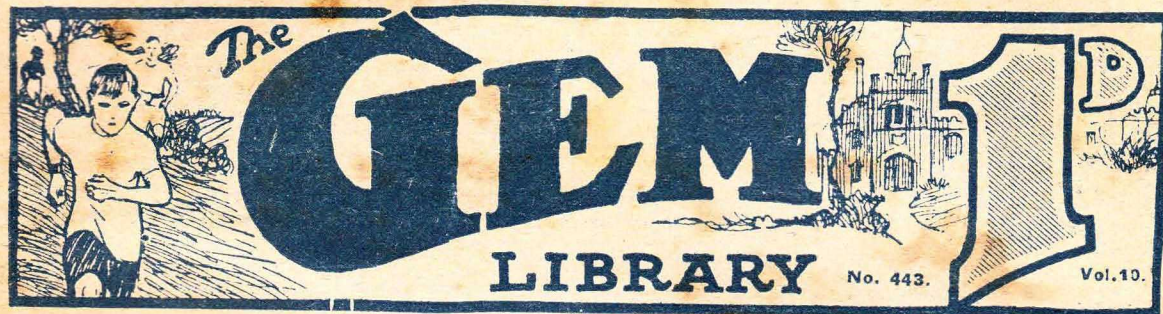


GRUNDY THE DETECTIVE!

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



MANNERS CLEARS UP A MYSTERY!

(An Exciting Scene in the Magnificent Long, Complete School Tale in this issue.)



THIS WEEK'S CHAT

Whom to Write to —
EDITOR "THE GEM" LIBRARY.
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 OUR · · THREE · · COMPANION · · PAPERS!
 "THE MAGNET" THE "PENNY CHUCKLES."
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 EVERY MONDAY | EVERY FRIDAY | EVERY SATURDAY.



For Next Wednesday :

"EVERY INCH A HERO!"

By **Martina Clifford.**

Dick Brooke, the day-boy who won a scholarship at St. Jim's, is the chief figure in next week's fine long, complete story. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, in love once again, imagines Brooke his rival—which Brooke is not, having too much sense for spooning—and quarrels with him in consequence. But the quarrel with Gussy is not the biggest of Brooke's troubles. He deeply offends Tom Merry & Co., in connection with a cricket match, and suffers in mind and in body through what is taken to be his unpardonable slackness. Circumstances render it impossible for him to explain, and it is only when the mystery is cleared up that St. Jim's generally comes to understand that no mistake has been made by the school in thinking Dick Brooke a thoroughly good, sound fellow, while beyond and above that he is

"EVERY INCH A HERO!"

A SAD STORY.

The mother of a boy who was a very keen reader of "Chuckles," our bright and breezy Saturday companion paper, wrote the other day to tell me of what had befallen her son. I say that he "was" a reader, because it seems quite unlikely that he will ever be able to read the paper, or any paper, again. Some six years or so ago he lost the sight of one eye through the carelessness of a boy who was throwing broken bottles about—a foolish thing to do anywhere. Now, the other eye has been injured by a blow from the instrument known as a "cat" used in the game with which most of you must be familiar. So bad is the injury that hope of any recovery of sight has practically been given up.

The time is a time of tragedies. If it were not for the wonderful cheerfulness with which the men themselves bear their misfortunes, it would scarcely be possible to feel otherwise than utterly gloomy in walking through the streets and seeing everywhere the human wreckage of the sea of war. But even at such a time the sad case of this poor little chap appeals specially to one's sympathy. It was the cruellest of coincidences that he should suffer twice in the same way. I know a man who has a scar across each eyelid, and those scars were sustained in different accidents, one in the football, and the other while cycling, separated in time by nearly twenty years. Either of those accidents might have cost him the sight of an eye. The fraction of an inch would have made all the difference. But, as a matter of fact, neither did any lasting damage at all. His luck was in—there, if not in other matters. Our poor little chum's luck was out.

Will some of you write and cheer him up? I don't mean say a lot about his misfortune, because he will naturally be thinking more than is likely to be good for him about that, anyway. Say you have heard of it, and think that he might be glad of letters, and then tell him something about yourselves, and the things that interest you.

His name is R. Jordan, and his address is 29, Truro Road, Bedminster.

SOME APPRECIATIONS.

P. A. Sage, who is a boy on H.M.S. Niobe, stationed on the Canadian coast, writes to say that his request in the "Gem" for back numbers brought him several parcels. "I and my pals were simply delighted," he says. "They swarmed round me like a lot of bees. Will you please thank all the kind readers who sent?" They are hereby thanked.

"My uncle in the Navy," writes a Birmingham reader, "was delighted with the 'Gems' I sent him. As soon as he had read them he handed them round to his mates, and quite a lot of them became so keen that they wrote home to their people to say that they must have the 'Gem' sent them every week. Now, one postbag each week is pretty nearly full of 'Gems.' Good!"

"It was jolly good and thoughtful of you, Mr. Editor," writes a man in one of the Remount Squadrons of the Egyptian Expeditionary Force, "to send me on those back numbers to be going on with till my notice asking readers to send could appear. I was in a simply rotten mood before they came; but I started in on a 'Gem' at once, and in a few minutes my depression was completely chased away."

NOTICES.

Leagues, Correspondence, Etc.

Montague R. Young, 9, Westbourne Road, Barnsbury, N., is forming a local "G." and "M." League, and would be glad to hear from readers in his neighbourhood. Stamped and addressed envelope, please.

J. W. Smith and H. E. Ballard, 6, Stonefield Mansions, Cloudesley Square, Islington, N., are forming a "G." and "M." League for the North London district, and hope to be able to run a cricket club in connection with it. Those interested, please write.

R. De Negri, 63, Newington Green Road, Islington, N., is forming a local "G." and "M." League. Will those interested send stamped and addressed envelope, or call?

A. R. Colbeck, Vale Cottage, 9, Northern Road, Aylesbury, wishes to form a correspondence club for "G." and "M." readers anywhere. Stamped and addressed envelope, please.

Charles H. Scott, Harwood Street, Stantonbury, Bucks, will be glad to correspond with readers, and especially with any soldiers and sailors, who would care for friendly letters. Longhand or shorthand.

Back Numbers, &c., Wanted.

G. Smith, Kanimbla, 1, Russell Street, Woollahra, Sydney, Australia, wants to buy old "Gems" or "Magnets" (before No. 300), and will be glad to hear from any reader who has them for sale.

Private H. Mallett, 21796, 4th Platoon, A Coy., 15th Batt. Durham Light Infantry, B.E.F., France, would be glad to have the "Gem" and "Magnet" regularly each week from some reader.

J. Morley, 78A, Rodney Place, New Kent Road, S.E., who is confined to bed through an operation to his feet, would be glad to buy back numbers of the "Gem" and "Magnet" cheaply.

A. Crudgington, c.o. Mrs. Sillars, 160, Taylor Road, King's Heath, Birmingham, offers 1d. each for back numbers of the "Gem" earlier than 350.

A. Daniel, 136, Manchester Road, Cubitt Town, London, E., wants to buy No. 3 of the "Greyfriars Herald," and No. 715 (dated February 20, 1915) of the "Boys' Friend."

Private H. Strand, 2227, 2nd Battalion Manchester Regiment, Military Hospital, Wittington, Staffs, would be much obliged if any of the older readers of the "Gem" would supply him with a razor and strop.

H. Daley, Salisbury Hotel, Oxford Street, Manchester, would be glad to hear from any readers having back numbers of either the "Gem" or "Magnet" for sale.

J. C. Dransfield, 128, Ashton Road, Oldham, is anxious to form a "Gem" and "Magnet" League, open to readers anywhere in the world. Special attractions. Stamped and addressed envelopes, please.

Private A. E. B. Mellor, 1140, A Company Reserve Battalion, 1st South African Infantry, c.o. G.P.O., London, would be glad of copies of the companion papers.

Your Editor

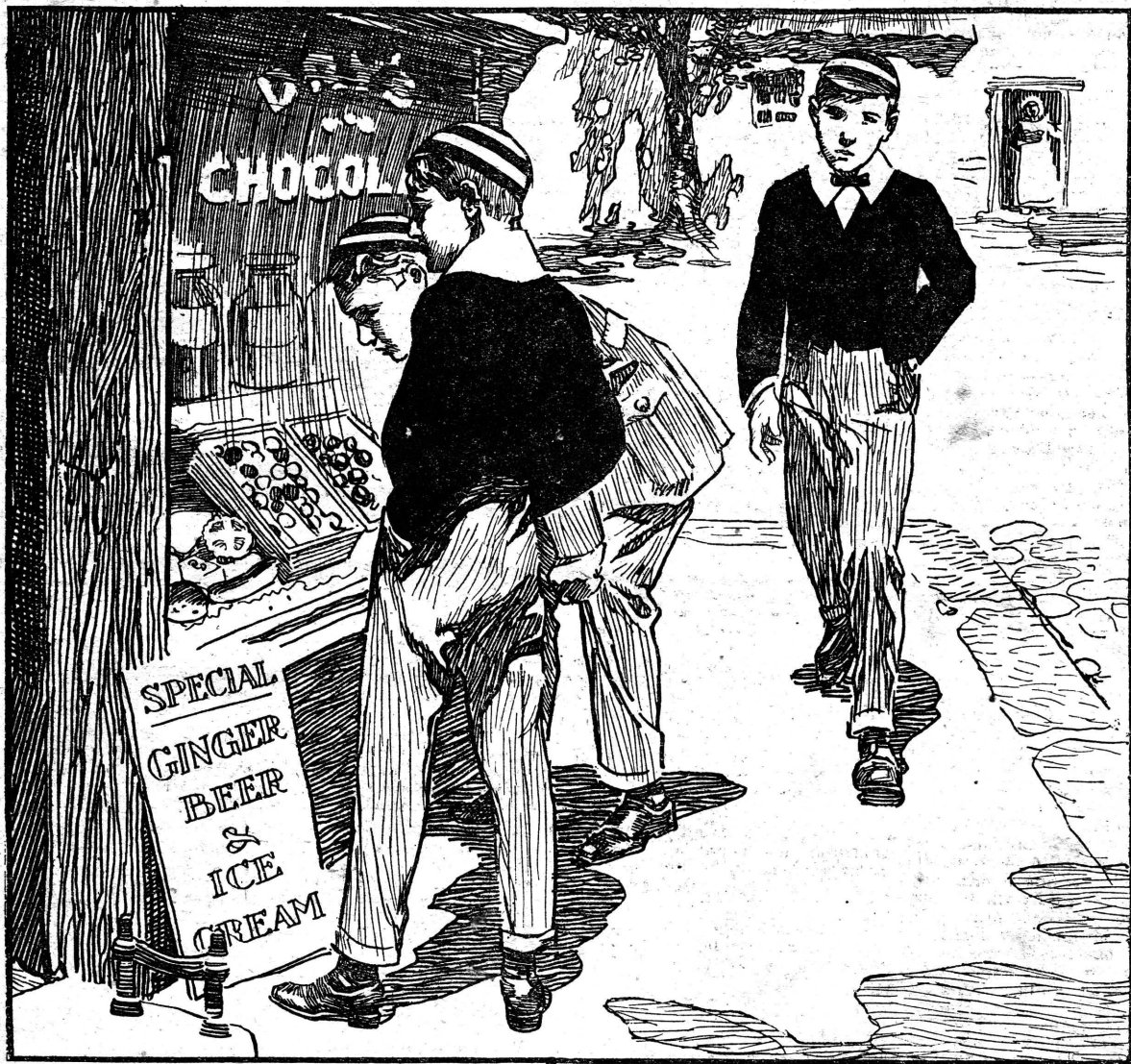
PUBLISHED IN TOWN
AND COUNTRY EVERY
WEDNESDAY MORNING



COMPLETE STORIES
FOR ALL, AND EVERY
STORY A GEM!

