nervously. "What's the silly game, Grundy? What were you making those thumping noises for? Think you've turned suddenly into a bow-wow?"

Grundy did not speak; he seemed to be quite taken aback.

"You—you think I made those noises?" he gasped.

"Of course you did, dummy!"

"But—but—"

Grundy seemed at a loss for words. Then his eyes gleamed, and once again his features were contorted, and it seemed as though he were once again trying to burst a bloodvessel. Then out it came:

"Wow-wow-wow! Gurrrrrrrrrr!"

As the noises ceased Grundy gave a yelp—in his own tones now—and after a hasty glance under the seat he leaped up upon it.

"Look out, you fellows! It's under the seat!"

"Wha-what-what—"

"The dog! Can't you hear it?"

"Wow-wow-wow! Gurrrrrr!"

"Bai Jove!"

The juniors leaped up in great alarm. But they did not look under the seat. They just stared at Grundy, crowding back from him. There was no need to look under the seat for any dog. No dog ever made sounds like that. Moreover the sounds came from Grundy himself—there was no doubt, no possible room for doubt about that.

"Mind!" called Grundy, stooping and trying to look under the seat. "Keep away! He might be dangerous! Hark!"

"Grrrrrrrrr! Wow-wow-wow!"

"Oh dear!"

For another instant they blinked at Grundy, and then quite suddenly Tom Merry gave a gasp. In one fleeting instant enlightenment came to him. He understood it all now, every bit of it. He remembered the events of the afternoon, and quite abruptly he doubled up and howled with laughter.

"Ha, ha, ha! Oh, my hat! Ha, ha, ha!"

"What the thump—" began Blake.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tom. "Can't you see? It's only Grundy ventriloquising. He thinks he's a—ha, ha, ha!—giddy ventriloquist. That's why he was making those noises in his study, that's why he's been hobnobbing with that boozey ventriloquist!"

"Oh!"

"I—I see!"

"Bai Jove! Gweat Scott! The—the sillay—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's astonished remarks were cut short by a howl of laughter as Blake and the rest "tumbled" to the meaning of it all.

From his stand on the carriage-seat Grundy looked down at the laughing juniors, his face growing redder and redder, until it closely resembled a beetroot in colour. It was only too obvious—too painfully obvious—that Tom Merry had hit on the truth. Grundy's face was clear, undoubted proof of that.

Very slowly he stepped down from the seat. It was really not much good trying to persuade Tom Merry & Co. that there really was a ferocious dog under the seat now. Tom Merry had quite given the game away.

"Look here!" stammered Grundy. "What the thump d'you think you're cackling at?"

"A—ha, ha, ha!—giddy ventriloquist!" cackled Tom Merry. "Oh dear! Ha, ha, ha! You'll be the death of me yet, Grundy!"

"Bai Jove!" gasped Arthur Augustus D'Arcy faintly.

"So now you know my secret," said Grundy, rather loftily. "I wasn't going to let it out until I was perfect—though I'm practically that now. Captain Fox was just telling me so when you silly asses butted in with your silly danger rot!"

"Oh!" grinned Tom Merry. "So that's it. You visited that giddy, boozy ventriloquist to get lessons from him. Was that what you were doing there, Grundy?"

"Of course it was!" snorted Grundy. "What the thump did you think I was after in that beastly hole? Captain Fox is charging me a pretty stiff fee for the course—two quid a lesson, in fact. But it's worth it. He said it was himself."

"Oh, my hat!"

"Anyway, you know about it now, and I shall expect you fellows to keep it mum, of course. It will spoil everything if it gets out among the chaps at St. Jim's," said Grundy seriously. "I don't want that, of course—yet. Of course, it will have to come out at the week-end—the concert, you know."

"The—the concert!" echoed Tom Merry. "You mean my concert in aid of the Rylcombe Infirmary, Grundy?"

"Of course, you dummy! I shall want a good show at



St. Jim's Jingles!

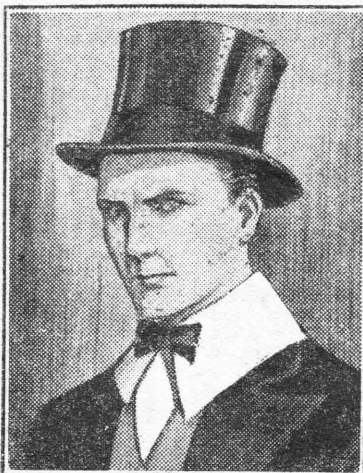


No. 18. AUBREY RACKE.

THE dude and dandy of St. Jim's
Is neither fine nor famous;
His boastful airs, his cad-
dish whims,
With rightful rage inflame us.
He looks on us with scornful sneer,
And treats the fags like lackeys.
There's not a fellow on this sphere
So base a snob as Racke is!

His pater was a profiteer,
As crafty as an eagle;
His goods were sold at prices dear,
And brought him gains illegal.
He's now a bloated millionaire,
And leads a life of leisure.
Smart cars to drive—smart clothes to
wear—
One giddy whirl of pleasure!

The son is modelled on his sire,
Of wealth he's always dreaming;
And few there are who can admire
His ways so dark and scheming.
At worshipping the golden calf
He hasn't a superior;
He's too stuck-up and proud by half,
And thinks the rest inferior.



AUBREY RACKE.
The Black Sheep of the Shell.

His chosen chum is Gerald Crooke;
They're often seen together,
Strolling to some secluded nook—
Birds of a kindred feather.
With Percy Mellish they proceed,
These rascals base and caddish,
To puff by stealth the fragrant
weed,
Or else a "Flor de Radish"!

The decent fellows in the school
Shun Aubrey Racke's society;
They like their schooldays to be full
Of pleasure and variety.
But they believe in healthy sport,
Not shady recreation;
Manly and straight, they're not the
sort
To sink to dissipation.

But Nemesis is on the track
Of every "blade" and "goer";
And I would strongly counsel Racke
To go a trifle slower.
Or he'll be hauled before the Head
For sentence of expulsion.
No tears of sorrow will we shed—
We view him with revulsion!

NEXT WEEK :—MRS. TAGGLES, THE TUCK SHOP DAME

Grundy clenched his great fists.

"Why, I'll—I'll smash the lot of you!" he burst out in a sudden roar. "Laugh at me, would you? I suppose you think I can't do it! I suppose you're going to pretend I'm not a ventriloquist!"

"Oh crumbs! Ha, ha, ha!"

"You cackling dummies!" roared Grundy. "I know just what it is! You knew jolly well I was ventriloquising, and you pretended it sounded as if it came from me. I know it didn't. I know it sounded just as if it came from under the seat. Why, that chap, Captain Fox, said I was nearly perfect and scarcely needed many more lessons in the art. He told me that this afternoon—told me so himself. And he ought to know, being the greatest ventriloquist on the boards. Yah! Think I can't see through you fellows, you rotters!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Grundy's remarks served to increase the uncontrollable mirth of the juniors. Wilkins and Gunn almost choked as they thought of that scene in their study.

that, Tom Merry. Remember that when you're getting your programme out, I've already sent a cheque for a ventriloquial figure. It'll be here by Saturday morning. I rather fancy I shall make the chaps sit up on Saturday night!"

"Oh crumbs! And you think you're going to give a show at the concert, Grundy?"

"Naturally!"

"You—you burbling idiot!"

"Eh? What?"

"You chumpheaded, fatheaded dummy of a born idiot!" grinned Tom Merry. "Why, I wouldn't have you as a dashed programme seller, Grundy?"

"Look here—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors howled at the expression of growing wrath on Grundy's face. He glared at them, and something

seemed to tell him at last that they were, indeed, laughing at him.

"That's cheek!" he said, glaring at Tom Merry. "I'll show you what's what, Merry! Laugh at me, would you? I promised I'd come quietly, and I've kept my word. But I didn't promise to let you off a whopping when we got here. I'm going to give you that now, and I'm going to start on you, Merry."

With that Grundy rushed at Tom Merry. But he never reached him.

"On the ball!" chuckled Monty Lowther.

They all fell on Grundy as one man, and Grundy went down on the carriage floor, roaring with fury. And at that moment the train ran into Rylcombe Station and slowed up. Tom Merry opened the carriage door and jumped out.

"Come on, out with the silly ass!" he said. "Yank him out! We've had enough Grundy for one afternoon."

Yelling and howling threats, George Alfred was yanked out of the train and fairly strewn on the platform. Then after bumping him several times on the planks of the platform, the laughing juniors left him there, roaring with anguish, and started out for St. Jim's. Grundy leaped to his feet as they streamed away, and he seemed about to charge after Tom Merry & Co. But after running a few yards in pursuit he changed his mind and slowed down. Apparently, even Grundy, mighty fighting man as he was, had had enough for that afternoon.

CHAPTER 5.

More Ventriloquism!

"OH dear! He's at it again! Hark!"
Outside the door of Study No. 3 Wilkins and Gunn paused, and Wilkins made that remark in tones of utter disgust.

It was some time since the juniors had arrived back at St. Jim's, but Wilkins and Gunn had given Grundy a wide berth. But it was now well past tea-time, and Wilkins and Gunn were hungry—very hungry, therefore they decided to risk the wrath of Grundy.

But they had come along the passage to their study very slowly, and very apprehensively for all that. Grundy was a handful even for two fellows to tackle, and Wilkins and Gunn guessed that they were in for a high old time after what had happened.

Yet, now they had to face Grundy's indignant wrath and scorn, Wilkins and Gunn began to feel a trifle sorry that they had not backed him up. There was not only the prospect of no tea if Grundy chose to be on his dignity, or wrath. Grundy was the man of wealth in that study. When Grundy stood a tea—as he usually did—it was a good tea. There was nothing mean about Grundy. He stood tea as a matter of course, never even seeming to expect Wilkins or Gunn to stand it. And Grundy's uncle kept his nephew well supplied with cash. It was, perhaps, the one thing that made Wilkins and Gunn stand Grundy. Most fellows vowed they could never stand him, even considering that.

But there it was. On this afternoon both Wilkins and Gunn were stony-broke to the wide, as Gunn expressed it, and they were hungry.

"It doesn't sound as if the ass has started getting tea ready, even," grunted Gunn.

"Ya-ha! Gugg-goor!"

The two chums stood outside the closed door and listened, with looks of utter disgust on their faces. From within the room came the sounds that were no longer regarded by Gunn and Wilkins as mysterious.

"Yes, he's at it again!" groaned Wilkins.

"The awful ass!" said Gunn.

"Awful!" agreed Wilkins. "Fancy a fellow fancying that that's ventriloquism! He must be potty!"

"He is potty—no doubt about that," said Gunn morosely. "But we'll have to humour him, Wilkins. I want my tea."
"So do I," said Wilkins, nodding gloomily. "I suppose we'll have to humour him, as you say. We'll pretend to think his dashed ventriloquial rot's ripping, Gunn. We'll praise it no end. He'll perhaps come round then, and see about tea. Come on! We'll risk it!"

"Yes, rather, Wilky!"

Wilkins opened the door cautiously and peeped into the room. Then he stepped inside, with Gunn at his heels, both of them ready to bolt at the first sign of trouble.

But there was no trouble to be faced, apparently. Grundy seemed quite to have forgotten their recent little differences. "Oh, here you are, you chaps!" he said agreeably. "I'm jolly glad you've come in at last! I want to try the voice on the roof on you. I want you to tell me candidly if it really does sound like a man on the roof—a man mending the roof, you know. You've got to imagine that, of course. I'm quite satisfied myself, but I'd rather like the

opinion of you fellows before trying it on an audience on Saturday night. If you fellows think it perfect, all well and good. If you're at all doubtful, I want you to be quite candid, and I'll mug it up a bit more before Saturday. Personally I think I'm quite perfect now."

"D-dud-do you?" gasped Wilkins.

"Yes. Now listen! I say, are you there?"

Grundy placed his head up the chimney and called up.

But before he could answer, Gunn, who had noted with disgust that the table-cloth was not even laid for tea, chipped in hastily.

"Here, half a moment, Grundy, old fellow!" he said. "What about tea, old chap? Let's have tea first, and then we'll have a jolly good rehearsal. How's that?"

Grundy withdrew his head and glared at his study-mate—glared at him in withering scorn.

"Now, isn't that just like you, Gunn!" he snorted. "Can't thundering well think about anything but dashed grub! Bah! What do you think about Art? Nothing! Tea be blowed! Who wants tea? I don't. Let tea rip then. I've something more important on. You can see that, can't you? Now just listen and be quite quiet."

"But we want our tea," snorted Wilkins in great exasperation. "That rot—I mean the ventriloquism can wait until then, surely? We—we're dying to hear it, of course, Grundy. But—but we're hungry. You can't expect fellows to give a candid opinion of your capabilities as a ventriloquist on an empty stomach, can you now?"

But Wilkins' appeal, well-reasoned and a trifle pathetic as it was, fell upon deaf ears.

"You—you burbling dummies!" snorted Grundy in his turn. "Don't I keep telling you that I don't want any tea?"

"But we do, you ass!"

"What does that matter? Now just be quiet and listen. I say, are you there?"

"Yes, I'm 'ere, guv'nor," came the voice in reply—Grundy's own voice.

"Where are you?"

"Up the chimney!"

"What are you doing there?"

"Mending the roof, guv'nor!"

Grundy turned a red and agonised face to his staring study-mates.

"There!" he said triumphantly. "What do you fellows think about that? Realistic, what?"

Wilkins and Gunn blinked at him. They were staggered—dumbfounded that any fellow could possibly be such an awful ass as Grundy. That he should imagine for one moment that the replies he gave sounded as if they came from up the chimney simply amazed Wilkins and Gunn. How any fellow outside an asylum could be under such a delusion beat them hollow. They scarcely knew whether to weep for their hapless study-mate, or to roar with laughter.

But they did neither. They were hungry, and wanted their tea.

"Wonderful!" gasped Wilkins, winking at Gunn. "Simply wonderful!"

"Marvellous!" agreed Gunn, trying his utmost to gaze admiringly at Grundy without grinning openly. "You—you're a wonder at it, Grundy, old fellow. That fellow Foxy, or whatever his name is, was a perfect idiot compared to you."

Grundy grinned a trifle complacently. He liked flattery, and he liked it in chunks.

"Rather good, what?" he said patronisingly. "That's nothing to what I can do, though."

"It—it was splendid, Grundy—really splendid! I've really never heard such a ventriloquist as you before!" gasped Wilkins.

"Never!" agreed Gunn quite truthfully. "Neither of them had ever heard a ventriloquist quite like Grundy before. "It was simply top-hole, Grundy, old man. We really must hear you do it again, after tea. Now what about tea? Shall I lay the cloth?"

"Eh? Cloth!" said Grundy. "Of course not! We've no time for tea, you dummy! I shall need every minute of my time if I'm to get everything perfect by Saturday. Now I'm going to try the man behind the screen on you. Ready?"

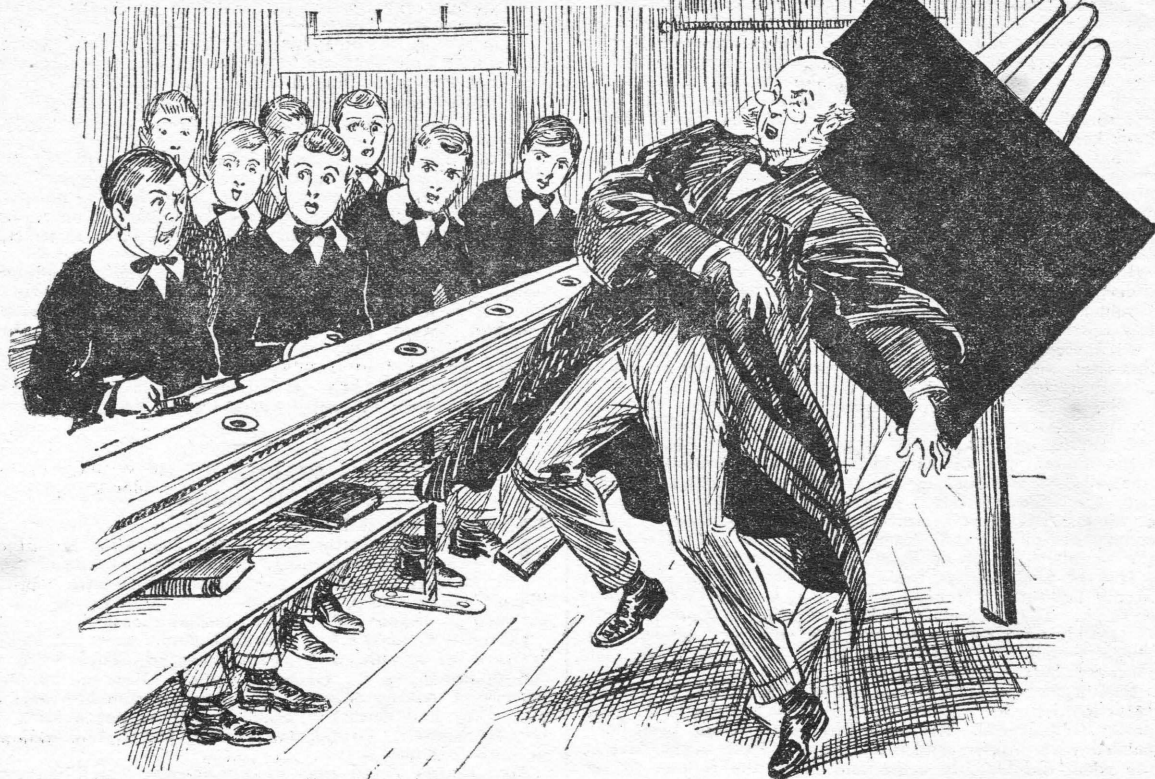
"No, we're jolly well not ready, Grundy!" snorted Gunn, losing patience a little. "Look here, Grundy, we want our tea. That rubbish—I mean that—that splendid ventriloquism can wait, surely, old fellow. Let's have tea first."