GRUNDY THE DETECTIVE!

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



Levison of the Fourth was lounging outside the tuck-shop, chatting with Mellish, a little later, when Grundy bore down on him. "Getting on with the case, Grundy?" asked Levison, with a wink at his comrade. (See Chapter 9.)

CHAPTER 1.

More Haste, Less Speed.

"**W**HERE'S my camera?" Manners of the Shell asked that question in a voice that could be heard from one end of the passage to the other.

Manners was furious. Manners had rushed into the study in hot haste for his

camera. A detachment of the New Army was marching past the gates of St. Jim's, en route for the camp at Abbotsford. Tom Merry & Co. had gathered at the gates to look on, and to give them a yell, as Monty Lowther expressed it. Manners had bethought himself of his camera at once, and rushed in for it—to put that march-past on permanent record.

And the camera wasn't there!

It was enough to exasperate anybody, and especially a keen

Next Wednesday.

"EVERY INCH A HERO!" AND "CORNSTALK BOB!"

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an amateur photographer. Manners glared round the study warily. But the camera was not to be seen. It wasn't on the table, it wasn't under it, it wasn't in the cupboard or the coat-locker or the bookcase. It had vanished! Manners' wonderful presentation ten-guinea camera had vanished!

And Manners put his head out of the doorway, and demanded of the world generally, at the top of his voice:

"Where's my camera?"

Most of the fellows were out of doors, and there came no reply to Manners' excited demand.

"Where's my camera?" bawled Manners.

Then Grundy of the Shell looked out of his study.

"Hallo! What's the matter with you?" he asked.

"Where's my camera?" yelled Manners.

Grundy looked surprised.

"Blessed if I know!" he replied. "Have you lost it?"

"No!" roared Manners. "I haven't lost it! Some beast has taken it out of the study. Have you borrowed it?"

"If you're calling me a beast—" began Grundy, with a warlike look.

"Have you had my camera?"

"You should take more care of it!" said Grundy, shaking his head. "Why don't you look after your property?"

"Have you had it, you ass?"

"Oh, no; I haven't had it! But you should really be more careful—"

"Oh, dry up, you ass!"

Manners was excited—too excited to be polite. He rushed down the passage in quest of the sacrilegious person unknown who had laid hands on his camera. Grundy caught him by the shoulder as he passed, and stopped him. Manners, brought up with a sudden jerk, waltzed fairly round Grundy before he came to a halt.

"Look here, Manners—"

"Leggo, you ass! I want my camera—"

"You called me an ass—"

"So you are—a frabjous ass!" roared Manners, struggling in Grundy's powerful grasp. "Leggo, or I'll biff you on your silly nose! The soldiers will be gone in two minutes, and I want to photograph them!"

"You called me an ass," said Grundy obstinately, and still holding the excited Shell fellow. "I never stand any rot, I've told you that lots of times. I haven't seen your silly old camera—"

"Leggo!"

"I'm sorry you've lost your camera, if you've lost it!" pursued Grundy calmly. "But you can't call a chap names because you've lost a camera—"

"Will you let go, you shrieking idiot? I'm in a hurry!"

"Of course, I don't want to stop you if you're in a hurry, but you can't call a chap an ass because you've been careless with your camera. I simply want to point out to you civilly—yaroooh!"

Manners' patience was quite exhausted. Perhaps Grundy was within his rights, but he was a little tactless under the circumstances, considering that Manners was a young man in a hurry. Manners smote George Alfred Grundy on his broad chest, and George Alfred staggered against the wall with a roar.

Then Manners tore down the passage, hurled open the door of Study No. 6, and rushed in. D'Arcy of the Fourth was there. Blake and Herries and Digby, his study-mates, had gone out to watch the soldiers pass.

"Have you got my camera?" roared Manners.

"Bai Jove!" ejaculated D'Arcy.

"Where's my camera?"

Arthur Augustus rose to his feet, carefully adjusted his celebrated monocle in his eye, and stared at Manners. It was a withering stare, though it had no perceptibly withering effect on Manners.

"Weally, Mannahs, I wegard it as the vevy worst of bad form—"

"You fathead—"

"To wush into a fellah's studay, and woah at him like a Pwussian Hun! I wequest you not to woah at me, Mannahs!"

"My camera!" yelled Manners.

"Unless you are willin' to modewate your voice, Mannahs, I have no wesdorse but to wequest you—"

"My camera—"

"To wetiah from the studay. A voice like youahs thwows me into a fluttah!"

"Have you got my camera?" shrieked Manners. "You wanted to borrow it yesterday, you ass, I remember that!"

"I wequested you to lend me your camewah to pwactise on, Mannahs, as I had an ideah of buyin' one," said D'Arcy, with dignity. "But as you wefused the wequest, the mattah was at an end. I twust you do not considah me capable of

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bowwowin' a fellah's pwopahty without askin' and obtainin' his permish."

"Then, what silly ass has taken it?"

"I weally do not know; but if you mean by that remark to imply that I am a silly ass, Mannahs—"

"Oh, here you are!" Grundy red and wrathful, appeared in the doorway of the study. "Hear you are, are you?"

"They'll be gone!" gasped Manners. "Oh I'll scalp the silly idiot who's borrowed my camera! I'll pulverise him! I'll—"

"It's you that's going to be pulverised!" shouted Grundy, barring Manners' way as he was rushing from the study.

"You biffed me in the bread-basket—"

"Get out of the way!"

"And I'm going to wallop you—"

"Let me pass, idiot!"

"You biffed me in the bread-basket—"

"I'll biff your silly head off if you don't let me pass!" raved Manners.

"Come on, then, and do it!" said Grundy. "I'm ready for you. I never stand any rot!"

Manners made a charge through the doorway, and the next moment he and Grundy had clasped one another, and were waltzing about the study gasping and pommelling.

Both of them were excited and wrathful.

Grundy was a burly, powerful fellow, much bigger than Manners; and the amateur photographer of the Shell had no time to think of his camera now. They staggered about the study in deadly combat.

"Bai Jove!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus. "I don't want to intewwupt you, deah boys, but pway don't w'eck the place. Pwewwaps you would be kind enough to do your scawppin' in your own quartahs."

"Grooh! Take that!"

"Yah! Take that!"

"Yow! You silly chump—"

"Grooooooh! You frabjous ass—"

"Gweat Scott! Look out, you'll have the table ovah!" shrieked D'Arcy.

But the excited combatants did not look out. They crashed into the study table, and it went dancing. An inkpot shot off it, and caught Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's knees with direful results to his beautiful trousers. There was a terrific crash as the struggling combatants rolled over on the floor.

"What the thunder!" Jack Blake looked into the study. Herries and Digby and Tom Merry and Lowther were behind him. "What the merry thunder! Is this a dog-fight?"

"Gwoogh! Look at my twousahs—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There is nothin' to cackle at, you howlin' ass! My twousahs are wuined—"

"Stop that row, you pair of dummies!" shouted Blake. "You can't hold your dog-fights in this study. Here, collar them, you chaps, and bump some sense into them!"

"Hear, hear!"

Grundy and Manners were still struggling on the floor. Tom Merry & Co. pounced upon them, and they were dragged apart by main force. Then, with great impartiality, they were bumped on the study carpet, till clouds of dust rose from the carpet, and fiendish yells from Grundy and Manners.

CHAPTER 2.

The Missing Camera!

"LEGGO!"

"Chuck it—you-ow!"

Grundy and Manners sat on the carpet and gasped, after justice had been done. They were looking, and feeling, damaged.

"Oh, you silly chumps!" gasped Manners.

"You howling fatheads!" roared Grundy. "I'll jolly well lick the lot of you!"

"Bai Jove! Look at my twousahs!"

"What's the merry row about?" asked Monty Lowther.

"Have they gone?"

"Eh?"

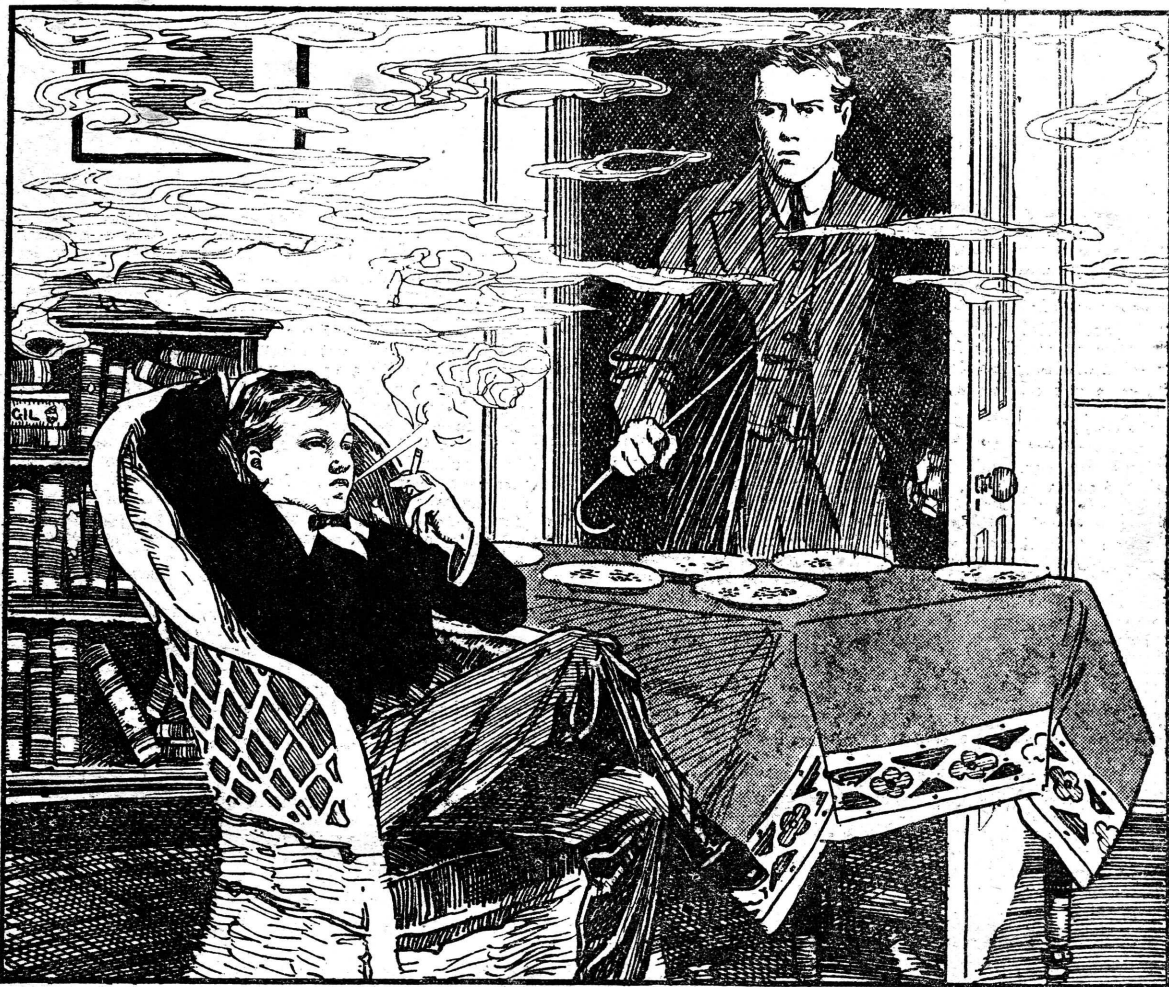
"Have they gone?"

"That depends on who 'they' are," said Lowther. "If you mean the German Fleet, they stood not upon the order of their going, but went at once, as Shakespeare remarks."

"You ass! I mean the soldiers—have they gone?"

"Yes, fathead, long ago; they weren't long in marching past the gates," said Tom Merry.