"Yes, tea first," said Wilkins. "You'll be able to do yourself real justice after a good square meal, Grundy. I'm simply dying to hear you behind the screen—I mean do the screen stunt. But let's have tea first."

It was Grundy's turn to lose patience.

"Don't I keep telling you dummies that I don't want any dashed tea?" he hooted. "Tea be blowed! Besides, there's nothing in the cupboard. That fat thief Trimble must have

"Lemme out, for goodness' sake, guv'nor! I'm suffocating in 'ere! You old buffer in the gown, lemme out!" Mr. Linton eyed Grundy aghast as those remarks issued from his mouth. "Good gracious!" gasped the Form-master. He backed away, from Grundy until he brought up abruptly against the blackboard. And with a crash blackboard and easel clattered to the floor. (See Chapter 7.)



been scrounging round here while we were at Wayland. He's cleaned the cupboard out."

"Wha-at?"

"And I'm cleaned out, too!" snorted Grundy. "Haven't a blessed penny to spend on dashed teas. Blow teas!"

"But—but you had three quids this morning!" gasped Gunn.

"I know. But I handed Captain Fox all that," explained Grundy airily. "Two quid for to-day's lesson, and a quid in advance on account of to-morrow's. See? I was going to borrow of you chaps to pay his other quid to-morrow. Now just stop this tea rot, and attend to me. Now I'm supposed to be speaking to a chap behind that screen, aren't I? He's only an imaginary man, really, but—"

Grundy was interrupted.

"You—you burbling, howling maniac!" hooted Wilkins. "You mean to tell us you've paid that boozezy boulder three quid to-day?"

"Three quid, and left nothing for tea?" howled Gunn.

"Eh? Look here—" Grundy was beginning warmly, but again he was interrupted. This time it was a cushion that caught him full in the face and fairly bowled him over. He went backwards, sitting down amid the fire-irons with a tremendous clatter and a tremendous howl of wrath.

"Yarooooh!" he roared fiendishly. "Why, I'll—I'll make dashed mincemeat of you howling rotters for that. Why, I'll—I'll—"

Scrambling from the fireplace, Grundy made a blind rush at his study-mates, fairly raging with fury. But, for once, Wilkins and Gunn did not turn tail and bolt. They gave each other a hasty glance, and then they stood their ground, and grasped at Grundy as he rushed at them. Grundy's fist struck Gunn's nose hard, but after reeling back a moment, Gunn recovered himself, and flung himself to aid Wilkins. The three of them crashed to the floor, struggling furiously.

With Grundy bellowing furiously the three struggled and rolled over the carpet. But Grundy, mighty man as he was, did not get the better of the encounter—far from it. Wilkins and Gunn were furious, and they proceeded to put Grundy through it. Heedless of his bellowing threats, they rolled him over, and, after rubbing his head in the cinders, Wilkins snatched a bottle of ink from the table, and tipped it over Grundy's hair and rubbed it well home. Then, at a signal from Wilkins, both of them released Grundy suddenly and leaped for the door. They rushed out, leaving

Grundy seated on the carpet, feeling as if he had been through a threshing machine, and in a state of mind bordering on madness.

CHAPTER 6. Not Appreciated!

"THAT awful ass!"

"That frabjous imbecile!"

Wilkins and Gunn were referring, of course, to George Alfred Grundy.

They had just met the Terrible Three in the passage, and they were telling those grinning juniors about Grundy. It was just before morning lessons the next day, and by that time Wilkins and Gunn were full up on the subject of their study-mate, and also, to use Wilkins' phrase, "fed-up."

For Grundy was still "going it" with his ventriloquism. The little, disappointing "set-backs" he had experienced so far did not deter or dismay Grundy in the slightest. He understood quite well what they meant. The fellows knew he was ventriloquising, and they simply pretended not to believe that the noises and voices came from anywhere else but him. There was a general conspiracy against him on the subject. They all refused to admit that he was a ventriloquist. Sheer dog-in-the-manger jealousy, of course. But there it was. That was Grundy's view.

After that unfortunate disagreement concerning tea in Study No. 3, Wilkins did not see their chum until bed-time. They themselves took good care of that. Meeting Tom Merry in the passage just afterwards, they had gladly accepted Tom's invitation to tea in Study No. 10, and they had stayed for prep, and had afterwards spent the rest of the evening in the Common-room, chiefly discussing Grundy.

It was rather an anxious evening for Wilkins and Gunn, and also, to a less extent, for Tom Merry & Co. and Blake & Co. They had by no means forgotten the adventure with Gerald Knox, the prefect. They knew that Knox would suspect them as a matter of course, whether he happened to have any proof or not. Knox was always more or less "up against" the chums of the School House. And if he did happen to charge them on suspicion, and haul them up before Mr. Railton, they knew, not being given to lying, that the keen Housemaster would soon "bowl them out."

But fortunately Knox did not do that. He met Tom Merry in the passage just after prep, and he stopped and seemed about to speak. But changing his mind again, he walked on, giving the captain of the Shell a savage, helpless glare.

It was evidently just as Tom Merry had opined. Knox had no intention of making the matter public without proof. He obviously suspected the juniors of that attack in Wayland, but he could prove nothing. Therefore—like a wise fellow, if a savage one—he said nothing, preferring to let the matter drop rather than make himself a laughing-stock before the school to no purpose. If he could have got somebody flogged, or sacked over it, the matter would have been different.

That was evidently Knox's view. And when Knox turned away from him with that helpless, savage glare, Tom Merry understood that, and he smiled cheerily, knowing that the danger was past.

But though that danger was past for Wilkins and Gunn, there was still the danger from Grundy left. And so, until bedtime, they gave their study-mate a very wide berth indeed. And at bedtime they prepared themselves for trouble. But no trouble came. Grundy did not attempt any reprisals. He seemed far too full of his ventriloquism.

All the fellows had heard about Grundy's new "stunt" by this time, and the Shell fellows went to bed fully expecting an entertainment by the great George Alfred.

They were not disappointed. Before Kildare, who was seeing lights out, was out of the room, Grundy had started. He started by making the sounds of a dog-fight proceed from under one of the beds—at least, Grundy fondly imagined he was making the sounds come from under the bed, and that the sounds resembled a dog-fight. Actually, to anyone but a born idiot, as Lowther expressed it, the sounds obviously came from Grundy, and they resembled the sounds made by no animal on this earth.

But the Shell fellows, taking their cue from the humorous Monty Lowther, pretended to think as Grundy wished them to think. They expressed their admiration in glowing terms of Grundy's marvellous performance, and they howled with laughter—not at Grundy's skill, as he fondly imagined, however, but at Grundy himself.

But, funny as Grundy undoubtedly was in the role of ventriloquist, the juniors tired of his ventriloquism long before Grundy did. And only after his bed had been bombarded with slippers and other articles from every part of the room did Grundy cease and allow the fellows to get to sleep.

Altogether, Wilkins and Gunn went to sleep that night greatly relieved, and they were more relieved still when Grundy tumbled out of bed at rising-bell the next morning merry and bright as ever. He nodded cheerily to his chums, and confidentially informed them that he proposed to "make things hum" in the Form-room that morning, and that he was going to make Linton "sit up."

This information rather upset his chums' feelings of relief. After all, they were Grundy's pals, and they did not want to see him get into serious trouble, as he undoubtedly was! But though they pleaded with Grundy not to act the goat in class, it was all to no purpose. And now Wilkins was telling the Terrible Three what to expect when they referred to Grundy as "That awful ass!" and "That frajious imbecile!"

"Well, he's all that, certainly," said Tom Merry. "My hat! He must be potty—absolutely potty! He'll get scalped if he tries any of his idiotic tricks on Linton!"

"Yes, rather!"

"Have you tried to make him see sense?" asked Tom Merry. "Dash it all, we don't want the idiot to get—Hallo, he's here!"

Grundy came along briskly, a self-satisfied grin on his rugged features.

"Just going in—what?" he asked cheerily. "Well, you're going to see some fun this morning, chaps. I'm going to make old Linton wonder if he's in his right senses. You fellows heard me ventriloquising in the dorm last night—"

"Ha, ha! Yes; just a few!" grinned Lowther.

Tom Merry was looking serious, however.

"You frajious chump!" he said in measured accents. "Don't be such a born idiot, Grundy! If you start any of your dashed silly games in the Form-room you'll get it where the chicken got the chopper!"

"Oh, cheese it—cheese it!" grinned Grundy, winking. "I know how you feel about it, Merry. Jealous, and all that, you know. You seem to think my ventriloquism will make me more popular than you, and I shall bag the captaincy of the Shell. Well, I don't know if I shall refuse it if the fellows ask me. I shall take it on from motives of patriotism, you see. The fact is you're absolutely no good as captain, Merry—no good at all!"

"Thanks, Grundy," said Tom dryly. "But I warn you that if you start these silly ventriloquist games on with the

masters you'll be looking for another school, never mind the captaincy of the Shell."

"Rot! Bosh! Bunkum!"

And, with those elegant remarks, Grundy was walking away when Wilkins caught him desperately by the arm.

"You burbling fathead!" he hissed. "Can't you see that Merry's only warning you for your own good? If you start your games with Linton—"

"I'm going to pull Linton's leg right out," grinned Grundy. "You shut up, George Wilkins! I might tell you that I'm in rattling fine form this morning. I've just been practising on Trimble—that fat ass in the Fourth, you know. I fairly made him open his eyes."

"Dud-did you?"

"Yes. The fat frog refused to admit it was my voice that came from the coal-scuttle at first. Jealousy again, you know. But I shoved my fist under his fat nose, and he soon admitted it then. Spoke the truth for once. Said it was wonderful. He's not at all a bad chap at times, is Trimble."

And with that Grundy grinned again and walked away towards the Form-room. It was just as well he did so, too, for as he vanished into the Form-room Tom Merry & Co. and Wilkins and Gunn stared after him for a brief second, and then they doubled up and howled.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

They could not help it. Concerned as they were on Grundy's behalf, he really was too much for their gravity.

CHAPTER 7.

Poor Old Grundy!

THERE was rather an air of subdued excitement and expectancy in the Shell Form-room when Mr. Linton came in that morning. All the fellows had heard of Grundy's intention to "make things hum" and to make "Linton sit up," and most of the fellows were looking forward to lessons with quite unusual pleasure.

Certainly Grundy's own personal chums were not looking forward to lessons with much pleasure. They were far too apprehensive on Grundy's behalf. But the majority were just looking forward to an entertainment—that was all. They had neither apprehensive fears nor anxiety for Grundy himself. Grundy was asking for it, and that was his own look-out.

Mr. Linton noted that something was "on"—he could hardly fail to note it—also that Grundy was the centre of glances—grinning glances—from every part of the room.

But he said nothing, though he looked very keenly at Grundy.

The lesson started, and proceeded on its uneventful way for some time. Many of the juniors were even getting impatient, and they nodded and made gestures to Grundy, apparently urging him to begin. Roman history was all very well, but it did not come up to Grundy's ventriloquism as an entertainment.

But Grundy was only biding his time, and his chance came at last.

Grundy had been told by "Captain" Fox during the course of his lessons on ventriloquism, that it was necessary, before throwing one's voice anywhere, to draw the public's attention to the spot whence he wished them to believe the sound proceeded, beforehand.

Grundy remembered this now. Mr. Linton was writing on the blackboard, and his back was to Grundy. Seeing his chance, Grundy grasped his ruler, and slipping from his place he rapped sharply on the door of the cupboard a yard or so away from him. Then he jumped back into his seat.

Mr. Linton wheeled round from the blackboard as that sharp rap sounded through the silent room.

"What was that?" he snapped. "Who made that noise?"

Grundy volunteered information.

"Didn't it seem to come from that cupboard, sir?" he asked innocently.

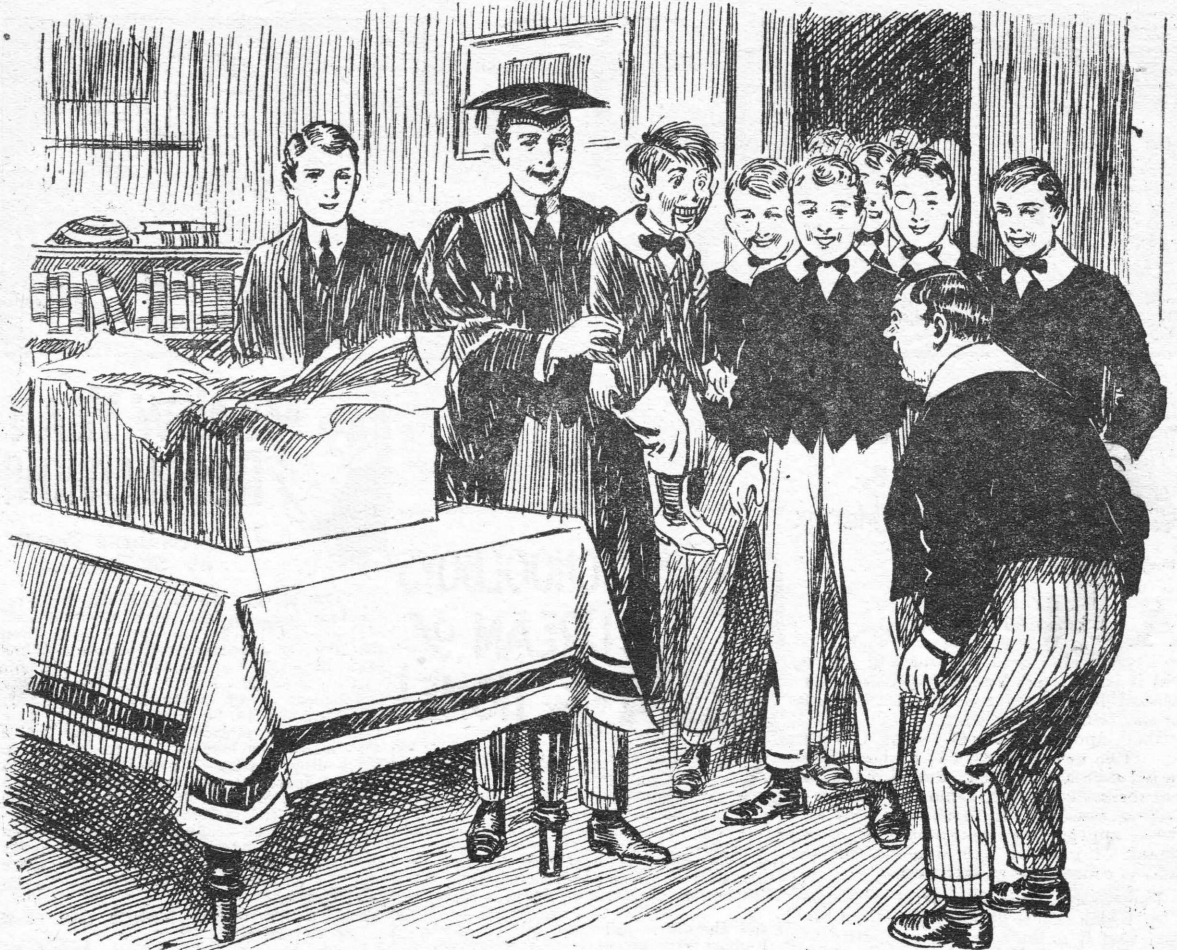
There was rather a breathless silence. All eyes turned on Grundy. Grundy was "going it" at last!

"Yes, it certainly did come from that cupboard, Grundy!" said Mr. Linton, in an ominous voice. "Did you dare to leave your place, Grundy, in order to— Bless my soul, boy! Why are you screwing up your face in that extraordinary manner? Are you ill, Grundy?"

"Lemme out! I'm suffocated! Lemme out!"

The words, spoken in a kind of choking growl, made Mr. Linton jump. He stared and stared, but not at the cupboard, as Grundy had expected him to; he stared at Grundy. All the fellows stared at Grundy, some in a scared way, and the majority with broad, delighted grins.

The voice, disguised as it was, was Grundy's voice, and it came from Grundy. There was no shadow of a doubt about that. In breathless silence, the juniors waited for the storm to break. It soon did break!