"I was going to photograph them," hooted Manners, "and some silly ass has borrowed my camera, and I couldn't find it. They belonged to Railton's old regiment, too! I want to find the silly chump who's taken my camera out of the study!"



The captain of St. Jim's could scarcely believe his eyes, for George Alfred Grundy was seated in the arm-chair, methodically smoking cigarettes. (See Chapter 7.)

"Look here——" said Grundy.

"Nuff said," interrupted Blake. "You buzz off, Grundy. You're too numerous."

"I've been bumped on that carpet——"

"Well, it hasn't damaged the carpet," said Lowther, inspecting it. "No harm done, Grundy."

"You silly chump, I'm hurt!" roared Grundy.

"Good!"

"And I'll jolly well lick the lot of you!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Grundy made a rush at the juniors. Grundy was wrathful, and Grundy never counted odds. The next moment an earthquake happened to Grundy, and he found himself lying in the passage, with a dazed impression that the floor had risen up and smitten him hard. A crowd of grinning faces looked at him from the doorway of Study No. 6.

"Come back and have some more!" chortled Blake.

"Yow-ow-woop!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Wilkins and Gunn, of the Shell, came along the passage, and they picked up their chum and helped him away. Even the warlike Grundy had had enough for the present. Manners was still unappeased, however. Manners' camera was missing, and so long as that precious instrument was missing, Manners was sure to be like unto Rachel of old, and to mourn and refuse to be comforted.

"Some silly idiot has borrowed that camera," said Manners. "I thought it was Gussy, as the howling ass wanted it yesterday——"

"I refuse to weep to you, Mannahs! You have ruined my twousahs. I have a very great mind to give you a feahful thwashin'!"

"Never mind your trousers, Gussy," said Blake. "Lend a

hand getting tea. Fill the kettle, my son. Your trousers will keep."

"I am goin' to change my twousahs, Blake. I suppose you cannot expect me to have my tea in inky twousahs!"

That being evidently impossible—from Gussy's point of view, at all events—the swell of St. Jim's quitted the study wrathfully, and proceeded to the dormitory for a change. Manners stamped out of the study, still greatly excited. His camera wasn't in Study No. 6. The question was, where was it?

"It doesn't matter, old chap," said Lowther consolingly. "It's too late to photograph the soldier boys now. Let's go and have tea."

"Some idiot is very likely damaging my camera!" howled Manners. "I dare say it's Levison. He takes photographs, and he's too mean to buy a camera for himself. I think I'll look for Levison."

"But it's teatime——"

"Blow teatime!"

Manners threw open the door of Levison's study. The occupants of that study were at tea—Levison, Mellish, Trimble, and Lumley-Lumley. They stared at Manners' excited face.

"Ever heard of the custom of knocking at a door before you push your face into a room?" asked Levison politely.

"Have you got my camera?"

"Is that a conundrum?"

"No, it isn't!" roared Manners. "Some cheeky beast has taken my camera from my study. I'm going to skin him! You asked me for it this morning, Levison."

"Well, you didn't lend it to me," said Levison.

"You're just worm enough to take it without permission."

"Thanks!"

"Well, did you take it?"

NEXT
WEDNESDAY:

"EVERY INCH A HERO!"

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Levison grinned.
 "If I'm worm enough to take it without permission, I'm worm enough to tell a whopper about it. So it's no good my saying anything, is it?"

"Look here, did you take it?" demanded Manners, pushing back his cuffs.

"Find out," said Levison coolly.

"You might ask a chap a bit more civilly, Manners, I guess," remarked Jerrold Lumley-Lumley.

"I haven't any civility to waste on a cad who borrows a fellow's camera without permission," snorted Manners.

"Who steals my purse, steals trash," said Monty Lowther, paraphrasing Shakespeare. "But he who borrows my presentation camera, robs me of that which not enriches him, but gets my hair off and puts my back up."

"Oh, cheese it!" said Manners. "I want my camera!"

"Better go and look for it," suggested Levison. "Would you mind shutting the door after you?"

"I give you one second to tell me whether you've got it, you worm!"

"Go hon!"

"Have you got it?"

"Nice weather, isn't it?" said Levison calmly. "If we don't get any more rain, it will be ripping for cricket."

"Where's my camera?"

"But if it rains, cricket will be off," continued Levison.

"Do you think it's likely to rain, Lumley?"

Lumley-Lumley grinned, and Trimble and Mellish chuckled audibly. But Manners was in no mood for Levison's humour. He hurled himself at the cad of the Fourth, and dragged him backwards over his chair.

"Here, let go!" roared Levison.

"Where's my camera?"

"Hang your camera!"

"Then I'll jolly well lick you till you tell me where it is!"

Tom Merry and Lowther seized Manners and dragged him away from Levison. Levison scrambled up, his fists clenched, his eyes glistening.

"Let him come on!" he said, between his teeth.

"Lemme get at him!" howled Manners.

"Easy does it," said Tom Merry coolly. "You're not going to scrap with Levison. I don't believe he knows anything about your silly camera."

"Let him say so, then!"

"I might answer a civil question," said Levison. "But you can't bully me. Go and eat coke! Hang your camera, and hang you!"

Manners made an effort to break loose, but his chums propelled him out of the study.

"Better get a strait-waistcoat for him!" called out Levison, as they went, and he slammed the door.

Manners was propelled forcibly back to his own study. There he was plumped into the armchair, gasping and furious.

"Now, you silly ass, go easy!" said Tom. "You can't start scrapping with every chap in the House because somebody's playing a joke with your camera. Take it calmly."

"I'll pulverise him—"

"No, you won't! You'll sit there till you get into a better temper."

"Look here, you dummy—"

"Br-r-r-r!"

Manners jumped up. Tom Merry and Lowther promptly collared him, and bumped him into the chair again. Manners glared at them ferociously. But he gradually calmed down. Look here, will you help me look for my camera?" he said at last.

"Yes—after tea."

"But the villain may be damaging it!"

"Oh, rot! It's only some chap borrowed it to take photographs," said Tom. "I'm jolly hungry. After tea we'll scour the School House for it, and we'll bump the fellow who's taken it. Now be reasonable."

And Manners finally decided to be reasonable, and the Terrible Three sat down to tea.

CHAPTER 3.

Trouble in the New House.

MANNERS' camera was well known in the School House at St. Jim's, and in the New House, too, for that matter. Manners was enthusiastic on the subject of photography—indeed, he was generally considered "potty" on the subject. His work in that line was very clever. The study was adorned with handsome enlargements of photographs taken by Manners, representing the St. Jim's elevens, senior and junior, and

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St. Jim's itself, seen from the south, and the east, and the west, and the north. Indeed, Lowther had sometimes, in a sarcastic mood, expressed surprise that Manners didn't paper the study with his blessed photographs.

Manners very seldom lent his camera—it was the apple of his eye. It had associations, too—it was a very expensive camera, and had been presented to Manners in recognition of an act of courage. He would lend it to Kerr of the New House, or to Talbot of the Shell—fellows who understood its use and could be relied upon to take every care of a fellow's property. But he had steadily declined to lend it to Arthur Augustus D'Arcy to learn on, and he had ferociously refused to let Skimpole have it to experiment with. Manners didn't believe in a camera being common property.

When Manners' celebrated camera was found to be missing, therefore, it was easy for all the fellows to guess that Henry Manners would get his "wool off." And Manners' "wool" was off, with a vengeance, now.

After tea the Terrible Three went up and down the School House inquiring for the missing camera. They questioned everybody in the Shell and the Fourth and the Third. But nobody seemed to know anything about the camera. Nobody admitted having borrowed it. Kangaroo of the Shell told Manners that he wouldn't be found dead with it. Gore told him that he was fed up with his camera and with himself, too. Skimpole advised him to search all his pockets carefully. Skimpole was an absent-minded youth, and often lost things in his pockets. As the biggest imaginable pocket would not have held half the camera, however, Skimmy's advice was not of much service.

Manners was growing quite distracted, and everybody else was growing bored to death with his missing camera. Manners had feared at first that some amateur had borrowed it to practise with, and might damage it. But evidently that was not the case. Either it had been hidden by some youth with a mistaken sense of humour, or else it had been actually stolen. That it had been stolen was an idea scouted by Tom Merry and Lowther at once. But Manners was doubtful.

"It's a jolly valuable camera," he said. "It cost ten guineas at least. First-class. Some cad who's hard up may have taken it to pawn it. Trimble wouldn't be any too good for that. Or Levison, either."

"Shush! It's not been stolen!"

"Then where is it?" demanded Manners heatedly.

"Somebody's hidden it," said Lowther. "The fellows know how cranky you are about it, old chap. It's a practical joke."

"I'll practical joke the idiot when I find him!" said Manners sulphurously.

"Only nobody seems to know anything about it," said Tom Merry, perplexed. "Some of them might be lying—Levison, or Trimble, or Crooke."

"Look here, we'll give 'em a jolly good hiding each, and make 'em own up!"

"My dear idiot, we're not going to start handing out hidings on spec. Perhaps it was a House raid," said Lowther, struck by a sudden thought. "Figgins & Co. may have done it. They may be cackling over the camera in their study at this minute!"

The suggestion was enough for Manners. He strode out of the School House and hurried across the quadrangle. His chums hurried after him.

Manners entered the New House, and dashed up the stairs to the junior quarters. He pitched open Figgins' door and strode in.

Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn, the celebrated Co. of the New House, were at work on their preparation. So ought the Terrible Three to have been, as a matter of fact. But prep had been postponed while the missing camera was hunted for.

Figgins & Co. stared at their visitors somewhat grimly. Manners' look hinted at trouble, and the heroes of the New House jumped up, in anticipation of war.

"Have you got my camera?" demanded Manners.

"Your which?"

"Camera, fathead!"

"Shut up, Manners!" growled Tom Merry. "Figgins, old man, if you've been raiding Manners' camera, hand it over, for goodness' sake, before he goes right off his dot. Life won't be worth living till he gets his camera back."

Figgins & Co. grinned.

"But we haven't been raiding it," said Kerr. "We don't know anything about his silly camera!"

"If it had been grub, we might have raided it," said Fatty Wynn. "But why the dickens should anybody take the trouble to raid a fatheaded camera?"

"Then who's got it?" howled Manners. "I feel pretty certain that it was some New House rotter!"

"Have you come here to call us pretty names?" asked Figgins.

"Well, I want to find the cad who's got my camera!"
 "Must be in the School House. They're all cads there," said Kerr sweetly. "Go home and inquire among the other cads."

"You silly idiot!"
 "And get outside this study till your manners improve a bit," said Figgins. "Take that howling idiot away, Tom Merry, if you don't want him chucked out!"

"We don't want hooligans in the New House, you know," remarked Kerr. "That kind of thing belongs to your side."

"I want my camera, and I'm jolly certain some New House cad has it!" growled Manners. "I wonder I didn't think of that at first. Might be Redfern—"

"Redfern isn't a cad," said Figgins. "I'm sorry you've lost your camera, Manners, if you've lost it. But I don't like your style of speech."

"Lump it, then!" grunted Manners.

Figgins came round the table.

"Are you going out on your feet or your neck?" he asked warmly.

"Oh, shut up!"

That was more than enough for George Figgins. He was a good-tempered fellow, but there were limits. He jumped at Manners.

"Here, hold on!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "We haven't come over for a row—"

"Manners has," grinned Kerr, "and he's getting it. Chuck the silly ass into the passage, Figgy, old man!"

"I'm going to!" panted Figgins.

"We may as well chuck these other cheeky rotters after him," said Fatty Wynn. "What are the School House bouncers doing in a respectable House, anyway?"

"Look here, you New House prize porker—"

Fatty Wynn rushed to the attack. Tom Merry and Lowther collared him and bumped him down, and Kerr dashed to the rescue. In a moment more three pairs of combatants were struggling in the study. There was a patter of feet in the passage, and a yell of "School House cads! Back up!"

Redfern of the Fourth dashed into the study, with Owen and Lawrence at his heels. After them came Koumi Rao and Clampe and Pratt and Diggs and Thompson, and a crowd more fellows. The Terrible Three were collared from all sides. A raid on a New House study was an outrage that had to be severely punished.

"Frogs' march 'em out!" roared Redfern.

"Hurrah!"

Bump, bump, bump, bump, bump! The Terrible Three went down the passage to the stairs in a succession of bumps. They yelled and struggled, but there was no help for it. They reached the landing, and rolled down the stairs, with a forest of New House boots helping their descent.

The New House juniors crowded the landing, shouting with laughter. Tom Merry and Lowther and Manners rolled down helplessly, and clung to the banisters and to one another. Monteith of the Sixth came striding along the lower passage, with a frowning face.

"What's this thundering row about?" he shouted.

The New House fellows vanished from the landing in the twinkling of an eye. In marvellously short time Figgins & Co. and the rest were quietly at work on their preparation in their studies, as if they had never even dreamed of such a thing as a House rag.

The Terrible Three blinked at Monteith. They were dusty and dishevelled; their collars were torn out; their ties were gone; their hair was like unruly mops. The prefect could not help grinning as he looked at them.

"Groogh!" said Tom Merry.

"Ow! Oh dear!"

"Yow-ow-ow!"

"You seem to have come looking for trouble, and finding it," grinned Monteith. "Clear off, you young rascals! If there's any more of this, I'll report you to your House-master."

The chums of the Shell limped out of the New House. They gasped and grunted their way back to their own quarters. In their study at last they sank down, quite fagged out.

"Oh dear!" moaned Lowther.

"I'm bumped all over," mumbled Tom Merry.

"But what about my camera?" gasped Manners.

"Eh?"

"My camera—"

His chums glared at him. They were in no mood to bother any more about that camera. They had suffered enough on account of Manners' camera.

"You frabjous idiot!" gasped Monty Lowther. "If you say the word camera in this study again, I'll squash you."

"But my camera—"

"Oh, bump him!"

Tom Merry and Lowther were all but spent. But they found energy enough to grasp Manners and bump him on the carpet.

"There!" panted Tom. "Now let's hear no more about your dashed camera for a bit! I'm fed up on your camera!"

"Say camera again, and we'll scalp you!" hooted Lowther. But Manners did not say "camera" again. He couldn't. He sat on the carpet and said:

"Groo-hoo-hoo! Ow-wow-wow!"

CHAPTER 4.

Up to Grundy!

"IT'S up to me," said Grundy.

Wilkins and Gunn had been wondering for some time what George Alfred Grundy was thinking about. Grundy was seated in the study, and Wilkins and Gunn were getting tea. Grundy had a deep wrinkle in his brow, and was evidently in deep thought. It was quite an unaccustomed state of things with Grundy, and his study-mates were naturally surprised.

It was the day following the disappearance of Manners' celebrated camera. That camera had not turned up. Manners was going about like a bear with a sore head, as the other fellows called it. There was a good deal of sympathy for Manners; but even the most sympathetic fellows had to confess that they were fed up with the camera. There was such a thing, as Kangaroo remarked, as having too much of a good thing.

Grundy had taken some interest in the search for the camera. Grundy might have been expected to be quite indifferent, considering his warlike dealings with Manners as a result of the loss of the camera. But Grundy had boundless good nature, and he always forgave a fellow freely after "walloping" him.

"It's up to me," repeated Grundy, as Wilkins and Gunn looked at him inquiringly. "I feel I ought to take the matter up!"

"Oh, certainly!" yawned Wilkins. "Any old thing! Are you going in for ventriloquism again? I remember how old Linton appreciated it last time. Pass the jam!"

"I've been thinking about Manners' camera."

"Oh, crumbs, don't say anything about that!" implored Wilkins. "I've heard of nothing but Manners' camera for twenty-four hours! I'd rather read Lloyd George's speeches than hear anything more about it!"

"Manners' camera is gone," said Grundy, unheeding. "I've heard about Manners getting that camera. It was before I came here, but I've heard that it was presented to him for rescuing a kid, or something, from a fire, or something, by an uncle or aunt or grandfather of the kid, or something!"

"Exactly," said Gunn; "or something or other, or something!"

"Don't be funny, Gunny! This is a rather serious matter!"

"It is," said Wilkins, with deep feeling—"jolly serious, if we're going to have Manners' camera dinned into our ears in our own study! We can't go outside without Manners asking us if we've seen anything of it!"

"It's rather hard on Manners."

"Harder on us, if you ask me. Why can't a fellow lose a camera without boring a whole school to tears about it?"

"Well, that camera's going to be found," said Grundy.

"I hope so. We shall never hear the end of it till it's found. I'd give anybody tuppence of my own money to find it!"

"Manners has put a notice on the board, and the House-master has asked him about it. Railton's given an order that if anybody's hidden Manners' camera for a practical joke, he's to produce it at once!"

"Yes, we've had it from Railton, too," said Wilkins, almost tearfully. "If it isn't found, I suppose we shall get a speech from the Head next. Then they'll call in the Board of Governors on the subject. After that, it will be taken before Parliament, I suppose. It's a great pity that the last Zeppelin didn't drop a bomb on Manners and his camera. Those Zeppelins are irritating beasts!"

"It's clear to me," said Grundy, "that the camera's been stolen!"

"Oh, rot!"

Grundy fixed his eyes on Wilkins, and rose from the table. He pushed back his cuffs methodically—a proceeding that Wilkins watched with some alarm.

"Did you say that what I said was rot, Wilkins?" asked Grundy, with deadly politeness. "I'm sorry to have to wallop a pal. Would you mind getting up?"

"Oh, don't be a goat!" said Wilkins uneasily. "I didn't"

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mean exactly rot. I meant—ahem!—very likely you're quite right, as—ahem!—you usually are!"

Grundy sat down again. Grundy was always ready to punch his best pal's nose at the shortest notice, but it was easy to placate him.

"Well, if you agree with me, Wilkins, that's all right. It's as clear as daylight that the camera's been stolen. If a practical joker had hidden it, Railton's order would have brought it to light. But it hasn't turned up. Those duffers have searched high and low for it, too, and there's no sign of it. Manners has routed out every blessed corner of the House. I've heard chaps say they've seen him looking up the chimneys and down the sinks after it. Now, that was rather a valuable camera. It could be sold for five quid, I should say. It's been stolen!"

"But there isn't a thief in the School House!" urged Wilkins.

"There can't be a theft without a thief, Wilkins."

"Did you work that out in your head, Grundy?" asked Gunn, with sarcasm.

But the sarcasm was wholly lost on Grundy. He nodded calmly.

"Yes, I thought that out, Gunny. Some fellows can think things out, you know, and some can't. I'm one that can. The camera's been stolen—ergo, there's a thief somewhere in the school. Most likely in the New House, of course. Still, there are some fellows in this House that I don't really approve of, and they might be thieves for all I know. That remains to be seen. But, as I said, it's up to me. I'm going to get that camera back for Manners!"

"Oh, dear!" said Gunn. "Does that mean that we're going to have jaw about it in the study, as well as everywhere else?"

"I'm surprised at you, Gunny! Manners is simply knocked over by losing his camera. He's rather a cheeky beast, and I had to wallop him yesterday. But I don't bear malice. When I've licked a fellow I can be decent to him!"

"I understood that he licked you."

"You understood what?" roared Grundy.

"Ahem! I—I mean, exactly! I—I hope you didn't hurt him too much, Grundy. You know what a terror you are!"

"Well, I suppose I did hurt him a bit," said Grundy. "That doesn't matter. He was a cheeky rotter, and asked for it. But that doesn't make any difference. I'm going to find his camera for him. Not only to do him a good turn, you know, but to show all the Shell that this study can do it. There are some jealous chaps in the Shell who run this study down. Now, you fellows know that this study has practically all the brains in the Form!"

"Hear, hear!"

"A chap with brains," went on Grundy, "can turn his brain-power on practically any subject, and master it. I don't brag of what I can do; you fellows know I'm not that kind. But facts are facts. I happen to be one of the brainy sort!"

Wilkins nearly choked over his tea-cup. Gunn had some difficulty in mastering a sudden internal convulsion. Grundy as a brainy chap took their breath away. Gunn and Wilkins were loyal followers of the great Grundy. They found many things to admire in him, which were quite imperceptible to other fellows. But, in their most loyal moments, they would never have suspected him of being brainy.

"You chaps remember how I took up hypnotism once," said Grundy. "And then there was my ventriloquism. Anything a bit out of the common, you know—that's me! Other chaps don't do these things!"

"They—they don't!" gasped Wilkins.

"Then there's my cricket," resumed Grundy. "I don't brag of my cricket. But I've always been such a ripping player that cricket captains always wanted to leave me out of the team—"

"Eh?"

"From jealousy, I mean."

"Oh!"

"You've noticed that with Tom Merry here. A very decent chap, in his way, only he can't stand the idea of being put in the shade by a better player. It was the same when I was at Redclyffe. I had to wallop the junior captain before he'd put me in. Then I was always getting run out, and the fellows were so jolly envious that they used to say I ran them out!"

"D-d-d-did they?"

"Now, a fellow who can do a lot of things in a masterly way can do other things, if he sets his mind to it. Don't you think so?"

"Oh! Ah! Ye-e-es! Of—of course!"

"I've often thought," said Grundy, "that I should make my mark as a detective."

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"A—a—a what? A—a—a which?"

"A detective. You know, a detective has to have a clear, cool brain, quick judgment, knowledge of human nature, wonderful intuition, and so on. Well, you fellows know that that's me all over. So that's what I'm going to do. I'm going to take up the detective bizney, and find the stolen camera!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Gunn and Wilkins couldn't help it. They had been suffering internally for some time; but the idea of George Alfred Grundy as an amateur detective, looking for clues, was too much for them, and they burst into a roar. George Alfred Grundy stared at them in angry astonishment.

CHAPTER 5.

Sherlock-Holmes Grundy!

GRUNDY stared, and Wilkins and Gunn roared, and the thunder clouds gathered more and more darkly over the brow of George Alfred. There was not, so far as Grundy could see, anything of a comic nature in his idea of turning himself into an amateur detective, and taking up the stolen camera case. He would simply show, in that new direction, the same striking ability that had marked him as a ventriloquist, a cricketer, and a footballer. He was prepared for surprise, for admiration, but he wasn't prepared for that wild yell of merriment.

Wilkins and Gunn simply wept. George Alfred Grundy stared more and more ferociously, till his looks would have done credit to a Hun on the warpath. He jumped to his feet at last.

"You silly, cackling asses—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

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

"So that's the tune, is it?" roared Grundy. "Well, I've told you fellows that I never stand any rot!" Put up your paws, both of you!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'll jolly well mop the study up with you! Cackling at a chap in his own study, by gum! I'll show you! Put up your silly paws! That's for a starter!"

"Yaroo!" roared Wilkins.

His merriment came to a sudden end as Grundy grasped him and whirled him out of his chair.

Crash! Wilkins went to the floor. Grundy danced round him, and then rushed at Gunn.

Gunn leaped up, and dodged round the table in alarm. There was no laughter in the study now. Matters were growing serious.

"Now, then, come on and have something to cackle at!" roared Grundy, brandishing a pair of fists that looked remarkably like shoulders of mutton.

Wilkins sat up, gasping.

"You frabjous idiot!" he yelled.

"Get up and have some more!" said Grundy truculently.

"You—you dangerous ass—"

"Don't keep on dodging me round the table, Gunn!"

"I—I say, Grundy, old man," stammered Gunn, "don't play the goat, you know! I—I couldn't help laughing at—at Tom Merry."

"At Tom Merry!" ejaculated Grundy, stopping short.