Mr. Railton held up the doll, and a roar of laughter went up from the juniors gathered in the doorway. "Is this—the corpse?" asked the master blandly. "Oh!" gasped Trimble in dumbfounded amazement. "Oh crumbs! I thought it was a corpse!" "Ha, ha, ha!" (See Chapter 8.)

"Grundy!" thundered Mr. Linton, in a scandalised tone. "Have you taken leave of your senses, boy? Are you ill? What does this nonsense—this absurd buffoonery mean, Grundy? Why did you speak in that—that extraordinary manner?"

Grundy started. Was it possible that he was not perfect, after all? Was it possible that he had not practised enough? Mr. Linton was addressing him—Grundy! He had not even looked at the cupboard, much less rushed to it to the help of an imaginary individual who was suffocating inside.

It was really remarkable to Grundy.

He decided to try his luck again. At all cost, Mr. Linton must be convinced that the voice did come from the cupboard, or he—Grundy—was "for it."

He screwed up his face again. Grundy's face was not handsome at any time. It was more homely than pretty. But when he screwed up his features in order to ventriloquise, Grundy looked positively fiendish.

Mr. Linton eyed him aghast. He jumped again as that weird voice came from Grundy's twisted lips:

"Lemme out, for goodness' sake, guv'nor! I'm suffocating in 'ere! You in the gown—you old buffer in the gown! Lemme out! Grooooh! I'm dying! Grooooh!"

"What—what—"

Groan, groan, groan!

"G-good gracious!" gasped Mr. Linton faintly.

He blinked in petrified alarm at Grundy, as those words, followed by a series of truly remarkable groans, came from his lips.

He backed away from Grundy, backed away until he brought up abruptly against the blackboard behind him with a jolt that brought the board crashing down from the easel. Crash, crash, crash!

Mr. Linton leaped into the air, narrowly escaping the blackboard as it fell. He was obviously scared—scared of Grundy. Grundy was mad, had suddenly taken leave of his senses! He had always had grave suspicions regarding Grundy's sanity. It was distressing, terrible!

That was Mr. Linton's grave fear as he backed up against the blackboard. But he changed that view as the blackboard fell. For as it fell there arose a howl of laughter from the juniors.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Grundy's attempts at ventriloquism, and his blissful belief that his voice sounded from the cupboard, had been enough. But Mr. Linton's obvious fears had proved too much for their gravity. Their chuckles and grins developed into a roar of laughter as the blackboard crashed down.

And the laughter brought enlightenment to Mr. Linton. Grundy was not mad, after all, then! It was all a practical joke on his part; the laughter of the juniors told him that. He had been tricked. He had been distressed and alarmed to no purpose, and had been imposed upon by Grundy. He had also been insulted by Grundy—had been called an "old buffer" by that daring and reckless junior!

The look he gave Grundy was terrifying.

"Silence!" he thundered, his voice trembling with righteous anger. "Silence, boys! How dare you laugh at the idiotic buffoonery of that reckless boy, Grundy? I am amazed, disgusted! Silence, all of you!"

The juniors ceased to laugh abruptly. There was a note in the master's voice that did not encourage further laughter.

Once again, Mr. Linton turned a terrifying look upon Grundy.

"Grundy, you utterly reckless and senseless dolt!" he gasped. "I shall require a satisfactory explanation of this—this disgraceful farce, or I shall take you at once to the headmaster. You have not only caused a disturbance, but you have insulted me, and have caused me great distress of mind. I imagined at first that you had suddenly gone mad!"

"Mum-mad?" stuttered Grundy. "Mum-me mad?"

"Yes. I know now, however, that it was merely you!"

(Continued on page 16.)



THE St. Jim's News



EDITORIAL!

By
Tom Merry.

A HAPPY and Prosperous New Year to all my readers!
It is the same old wish, expressed in the same old way; but it is sincerely uttered, and sincerely echoed by all the fellows on the staff of the "St. Jim's News."

Well, and hasn't the Old Year whizzed by! I've never known old Father Time to get such a hustle on. One of our wise old scribes compared Time to "an ever-rolling stream." I think it would be more appropriate to compare it to a streak of greased lightning—so far as 1925 is concerned, at any rate.

Personally, I've no quarrel with the year which is just dying, apart from the fact that it galloped along as swiftly as Dick Turpin's mare when it was alive! The year seemed scarcely to have got into its stride when the Easter vac came along. Whitsun followed hard on the heels of Easter; then came the summer holidays, followed in due course by Guy Fawkes' Day and Christmas; and here we are, standing on the threshold of another New Year!

This is the time for making resolutions to go one better than we did in 1925. I'm all in favour of New Year resolves, but I believe in making just one or two, and keeping them, rather than making a whole heap and failing to live up to them.

Some fellows are very rash and reckless in making resolutions. They set themselves tasks which are quite beyond their powers. I heard Fatty Wynn telling Figgins that he had been in the habit of eating a dozen jam-tarts a day, and he was going to cut them right out in the New Year, in case such an orgy of tarts should spoil his goalkeeping. Now, human nature being what it is, Fatty hasn't a dog's chance of keeping that resolution. He might keep it for a day, or two days; but you'll soon see him popping into the tuckshop for his usual ration. It would have been a more sensible resolution if Fatty had agreed to cut down his daily consumption of tarts from a dozen to half a dozen. He could have managed that quite easily; but to go absolutely tartless is quite another matter.

There is no reason why 1926 should not be a grand and glorious year for all of us. It rests with ourselves. To work while we work, and play while we play,

and put a hundred per cent. of energy into both, is, in my humble opinion, the proper recipe for a Prosperous New Year—a year of effort and achievement, which we shall always look back upon with honest pride.



The SCHOOLBOYS' DREAM OF HOME!

By
Baggy Trimble

AS I lay in my bed, so cosy and warm,
On New Year's Eve, in the Fourth dorm,

I dreamed a dream that was merry and bright—
One long sweet dream of pure delight!
I dreamt I was home at Trimble Hall,
With butlers and serfs at my beck and call.

I saw the old mansion and faces I loved,
I dined with my pater and mater;
And I listened with joy, as I did when a boy,
To the hurrying steps of the waiter!
The fire was burning brightly,
And my face wore a wonderful grin;
For the bells were ringing the Old Year out
And the New Year in!

I saw a plump turkey stretched out on a dish,
And I eagerly raced through the soup and the fish,
My pater then carved me a slice off the breast;
I gobbled it up, then demolished the rest!
"Plum-pudding to follow!" my mater exclaimed,
And with rapture and joy my fat cheeks were inflamed!

I saw the old mansion, so stately and grand,
And the armour that hung in the hall;
And when dinner was over I danced like Pavlova
And joined in the fancy-dress ball.
I waltzed and danced divinely,
The hearts of the damsels to win;
While the bells were ringing the Old Year out
And the New Year in!

I romped and I revelled with rapture and glee;
The life and the soul of that party was ME!
My ancestors smiled from their frames on the wall—
Oh, never was known such a wonderful ball!
Then when the proceedings were just at their height,
I gave a shrill scream—and awoke in a fright!

I saw the old dorm and the faces I loathed;
There were Gussy and Herries and Blake,
One tilted my bed, one sat on my head,
One gave me a terrible shake!
"Wake up!" they chanted in chorus,
"To sleep in your bed is a sin"
When the bells are ringing the Old Year out
And the New Year in!



MY NEW YEAR RESOLUTION!

By
Prominent People at St. Jim's.

GERALD KNOX (the Bully of the Sixth):
I look back on 1925 with keen remorse. My conscience tells me that I have been too kind and easy-going and tolerant. When fags have been brought before me for various misdoings, I have been too fatherly and lenient in my treatment of them. All this is going to be changed in the New Year. I have resolved not to temper justice with mercy any longer. I'm going to be a strict disciplinarian—a perfect martinet, in fact. "Spare the rod, and spoil the child," runs the old maxim. But you won't find me sparing the rod in 1926! I'm going to conquer that little weakness of mine of being "soft" and good-natured. I shall do great execution with my ashplant, and make myself a man to be feared. All cheeky fags, take warning!

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY (the Swell of the Fourth):

Lookin' back on the Old Year, deah boys, I am not at all satisfied with the manna in which I have comported myself. I have been fah too shabby an' slovenly in regard to dress, an' that, to my mind, is a cardinal offence. I have even sunk to the depth of weavin' cheap ten-guinea suits, cut by a Wayland tailor, instead of by my family tailor in Savile Row. Fancy an awistocwat payin' less than twenty guineas for a suit! Moreovah, I have sometimes worn the same toppah for two days in succession. Scandalous, bai Jove—perfectly scandalous! Howevah, I have resolved to dress smartly an' decently in the New Year, an', with this object in view, I have already increased my wardrobe to three times its usual size!

BAGGY TRIMBLE (the School's Champion Gorgel):

I have been very careless and neglectful about my food in the Old Year. Sometimes I have gone without grub for hours together! On one occasion I actually went without my dinner, and was carried away to the sanny in a fainting condition. The doctor was sent for, and he said I was waisting away through lack of nourishment, and would have to mend my ways in 1926. So in future, instead of having dainty snacks which would not be sufficient to sustain a sparrow, I shall eat good, harty meals, and I shall also rekrvest my people to send me a big hamper of tuck every week. If only I can keep this resolve, I sha'n't be such a scraggy skellington at the end of 1926 as I am now!

GEORGE ALFRED GRUNDY (the biggest dunce in the Shell):

I'm not going to do so much swotting in the New Year. I have been putting too grate a strane on my brane, and I shall be getting brane-fever or a timid brakedown if I'm not jolly careful. It's the biggest mistake a fellow can make to develop his intellect at the expense of his mussels. I sha'n't enter for any of the exams in 1926, and that will give some of the less clever fellows a chance. They must have felt awfull sick in 1925 to see me carrying off all the prizes!



OLD GORE'S ALMANAC

for
1926

Compiled by **GEORGE GORE**, of the Shell.

JANUARY.

BEING the thirteenth month of 1925, this will be a very unlucky month for most fellows. The carrying of lucky mascots, such as ju-ju's, Jubilee coins, and four-leafed shamrock, is to be strongly recommended. Lucky mascots can be obtained, at one shilling each, from George Gore. One of my delighted customers, Bagley Trimble, writes: "Your Lucky Mascots are wonderful! I bought one the night before I was booked for a public flogging, and the next morning the Head got newritis in his right arm, and the flogging was 'off.' I have also enjoyed a blissful freedom from lines and lickings since investing in your Mascot." So now you know what to do if you want to ward off ill-luck during this fateful month.

FEBRUARY.

THIS is the month of sneezes and wheezes, and the 'flu germ will be working overtime at St. Jim's. The sanny will be full to overflowing. Those who wish to avoid the ills and chills of this disastrous month should not fail to buy a bottle of "GORE'S LIGHTNING COLD CURE." Only a few bottles left; selling like hot cakes at a tanner a time. Monty Lowther, the champion japer of St. Jim's, writes: "Since I purchased a bottle of your famous cold cure I have not had a single 'wheeze.'" So if you want to feel fighting fit in February, your course is clear.

MARCH.

MARCH is a month of evil omen. The cold east winds will fray a good many tempers at St. Jim's—particularly the tempers of Messrs. Ratcliff and Selby. There will be quite an epidemic of lickings. Those who wish to avoid the awful pangs of corporal punishment should purchase a pot of my PATENT PAIN KILLER. This is a resinous substance which, when rubbed into the palms, greatly minimises pain, and in most cases eliminates it altogether. Master Wally D'Arcy writes: "I had a dozen of the best from Old Selby yesterday. He laid them on with all his might, but, thanks to your Patent Pain Killer, it merely felt as if somebody was tickling my palms. Please send another dozen pots to the fags' Common-room at once."

APRIL.

WE shall get so many showers this month that it will remind us of an English summer! If you want to avoid drenchings and soakings, and the ills that arise therefrom, you will invest in one of GORE'S ANTI-SOAK WATERPROOF CAPES. I've only a limited number left, so order early. Dick Redfern writes: "I wore one of your wonderful waterproofs last April, and the rain ran harmlessly off me like water from a duck's back. It would be possible to swim across a river in one of your capes, and land on the opposite bank as dry as a bone. Please supply another cape for the coming April, which I understand is going to be the wettest ever!"

MAY.

CRICKET will be starting at St. Jim's, and it will be ideal weather for the "ducks." I hope you won't think I'm making my ALMANAC a commercial affair; but the fact is, I have a number of topping cricket-bats for sale, all bearing the autograph of that famous cricketer, Eric Kildare. George Alfred Grundy writes: "I bought one of your bats last May, and I went right through the cricket seazon without getting

a single duck's-egg. P.S.—Tom Merry refused to let me play in any of the matches."

JUNE.

THE St. Jim's Swimming Gala will be taking place this month. Non-swimmers who wish to learn the noble and aquatic art will do well to equip themselves with a pair of Gore's famous "HOLD-ME-UP WATER WINGS." David Llewellyn Wynn writes: "Before I had the sense to buy a pair of your Water Wings, I used to swim like a brick, and my chums would have to fish me out from the river-bed. With the aid of your wings, however, I swam like a porpoise. The fact that I turn the scale at fourteen stone is a wonderful tribute to the weight-lifting qualities of your Water Wings. Having burst six pairs, I am writing to you for a further supply."

JULY.

JULY is generally a ripping month, and there will be no exception this year. All will be merry and bright at St. Jim's. But my prophetic intuition tells me that there will be a plague of flies in the school, and study-owners will be greatly annoyed thereby. If you want to exterminate the little pests, why not invest in a few of my "CATCHEM-

ALL" FLY-PAPERS? They catch flies, mosquitoes, wasps, bluebottles, and daddy-long-legs; but they are quite harmless to "gay dogs," so Knox of the Sixth can hang one in his study with impunity. They are also harmless to fat rats, so Baggy Trimble has nothing to fear. Herbert Skimpole writes: "Your CATCHEMALL FLY-PAPERS fully justify their name. Last July, with their aid, I caught a million and a half flies, all but one, and I spent the whole month counting the victims!"

AUGUST.

ST. JIM'S will be on holiday, so I shall have nothing to sell—worse luck!

SEPTEMBER.

FOOTER will be starting again at St. Jim's. Fellows who wish to become geniuses at the grand winter game cannot do better than buy a copy of that wonderful book, "THE COMPLETE FOOTBALLER," written by a chap called George Gore. Bagley Trimble writes: "I used to be an awful duffer at footer. I hardly knew the difference between a goalpost and a maiden over. I was the larfing-stock of the school, and my antics on the footer-field used to send the fellows into fits. Then one day I bought a copy of your valewable book, and studied the hints, with the rezzult that I am now the finest footballer at St. Jim's. I egg-spect at any moment to reseeve a tempting offer from Aston Hotspur, Tottenham Villa, or some other big club."

OCTOBER.

THIS month will be the same as February, only worse! If you would avoid such painful maladies as influenza, whooping-cough, and clergyman's sore throat, you will fortify yourself with a bottle of my LIGHTNING COUGH CURE, and thus make yourself immune from the ills and chills of winter.

NOVEMBER.

"Remember, remember, the Fifth of November, Gunpowder treason and plot!" And also remember that Gore, in November, some wonderful fireworks has got! Bonfire Night in 1925 was a "wash-out." The rain pelted in torrents, and the fireworks were soaked, and refused to ignite. I walked round the bonfire, collecting scores of fireworks which had been thrown away as useless. They have been placed in a hothouse, and will be quite dry by the time "The Fifth" comes round again. I shall be selling them off cheaply in my study, and it will be a case of "First come, first served."

DECEMBER.

"OLD GORE'S" powers of prophecy are so amazing and wonderful that he can foretell with certainty that Christmas Day will fall on the 25th of this month. There is no time of the year when funds are so urgently wanted as at Christmas-time. Therefore, in order to avoid the dire calamity of being "broke" at Christmas, you should join GORE'S CHRISTMAS CLUB. The rules are quite simple. You pay into the club a shilling a month for a year. Then there is a Christmas "share-out," and you receive the sum of six shillings. If you want to know what has become of the other six, it has been deducted to cover working expenses! Percy Mellish writes: "I paid a bob a month into your Christmas Club last year, and I received six bob at the share-out. I consider this a remarkable rate of interest, because every bob I paid into the club happened to be a 'dud.'" But "OLD GORE" won't be caught napping this year!

UNDER THE MISTLETOE!

(A Christmas poem submitted by Sidney Clive, which came in too late for publication in our Christmas issue.)

Our Christmas dinners are divine,
Bring forth the fatted turkey!
The Christmas fireside, too, is fine,
When skies are dull and murky.
And yet the grandest joy I know
Is underneath the mistletoe!

When strains of music fill the air,
And dancers whirl and glide,
I love to have a maiden fair
Careering at my side.
And when I turn and whisper "Whoa!"
It means we've reached the mistletoe!

I gaze into her glorious eyes
And murmur words of bliss;
And then—unless the damsel flies—
I claim the usual kiss.
Man wants but little here below—
A maiden, and some mistletoe!

Alas! my luck is often out;
I meet no maid of beauty.
And waltzing maiden aunts about
Becomes a painful duty.
Fancy embracing Auntie Flo
Beneath the festive mistletoe!