"Yes. Whom do you think I was laughing at?" asked Gunn innocently.

"Oh!" said Grundy, nonplussed.

"I was thinking of what an ass he'd look when you found the stolen camera, you know, after the way he's always regarded you as a thundering idiot, you know," Gunn explained.

"Exactly!" said Wilkins, taking his cue from the astute Gunn. "Really, Grundy, you don't encourage a chap to appreciate you as you deserve."

"Well, I'm sorry!" said Grundy. "Of course, it was rather hasty of me; but I certainly had the impression that you were laughing at me."

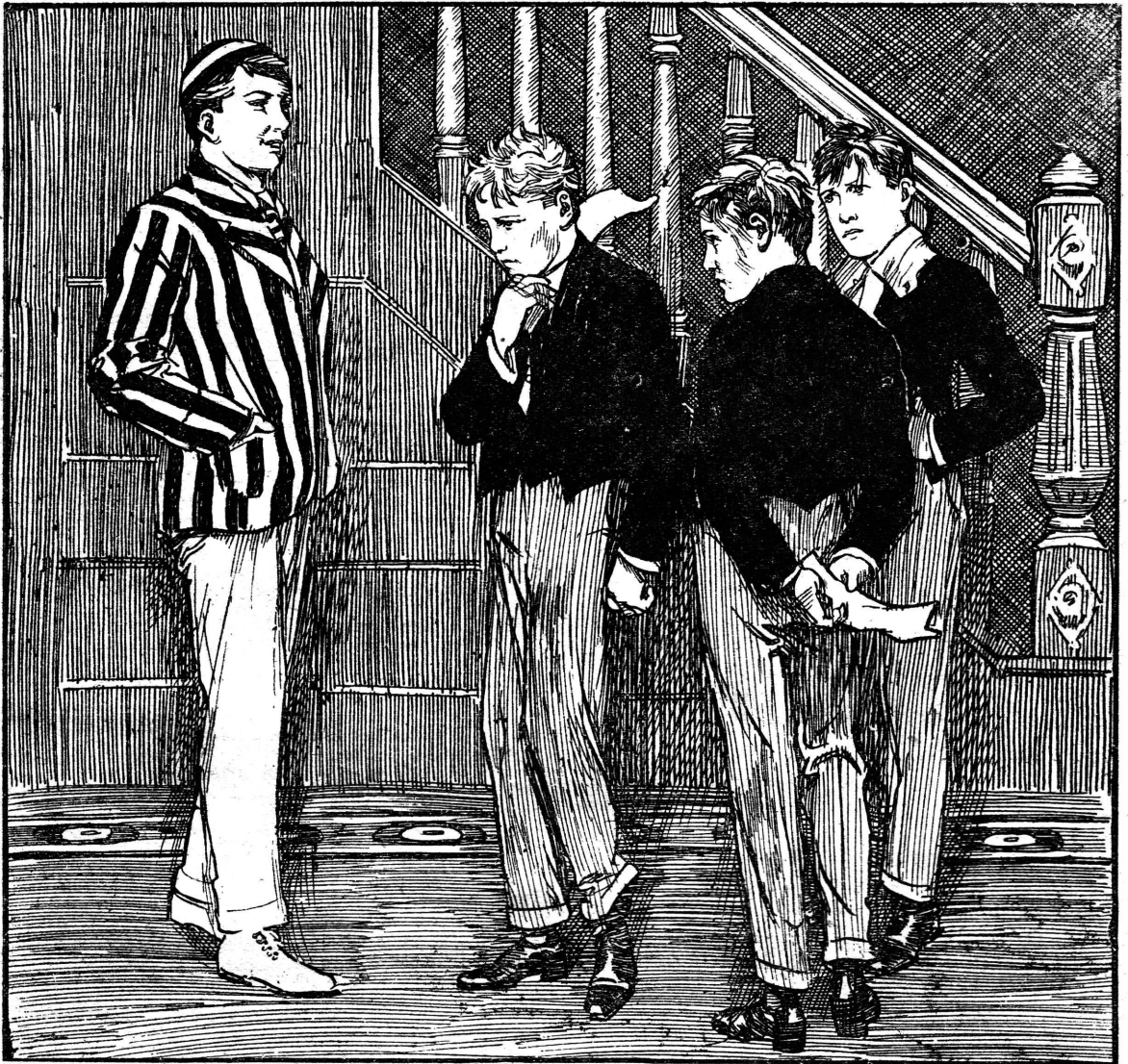
"Oh, Grundy!"

"I wish you'd explained," said Grundy, giving Wilkins a helping hand to rise. "I'm sorry, old chap! As you say, Tom Merry will look a silly ass when I prove that I've got more brains than his whole study. Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" echoed Wilkins and Gunn.

Peace was restored. It was really easier on a warm afternoon to pull Grundy's leg than to fight him. And, besides, Wilkins and Gunn did not want to quarrel with Grundy. They liked old Grundy, and he was an easy fellow to get on with so long as a chap was careful not to tell him what he thought of him. And Grundy's never-ending supply of cash rendered the study a land flowing with milk and honey, and Grundy's clums were not ungrateful. Gratitude, it has been

TUCK HAMPERS ARE GIVEN AWAY TO READERS OF THE "BOYS' FRIEND," 1st



The Terrible Three blinked at Monteith. They were dusty and dishevelled; their collars were torn out; their ties were gone; their hair was like unruly mops. The prefect could not help grinning as he looked at them. (See Chapter 3.)

said, is a lively anticipation of further favours to come. On those lines, at least, Wilkins and Gunn were grateful.

Grundy grinned serenely as he sat down. Fortunately, he was not a suspicious fellow. If Grundy had been suspicious he might have divined his chums' real opinion of his brain-powers, and there would certainly have been serious trouble in the study.

"Of course, Tom Merry will look a silly ass when I've handled this case in a masterly manner," said Grundy, with a nod. "He's always running me down—not exactly running me down, I mean, but acting as if he considered me a silly ass. I'll jolly well show him this time! You chaps can assist me in the case if you like. In fact, I shall be glad of your assistance."

"Highly honoured!" murmured Gunn.

"You see, I've been reading up detective literature," said Grundy. "I'm rather taken with the methods of Sherlock Holmes. There's a sort of calm, lucid, well-reasoned certitude about Holmes' methods that appeals to me. I think I'm really much the same sort of a chap. Holmes always gets right to the point, and never makes a mistake, and can't be taken in at any price. That's me all over!"

"I shall discuss the matter with you, and explain my clues, the same as Sherlock Holmes does to Dr. Watson," said Grundy.

"Wonderful!" ejaculated Wilkins.

"Eh? What's wonderful?"

"Oh, I thought that was my bit! Dr. Watson always says 'Wonderful!' while Sherlock Holmes does all the jawing."

"I'm afraid you're a bit dense, Wilkins, old man. You don't seem quite to understand. Now, I'll give you my ideas of the case. Manners' camera has been stolen. I deduce a thief. The thief belongs to this school. The place can't have been burgled for a camera. It's one of the chaps."

"My eye!" murmured Gunn. "My hat!"

"What did you say, Gunn?"

"I said, 'Go ahead, old chap!' This is getting interesting."

"I thought you'd be interested," said Grundy, gratified.

"If you like I'll give you a sample of my powers of deduction, the same as Sherlock Holmes does. For instance, suppose you ask me to tell you just what you've been doing this afternoon?"

"Bet you you couldn't!" said Gunn.

"My dear chap, it is child's play to me—the same as to Holmes. It simply requires the concentration of a cold clear intellect." Grundy looked Gunn over with quite a professional eye. "Now, I can tell you some things that may surprise you. You went down to Rylcombe this afternoon after lessons."

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"Did I?" ejaculated Gunn.

"You did!"

"How do you deduce that, Grundy?" asked Gunn meekly.

"You won't think it wonderful if I explain to you," smiled Grundy, who had evidently been reading a good deal of Sherlock Holmes. "But I'll explain, all the same, Watson—I mean, Gunn—and then you can study my methods."

"Your methods!" murmured Gunn.

"My methods," said Grundy firmly. "I deduce that you've been down to Rylcombe by the state of your boots. You've got mud on them. It's the thick, black mud that's found in Rylcombe Lane after rain. Therefore, you made your boots muddy in Rylcombe Lane, and nowhere else."

"Splendid!" said Gunn. "I suppose it's no good my telling you that I got my boots muddy on the towing-path?"

"No, it isn't!" said Grundy warmly. "I should be sorry, Gunn, to see you descend to falsehood, rather than admit my powers of deduction."

Gunn gasped.

"All right, I went down to Rylcombe," he said resignedly. "It's the first I've heard of it, but perhaps I was asleep at the time."

"If you're going to be funny, Gunn——"

"Not at all!" said Gunn. "Perhaps you could deduce what I did when I was in Rylcombe—if I was there. That would be awfully interesting!"

"I dare say I could if I wasted any more time on you," said Grundy. "But the present matter to attend to is Manners' camera. Come on."

Grundy rose, and Wilkins and Gunn blinked at one another, and followed him from the study. Sherlock-Holmes Grundy was on the track, and his study-mates were really interested in his progress. If he showed the same powers of deduction in the case of the missing camera—as in the matter of Gunn's supposed excursion to Rylcombe, the result could not fail to be very interesting.

CHAPTER 6.

The Clue.

TOM MERRY & CO. were in their study. Tom and Lowther were looking as sympathetic as they could while Manners talked about his camera.

They felt sympathetic. They were really concerned about the missing camera. But Lowther had whispered to Tom Merry that if Manners didn't give the camera a rest he would get up and shriek soon. Manners' chums would have sacrificed a whole term's pocket-money to get that camera back safe and sound. Only by that happening could they hope to hear the end of it.

There was a tap at the door, and Grundy of the Shell came in. Wilkins and Gunn followed him, looking very grave.

Manners looked up hopefully.

"Heard anything of my camera?" he asked.

"Heard of nothing else," said Wilkins, with a deep yawn. "The war is quite done with as a topic, and Zeppelins are simply nowhere. You'll hear me talking about that camera in my sleep to-night."

"Shut up, Wilkins!" said Grundy. "The fact is, Manners, we've come here about your camera. I think I can find it for you."

"You know who took it?" exclaimed Manners.

"Not yet. I'm going to find out."

"How the thunder are you going to find out if you don't know anything about it?" said Manners crossly.

"I'm going into the matter as a detective."

The Terrible Three stared at Grundy. Wilkins, behind his great leader, tapped his forehead significantly. Grundy glanced round, and Wilkins hastily scratched his head.

The Terrible Three grinned.

Grundy gave Wilkins a rather suspicious look and resumed. "I've read about Sherlock Holmes, and studied his methods a bit. My idea is that I could beat him at his own game. I'm going to take up this matter, partly to find Manners' camera for him, and partly to show that I can do it if I like. I don't mind admitting that. Of course, I sha'n't want any reward or anything of that sort. It will be child's play to me. Now, in the first place, I want some particulars."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What are you cackling at now?"

"At a silly ass," said Tom Merry politely. "Run away and play, Grundy, and don't try to be funnier than you were born!"

"More jealousy!" said Grundy, with a snort. "I can't say I'm surprised. I might have expected as much from you, Tom Merry, after your conduct over the cricket. But I'm going to find the camera, and show you. I may write an account of it for the next number of the 'Weekly.' You can make room for it by leaving out some of Lowther's comic rot. Fellows are getting fed up on that, anyway."

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"You silly owl——" began Lowther.

"Now, Manners, about your camera——"

"Take him away and bury him, Wilkins!" said Tom.

"Oh, let him run on!" said Manners. "He can't be left being a silly idiot, but he might come across the camera if he hunts for it. But I've searched jolly well everywhere already, Grundy."

"That's not my method," said Grundy. "When Sherlock Holmes wants a murderer, he doesn't go out searching for him. He just lights his pipe, and works it out in his brain, with the help of a clue or two, and then tells the police where to find the man. A little cigarette-ash is enough for Holmes."

"I'm afraid there isn't any cigarette-ash in this study," said Lowther regretfully. "Apply next door. Crooke has plenty of it."

"I want a few particulars," said Grundy, unheeding Lowther. "I'll take them down, Manners." He took out a pocket-book and pencil. "In the first place, what size was the camera?"

"Half-plate."

"Good! Any identification marks?"

"My monogram on the leather."

"Now—be careful how you answer—at exactly what time did you miss the camera?"

Manners grinned a little; but, as he had said, there was no harm in letting Grundy run on. The more fellows that looked for the camera, the more likely it was to turn up.

"Yesterday afternoon," he said.

"What time?"

"About five."

"You didn't miss it before five yesterday afternoon?"

"No."

"Then it wasn't missing before five." Grundy made a note. "I suppose neither of you fellows missed it before that?"

Tom Merry shook his head, but Lowther nodded.

"Yes. I missed it on Saturday," he said.

"Oh, good! That's a bit further information. At what time did you miss it on Saturday, Lowther?"

"About three in the afternoon. Manners was taking photographs in the quad, instead of coming out on the river, and he wouldn't chuck it. So I shied an apple at the camera——"

"Eh?"

"And missed it."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Grundy gave the humourist of the Shell a ferocious look. He had not come there for Monty Lowther's little jokes.

"You missed the camera at five yesterday afternoon, Manners. Where was it when you left the study?"

"I left it in the bookcase."

"You generally keep it there?"

"Yes."

"Was it there when you left the study?"

"I suppose so?"

"What you suppose isn't evidence. Pull yourself together and think," said Grundy encouragingly. "Do you know it was there?"

"Well, I know I put it there on Sunday."

"Then we'll take it that it was there. When you came in for it on Monday afternoon—yesterday—it was gone? You didn't see anybody in the study?"

"No, ass!"

"Nor any suspicious foot-prints or finger-marks?"

"No, fathead!"

"Of course, you wouldn't; your eye isn't trained. I dare say I shall find a clue fast enough. I'll make some investigations now."

The juniors watched Grundy with interest as he made his investigations. He opened the bookcase, which was half full of books, the rest of the space being occupied with baskets belonging to foils, old footballs, a couple of slippers, a jar of jam, and other miscellaneous articles. There was an empty space, however, where Manners had kept his camera.

"You don't keep this bookcase locked?"

"No; of course not!"

"Then the lock wasn't picked?"

"Wonderful!" ejaculated Wilkins.

"No; that isn't very wonderful, Wilkins. Anybody could have deduced that, with a little thought," said Grundy modestly. "By Jove!"

"Hallo! Found a clue?" asked Lowther.

"Yes, rather! I suppose none of you three fellows ever smoke in this study—what?"

"No, burler!"

"Then the chap who took the camera was smoking a cigarette!" exclaimed Grundy triumphantly. "I've found a clue. Cigarette-ash, by thunder! It won't be long before I get the thief now."

"My hat!"

The juniors jumped up. Manners was a little excited now. "I never noticed it!" he exclaimed. "That looks like Levison. Levison smokes."

"But is it cigarette-ash?" asked Lowther.

"No doubt about it—and I've found it," said Grundy. "I don't blame you for not noticing it, Manners—your eye isn't trained. But there it is. Look!"

There it was, and Grundy's triumphant finger pointed it out. On the lowest shelf of the bookcase was a little patch of white ash. Grundy fairly gloated over it. His career as a detective was starting under the most favourable auspices. Sherlock Holmes could not have been more successful than that.

"Ripping!" exclaimed Grundy. "I'll take this bit of ash away. I shall have to—to analyse it—at least, examine it under a microscope. I'll borrow old Lathom's microscope. If I can find out the brand of cigarettes, that settles it. It will point to the real criminal, beyond the shadow of a doubt. I'll borrow one of these envelopes."

Grundy carefully scraped the ash into an envelope, and quitted the study in great glee, followed by Wilkins and Gunn. The Terrible Three looked at one another and grinned.

"Queer about that ash being there," said Tom Merry.

"I hadn't noticed it," said Manners. "Not that that fat-head will find out anything from it."

"Oh, he might!" remarked Monty Lowther thoughtfully. "I could help him, really; but I don't want to shove in my oar when Sherlock Holmes is at work. I don't quite know how Grundy will analyse that ash; but if he does, he may discover that it's not cigarette-ash at all—"

"What?"

"It may dawn on his mighty brain that it's ash of carbide of calcium, and that it's been spilt from a bike lamp," suggested Lowther. "I don't say it will dawn upon him, but it might. The fact that my carbide lamp is lying on that shelf is really a clue, isn't it?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Terrible Three roared. Grundy heard that roar of laughter as he retired, and he snorted. They might laugh now, but they would have to wonder and admire when Grundy had analysed that tell-tale ash, and discovered what brand of cigarettes it belonged to!

CHAPTER 7.

Investigation Under Difficulties.

"YOU young rascal!"

Kildare of the Sixth thundered out those words. The captain of St. Jim's could scarcely believe his eyes as he looked into Grundy's study, and beheld Grundy. George Alfred was seated in the armchair, methodically smoking cigarettes!

Grundy was every imaginable kind of an ass, but no one had suspected him of having any vices; yet there he was, smoking cigarettes as if for a wager! There were half a dozen plates on the table, and each of them had been used as an ash-tray. There was cigarette-ash on all of them. And half a dozen half-smoked cigarettes lay in the fender. The atmosphere of the study was hazy with smoke.

Kildare stared at Grundy. He had come there to see Grundy. The great Grundy, busy in his new work as a detective, had quite forgotten that a certain number of lines were overdue. Kildare had come to the study to inquire after those missing lines, and he had thoughtfully brought a cane with him. He took a tight grip on the cane now, as he saw Grundy smoking.

"You dirty young rascal!" ejaculated Kildare. "You unclean little beast! How dare you?"

Grundy jumped up, and took the cigarette from his mouth. His usually ruddy face was a little pale. Grundy was a powerful fellow, but his internal arrangements were not powerful enough to deal adequately with the number of cigarettes he had smoked.

"Oh, draw it mild, Kildare!" he said warmly. "What's the matter?"

"The matter? The matter is that I'm going to lick you! How dare you smoke in your study—or anywhere else, for that matter?"

"I'm not—not exactly smoking," said Grundy. "Really, Kildare, I suppose you don't take me for that sort of silly ass? I've punched chaps' heads for smoking."

"You're not smoking?" ejaculated Kildare, in astonishment.

"Certainly not!"

"Then what are you doing?"

"Investigating!"

Kildare blinked at him. As the study was getting like a

tap-room with smoke, and Grundy had a lighted cigarette between his lips, Kildare had not expected him to deny that he was smoking!

"I don't mind explaining," said Grundy, keeping a wary eye on the cane. "Keep your wool on, you know!"

"Hold out your hand!" thundered Kildare.

"Hold on, I tell you!" Grundy backed round the table as the prefect advanced upon him. "Can't you give a chap a chance to explain? I tell you I'm not smoking—not what you'd call smoking—yaroooooh!"

Kildare's left hand grasped him by the collar, and the right made rapid play with the cane. Grundy roared and wriggled.

"You silly ass! Leggo! I tell you I'm not smoking!" he roared.

Whack, whack, whack, whack!

"Yaroooo! Oh, my hat! You howling ass! Yow-ow-ow-ow!"

"There!" said Kildare, breathing hard. "You'll get worse than that if I catch you smoking again!"

"I wasn't smoking!" yelled Grundy.

"Now hand me over all the cigarettes you've got, sharp!"

"I can't!"

"Do you want some more?" demanded Kildare.

"Will you listen to a chap?" shrieked Grundy. "I'll jolly well slog you if you touch me again, I tell you! I was investigating. I don't smoke. The rotten things have made me feel queer already, too; but I had to chance that. I'm on the track."

"You're what?" ejaculated Kildare.

"At present I'm acting as a detective—"

"A—a—a what?"

"A detective," said Grundy. "I suppose you know that Manners' camera has been stolen?"

"I know it's been lost," growled Kildare. "I should think all Sussex knows it by this time. What has that to do with your smoking?"

"I've taken up the case, and I've found a clue. The thief left some cigarette-ash in Manners' study when he stole the camera. I've got the ash—that's my clue."

Kildare stared at him.

"You see," explained Grundy more calmly, and falling into his Sherlock-Holmes manner, "by analysing that ash, I can find out the brand of cigarettes it belonged to, and when I've found the chap who smokes that brand of cigarettes, I've got the thief. I suppose you know that ash varies according to the brand of the cigarette?"

"You seem to know a lot about cigarettes for a fellow who doesn't smoke."

"Oh, I got that out of Sherlock Holmes! Holmes has analysed the ash of forty-two kinds of tobacco—or a hundred and forty-two kinds—I forget. Well, I can't analyse the ash like Holmes—I haven't a laboratory, you know. So the only thing was to get a lot of cigarettes of different brands, and smoke them. You see that ash on those plates? Well, I've knocked off the ash carefully of every kind of cigarette I've smoked already. When I've got the whole set complete, I'm going to compare every kind of ash with the ash I discovered in Manners' study. Thus," said Grundy dramatically—"thus I shall make the crowning discovery, and denounce the criminal."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Kildare burst into a roar.

"Of all the silly young asses!" he ejaculated. "Well, I'm glad to find that you're only a silly idiot and not a silly black-guard, Grundy! But you're not going to smoke, all the same. You'll hand me all the cigarettes you've got in the study, or I'll march you straight to the Housemaster."

"Now, look here, Kildare—"

"Sharp's the word!"

Grundy snorted in utter disgust. It was intensely exasperating to have his professional investigations interrupted in this reckless way. Sherlock Holmes himself would not have had a chance if he had been subjected to such ruthless interruptions. But there was no help for it. Kildare was gripping the cane again, and Grundy had had enough of that cane.

"Well, here you are," said Grundy reluctantly. "I suppose a chap like you wouldn't understand. Fools rush in where angels fear to tread."

"Is that the lot, you egregious young ass?"

"Yes," growled Grundy.

"You can go on with your precious investigations," said Kildare grinning. "But you must find another means. If you're caught smoking again, you'll be reported to the Housemaster, and that's serious. Have you done your lines?"

"Of course I haven't!" said Grundy indignantly. "I haven't had time to do any lines."

"Then they're doubled," said Kildare, "and if they're not brought in to-morrow by teatime, you'll get licked. Mind that!"

Kildare strode out of the study with the cigarettes. Grundy

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cast a frowning look after him. His investigations had been cut suddenly short. However, he had six kinds of ash to go on with. But, as it happened, his investigations were not to be resumed, even on that limited scale. A sudden inward spasm made Grundy's face turn a ghastly white, and he caught at the table and gasped.

"Grooooooh!"

When Wilkins and Gunn came into the study to do their prep, they found George Alfred Grundy stretched in the armchair, his legs hanging limply on the hearthrug, and his face as white as a sheet. He was breathing stertorously. His study-mates looked at him in astonishment and alarm.

"Are you ill, old man?" exclaimed Wilkins.

"Grooogh!"

"You look awful!" said Gunn sympathetically.

"Gurrrrr!"

"Somebody's been smoking here," remarked Wilkins, sniffing. "Dash it all, you haven't been smoking, have you, Grundy?"

"Grooooooh!"

"Open the blessed window!" said Wilkins. "The place is like a tap-room. If you've been smoking, Grundy—"

"Grrrrr!" moaned Grundy. "I've been investigating cigarette-ash, you dummy! I had to smoke the cigarettes to get the—groooh!—ash. Ow! Oh, dear, I feel jolly queer inside! Grooooooh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Groogh! What are you cackling at? I—I feel as if I were on the Channel! Oh, dear! I only smoked six—groogh! Some of them were rather strong! Ow, wow!"