I'd dearly love to have a "peck"
At charming Cousin Phyllis;
Instead of which, I clasp the neck
Of Auntie Amaryllis!
She's eighty years of age, you know,
Yet waits beneath the mistletoe!

The strains of music rise and fall,
The dancers gaily dance;
Methinks I'll pop into the hall
To see if there's a chance.
Oh, help! My whiskered Uncle Joe
Beckons me from the mistletoe!



(Continued from page 13.)

stupid idea of a joke, Grundy! For that you shall suffer dearly. How dare you call me an old buffer, and treat me with such gross disrespect?"

"But—but—" Grundy was looking quite bewildered. Even now he did not seem to realise that it was "no go." He only wondered dimly how it came about that Mr. Linton had failed to be taken in by his ventriloquism. He gasped desperately. "But—but, sir! Dad—didn't you hear that the voice came from the cupboard, there?"

"Rubbish! Really, Grundy, this is beyond all bearing! You—you dare to suggest that those words and that foolishly-disguised voice did not come from you? Enough of this! Unless you give me an explanation of your conduct without delay, I shall take you before Dr. Holmes, Grundy!"

"Oh crumbs!" Grundy gasped at that. He glared round him at the grinning juniors bitterly. He saw it all now. It was just more of the general jealousy. Some fellow, jealous of his ventriloquial abilities, had "split" to Mr. Linton, and warned him what to expect. That was the only possible explanation Grundy could think of as to Mr. Linton's failure to be taken in by his ventriloquism.

But Mr. Linton was waiting. There was no help for it. He would have to own up. In any case, Mr. Linton knew. Under the circumstances, it would be better for him to own up than to be yanked before the Head.

"Oh, all right, sir, I'll own up!" said Grundy, bitterly and recklessly. "I know all about it, of course. Some rotter's given the game away—told you beforehand that I was a clever ventriloquist."

"A—a what, Grundy?" "Ventriloquist! I can see it all now," said Grundy, with deep bitterness. "I've been let down—badly. You refused to believe the voice came from the cupboard, simply because you knew it was me ventriloquising."

"Bless my soul! So—so that—that is the explanation of this—this farcical scene, Grundy! You—you actually had the fatuous folly to imagine that you were ventriloquising and—"

"Eh? Fatuous folly!" gasped Grundy, going red. "Look here, sir, I'm a jolly good ventriloquist—"

"Silence!" thundered Mr. Linton. "Grundy!" he went on, with a gasp. "Then—then you attempted to deceive me—"

"I was only practising, sir," said Grundy gruffly. "I just wanted to show these fellows what I could do. That's all!"

"Oh! That is all, is it?" said Mr. Linton, in a grinding voice. "That is all, is it? You have had the brazen effrontery to attempt to fool your Form master for the—the entertainment of yourself and your Form-fellows? Very well! Oh, very well, Grundy! Were I absolutely certain that you were mentally sound, Grundy, I should certainly take you to the headmaster for a flogging. As I have grave doubts, I will deal with the matter more leniently. I shall cane you myself, Grundy! Hold out your hand, boy!"

"But—but, look here, sir—" "Hold out your hand!" thundered the master. "But, sir, I say, sir—"

Mr. Linton did not ask again. He grabbed his cane, and he grabbed Grundy, and he twisted Grundy round and flung him across the nearest desk. Then the cane came into play. Mr. Linton was only a little man, but he was a terror when he was roused. He was roused now.

Whack, whack, whack, whack! The cane whistled through the air, and came home against the tightly stretched trousers of the St. Jim's ventriloquist. Grundy protested at the top of his voice, and tried to struggle, yelling as he did so. But it was useless.

Whack, whack, whack! Mr. Linton tired at last. He threw down the cane, panting and gasping with his exertions. Grundy almost collapsed as he slid off the desk.

"There!" panted Mr. Linton. "Let that be a lasting lesson to you, Grundy. And now you will go and stand in the corner for the remainder of morning lessons. If you will persist in playing infantile tricks, you shall be treated as an infant."

"But, look here, sir—" Grundy was beginning in great indignation.

"Stand in that corner, Grundy!" It was a bellow. Grundy obeyed. There was something in the master's voice and looks that cowed even Grundy just then. And, conscious that all the fellows were grinning, and conscious—sadly conscious—that he would never hear the last of this, the crowning humiliation, Grundy went and stood in the corner with his back to the Form.

Grundy did no more ventriloquising in public that day!

CHAPTER 8. Joey Arrives!

"Y AROOOOOOOOH!" "What on earth—" "Ow! Oh, help! Murder! Yaroooh! Oh crumbs!"

"What—what—" The Terrible Three fairly rushed out of their study. After them dashed Blake, Herries, Digby, and D'Arcy, who had been chatting with them concerning the forthcoming concert to be given by the juniors in aid of the Rylcombe Infirmary.

"Keep him off! Murder!" It was just before prep that same evening, and quietness reigned supreme in the School House at St. Jim's. But the silence—of the Shell passage and neighbouring passages and studies at all events—was rudely shattered as a series of terrified yells suddenly rang out.

Like Tom Merry and his startled chums, fellows came rushing out of their studies to see what was amiss. But the Terrible Three were among the first out.

"Sounded like Trimble's voice!" gasped Tom Merry, as he rushed out.

Crash! Barely had the words left Tom's lips when someone crashed into the juniors at the doorway.

It was Baggy Trimble, and he was still howling as if a thousand fiends were at his fat heels.

"Wow!" howled Trimble. "You—you fat ass!" snorted Tom Merry, grabbing Baggy Trimble by the collar. "What are you yelling about? What's the matter?"

"A—a corpse!" "A—a whatter?" "A corpse—in a box!" howled Baggy. "I saw it—felt it! Oh dear! It was awful! Groooooogh!"

And Trimble shuddered, his pasty face as white as chalk. It was only too clear that Trimble had had a terrible fright. He was shaking from head to foot. The juniors were still blinking at him in amazement and alarm when the rustle of a gown sounded.

"Here's Railton!" hissed Tom Merry. "Get up, Baggy!" Trimble scrambled to his feet. He seemed to be petrified with terror, however. Mr. Railton looked at him in great astonishment.

"Trimble," he gasped, "what ever is the matter, boy? I heard you shouting. Are you mad, boy, or ill?"

"Ow! Oh dear!" panted Trimble. "Oh dear! It was awful! I've had such a shock, sir! I saw it! Put my hand on its face! I felt the eyes move, and I felt the mouth move! Ow! It was awful!"

And Baggy shuddered again violently. "Bless my soul!" ejaculated Mr. Railton. "What ever is the boy talking about? What have you seen, Trimble?"

"A corpse, sir!" "What?" "A corpse, sir!"

"This is amazing!" remarked Mr. Railton, eyeing Trimble fixedly. "The boy has undoubtedly had a severe shock," he added, resting a kindly hand on Trimble's shaking fat shoulder.

"Now, Trimble," he said, "try to be calm, my boy. You have undoubtedly received a severe fright. Where did you see this—this thing which has terrified you?"

"Ow! In Study No. 3, sir!" panted Trimble, regaining some of his scattered wits. "I put my hand in the box, and I saw the face, too. It—it was awful!"

Mr. Railton looked at Kildare, who had just hurried up. "We had better see what the boy has seen, Kildare," he said. "Come, Trimble! There is nothing to be afraid of, I am convinced. You have made a mistake. What you claim to have seen is impossible—absurd! Come!"

"Ow! Oh dear!" Mr. Railton led the wondering juniors along to Study No. 3—Grundy's study. Baggy Trimble brought up the rear in a very frightened and apprehensive state of mind. Even

the presence of the Housemaster and Kildare did not comfort him much, apparently.

Mr. Railton halted, and flung open the door wider. The study was in darkness, save for the flickering, dancing flames of the study fire. Grundy and his study-mates, Wilkins and Gunn, were obviously not at home.

Mr. Railton walked into the study. Behind him came Kildare, who was smiling, and behind Kildare was Tom Merry & Co., and the rest of the staring crowd.

"Ah!" said Mr. Railton, glimpsing something bulky standing on the study table. "That is the box, I presume, Trimble?"

Trimble was out in the passage, and heard the question.

"Yes, sir. That's it!" he gasped.

Mr. Railton struck a match and lit the gas. He turned it up, and as the study became illuminated he strode to the box.

It was a large, square box, and it was open—at least, the lid had been taken half off. Mr. Railton removed a heap of tissue paper and wrappings from the top of the box. Then he peered inside.

Then he jumped.

"Good heavens!" he gasped. "Boys, stand back a moment. Kildare—why—"

Mr. Railton, obviously very much agitated, looked in the box again. Then he gave a muttered exclamation, and dived his hand inside, after removing more wrappings. The next moment there was a startled, scared gasp from all as he lifted out something—a body, it seemed.

But, even as the St. Jim's fellows gasped, they caught a closer glimpse of the thing, and, quite abruptly, all their fears vanished. Somebody giggled, and a howl of laughter burst out. Even Mr. Railton and Kildare joined in it. They could not help themselves.

For the thing Mr. Railton held up was a large doll, life-like in features, but with small body and smaller legs that waggled grotesquely as the Housemaster shook the figure. The face was red and otherwise highly coloured, and was grinning grotesquely. The hair was fluffy, and stood up in a tuft at the top. It was the face of a small boy—a cheeky, impudent-looking urchin.

Mr. Railton held it up smilingly. From behind the doll hung two strings. The master pulled one, and the tuft of hair jerked up and down. He pulled another, and the eyes rolled realistically. He pressed something at the back of the figure's head, and the mouth opened and shut jerkily.

"Is this—this the corpse, Trimble?" asked Mr. Railton blandly.

"Oh!" gasped Trimble, in dumbfounded amazement and relief. "Oh—oh crumbs! I—I thought it was a corpse! It's only a doll!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The fellows howled with laughter.

"It is a ventriloquist's doll—a puppet!" laughed Mr. Railton, replacing the doll back in the large box. "Really, Trimble, you should not have jumped to such a—hasty conclusion. I am very much relieved, however, that it is not a—what you imagined it to be."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the juniors. "Poor old Trimble!"

The juniors understood what it all meant, if Mr. Railton did not. The doll was evidently the property of George Alfred Grundy. They had all heard him say that he had ordered one. And Trimble must have been up to his usual games. He had seen the box arrive, and, imagining it contained foodstuffs, had watched his chance. In the absence of Grundy & Co., he had crept into the darkened study, and, without daring to light up, had investigated the contents of the box, after the grub.

In the circumstances it was no wonder that the fat youth had got a fright.

Apparently, Trimble realised that only too well. While the crowd in the study were laughing uproariously, he slipped away along the passage while the going was good. Being on the extreme fringe of the crowd, he found that very easy.

It was just as well he did so, too, for scarcely had he gone when a burly form came pushing his way through the crush. It was Grundy, and Grundy was looking surprised and wrathful.

"Here, what the thump's this mean?" he roared. "Get out of this, the lot of you! Why, you cheeky lot of rotters, I'll thumping well— Oh, crumbs!"

Grundy suddenly saw Mr. Railton and Kildare.

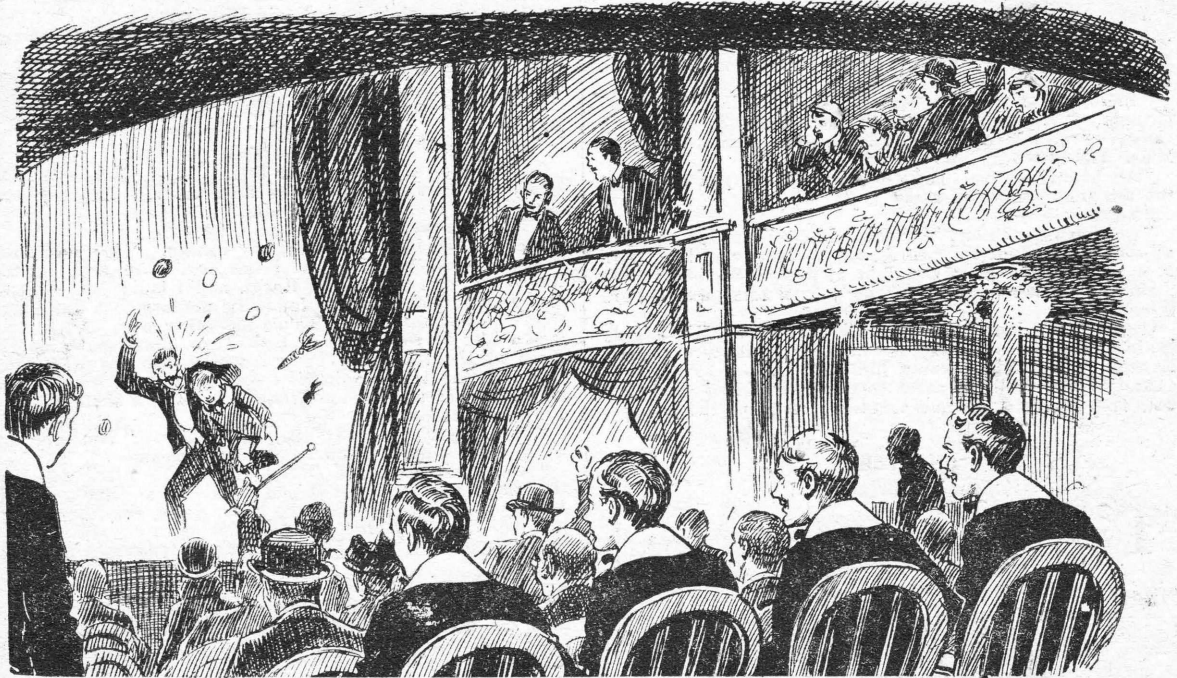
"Ah!" said Mr. Railton, professing not to have heard Grundy's remarks. "Here is Grundy now. Grundy, does this puppet belong to you?"

"Yes, sir!" said Grundy feebly, his face going red. "It—it came this evening, and I was just unwrapping it when I thought I'd go and fetch those asses—I mean, Wilkins and Gunn, to see it. I can't find them, though."

There was a chuckle. It was well known that Wilkins and Gunn were giving Grundy a wide berth as far as possible these days, since he had taken up ventriloquism, in fact.

"This is somewhat surprising!" smiled Mr. Railton. "I had no idea we had a—ahem!—a ventriloquist in our midst. I—er—presume you are the ventriloquist, Grundy? I seem to have heard something about it lately."

"Yes," said Grundy, regaining his nerve on seeing Mr. Railton was so amiable. "I only discovered this week that I had the gift, sir. I bought this figure to give a show at the concert on Saturday night. Of course, I shall also give an exhibition of distant ventriloquism, as well as near



Crash! Plop! "Yarooogh!" roared Grundy. A regular hurricane of missiles came whizzing on to the stage. Some of them missed Grundy, and some of them hit him—hard! "Wow!" he gasped. "Oh, you rotters!" "Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tom Merry & Co. (See chapter 9.)

ventriloquism with figures. I fancy I shall give a good show, sir."

Grundy spoke in rather a patronising way, and Mr. Railton's mouth twitched.

"I am sure you will, Grundy," he said, with a cough. "I shall be very interested indeed to see your performance."

"You'll grant me your permission to give a show at the concert, of course, sir?" said Grundy, with rather a crafty glance at Tom Merry.

"Certainly!" laughed the Housemaster. "I am sure Merry will be very glad to give you a chance to see what you can do—won't you, Merry?"

Tom Merry flushed, and gave Grundy a meaning look. As a matter of fact, neither he, as the organiser of the concert, nor the rest of the committee with him, had had the slightest intention of allowing George Alfred to give a "show."

But he could scarcely go against the wishes of the Housemaster now.

"Oh—ah! Ye-e-es, sir!" he gasped. "If—if you really wish it, sir."

"It will be very—ahem!—interesting, I am sure, Merry," smiled the Housemaster. "And as Grundy has bought a lay figure as well, I should certainly give him a trial."

"Oh—oh, yes, sir! Certainly, sir!" gulped Tom.

"And now, boys, you had better disperse!" exclaimed Mr. Railton. "There has been no terrible tragedy, after all!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

It was always a duty to laugh when a master made a joke; but on this occasion the juniors did not need duty to make them laugh. They followed the Housemaster and Kildare out of the study, laughing hilariously.

Only the Terrible Three and Blake & Co. remained in the study. Tom Merry gave Grundy a deadly look. Grundy returned an equally deadly look.

"You—you rotters!" he gasped. "I suppose this is some more of your rotten jealousy! You brought Railton to see this doll, thinking he'd collar it, and muck up my show on Saturday. But it hasn't come off. Yah!"

Tom Merry breathed hard. He was feeling decidedly sore at having been practically forced to say that Grundy could give a show on Saturday.

"You—you potty owl!" he snorted. "Don't you know what's happened? That fat ass Trimble came nosing in here after grub. He felt in that box, and thought that dashed doll was a corpse!"

"Mum-my hat!"

"He went away yelling blue murder," went on Tom.

"It was that fat funk who brought Railton here, Grundy!"

"Well, I'm blown!" said Grundy, his face breaking into a grin. "Well, it's turned out for the best, anyway. I've got Railton's permission to give my show at the concert. You said I wasn't going to have a look in," grinned Grundy. "I worked that rather neatly—what?"

"You silly idiot!" hooted Tom. "You'll muck up the whole programme! You and your dashed idiotic foolery! Well, I've given my word, but I'll watch you don't have much of a show, for all that!"

"Eh? Call my ventriloquism idiotic foolery!" gasped Grundy. "Why, I'll smash you, Tom Merry! As for my show—let me tell you I sha'n't be satisfied with less than an hour. Got that?"

"An hour?" gasped Tom. "Why, I'll see you don't get ten minutes, you awful ass!"

"Look here—"

"Oh, let him run on!" chuckled Monty Lowther. "After all, with Grundy on the boards, the audience will be certain of a good laugh. Even the sight of him on the boards will make the fellows howl! Isn't he a born idiot, and a born comedian?"

Grundy stared at Lowther, rather puzzled. His mighty brain worked rather slowly, and he wasn't quite sure whether Lowther was complimenting him or not.

And by the time the great George Alfred had worked it out, Tom Merry & Co. had sauntered off along the passage.

CHAPTER 9.

Grundy's Great Idea!

"T O-NIGHT'S the night!"

George Alfred Grundy rose to his feet as he made that remark. Tea had been over some time in Study No. 3. It was the next evening—Friday evening.

Wilkins and Gunn stared at their chief in wonderment. Grundy had been unusually silent during tea, and he had been wrapt in deep thought. So his chums had not troubled to speak to him. They had been too busy eating, and they knew better than to speak to Grundy when he was thinking. Grundy was so seldom silent, that it was quite a treat not to hear his voice in the study. So they had let him remain

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wrapt in thought, and they had hoped he would remain thus.

And now, tea being long over and the table cleared for prep, Grundy had spoken. And his remark was so strange that Wilkins and Gunn blinked at him wonderingly.

"To-night's the night!" he repeated.

"You—you mean to-morrow night, don't you, Grundy?" asked Wilkins cautiously. "The concert's to-morrow night."

"I mean what I say!" snapped Grundy, his eyes gleaming. "To-night's the night! Concert—pah! That's a small matter. It's hardly worth while my bothering about a dashed private concert like that! You see that, don't you?"

Wilkins and Gunn did not see it, but they nodded agreement. It was always as well to agree with Grundy when they were at all doubtful as to what he meant.

"It's like this, you fellows," said Grundy. "That concert's all very well, but it's not my ambition just to give a ventriloquial show at a potty private concert like Tom Merry's. It's a bit of practice, and it'll just show the fellows what I can do—see? But my ambition is to give a show at a real music-hall, on a real stage before the public. Well, I'm going to do that to-night."

"Great pip!" gasped Wilkins.

"You—you are?" murmured Gunn blankly.

"Just that. I'm going to give my show at the Theatre Royal in Wayland to-night, chaps—at least, if my plan works all right, I shall."

"You—you don't say!"

"Yes, I do, George Wilkins! The fact is, Captain Fox—the ventriloquist, you know—promised me a show before the week's out. He said I was nearly perfect, and would be a better man than himself by the week-end. He said he'd stand down one night and let me take his place—pretend to be ill, you know, and shove me in as his understudy. He said he'd do it for an extra two guineas. I've already paid him the two guineas."

"Well, you—you born——" Wilkins pulled himself up just in time.

"But the point is," went on Grundy reflectively. "I've been thinking, you know. It's Friday night to-night. Well, just because I hadn't any more cash with me, and told the rotter that I wasn't likely to get any more this week, he turned rusty last night, said he wasn't feeling up to giving me my lesson. And I'd already paid him in advance for that, too, you know!"

"A rotten swizzler!" said Gunn. He felt safe in saying that.

"Yes, I'm beginning to think he is that myself," said Grundy, frowning. "It looks to me as if he's backing out of his promise now. In fact, I know he is. He was quite—well, dashed unpleasant last night, because he knows his company's moving on after this week, and he knows he'll get no cash out of me. Yes, I'm beginning to think he is a swizzler."

"I'm jolly certain he is," said Wilkins.

"But the lesson doesn't matter, of course," went on Grundy. "You see, he can't teach me anything more. I flatter myself I know as much about the game as he does. But I don't intend to lose my chance of going on the boards at Wayland—see? I've quite decided upon that. There-fore—"

"Therefore?" echoed Wilkins.

"Therefore, as I know that boozey beast, Fox, means to break his word, I'm going to take the law into my own hands. I'm going to kidnap him."

"To—to what?" almost yelled Gunn.

"To kidnap him," said Grundy calmly. "Are you deaf, Gunn. Well, I've thought it all out. I've been behind the scenes with him at the Royal, and I know just what to do. I shall trick him into following me into that warehouse where you chaps shoved Knox the other day, and I shall fasten him in there. Then I shall go along and take his place at the theatre. The manager's seen me with him, and if I just turn up in time for the turn, I fancy I can persuade him to give me a trial. In fact, I shall just say I'm Fox's understudy. See?"

"Well, upon my word!" gasped Wilkins. "You—oh, you awful ass, Grundy! You surely can't mean—"

"Now don't you start, George Wilkins. I tell you I've thought it all out, and it should work a treat—like a charm. I fancy I shall fairly bring the house down, you know. Fox is good, I'll admit that, but he's not quite my style. Anyway, the point is that I shall want you fellows to help me, of course."

"Us to—to help you?"

"Yes. Your job will be to collar Captain Fox when I give the word. You'll have to be jolly smart, though. I shall just hiss, once, and then you chaps collar him and bundle him inside. See?"

Wilkins and Gunn looked at each other, and then they looked eloquently at Grundy.

"Yes, we do see," said Wilkins in measured, concentrated tones. "We see the biggest idiot, the silliest clown, the most burbling, babbling madman outside a blessed lunatic."

asylum, Grundy. You're the pottiest, balmiest, soapiest, dottiest, sap-headed idiot that ever was born, Grundy. See?"

Wilkins paused, breathless, with a wary eye on Grundy. That astonished individual fairly glared at Wilkins.

"Eh? What?" he gasped. "Does that mean you refuse to help me, George Wilkins?"

"Help you?" roared Wilkins. "I'll see you in a blessed strait-jacket first, you dangerous maniac!"

"Same here!" snorted Gunny. "You must be fairly off your onion to expect us to help you do a mad thing like that. Of course we won't help. Besides, it's breaking bounds in any case."

Grundy glowered at his faithless chums. For a moment it seemed as if he were about to commit assault and battery upon them, but he appeared to restrain himself with a mighty, heroic effort.

"Well, I'm hanged!" he stuttered, breathing hard. "Call yourselves pals, eh? Rotters! Funks! Cowards! More jealousy, eh?" he sneered. "I never—I must admit I never expected jealousy among my own pals. Well, it doesn't matter much in any case. After all, you're neither of you any good—not in a scrap. You'd only muck up the whole thing, I know. I shall know the thing will go off all right handling it myself. You can go and eat coke and chop chips, the pair of you. I've finished with you, I wipe my hands of you. Bah!"

And with that George Alfred snatched up his cap and stuffed it into his pocket. Then he walked out.

Wilkins jumped up in great alarm.

"Here, you awful idiot, come back!"

"Come back!" yelled Gunny.

But Grundy did not come back. He was evidently in deadly earnest. His chums stared blankly at each other, and then with one accord they rushed from the study after Grundy.

But they were too late. Grundy had gone, and how he had gone they did not know. There was no sign of him about the House, but from Cardew they learned that Grundy had walked quickly out into the quad.

It was enough for Grundy's chums. Knowing Grundy as they did, they realised the worst—that Grundy had, indeed, gone off to Wayland to carry out his amazing plot.

"Well, if that idiot doesn't take the biscuit," said Wilkins almost with a groan. "What shall we do, Gunny? We can't let the fool go on with it. He may even get into the hands of the police."

"Quite likely."

"Let's go and tell Tom Merry," snapped Wilkins.

Gunny agreed at once. Tom Merry's calm judgment was always sought in an emergency, so the two chums went along at top speed to Study No. 10, and in a few moments they were blurting out the facts to the captain of the Shell.

"Well, the—the born idiot!" breathed Tom Merry. "We must stop him somehow, of course. Come on! We must risk trouble, and go after the chump."

"Yes, rather!"

Wilkins and Gunny were only too eager to do that, as were Lowther and Manners. And three minutes later they were all in the dark quad, making for Rylcombe Lane by the school wall. Once in the lane they made tracks at top speed for the station. There they learned that the Wayland local had been gone several minutes, and realising that Grundy had gone with it, they decided to wait for the next.

It was a twenty minutes' wait, and the juniors' remarks regarding Grundy would scarcely bear repeating. But the time passed, and at last the juniors arrived at Wayland, and made tracks at once for the Theatre Royal.

As Tom pointed out, it was already past the time for the first performance. And as the ventriloquist's turn was one of the first on the programme, it was clear that if Grundy had acted at all on his plan, he would have acted by this time.

So at Tom Merry's suggestion they followed him into the Theatre Royal, and Tom bought seats. It was really the only thing they could do, as they had arrived at Wayland too late to catch Grundy.

As the juniors took their seats a dancer flitted off the stage to the accompaniment of a round of applause, and then, as the lights changed, Tom Merry gave a grunt.

"Here we are—the dashed ventriloquist next!" he breathed. "Now we shall know if that awful duffer has done anything. I expect— Oh, great Scott!"

Tom Merry almost gasped aloud, for at that moment the curtain went up. It revealed a figure standing on the stage, with one foot on a stool, and a ventriloquist doll, that of a cheeky-looking urchin, seated on his knee.

All the juniors recognised the figure at once. It was the same doll Captain Fox had used for his show before. But the ventriloquist was certainly not Captain Fox now, though the individual certainly resembled him slightly. He was short, and he was dressed in shabby evening-clothes several sizes too big for him. He also wore a false moustache, one spiked end of which pointed downwards and the other upwards.

But even in that disguise, and under the grease-paint, Tom Merry recognised the individual. It was none other than George Alfred Grundy. There was not a doubt about that. The juniors knew him too well to make any mistake about that.

"Oh, great pip!" groaned Wilkins. "He's done it—he's done it, after all! Oh, my only sainted aunt! Now for some fun!"

"And some trouble," groaned Gunny.

The trouble came very quickly. As the curtain rose there was a little applause, but from the gallery came a few hisses and groans. It was only too clear that the ventriloquist was not popular in Wayland. As a matter of fact, Wayland folk were very particular in some respects, and Captain Fox's stale humour—to give it a mild term—had not pleased them. Hence the hisses and groans from the "gods."

This rather frigid reception seemed to put Grundy off at once. He glared up rather angrily at the gallery, apparently forgetting that the orchestra had ceased playing, and that it was up to him to begin his show.

"Go on, you fool!" came a hissing whisper from the manager in the wings. That individual had already had many doubts regarding Grundy. But he was in a hole. Captain Fox had unaccountably failed to turn up, and he had been obliged to accept Grundy's offer to take his place, and to accept Grundy's earnest assurance that he was a better man at the game than Fox. He felt more doubtful than ever now.

But his desperate whisper only put Grundy off still more. He had never been before the footlights in a real theatre before, and the sea of faces dazed him. He just stood with the doll on his knee, staring up at the gallery.

"Go on, get it over, gov'nor!" came a voice from the gallery. "We ain't paid our money to be stared at. 'Ave yer left yer ventriloquist voice at home on the piano or what?"

"Haw, haw, haw!"

The sally was greeted by a roar from the gallery and a titter from the rest of the house.

Grundy glared still more at the gallery. As a matter of fact, he had completely forgotten how his patter began—the patter he had written himself and "mugged up" so carefully. It was a dialogue full of "gems" of humour—in Grundy's view. But alas! he could not remember one word of it now. He only remembered that a song came into it—a song to be sung by the ventriloquist figure, and so in sheer desperation he began it.

Working the jaws of the doll up and down as hard as he could, he screwed up his face into an extraordinary expression, and started to warble out in a cracked, strained voice the song he had chosen. It was one of Harry Lauder's songs, and Grundy had felt it suited the doll admirably. As it was that famous song "I'm the Safest of the Family," and as Grundy's contortions and the rapid working of the doll's jaws gave a remarkably absurd effect, the audience must have thought it suited Grundy admirably, too.

At all events they only stood one verse of it, and then there went up a perfect howl of laughter, mingled with yells and hoots and catcalls from the gallery.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Haw, haw, haw!"

"Cheese it!"

"Chuck 'im off! Yah! Call that ventriloquism?"

"Haw, haw, haw! 'E'll 'ave that bloomin' doll's 'ead off yet!"

"Softest of the famby—hey? My heye! He must be!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tom Merry & Co.

They could not help it. Grundy's performance was too screamingly funny for words. The thought that Grundy could imagine for one moment that the voice appeared to come from the doll made them howl.

But the gallery did more than howl. They had evidently come prepared to deal with the ventriloquist they disliked. A rotten egg suddenly whizzed from somewhere on to the stage.

It was a really good shot, and it took the doll full in the face, spreading over it, and sending it spinning out of Grundy's grasp. And then, as Grundy stood there—his song having come to an abrupt end—another egg came and took him full in the left eye.

Plop!

"Yarooooogh! Gug-gug! Oh, my hat!" roared Grundy.

That second egg was followed swiftly by a third, and then a fourth, and then a perfect hurricane of missiles came whizzing on the stage. Some of them missed Grundy, and some of them hit him—hard. He danced about, gasping, desperately trying to avoid the rotten eggs and tomatoes, and other unwelcome missiles from the "gods."

"Oh, you—you rotters!" he howled, shaking his fist up at the yelling gallery.

It was the "bird"—very much the "bird." Even Grundy realised that. And had he been wise he would have turned tail and bolted.

But Grundy never did act wisely at critical moments like this. He faced the music doggedly, yelling threats up at the gallery. Amidst the uproar of laughter and howls, his voice could be heard bellowing. In the wings the manager was almost in an apoplectic fit. The curtain started to come down, but, unfortunately, it stuck—or else the man responsible was too helpless with laughter to work it. So, in sheer desperation the manager rushed on the stage and grabbed at Grundy.

"Get off, you blithering dolt!" he roared. "Come on! Out of this, you confounded lunatic!"

"Here, leggo!" roared Grundy furiously. "I'm going to smash those blighters up there! Leggo! Why, I'll—"

As the manager started to drag him away Grundy hit out at him, and both of them went down, struggling furiously.

The audience were in fits of laughter by this time. They laughed still more when the struggling two crashed into the scenery, pulling down the whole side of a "house" on top of them.

Grundy had spoken to his studymates regarding his intention of "bringing down the house." But he had obviously not intended to do it in this manner.

Then several stage-hands came rushing to their manager's aid, and as Grundy was rushed off the stage the curtain came down with a run.

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Tom Merry. "Oh, my hat! Grundy will be the death of me yet. Come on! He's bound to be kicked out of the stage door. Let's go round and pick up the pieces!"

"Oh dear! Ha, ha, ha! All right!"

Leaving the audience still shrieking with merriment, the St. Jim's juniors hurriedly left the theatre, and ran round to the stage door. As they expected, they were just in time to see a struggling bundle pitched out, neck and crop, into the side-street.

It was Grundy, right enough, and Grundy was a wreck. Gone was his moustache, and his collar and white tie were torn from their moorings. His clothes were covered with egg and flour and soot. Altogether he looked a most deplorable sight.

He sat in the gutter and roared. The juniors had almost reached him when a rather dingy-looking figure came hurrying up out of the gloom. As he emerged into the light from the lamp over the stage-door the juniors recognised him. It was Captain Fox, and he appeared to be in a towering rage.

He spotted Grundy, recognising him in a flash.

"Here you are, you little villain!" he hooted, shaking a fist in the prostrate Grundy's face. "Kidnap me, would yer? Trick me inter following you inter that shed, and then locking me in? We'll see what the p'lice 'as to say about this. Why, I'll—I'll—"

As if words did not satisfy him, he stooped over Grundy, and started to punch him for all he was worth. Grundy growled and jumped up. Then he started to retaliate, hitting out right and left in sheer desperation.

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Tom Merry. "Come on, chaps, for goodness' sake. We must stop this and get that awful idiot away."

The St. Jim's juniors rushed to Grundy's rescue. Tom Merry and Manners and Wilkins grasped the irate "captain," and sat him down in the gutter with a thump. They knew how he had swindled Grundy, and they had no sympathy for him at all.

Leaving the ventriloquist—the real one—gasping in the gutter, they grabbed Grundy, and, with the help of Lowther and Gunn they fairly raced the protesting George Alfred away.

Down the narrow side street they rushed him, past the light of the Bull's Head, and down to the towing-path. It was not a very dark night, and the towing-path was visible enough. They rushed Grundy along it, past the gleaming, shadowy river; only stopping when they felt safe from possible pursuit. Then they released Grundy.