"You'd better go and lie down a bit!" grinned Wilkins.

"I—I think I'm going to be s-s-s-sick!" moaned Grundy. "Ow, wow! Groogh! You cackling rotters, I'd jolly well wallop you, only—groogh!—I feel so bad! Wow!"

Grundy heaved himself out of the armchair, and staggered from the study. Wilkins and Gunn roared. The latest development of Grundy's investigations struck them as better than ever.

"He'll be the death of me, I know that," murmured Wilkins, wiping away his tears. "He ought to get a job on the front page of 'Chuckles.' That's the only place suitable for Grundy! Poor old Grundy!"

It was an hour later when Grundy came into the study again. He limped in weakly, still very white and worn. He had passed a volcanic time in the dormitory. The cigarettes had taken their revenge.

"Feel better?" asked Wilkins, grinning.

"Y-e-es, I'm all right now," said Grundy weakly. "A—a detective has to go through some rotten experiences, you know. I—I dare say Sherlock Holmes was a bit seedy when he started smoking. Grooogh! What silly idiots smoke for beats me! Of course, I wasn't smoking—only getting ash for my investigations. I've got the ash, anyway—six kinds. Where is it?"

"Eh? Where's what?"

"The ash! I left it here, on six different plates on the table."

"Oh, my hat!" said Wilkins. "Were you keeping that muck?"

"Keeping it!" gasped Grundy. "What did you think I smoked the rotten stuff into ash for, you dummy?"

"Blessed if I thought about it at all," said Wilkins. "I thought you were a dirty beast to use the crocks for ash-trays, that's all. I've dusted them—"

"Dusted them!" shrieked Grundy.

"Yes, and put them away. I suppose a chap ought to keep the study tidy?" said Wilkins.

Grundy gazed at him. His feelings were too deep for words. Wilkins had dusted the plates upon which he had carefully placed the ash of half a dozen different kinds of cigarettes, all ready for experiment. The ash had vanished—the amateur detective had suffered in vain. And his unfortunate inside was still weak and inclined to be volcanic.

"Oh, you idiot!" gasped Grundy at last.

"Never mind!" said Wilkins comfortingly. "You can smoke a lot more to-morrow."

"Grooogh!"

The bare idea of smoking a "lot more" made Grundy feel queer. Keen as he was, he had to admit that unless his investigations could take a different line, they would have to be dropped. Grundy had done enough smoking. For the rest of that evening Wilkins and Gunn were greatly entertained in noting the various shades that Grundy's complexion assumed. He was still slightly green when the Shell went to bed. And to the hail of inquiries as to how he was getting on with the case, Grundy replied only with a grunt. For once, George Alfred Grundy was in a subdued mood.

CHAPTER 8.

Smokers Wanted!

THE next day Grundy of the Shell was an object of considerable interest to quite a large number of the St. Jim's juniors.

His fame as a detective had spread.

Jack Blake observed that he had believed that he knew every kind of an idiot Grundy was. But he confessed that Grundy had succeeded in surprising him with a new variety.

Grundy as a detective was, as all the fellows agreed, a real "corker."

The adventure of the cigarettes was the talk of the School House. Grundy's stern devotion to duty had been proved by the fact that he had travelled through half a dozen smokes in succession, and his subsequent illness was heartlessly regarded as funny. The fact that he had received a licking from the head prefect was looked upon as the cream of the joke. And when it was learned that Wilkins had carelessly dusted away the results of his painful labours, the juniors shrieked. Even Manners seemed to be cheered up by Grundy's adventures, though he was still worried and exasperated by the loss of his beloved camera.

The missing camera did not turn up, and George Alfred Grundy was still on the track. Most of the fellows scouted the idea that there was a thief in the House, who had taken the camera with the intention of keeping or selling it. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy declared that such an idea was "howlin' wot!" and nearly everybody agreed with him. Grundy disagreed. The amateur detective could not track down a thief unless a thief existed; therefore, it was necessary that there should have been a theft. Grundy was not the first detective, probably, who insisted that facts should square with his theories, instead of making his theories square with the facts.

Manners, who took the loss of the camera more seriously than anyone else, could not quite believe that it had been stolen. Some unfeeling practical joker had hidden it to worry him. It might have been Levison, or Mellish, or Crooke, or Trimble, or Piggott, or some New House fellow with a mistaken sense of humour. And there were endless nooks and crannies about the school where it might have been hidden in safety, defying the most thorough search. His suspicion rested chiefly on Levison of the Fourth, who was as ill-natured and full of tricks as a monkey, and who was "up against" the Terrible Three in every way. It was just like one of Levison's rotten jokes; but if so, Levison did not care to own up. Mr. Railton had promised a severe caning to the person who had taken the camera, if it was not returned immediately; but it had not been returned. But Levison had plenty of nerve, and he was not likely to care much for the risk of a caning.

But there was no proof—and Manners could only glare at Levison, and receive sneering grins in return for his glares. Meanwhile, though the weather was sunny and quite propitious, the amateur photographer was debarred from using his camera, much to his exasperation.

"Levison's got it, most likely," he told Tom Merry and Lowther that day, "and if it isn't found, and the time runs on, he's quite cad enough to keep it and sell it secretly. He ought to be made to own up!"

"But there isn't any proof," said Tom. "You thought it was a New House chap once. It might have been dozens of fellows."

"Leave it to Grundy!" said Lowther. "With the clue of the cigarette-ash—I mean, the carbide of calcium ash—Grundy is bound to arrive somewhere. It's the best joke this term, and, under the circs, Manners, it's really lucky that your camera was lost. Otherwise, we should have missed Grundy as a detective."

"And it's bound to turn up," said Tom. "Whoever's got it will hand it out sooner or later. Or it may be found."

"It's a half-holiday this afternoon!" growled Manners. "I was going down to Abbotsford to take some pictures."

"Play cricket instead!"

"Blow cricket!" growled the amateur photographer.

Grundy of the Shell was glad that it was a Wednesday, and a half-holiday. It gave him time to pursue his investigations without the bother of lessons. After morning lessons, Grundy was prepared to go on the warpath again. Wilkins and Gunn were thinking of cricket; but Grundy soon put a stopper on that. He required Wilkins and Gunn to play the parts of the faithful Watson and the devoted Tinker, while he emulated Sherlock Holmes and Sexton Blake. Wilkins and Gunn gave in. It was no use arguing with Grundy.

After dinner, Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson and Tinker—otherwise Grundy and Wilkins and Gunn—held a consultation in the study. Grundy was full of ideas—ripping ideas.

"You see, the clue of the cigarette-ash is a regular



"Gweat Scott! Look out, you'll have the table ovah!" shrieked D'Arcy. But the excited combatants did not look out. They crashed into the study table, and it went dancing. (See Chapter 1.)

clinker," he told his assistants. "I've got to follow that up. It was a distinct stroke of luck that the thief should have left that clue behind him. Sherlock Holmes is strong on clues of cigarette-ash—and, I may say, I know the whole game from end to end. That was a rather distinctive kind of ash, too—I noticed that it had rather a smell—a sort of chemical smell. When I get some ash just like that, I shall recognise it at once, and then I shall hold the thief in the hollow of my hand. In the hollow of my hand," repeated Grundy sternly, as Wilkins and Gunn showed signs of risibility.

"Well, suppose you go smoking, and getting your blessed ash, while we do some cricket," suggested Gunn.

Grundy shook his head.

"Can't be did! You see, I can't do any more smoking—it upsets my inside. Of course, I'm prepared to face that, or anything else, to make the case a success. But a detective is bound to keep himself fit and clear-headed, and all that. That's where a detective's assistants come in useful. What do you think Sherlock Holmes would do, if he badly wanted a variety of cigarette-ashes to furnish him with clues? Why, he would set Dr. Watson smoking the cigarettes for him!"

Wilkins suppressed a yawn.

"So you see," went on Grundy, "that's where I require your help. So far as the brainy part of the business goes, you can't help me much—that's not to be expected. But you can do the monkey-work, as it were. You two fellows are going to smoke the cigarettes for me and get the ash."

"Eh?"

"You can divide 'em equally between you, and smoke a dozen each," said Grundy, "and I hope this time you won't

be idiot enough to chuck the ash away before I've had time to examine it, George Wilkins!"

"I'm jolly well not going to smoke the rotten cigarettes!" exclaimed Wilkins, with some excitement. "I've got my inside to think of. I'm jolly well not going to spoil my wind for cricket to please you!"

"I don't want you to smoke as a habit, you dummy! Just once won't matter. It will only make you seedy for one day!"

"Do you think I want to spend a half-holiday feeling seedy?" hooted Wilkins.

"It isn't a question of what you want," explained Grundy. "It's a question of doing your duty as my assistant. Dr. Watson wouldn't have hesitated a moment."

"Perhaps Dr. Watson's inside would stand it, and he wasn't a cricketer, either! I'm jolly well not going to smoke myself sick for your fatheaded clues!"

"Same here," said Gunn. "I'll do anything I can, Grundy, but I draw the line at smoking cigarettes."

Grundy began to glare; but for once his faithful followers were firm. Wilkins and Gunn did not mean to surrender on that point. They were prepared to scalp Grundy first. It was mutiny.

"And you call yourselves pals?" said Grundy, more in sorrow than in anger. "Here I'm covering the whole study with glory, and you think of your measly tummies rather than of backing me up. However, I never stand any rot! If you don't back me up—"

Grundy was already pushing back his cuffs. Gunn made

a strategic movement towards the poker. But Wilkins rushed in with a suggestion.

"I've got it!" he exclaimed.

"I don't mind hearing a suggestion from my assistants," said Grundy. "You can go ahead!"

"You can get the cigarettes, and we'll get some other chaps to smoke 'em!" said Wilkins brightly. "There are some smoky cads in the House who like that kind of thing—chaps like Crooke and Levison and Mellish. They'll jump at the chance of a smoke for nothing, if you pay for the cigarettes."

"Good!" said Gunn heartily. "It doesn't matter about their insides!"

Grundy reflected, and then, much to the relief of Lis anxious chums, he nodded assent.

"Right!" he said. "It's a good idea, Wilkins. I will say that you're not always a dashed fool, Wilkins—nearly always, but not all the time. You can buzz down on your bike and get the cigarettes for me."

"Hadm't you better get them, Grundy? Your judgment, you know—"

"I'll give you a written list of the brands I want, so that you can't make a mistake."

"Look here, I'd rather not—"

"Never mind that. You see, I might be spotted going into the tobacconist's, and that means detention. I can't risk having my detective work interrupted by detention."

"But suppose I'm seen?" hooted Wilkins.

"Well, that won't matter!"

"But I should be detained, you ass!"

"It doesn't matter if you're detained. I shall be able to go on with the case without you."

"But I don't want to be detained!" shrieked Wilkins.

"That isn't the question. You keep wandering from the point, Wilkins!"

"But I might be licked!"

"I suppose you're not afraid of a licking?" said Grundy scornfully. "Don't be a shirker, Wilkins!"

"You frabjous ass, I'm not afraid of a licking, but I don't want to go out looking for one!"

"You'll get one without going out to look for it, if I have much more of your jaw!" said Grundy darkly. "A detective's assistants are supposed to back him up without gassing like dashed Cabinet Ministers all the time. You're going down to Rylcombe for the cigarettes. As for you, Gunn—"

"I may as well get some cricket, while Wilkins is gone!" remarked Gunn brightly.

"No time for cricket. You've got lines to do!"

"Lines! I haven't got any lines!"

"My lines, I mean. Kildare's doubled them because I didn't do them yesterday. I've no time for lines, of course. Make your fist as like mine as you can. Two hundred of Virgil, old chap."

Gunn gasped.