But as Grundy immediately started to rush back again they went after him and brought him back in a flash. Then they sat him down hard on the cinders with a bump.

"You—you burbling maniac!" gasped Tom Merry breathlessly. "Haven't you caused enough trouble, you blithering idiot, Grundy?"

"I—I— Lemme go back!" panted Grundy. "Lemme go back, and I'll smash the lot of them. Handling me—me, mind you! That brute Fox must have put them all up to this! Jealousy again! He knows I can lick him at his own game, and he's afraid I'll take his job. Lemme go back. What the thump do you asses want to chip in for?"

"Well, my hat!"

In the gloom the rescuers blinked at Grundy. Only for a moment, though! Then Tom Merry grasped the burly Shell fellow.

"Come along! Get the clown to the station, chaps, and

sharp's the word! No good arguing with him; he's hopeless. Yank him up!"

"Yes, rather!"

"Look here—" roared Grundy.

But Grundy's protests were unavailing. The juniors were fed-up with him, and they rushed him along, kicking him hard when he attempted to stop and argue. But once in the lighted town again, even Grundy realised that it would be best to go quietly; and he went quietly.

In sulky silence, glowering in turn at his captors, he accompanied them on to the station. Luckily, a train was in, and they boarded it thankfully—at least, all did excepting Grundy.

The moment the train started he started—apparently with the intention of "whopping" all five of them. But the five of them proved too many for Grundy. And they were too fed-up with Grundy to handle him gently, either.

They rolled him on the carriage floor, and they bumped him again and again, and then they rubbed his head in the dust. After which even Grundy's spirit was squashed, and he gave no further trouble. He was feeling a physical and mental wreck, and it was a very subdued and dismal Grundy that climbed the wall at St. Jim's some time later, and tottered rather than walked into the School House.

Grundy had had his ambition. He had performed before a crowded house on the boards of a public theatre. But it had not been quite the triumph Grundy had expected—far from it. And the fact that the authorities had not missed them, and their sheer luck in getting inside the school again safely brought little consolation to Grundy—though it certainly did to Tom Merry & Co., and Grundy's studymates.

CHAPTER 10. The Concert!

TOM MERRY & CO. saw little of Grundy until the following evening. They were much too busy preparing for the concert to bother about the great George Alfred. According to Trimble, Grundy was spending his spare time in the top box-room, practising with "Joey"—the name he had given to his ventriloquial doll. If the juniors had had any idea that Grundy would "drop" his ventriloquism after what had taken place the previous evening, they were disillusioned on hearing that.

Grundy was undoubtedly a stickler.

Out of sheer kindness to Grundy—and from other motives of prudence—Tom Merry & Co. had refrained from telling the story of Grundy's adventures on the boards at Wayland. With the story going the rounds, it was pretty certain that it would reach the ears of the authorities, sooner or later; which would mean serious trouble for all the juniors who had broken bounds that evening, in addition to grave trouble for Grundy.

So Grundy was saved that humiliation, though it took Tom Merry & Co. all their time to keep themselves from letting the story out.

But the incident had done one thing—it had not caused Grundy to "chuck" the business in disgust. It had quite decided Tom Merry to let Grundy have a good show at the concert.

He had brought down the house at Wayland, and it was more than likely that he would do the same at St. Jim's. And Tom and the rest of the committee wanted the concert to be a great success.

When the concert started that evening, Grundy's name was on the programme as Signor Georgio Alfredo Grundio, the Famous Ventriloquist. It came last on the programme, but that was because Tom wished to keep the best turn for the final—as he was careful to point out to Grundy.

From the very first the concert went with a rare swing. Miss Marie Rivers, the school nurse, was at the piano, and she opened the proceedings with a pianoforte solo. There was a crowded "house," almost every fellow in the school being present, in addition to the Head and all the masters. And the opening item was greeted with a round of hearty applause.

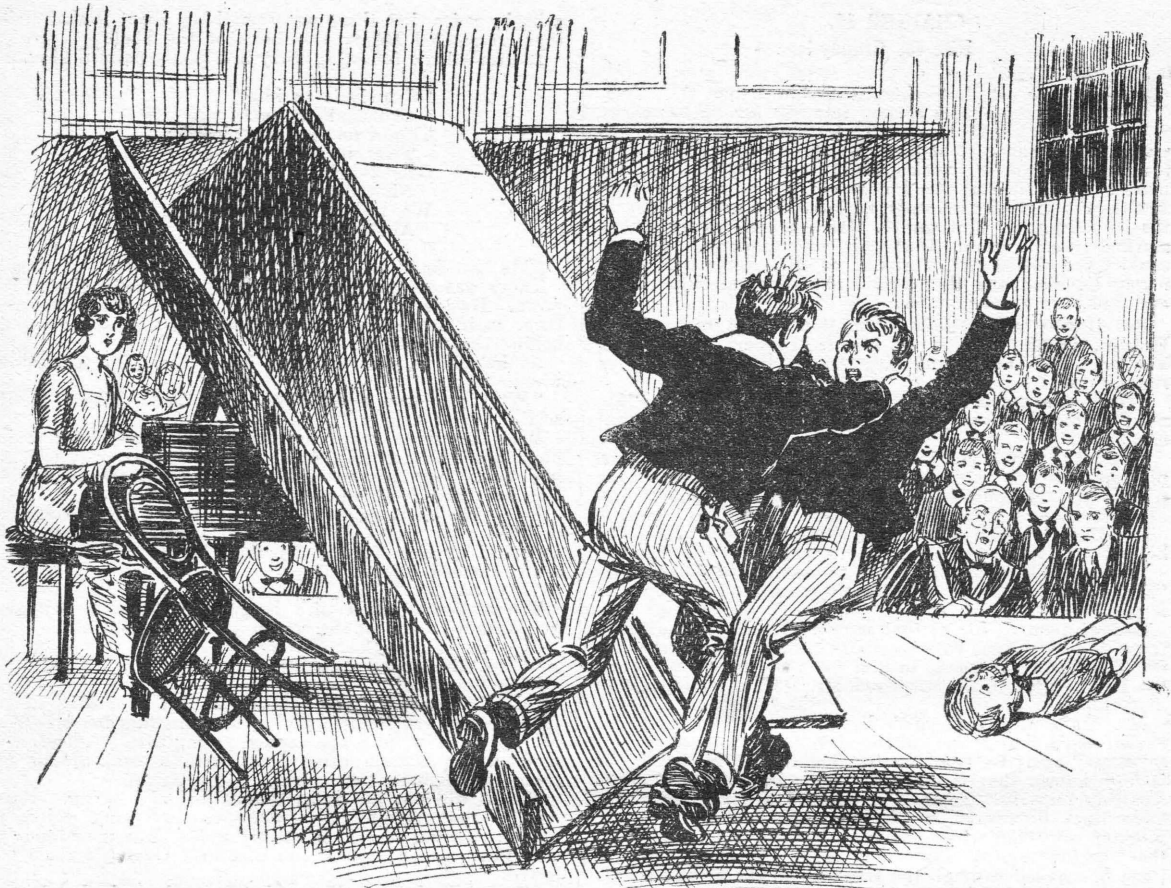
After Miss Marie, Talbot took the boards with a tenor solo. And as Talbot had quite a decent voice, he also received an ovation.

Then Lowther, dressed as a nigger, obliged with a nigger song, and was followed by a quartette composed of Tom Merry, George Herries, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, and Manners, and that also proved a great success.

After which Bernard Glyn obliged with a few conjuring tricks. And though one half of his experiments went wrong, the other half went right, and Glyn retired amidst more good-natured applause.

The next item on the programme was another comic song by Monty Lowther, in which Lowther excelled himself, and he left the platform amidst a perfect hurricane of clapping.

Then came Grundy's turn—the last item on the programme.



Apparently Grundy had quite forgotten the audience in his wrath at finding Lowther behind the screen. He went for the humorist of the Shell like a wild bull. The screen collapsed as Grundy and Lowther crashed into it. "I'll smash you to a jelly!" roared Grundy. "Ha, ha, ha!" The audience yelled with laughter at this unrehearsed incident. (See Chapter 11.)

There was a buzz, and a round of ironical cheering as Signor Georgio Alfredo Grundio made his appearance on the platform.

He was obviously viewed by the audience as the star turn of the concert.

Grundy bowed, and his rugged features beamed with pleasure as he heard the cheering. He put it down to his personal popularity, being quite ignorant of the fact that the cheering was ironical.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he boomed, "with your kind permission, I will now proceed to give an exhibition of the ancient art of ventriloquism. Ahem!"

Grundy cleared his throat, and there was an expectant chuckle. Then he looked up at the ceiling. There being no chimney at hand, Grundy had to be satisfied by doing that. He was evidently about to carry out a conversation with "the man on the roof."

"Hallo!" he called out. "Are you there, Bill?"
"Yes, I'm 'ere, guv'nor!"

There was a buzz throughout the length and breadth of the big hall. Tom Merry & Co. almost dropped out of sheer astonishment. For the voice had certainly, most emphatically come from above.

"Oh, great pip!" murmured Jack Blake. "The—the beggar can really ventriloquise after all!"
"Phew!"

It was certainly staggering. Instead of seeing Grundy make a hopeless ass of himself, Grundy was really "doing it." He had thrown his voice up on to the roof right enough. Even Mr. Railton could scarcely restrain a gasp. "Very good!" whispered the Head, turning to the House-master. "Very good indeed! The boy is certainly a clever exponent of the difficult art, Railton."
"Hum!" said Mr. Railton.

But if that voice had astonished the audience, it astonished someone else still more. And that someone was George Alfred Grundy.

No wonder! For Grundy had not even had time to try to ventriloquise when that answering voice had come. He had not even had time to screw his features into his

usual agonised expression which he found necessary when ventriloquising.

Whoever that voice belonged to, it certainly did not belong to him!

Naturally, Grundy was quite taken aback. He was absolutely astounded. He stared up at the white ceiling with mouth agape. And as he did so the distant voice sounded again:

"Yes, I'm 'ere, guv'nor. I say, is that white-whiskered old bloke in the front row old Holmes?"
"Wha-what?"

Grundy almost fell down on hearing that. A sudden dreadful silence fell on the assembly. It was broken by Mr. Railton's stern, angry voice:

"Grundy! How dare you? How dare you, sir? Come down from that platform this instant!"

The silence in the hall was deadly now. The scared boys looked at George Alfred as though they could not take their eyes from him. Dr. Holmes had not spoken yet. His kindly old face was hard now, and hurt.

But Mr. Railton was white with anger—anger at the thought that the Head had been so insulted in public. There was a faint movement at the back of the hall as Kildare slipped out almost unseen.

Grundy broke the silence.
"It wasn't me, sir!" he gasped wildly. "I didn't ventriloquise at all. I swear it wasn't me, sir!"

"'Ere, 'ere, guv'nor!" came the voice once more. "What's the good of trying to stuff 'em up with that? Don't disown me—what's your own voice. What's the harm in calling old Holmes an old bloke? Isn't he an old bloke? And so's old Linton and old Lathom. Silly old washerwomen they are! And as for Railton, he's a young bloke—a bloke who's a bit too handy with his cane."
"Bless my soul!" gasped Mr. Railton.

"And Ratty's another one," went on the voice cheerfully. "Only Ratty's a beast as well as a bloke. And as for Selby—well, the less said about him the better."
"Good heavens! Grundy!"

CHAPTER 11.

Nice for Grundy!

"GRUNDY!"

Mr. Railton thundered the name this time. Grundy almost sprang into the air. He scarcely knew whether he was on his head or his heels. He was perfectly innocent of those insulting remarks regarding the masters. Not for worlds would Grundy have insulted a master like that—not the kindly old Head, at all events. But though perfectly innocent, he knew that every person in the hall believed him guilty. He shivered as an angry murmur went round from his schoolfellows. Grundy could have called Mr. Ratcliff, or Mr. Selby just what names he liked and they would not have minded. Ratty and Selby were not popular.

But it was a far different matter in the case of Dr. Holmes, or Mr. Railton, or Messrs. Lathom and Linton. The boys were angry and disgusted at that—especially as regards the Head.

"Well, the rotter!" muttered Wilkins to Gunn. "He must be potty, Gunn—must be! I always said it would come to this!"

"Grundy," went on Mr. Railton, stepping up on to the platform, "come with me this instant! You shall be placed in the punishment-room until Dr. Holmes has decided what is to be done with you! Come!"

But Grundy stood his ground. His face was white, but his jaw was set in the old stubborn way.

"I tell you it wasn't me, sir!" he stammered desperately. "I never made a sound! I—I can't understand it! I swear it wasn't—"

Grundy paused, for at that moment Kildare came along the aisle between the rows of chairs hastily. He approached the Head and whispered to him for some moments. Then the Head called to the surprised Mr. Railton and spoke to him quietly.

Mr. Railton nodded, and stepped on to the platform again, and his face was clearer now.

"Boys," said the Housemaster, holding up his hand, "it is now known that Grundy was not responsible for those insulting remarks. Three boys whom I will not name now have been discovered in the box-room above this hall. Kildare suspected what was taking place, and hurried up there to investigate. He caught them in the act. One of them had called through the trapdoor in the ceiling above, which was slightly open."

"Oh!" gasped Grundy in utter relief, and there was a buzz of amazement from the audience. Mr. Railton held up his hand again.

"Grundy can now go on with his performance," he said, smiling slightly. "Dr. Holmes' wish is that no notice be taken of this disgraceful incident. He has no desire to spoil the evening's enjoyment. Grundy, you may proceed."

"Three cheers for the Head!" yelled someone. And the cheers were given with a will—cheers that brought a flush of pleasure into the Head's face. Then, laughing now, the audience settled down to enjoy Grundy and his ventriloquism. The cheer had relieved the electric atmosphere of the room, and even Grundy felt himself again.

He looked up at the ceiling, and then he opened his mouth, but closed it again just as suddenly. Somehow Grundy did not feel up to tackling the "man on the roof" voice again.

"On the ball, Grundy!" came a voice. "Go it!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Grundy grinned, and went it. Instead of tackling the roof, he turned round to the screen that stood in one corner of the stage. Behind the screen was a door. Grundy's intention was to make an imaginary person speak from behind the screen, and then go out through the door, and go on speaking until his voice grew faint in the distance.

That was Grundy's programme. He had seen a ventriloquist do it before like that. Unfortunately, Grundy quite failed to see something which several juniors at the extreme corner of the hall had already seen. They had just seen Monty Lowther sneak through that door behind the screen, and secrete himself there.

They chuckled, and waited for what would happen next. It soon happened.

Having drawn the attention of the audience to the screen, Grundy cleared his throat.

"Are you there, Joe?" he inquired.

"Yus, gov'nor, I'm 'ere."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There was a howl from the audience. The expression on Grundy's features as he sorewed them up to answer himself was a sight. And the voice was Grundy's, and it quite obviously came from Grundy.

But even as the laughter died down, another voice sounded, this time from behind the screen without a doubt. It was

a husky voice, but there was something about it that strikingly resembled Monty Lowther's of the Shell.

It chanted the following ditty in a really painful discord:

"Grundy is an idiot,
Grundy is an ass!
Thinks he can ventriloquise,
Tries it on in class!
Gets a licking for his pains—
Ain't he fairly potty?
We, to hear him, pay our brass;
Ain't we just as dotty?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There was another roar of laughter. Grundy almost fell down. He glared in petrified amazement at the screen, and then, as if he suddenly guessed what it meant, he rushed behind the screen.

As he did so, the audience heard him give a gasp of wrath.

"Why, you—you awful rotter. Lowther! Why, I'll—I'll smash you to a jelly!"

What happened next was rather alarming—to the senior portion of the assembly, at all events. Apparently Grundy had quite forgotten the audience in his wrath at finding Lowther behind the screen.

From behind it came the sounds of a furious struggle, mingled with gasps and thumps. Then the screen itself collapsed as Grundy and Lowther, locked in each other's arms, crashed into it.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The audience yelled with laughter as the two struggled and fought on top of the screen in full view of all.

"Go it—ha, ha, ha!—Grundy!"

"Give him socks, Lowther!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Out of respect for the masters present, and Miss Marie Rivers—who was almost weeping with laughter herself—Tom Merry acted with praiseworthy promptness. The next moment the curtain came down with a run, hiding the struggling figures from sight.

But it did not place the sounds out of hearing. From beyond the curtain came Grundy's bellowing voice, in addition to the sounds of the struggle. But the sounds of struggling ceased at last, and then only Grundy's voice was heard.

"Rot! Don't you tell me what I can do and what I can't do, Tom Merry! I tell you I'm going on with my show. Why, I haven't had a show with Joey yet! I'm jolly well going to finish my show!"

"But look here—"

"Shut up! I've had enough of you, Tom Merry! Leave this to me. I'm going to smash Lowther to smithereens after the show's over for this! Spoiled my screen act completely, the born idiot!"

"But—but—"

"I'm going on again!" roared Grundy.

And Grundy did come on again, greatly to the joy of the audience. Evidently Merry had given way, for next moment the curtain went up. It showed Grundy just seating himself on a chair. On his knee was the figure of Joey, the ventriloquial doll he had bought.

The sight caused an uproar of cheers and laughter.

"Go it, Grundy!"

"Good old Joey!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Grundy was plainly nervous now. He did not seem to be anything like so sure of himself as he had been over the "distant" voices. He handled the doll quite gingerly. But after clearing his throat, he made a beginning.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he began, "I will now introduce you to my young friend, Joey. I may say—"

"You shut up, gov'nor! You talk too much!"

That was obviously supposed to be an interruption from Joey. Unfortunately, instead of pressing the plate which worked Joey's mouth, Grundy pulled the string which worked his tuft of hair.

The combined effect of Grundy's twisted features as he tried to speak without moving his lips and of Joey's tuft of hair going up and down instead of his lower jaw was really too ludicrous for words.

The audience yelled.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

But Grundy was blissfully ignorant of the fact that they were laughing at him. He imagined they were laughing at Joey's humour, and he went on sawing away at Joey's tuft of hair as he continued his "patter" with Joey.

The audience were almost helpless with laughter by this time.

"Oh dear!" wept Tom Merry, who had come round to the front again. "Oh, isn't he a dream of joy? I wouldn't have missed this for worlds!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Grundy was warming up to the job now. He sawed away at the string, and Joey's tuft of hair went up and down vigorously as Grundy proceeded with his patter. And then quite suddenly Grundy seemed to become aware of his mistake. He stopped sawing abruptly, also he stopped his patter, and shot rather an anxious and guilty look at the audience, as if he wondered if they had noticed the fact that he had been lifting Joey's hair instead of opening his mouth.

The howl of laughter that went up must have told Grundy that.

Many a fellow at that juncture would have bolted headlong from the stage, covered in dismay at his mistake. But not so Grundy. Grundy was made of sterner stuff. As if to cover up his error, he changed his programme abruptly.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he said, "Joey will now sing us that well-known song, 'It Ain't Gonna Rain No Mo'! Now, Miss Marie, please?"

It was rather short notice for Miss Marie, but she was "on the spot." Her fingers were on the notes in a flash, and she started the song without any preliminaries—all done from a kindly desire to cover Grundy's confusion.

Grundy went after her, as it were, this time pressing the plate behind Joey's neck, and Joey's mouth opened and shut as Grundy bawled out the song, twisting his face into a fiendish expression in his efforts to prevent his lips moving.

Towards the end of the first verse Grundy had caught Miss Marie up, and they were about level on the chorus. Grundy's voice made up in noise what it lacked in tunefulness.

"It ain't gonna rain no mo', no mo',
It ain't gonna rain no mo'.
How in the world can the old folks tell
It ain't gonna rain no mo'?"

Grundy bawled out the song lustily, but he got no further than the end of the chorus, nor did Miss Marie, for at that moment an extraordinary thing happened.

As if to belie their song, it actually did begin to rain—or so it seemed to Grundy and Miss Marie, and those nearest to the platform. It actually began to rain on the platform!

Patter, patter, water!
Large drops of water splashed on the platform and on Grundy himself.

Grundy jumped up, and Miss Marie jumped up.
"Great pip!" gasped Grundy. "What the thump—"

He blinked up at the ceiling, his first thought being that someone was at the trapdoor above them again. But the trapdoor was now tightly shut.

And then, quite abruptly, Grundy looked above one of the wings. And he understood. What he saw was a hose-pipe, at the end of which was fixed a brass sprinkler. And it was from this that the water was coming.

It wasn't a miracle, after all. It was somebody playing a joke.

Miss Marie hurriedly stepped down from the platform, leaving it to Grundy and Joey. The water was pattering down faster and faster now, and even those at the back of the hall could hear it and see something of it.

"Oh, my hat!" hooted Grundy.

"Grundy!" gasped Mr. Railton, jumping to his feet.

"What—what ever is happening, boy? Bless my soul! It—it is water coming in through—"

Mr. Railton got no further, for just at that moment the sprinkler over the nozzle of the hose-pipe flew off, evidently forced off by the pressure of water.

It struck Grundy in the chest, and the next instant something else struck Grundy in the chest—a solid stream of water from the hose-pipe that swept him off his feet on to his back.

Grundy fairly howled with wrath, and the next moment the hose-pipe was threshing about the stage like a live serpent, spurring a stream of water over the prostrate Grundy and Joey.

"G-good gracious!" gasped Mr. Railton.

Like everyone else in the front seats he hurriedly retired to those behind.

"Oh, my only hat!" gasped Tom Merry, who had been almost petrified with amazement at first. "I see what it is! I bet it's those young rascals from the Third—Wally D'Arcy and his dashed pals. They were wild because I wouldn't let them take a hand in the concert. They must have known Grundy was going to use that song. They're at the window of the Hall, at the back of the stage!"

"That's it!"
"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors roared as they understood. The truth buzzed round the packed hall, and a perfect howl of almost hysterical laughter went up at the news.

"Run for it, Grundy!" shouted Tom Merry. "Run for it!"

And Grundy ran for it. He dodged the flaying hose, and jumped off the platform, streaming with water and gasping helplessly. As he jumped, the stream of water suddenly ceased, and the hose-pipe dropped flat and inert. And at that moment, with praiseworthy presence of mind, Tom Merry dropped the curtain for the last time!

This was the signal for another delirious shriek of laughter to go up. Fellows leaned over their chairs and forms and howled. Some of them were weeping with laughing. Even the Head, try as he would to be stern, could not help laughing. Mr. Railton was laughing openly, as were Mr. Lathom and Mr. Linton. Even the irascible Mr. Selby was laughing.

"Well—ha, ha, ha!—Grundy," exclaimed Mr. Railton at length, "you had better go and change without delay, my boy. You have certainly made us laugh, and have undoubtedly been the success of the evening."

"Hear, hear!"
"Ha, ha, ha!"

George Alfred Grundy went. He strode down the aisle with water dripping from him at every step. The laughter did not disturb him. Why should it? Mr. Railton had told him just the truth. He had made them laugh, as he intended doing. He had been the success of the evening, as he had intended being. Mr. Railton had told him that, and Grundy fairly swelled with pride as he strode away along the aisle amidst cheers and laughter.

He had vowed to bring the house down. He had kept his word!

St. Jim's rocked with laughter that evening over Grundy's ventriloquial performance. They had expected some fun, and they had not been disappointed. The only fellows who did not laugh—unless one excepted Grundy himself—were Aubrey Racke and Crooke of the Shell, and Percy Mellish of the Fourth.

And they had good reason for not laughing—or, rather, bad reason. For they were the three who had been at the trapdoor above the hall, and it was Aubrey Racke who had, disguising his voice, called down those insulting remarks regarding the Head and the masters of St. Jim's. Suspecting what was going on—Kildare was very sceptical regarding Grundy's powers as a ventriloquist—Kildare had rushed upstairs to the landing above, and had found the trio at work—had caught them in the act.

It all came out then. Only that morning Racke had sneered in his usual unpleasant manner at Grundy, and Grundy had given him a thrashing—a well-deserved one. And this was Racke's revenge—a particularly spiteful and caddish revenge. It was a revenge that might easily have got Grundy the sack from St. Jim's.

But, happily, it had failed, and the rascally trio had been brought to book, and the plot disclosed. And, considering everything, it was a wonder that they were not all three expelled. They escaped the extreme penalty, however, and were soundly flogged.

But nobody had any sympathy for the plotters. The fellows would rather have seen a dozen fellows of Racke's kidney sacked, rather than a fellow like George Alfred Grundy. They congratulated the Shell fellow heartily on his narrow escape, and they also congratulated him on his ventriloquial performance—with their tongues in their cheeks. They told him they were eager, anxious to see and hear him perform again. And they really were.

Yet, for all that, Grundy did not give any more exhibitions of ventriloquism. Whether he really suspected that his leg had been pulled, and whether he had come to the conclusion that he was not such a perfect ventriloquist as he had imagined, was never known. But he confided to his chums, Wilkins and Gunn, the next day, that he had decided to drop ventriloquism. It was, as he explained to them, little more than a kid's game and below his powers and his dignity, after all. And he sent the doll, Joey, to the Rylcombe Infirmary, with the generous hope that it would delight the heart of some poor kiddies there. And that was the last Wilkins and Gunn heard of Grundy, the ventriloquist.

THE END.

ANOTHER RATTLING FINE YARN
NEXT WEEK, CHUMS, ENTITLED.

"GUSSY'S GUESTS!" By Martin Clifford.

DON'T MISS IT, WHATEVER YOU DO!

THE TRAITOR!

Ten men are "pulling their weight" in the new Springdale eleven, and the odd man is working for a bookmaker. What's his name?

A LEADER OF THE LEAGUE!

Suspicion!

AN early goal was what was wanted. An early goal for the Albion, of course, but that was not how the opening play shaped. Disaster instead of triumph came. Straight from the kick-off the lusty Downside forwards—there was not a man in that line whose weight was less than twelve stone—swept down the field. Before the home defence could settle itself it was hustled and hustled until it became confused. Gathering a smart cross from the left, the visiting centre-forward plunged ahead, shook off the attentions of Huntley, the home left-back, and then, with almost insensate fury, shot.

Bennett sprang too late. His feet might have been made of lead. Whether he was unsighted, or whether that sharp, decisive attack had cast a mesmerising influence over him, the fact remained that his outstretched hand was several inches away from the fleeting ball, which crashed its way under the crossbar and set the net quivering. "Goal!"

Whilst the delighted Downside players raced back to the centre of the pitch, falling over each other in their joy, the great crowd which had gathered to see the Albion win that day perforce kept silent. Their disappointment was intense. They could scarcely look at each other. Some started to blame one player, some said that Huntley was responsible, whilst others maintained that Bennett should have saved. Yet what availed it all? There was the ball in the centre of the field, and the game was on once more.

"Don't be downhearted, Albion!" called a clarion voice, and that one man straightway put heart into over twenty thousand others by declaring his faith as a sportsman should. The crowd remembered that the game had only been on for a bare five minutes. There was still eighty-five minutes left for play. What might not happen in such time? What was a goal? Just one goal!

The first movement in which the home front line participated encouraged this new belief. Faith came back to the crowd. They cheered and cheered again. Over from the right wing the ball came in a high-sweeping cross. Dick Hastie subdued it with a single flick of his foot. Then out to Bob Layton, who moved at once as the football master moves, swerving this way and that with the ball always at his toes.

That first dribble which Bob Layton made for his new club was bewilderingly brilliant. Two opponents were beaten, and while a third was rushing towards him he pushed the ball inside to the waiting Hastie.

Dick was standing twenty yards from goal, and at an acute angle. Guarding the citadel were the two Downside backs, as well as the goalkeeper. The first defender he drew, encouraged the left-back to tackle him, and then, at the exact moment, pushed the ball across to the waiting centre-forward.

Dean, a red-haired young giant who had Celtic blood in his veins, pounced on that ball as a hungry dog pounces on a bone. You could see that the lad was animated by one vast thrill. Here was his big chance. He must not waste it. With a clear course, he nodded the ball on a yard or so, and then, while the crowd hung on his every movement, shot.

There was terrific power behind that shot—such power, that although the Downside goalkeeper got both hands to



BY
SYDNEY HORLER.

the ball, it spurned out of his hands and hurtled over the line.

"Goal!"
"One all!"
"Hurrah!"

How the crowd cheered! How they turned to each other! How they slapped each other's backs and flung each other's hats high into the air! The Albion had equalised, and there was still eighty minutes left for play.

Once having warmed themselves to the task, the Albion players showed that the trust which was being reposed in them was not misplaced. That equalising goal had been a wonderful tonic. It had given them confidence, it sent their feet scampering over the ground.

Every department played well, but in none was there so much brilliance as in the new left wing. The young player and the old blended with almost uncanny precision. Each seemed to know the other's game to a nicety. They would change places repeatedly, flummoxing their opponents to such an extent that oftentimes a laugh took the place of a cheer with the crowd.

A wonderful wing they were universally acclaimed. One old and very shrewd football observer sitting in the stand went further than this, however. To his companion he said the memorable words, "The wing of a century! I've been following football for forty years now, and have seen all the famous players, but I've never seen better play than this. Mark my words. The Albion will go far if they can only keep that left wing of theirs intact!"

Yes, it was a wonderful wing. On Hastie's side there was ceaseless energy and dauntless enthusiasm, to which was added marked natural skill, whilst Layton had all the craft of fifteen years' service in the highest class football at his command, plus an inborn ability for the game.

The two players continued to bewilder their opponents, so admirably did they dovetail their play. Hastie manoeuvred for position, so that he never called on his winger unless he could give Layton a clear field in which

to work his wiles. The crowd did not know that the night before the two had sat up to a late hour working out a plan of campaign.

With many a chuckle the old International—for Layton, five years before, had been England's outside-left against Scotland—had told his partner the exact kind of pass he most desired. He informed him, moreover, of the many tricks which he might work during the match the following afternoon. Perhaps, therefore, it was not so surprising to find the Downside defenders bamboozled time after time, and notably once when Layton ran almost into touch, only to back-heel the ball neatly to his partner just as the linesman came running up to signal "out."

The second goal came through this manoeuvre, for with the defenders standing staring at him, Dick Hastie was allowed to dribble on, to swerve past the right full-back, who had mistimed a vicious tackle, and then, running clean into the goalmouth, to drive the ball low and true past the Downside goalkeeper, who flung his cap away in disgust as the ball flashed past him.

"Hurrah!"

Thus came the second goal. Still the Albion were not satisfied, and it was not long before a third point was notched. This also was due to brilliant combination between Hastie and his new partner. A trick which Bob Layton had discussed with Dick before the match was brought to a splendid consummation. Wandering aimlessly into almost the centre of the pitch, Layton suddenly fixed on the ball. He did not speed out to his rightful position, but passed forward and wide of his left foot.

The crowd was amazed, but nevertheless thrilled to see that this time it was Dick Hastie who coursed down the wing, outwitting the defenders as he dribbled. Then, feinting to centre, he slipped the ball unexpectedly to Layton, who had taken up the inside-left position, and the old Swifts' player demonstrated that his left foot had lost none of its cunning by firing in a rocket-ball to which the Downside goalkeeper could only get the tips of his fingers as it flashed past him into the net.

This third goal fairly roused the crowd. They cheered in frenzied enthusiasm.

But there was another side to the picture. It was very evident, whenever the ball came in the direction of Bennett, that the home custodian, in spite of the wonderful work of the rest of the team, was very nervous. Why he should have been so no one could tell. Bennett, although not one of the most gifted goalkeepers in the League, had played many fine games for Springdale Albion. Yet to-day he seemed almost a nervous wreck, and this in spite of the fact that both his backs were covering him magnificently. Huntley and his partner were both kicking a fine length and tackling well. Why, then, should Bennett be nervous?

Whilst waiting for the ball to be returned after it had been kicked on to the roof of the smaller stand, Bob Layton approached his captain.

"There's something wrong with that goalkeeper of ours, Dick," said the old winger.

Dick stared at the speaker.

"Wrong? What do you mean, Bob?" he asked.

Layton frowned.

"I'll tell you after the game," he replied.

The words remained with Hastie throughout the rest of the match; and although a topping victory had again been secured, his mind was not entirely at ease when he had returned to the dressing-room at the conclusion of the game.

Springdale Albion had won a great victory by three goals to one; but the fact that the team harboured a possible traitor took away much of his pleasure.

Bob Layton's mysterious hint received confirmation from Andy Anderson.

"Dick," said the trainer, as he rubbed down the young captain; "I don't care for the look of that fellow Bennett this afternoon. It's my belief he's a wrong 'un. You

know how easy it would be for him to let the side down if once he got into the power of a football coupon merchant."

Dick turned sharply.

"You don't mean to say, Andy, that anyone in our team would stoop so low as to sell a match?"

Anderson glumly nodded his head, and Hastie burst out with:

"If I thought there was anything in it, I'd tackle the fellow on the spot. During the game Bob Layton approached me on the same subject; but, hang it, Andy, I can't believe it—I simply can't!"

"Well, I mean to keep a good eye on the fellow, anyway," returned the trainer, before going about the rest of his duties.

Much as he would have liked to believe the goalkeeper innocent of this foul charge, Dick Hastie was not reassured by watching the suspected Bennett leave the ground half an hour later in company with the discredited Burleigh, the deposed centre-half of the Albion team.

Smashing a Scheme!

THE question of Bennett's honesty occupied the attention of at least three people during the coming week. The three were Bob Layton, Dick Hastie, and Andy Anderson.

Looking through the newspapers, Dick was forced to come to the conclusion that Bob Layton, in his suspicion of Bennett, might be correct. Alive to the danger which threatened the game, the Football Association had asked the different sporting editors to print long columns dealing with a gigantic evil which had just been brought to light. The disclosure that was being made dealt with the discovery of a tremendous football betting organisation, the tentacles of which spread all over the country.

It had been proved, said the Football Association, that extraordinary sums of money had been offered to prominent players in the hope of bribing them to be false to their trust. It was a matter for congratulation that this evil scheme of wholesale bribery, which had threatened to bring the sport as a whole into the worst possible repute, had been largely defeated because no player worthy of the name had succumbed to the insidious temptation.

Had this organisation approached Bennett? And had Bennett yielded?

These two questions vexed Dick's mind to the exclusion of almost everything else. For what good was it for the rest of the team to play like Trojans, to put every ounce of energy that they had in a game, if behind them, in the most important position on the field, was a man who was seeking deliberately to sell them? Dick knew that Layton, with his great experience of League football, would not have spoken to him as he had done about Bennett unless he was fairly certain of his facts.

There had been that first goal of Downside's to account for. Good shot as it was, surely Bennett could have shaped better at it than he did? Why, the man seemed absolutely rooted in his tracks; he had made no effort to stop the shot! The evil must be sifted to the bottom. If Bennett was a traitor he must be thrown out of the club; but the position was embarrassing, to say the least of it. In the present straitened financial circumstances, the management was more or less forced to keep Bennett, because they had no capable reserve to guard their goal. No doubt Bennett was considering himself the master of the situation.

Monday was regarded as a holiday by the Albion players. Their only duty that day was to report at eleven o'clock in the morning to receive their wages.

As Bob Layton walked out of the office side by side with Dick Hastie, he turned to his companion and remarked:

INTRODUCTION.

DICK HASTIE, a young fellow of twenty, and a born footballer, is approached by

J. B. TOVEY, a football "scout" on the look-out for fresh talent, who declares that if Dick will join the famous Swifts he will make an International of him within two years. Dick, however, has to turn the tempting offer down, for

ROBERT HASTIE, his father, suddenly disappears, leaving behind him a host of clamouring creditors. Believing in his father's innocence, and holding himself responsible for the money entrusted to his father, Dick publicly announces that he will stay in Springdale until every penny has been wiped off.

DAVID MARTIN, Hastie's staunch friend.

JAMES BURN, a "live-wire" reporter on the "Springdale Gazette."

BENJAMIN TRAVERS, the managing-director of Springdale Albion.

Some time elapses, and so strong is public opinion that Benjamin Travers is forced to give Dick Hastie a place in the Springdale eleven. The lad acquits himself well. This move on Travers' part, however, is the beginning of a foul conspiracy, for Travers wants to see Dick out of the way. The lad is arrested on a charge of stealing money from the pockets of his fellow-players, and so strong is the evidence that Dick's guilt would appear to be proved up to the hilt. At the critical moment in the trial, however, Anderson, the Springdale trainer, declares that the charge is a foul conspiracy. What's more, he proves his statement to the satisfaction of the presiding magistrate. Dick is acquitted, and with his acquittal comes a change in the fortunes of the Springdale football club. A new board of directors takes control, and Hastie is handed the captaincy. With his inexperienced, but determined team-mates, Dick sets out in the match against Downside upon the uphill task of improving the Albion's position in the League.

(Now read on.)

"Thought anything more of what I told you about that fellow Bennett?"

"I can't help thinking about it, Bob! It's horrible to have to think about it at all; but if what you say is true, something must be done—and done soon."

Layton nodded.

"I've got an idea," he said. "To-morrow morning, when we're doing ball practice, you and I will slip into the dressing-room and go through Bennett's clothes. What do you say?"

Dick looked distressed.

"I don't like doing that, Bob," he replied.

"Well, I'll do it on my own if you're too thin-skinned, Dick. Hang it, do you think we can be too particular in dealing with a possible skunk?"

"Perhaps you're right, Bob. But what do you expect to find?"

"If I can get my hands on any evidence that Bennett is in league with these betting merchants, that will be good enough for Mr. Martin to throw him out of the club."

"I know; but we haven't any other goalkeeper fit to play for the League team."

Layton smiled.

"I know where I can pick up a good goalkeeper—and without having to pay any transfer fee, either," he replied. "This chap is as mad as a hatter; but, then, they say that all good goalkeepers are mad, so what does that matter?"

On the Tuesday morning Dick found his partner waiting for him at the entrance to the ground.

"I've got an item of news for you, skipper," he said, with a grim smile.

"About Bennett?"

"Yes, about Bennett. Last night I did a bit of shadowing work, and what do you think I found?"

"Goodness knows!"

"Well, I found that friend Bennett is hand-in-glove with a fellow named Sam Simister, who keeps a public-house—"

"Sam Simister! He used to be one of the directors. One of the old gang."

"Well, it was a jolly good thing when he got shifted off the Board, let me tell you that! I shouldn't be surprised if this Simister fellow was not doing a good bit of football betting. If he is, that would account for Bennett being so thick with him. Anyway, with Anderson's permission, I'm just going to go through Mr. Bennett's pockets this morning. It isn't a nice thing to do, I know; but when you're up against a position like this you can't be too particular in your methods."

The result of this conversation was that half an hour later whilst the Albion players were all at practice and Bennett was safely installed beneath the crossbar, both Layton and Dick excused themselves and returned to the dressing-rooms. Here they found Anderson waiting for them.

"No need to go through Bennett's clothes," said the trainer. "Here's something that dropped out of his pocket. I didn't like reading it at first; but now I'm glad I did—the dirty hound! He's been selling us!"

"What!" exclaimed Dick.

"I'm not a bit surprised," was Bob Layton's comment.

Whilst the trainer smoothed out a slip of paper the two players looked over his shoulder.

This is what they read:

"Dear Bennett,—Here's two pounds. If the Albion had lost on Saturday, it would have meant a fiver to you. Burn this.—S. S."

"Sam Simister!" cried Dick.

"Without a doubt," said Layton.

"Sam Simister! Do you mean to say he's got a hand in this?" exclaimed Anderson.

"Hand in it! He's got both feet in it, let alone a hand!" retorted Layton. "I was telling Dick half an hour ago that I tracked Bennett to that fellow's pub. last night. Bennett went in through the private entrance, and was there for over an hour. Arranging the details for next Saturday's match, I suppose."

Anderson brought his fist down with a smack upon the table.

"There'll be no Bennett playing in Saturday's match!" he replied. "I'll see to that!"

The sound of someone bursting into the room made the trainer turn.

"Hallo, Bennett! What do you want?" he asked.

The goalkeeper's face went livid.

"Talking secrets," he inquired, with a sickly grin.

Bob Layton stepped forward.

"You dirty hound!" he said threateningly. "It was a secret, but now all three of us know it. Selling us for a fiver a time, eh? Well, you won't have another chance!"

The colour flamed back into Bennett's face.

"If you were only ten years younger I'd knock you flat for that, Layton!" he stormed.

"Don't mind my age," replied Layton. "And if you want a fight, you have only got to say so. I've met some miserable skunks in my life, but never one quite as bad as you, Bennett! Now, then, want a scrap?"

But the belligerence had apparently suddenly died in the goalkeeper. Unable to meet the gaze of the trainer and Dick Hastie, he turned on his heel and left the room.

Three days later he left Springdale, for, hard-pressed as he was for a goalkeeper, David Martin paid the man off at once.

"If I did my duty, I should report you to the League authorities, Bennett," he said. "And it is only because I believe you have been the tool of a man higher up than I do not do so. Clear out of the town, and never let me see your face again!"

The Dramatic Surprise!

BOB LAYTON was as good as his word. After a brief talk with David Martin, the chairman of the Albion Club sent a telegram. In reply to this telegram, there arrived at the Springdale ground on the following morning a tall, gawky, red-haired young man, who gave the astonishing name of Gopher.

"I'm a goalkeeper, I am," he said, "and I don't care who knows it!"

This introduction naturally caused intense merriment amongst the Albion players, and the laughter continued until the arrival of Bob Layton, who promptly ordered Gopher to change, and then took him out himself to the playing-pitch.

Gopher, dressed in ordinary clothes, was a remarkable sight; but Gopher in football togs was a sight for the gods. Standing six feet two inches high, he was abnormally thin, and had the appearance of badly wanting a square meal. His feet were of such dimensions that not a pair of football-boots in the club's store would fit him. Consequently, he played in his street footwear.

With all these eccentricities, however, there could be no doubt that Gopher was a goalkeeper. Bob Layton had stated that he was probably mad. Well, that might be. But to see him falling full-stretch to turn a fiercely-hit ball round the upright made one forget his peculiarities. Within half an hour every Springdale player present gave it as his true opinion that the ungainly Gopher was one of the greatest custodians he had ever seen.

"But where have you been hiding all the time, lad?" asked one.

Gopher chuckled.

"I'm a terror, I am!" he said. "There's nothing I like better than fighting a copper!"

Dick Hastie, who had strolled up, looked at the speaker.

"What do you want to fight a policeman for?" he asked. Gopher grinned stupidly.

"I dunno! I just likes doing it, that's all!"

Bob Layton supplied the solution. He explained that Gopher had received many trials from first-rate teams, but that none of the teams could possibly keep the man on account of the trouble he caused both inside and outside the particular club. The man was a born fighter—always looking for trouble.

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"He generally finds it, too!" commented Bob, with a laugh. "But, of course, up to now he's been a fool to himself. However, I had a good, sensible talk with him this morning—I'm a relation of his by marriage, although don't tell anybody about that!—and he's promised me that he'll keep himself in order. If he only will, we've got a goalkeeper in a million."

The news of Bennett's departure and of Gopher's arrival caused no small amount of excitement in the town. And with an enterprising charabanc company announcing a trip to Downside on the Saturday, some hundreds of Albion supporters made the journey of twelve miles.

They arrived to find the town in a ferment of excitement. The defeat the previous Saturday had rankled, and it was commonly stated that Downside were determined to win the return match at all costs.

The Albion supporters listened in silence. They had their own views about the matter.

Then one of them broke into a broad grin.

"I hope none of your players won't look angry at our new goalkeeper," he said.

"New goalkeeper?"

"Ay, new goalkeeper, lad. He's been out West breaking in wild horses, and a few forwards ain't nothing to him. He just bangs their heads together and then slings 'em over the bar!"

Having thus established friendly relations with the natives, the Springdale Albion supporters passed on.

The Albion players themselves made the trip with a certain amount of trepidation. Not that they funk the issue, but they anticipated a gruelling match in which their opponents might not always have a due regard for the rules of the game. A double victory over Downside was more than they could reasonably expect; but, at least, as Bob Layton said, they hoped to draw.

It was just as the train was steaming out of the station that a telegraph messenger-boy came running up to the saloon carriage.

"Mr. Hastie!" he called. "Mr. Hastie!"

Dick took the wire wondering. Who could want to telegraph to him?

"Open it, boy!" said David Martin.

Dick slit the envelope and quickly read the contents. Then he burst into a great shout of joy.

"What's the matter, Dick?" inquired David Martin.

"Matter! Read it for yourself, Mr. Martin. I suppose it isn't a fake? I don't know whether I'm standing on my head or on my heels."

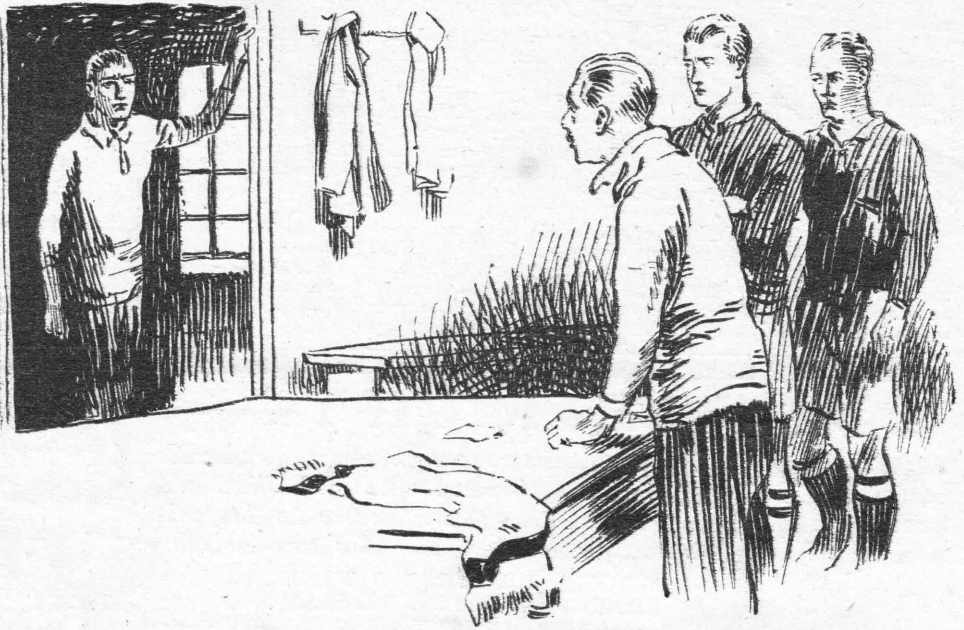
David Martin took the buff slip and read aloud:

"Coming home. Bank paying all debts.—Love,
"DAD."

"I see it was sent off from Ontario, Canada," commented Martin. "Well, this beats Christmas! It seems that your father has been out of the country all this time; but anyway, it's good news, Dick—the best possible news! It means that our faith has been justified! It means that your father was an innocent man!"

"It means," replied Dick, "that he will be able to hold his head up again in Springdale, and that's the greatest thing in the world to me!"

The news soon spread amongst the players, and each in his different fashion came forward and congratulated their captain upon the wonderful tidings. Such a procedure would have been impossible in the old Albion team, but the members of the new side one and all appreciated their



"There'll be no Bennett playing in Saturday's match," growled Anderson, "I'll see to that!" At that moment Bennett entered the room. "Hallo, Bennett!" said the trainer. "What do you want?" The goalkeeper's face went livid. "Talking secrets?" he inquired, with a sickly grin. (See page 26.)

skipper at his true worth. Like a couple of benevolent godparents, David Martin and Andy Anderson beamed upon the company.

It was naturally difficult for Dick to switch his thoughts, but as the train neared Downside he was forced to do so. He had always had confidence in his father; he had always had the belief that time would clear up the mystery; but, for the present, his mind became occupied with the approaching match.

A crowd of excited football followers watched the team as they stepped on to the platform.

"You're going to get a licking to-day, Springdale!" Some of the Albion players turned round to face the speaker, and a mild scene might have occurred had not Martin and Anderson ushered their charges down the slope and into the waiting taxicabs.

Great news awaited them upon their arrival at the ground. The eleven had only just started changing when David Martin, who had gone to speak to some of the home directors, rushed back into the room.

"Here's your chance, lads!" he said. "Mr. George Garrity, who has become a member of the International Selection Committee, is in the grand-stand going to watch the match! A wonderful stroke of luck for you, Dick," he added, turning to the young captain. "Garrity always believed in you, and if you show anything like your best form to-day you're almost certain to get a show in the International Trial Match next Saturday!"

Andy Anderson, his eyes gleaming, went about his business with renewed zest. The thought of having a possible future International player in his charge was a rare stimulant, and not only was the trainer excited, but the thrill occasioned by the chairman's words spread to every member of his side.

Just as the referee's whistle trilling in the corridor outside gave them the signal to take the field, Anderson drew Dick aside.

"Remember what Mr. Martin said," he remarked earnestly. "Play up well to-day, Dick, and goodness only knows what may happen! It's easy to see what was in Mr. Garrity's mind. He didn't come to see Springdale Albion play so much as to see you play! He wanted to see how you and Bob Layton hit it off together—but, of course, Bob's getting too old for an International now. Just play your ordinary game, Dick, and I'm thinking that an English Cap will come to Springdale before long!"

The words stirred Dick, and the thrill of them made him tingle as, picking up a practice-ball, he led the side out of the room.

The Downside cohorts had gathered in force. They meant to see this presumptuous side of untried youngsters beaten to the ground. The thought of the last week's match was as gall and wormwood to them, and they barely had patience

to wait while the captains tossed and the referee said a few words before starting the game.

A roar of delight, that held also a challenge in it, greeted the fact that the home captain had beaten Dick Hastie in the toss.

The densely-packed throngs round the railings and in the cheaper portions of the ground started to shout the names of their favourite players in the home team. Thus, encouraged, the Downside front line broke away from the kick-off, and but for stern defensive work by the visiting halves they might have caused very serious trouble to Gopher.

Joe Birtles, the right-half of Downside, and a prime favourite of the crowd, was an unpleasant-faced, heavily-built obstructionist. Birtles' plan of campaign was invariably to stop his man. He did so by methods which could not be called squeamish, and in consequence he had gained a reputation—justly deserved, let it be said—of frightening

many an infinitely better player into comparative impotence. It is safe to say that during the ten years of professional football that he had experienced Birtle had picked up every shady trick that a half-back can learn. The crowd now roared with delight when they saw their unscrupulous champion spit on his hands as he rushed into the fray.

The spectacular action of Birtles did not intimidate Bob Layton. Bob was old enough to put this mannerism down at its true worth.

"Watch that fellow, Dick," he said, drawing close to the other. "He means to play you a dirty trick, see if he doesn't."

And then, with the ball at his toes, Birtles lunged towards them.

(And Birtles will want some watching, too! Lots of things are going to happen before this match is played out. Follow the progress of the game in next week's fine instalment, chums.)

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