"You—you want me to stick in the study doing your lines, while you're playing the giddy ox?" he ejaculated.

"While I'm doing my detective work!" said Grundy sternly. "It's nothing to what Tinker does for Sexton Blake."

"Blow Tinker! Bust Sexton Blake!"

"Suppose Sexton Blake had lines to do when he was busy on a case? Of course, Tinker would do them like a shot. The same with Dr. Watson, if Sherlock Holmes had lines. There's such a thing as duty, William Gunn."

And Grundy walked out of the study to save further argument.

Wilkins and Gunn regarded one another.

"Tobacconist's, and a chance of a licking for you, and two hundred lines for me," said Gunn. "I don't want to quarrel with old Grundy, but I shall get fed up in the long run. Suppose we cut the whole bizney, and go down to cricket?"

"Toss up for it," said Wilkins.

"Good! Heads we go to the cricket, tails we play the giddy ox to please that frabjous idiot!"

Wilkins tossed a penny, and it came down tails—perhaps a little to the relief of the mutineers. For certainly there would have been earthquakes and tornadoes in the study if Grundy's autocratic commands had not been carried out. And carried out those commands accordingly were.

CHAPTER 3.

Too Much of a Good Thing!

LEVISON of the Fourth was lounging outside the tuck-shop, chatting with Mellish, a little later, when George Alfred Grundy bore down on him. The two black sheep of the Fourth were idle, as usual, that afternoon. They seldom appeared on the cricket-field, save for the compulsory practice. Tom Merry & Co. THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 443.

were enjoying themselves on Little Side, but that kind of healthy enjoyment did not appeal to Levison and Mellish, and funds were too low for any other enjoyment more in their line.

Mellish was, according to his own account, dying for a smoke. Levison was thinking of the back-parlour at the Green Man, of dirty cards, and frowsy sporting gentlemen who played nap. But a favourite "gee-gee" had run away with all Levison's available cash, and Mellish was in the same happy state of "stoniness." They were not feeling cheerful that sunny afternoon. But they brightened up a little as Grundy of the Shell joined them. Grundy the detective had a naturally inspiriting effect upon anybody.

"Getting on with the case, Grundy?" asked Levison, with a wink at his comrade. "Have you found the bloodstains yet?"

"There weren't any bloodstains," said Grundy. "It's not a murder case, you young donkey. Simply a case of theft. I'm getting on well with it, too. I may say that I have the thief practically in the hollow of my hand."

"The thief?" repeated Levison.

"Yes; the young criminal who stole the camera."

"Oh, you think it was stolen?" yawned Levison.

"I know it was."

"Well, if you know it was, of course, there's nothing more to be said," remarked Levison. "I should have thought it was a practical joke myself. Some fellow who has a grudge against Manners, perhaps—"

"He, he, he!" cackled Mellish.

"Nothing of the sort," said Grundy. "It's a certain case of theft. I've worked that out beyond the shadow of a doubt. I'm handling the case all."

"You're handling the case?"

"Certainly!"

"Then you've got the case?"

"Eh? Of course!"

"And haven't you got the camera?"

"The camera? No, not yet."

"But I understood from Manners that the camera was in the case when it was taken away from his study."

Grundy stared

"You young ass!" he said witheringly. "I don't mean I've got the camera-case. I've got the case of the lost camera to deal with, I mean. Not the case Manners keeps the camera in. You are rather dense, Levison."

"He, he, he!" came from Mellish. Mellish did not think that it was Levison who was dense.

"I want you chaps," went on Grundy. "You're a pair of smoky rotters, I understand."

"Eh?"

"I've got a lot of cigarettes, and I want somebody to smoke them."

"You're standing a smoke?" asked Mellish, with interest.

"Not exactly standing a smoke; but I want somebody to smoke cigarettes for me. I believe you do that kind of thing."

"You bet!" said Mellish proudly.

"Yes, you look that sort of a sickly worm," said Grundy.

"Well, come on! It won't do in the study, as that interfering dummy Kildare might come down on us."

"We generally do our smoking in the old tower."

"Good! I'll join you there with the cigarettes."

"Done!"

Levison and Mellish willingly sauntered away to the old tower. Grundy's offer was not exactly polite or respectful, but it had come like corn in Egypt in one of the lean years to the young blackguards, who were stony. They knew why Grundy wanted the cigarettes smoked; they had heard of the faithful Wilkins' exploits with the duster.

"Silly idiot!" remarked Mellish. "But we'll smoke his fags for him—what!"

"What-ho!" grinned Levison.

"As for his finding clues—"

"Ha, ha! I rather think that the chap who took Manners' camera away wasn't smoking a cigarette at the time," chuckled Levison. "I don't know, of course, but I fancy so."

"He, he, he!"

Grundy looked for Wilkins and Gunn. Wilkins had returned from Rylcombe with his pockets bulging with cigarettes, fortunately without having been spotted. Gunn had laboured through two hundred lines of Virgil, and was hoping that Sherlock Holmes II. was done with him, and that he could go down to the nets. But there was no escape for Detective Grundy's assistants.

"Come on, you chaps!" said Grundy briskly. "I've got Levison and Mellish to smoke the cigarettes. We're going to the tower."

"You don't want us, then?" demurred Wilkins.

"Yes, I do. You see, they're rotten young cads, and they'd

like to smoke a fag or two, but they may kick at smoking a dozen. They've got to do it, though. If necessary, they will have to be held by their necks while they smoke a sufficient number for the purpose. See?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Somewhat cheered by the prospect of holding Levison and Mellish by their necks while they smoked the cigarettes, Wilkins and Gunn followed their great leader to the old tower.

The two new recruits were waiting for them there.

"Trot out the fags, Grundy," said Mellish airily. "We'll show you Shell chaps how we do these things. Be a man, and have one yourself!"

"You dirty little jackanapes!" said Grundy wrathfully. "If you want a thick ear to begin with—"

"Ahem! Trot out the smokes!"

"Hand them out, Wilkins."

Wilkins grinned, and disinterred the smokes from his pockets. He had carefully carried out the written instructions of the great Grundy. There were a number of cigarettes of each of the twelve brands. Mellish and Levison took one each, and lighted up, and proceeded to smoke with a great appearance of enjoyment.

Grundy spread out a number of sheets of paper carefully on the stone floor. On each of them he scribbled in pencil the name of a cigarette-brand.

"Knock off the ash on these," he said. "Mind you don't get them mixed. The success of the whole case depends on this."

Mellish and Levison grinned, and obeyed instructions. They smoked mild Virginia cigarettes to begin with. Then Wilkins handed them a couple of fat Turkish cigarettes. Mellish eyed them rather doubtfully. However, the Turkish were smoked, and the ashes knocked off on the papers duly labelled.

"Egyptian next," said Wilkins.

The Egyptian cigarettes followed.

"Thanks!" said Mellish, as Wilkins offered him a further supply. "I'll put a few in my pocket, if you like. I won't smoke any more just now."

"Oh, go ahead!" said Grundy.

"The fact is, I'd rather not."

"Go ahead, I tell you!"

Mellish scowled.

"Look here, I don't care to smoke any more—especially such blessed strong ones. I'm done!"

"Same here!" remarked Levison. "Enough's as good as a feast, you know. Another time, Grundy."

"Another time won't do," said Grundy calmly. "I want one of each kind smoked."

"Go and eat coke!"

Mellish strode towards the doorway of the room. Grundy shoved him back without ceremony. Gunn grinned, and took up his post in the doorway. There was no escape for the merry blades of the Fourth. They had come there to smoke, and they were going to smoke. Grundy meant business.

"Look here!" said Levison, his eyes beginning to glitter greenly. "I suppose we're not going to smoke if we don't choose?"

"That's your mistake! I didn't bring you here for the pleasure of seeing you act the silly idiot. You've got to make yourselves useful. You've got to smoke three more each."

"Well, I won't!"

"And I won't, either!" howled Mellish indignantly.

"You will," said Grundy calmly. "You can do it without being licked, or after being licked, just as you like. But you'll do it!"

"You bullying rotter—"

"Oh, cheese it! I wouldn't make a decent chap smoke, even to make my case a success. But you rotters make out that you like it, and a bit extra won't hurt you. If it does, I'm sorry, but it can't be helped."

Levison and Mellish glared, but they did not care to "handle" three Shell fellows at once. They accepted another cigarette each, and smoked them slowly.

"That's better," said Grundy approvingly. "You look a bit greenery-yellow, Mellish. But you'll pull through. Have another."

"I—I—I won't!"

"Look here, you can get the ash by burning the cigarettes," said Levison.

Grundy shook his head.

"That wouldn't be the same thing. I can't afford to risk the success of my experiment. Go ahead!"

"I won't!" howled Mellish.

"Collar them!" said Grundy.

Levison and Mellish made a desperate rush for the doorway. Grundy and Gunn and Wilkins collared them promptly. There was a desperate struggle, and Mellish and Levison went down. Unfortunately, they landed on the carefully-spread

sheets of paper, and the carefully-collected ash was scattered far and wide.

The struggle was brief. The unfortunate cads of the Fourth gave it up, with the grasp of Wilkins and Gunn on their collars.

"See what you've done, you dummies!" howled Grundy. "You've mucked up the ash I was collecting. Now you'll have to begin again."

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Wilkins and Gunn.

"B-b-begin again!" stuttered Mellish.

"Yes. I must have the ash of each kind of cigarette."

"You dangerous ass! I shall be sick!"

"Well, it's your own fault!"

"I—I won't smoke at all—I—I—"

"Knock his head on the wall, Wilkins!"

Bang!

"Yaroooh!"

"Are you ready, Mellish?"

"Yow, ow, ow! Yes!"

"Are you ready, Levison? Knock his head on the wall if he isn't, Gunny!"

"I'm ready!" howled Levison.

"Good! Here you are. Here's a match."

With faces that expressed a queer mingling of rage and apprehension and inward misery, the two unhappy blades of the Fourth recommenced smoking—from the beginning. They started on the fat Turkish—with dreadful forebodings.

"And mind you don't upset the ash again," said Grundy warningly.

That warning was not needed. The awful prospect of having to begin again from the beginning made the unhappy smokers more careful of the ash than Grundy was himself. Cigarette after cigarette was smoked, till the room was hazy with it, and the two smokers grew yellow and green and white, and breathed spasmodically. They sat on the floor in dumb misery while they smoked, with internal heavings that warned them only too clearly of what was to come. But Grundy was inexorable. It was rot that the two young blackguards should be willing to smoke out of sheer perverseness, and unwilling to smoke to aid in his great experiment as a new Sherlock Holmes. Grundy had no patience with such rot. Mellish and Levison were doomed to smoke those cigarettes through to the last of the dozen.

The wretched victims would have yelled for help, but it was no use yelling. The old tower was selected as a place for smoking because it was a good distance from the School House. They would have been glad to see even Mr. Raitlon or the Head himself walk in at that moment. But nobody walked in. The cigarettes were smoked steadily through, while the inward anguish of the smokers increased crescendo.

Grundy watched the accumulating piles of ash with great delight. Success was within his grasp—the thief would shortly be in the hollow of his hand! Mellish and Levison looked as if they would shortly be in the sanatorium, but that could not be helped.

The dozen piles of ash were complete at last. Mellish and Levison leaned back against the wall, almost grey in the face. They dared not rise. They knew what would happen if they moved.

But Grundy had no eyes for them. He folded up the sheets of paper carefully, each separately, with infinite care.

"That's done!" he remarked, with satisfaction. "I wonder whether it would be a good idea, though, to have a bigger supply of ash, in case anything goes wrong in the experiment? Another dozen—"

Mellish moaned faintly.

"Oh, you beast! Go away!"

Grundy glanced at him.

"Hallo! Feeling queer?"

"Grooooh! Ooooo-er!"

"Well, that may be a lesson to you about playing rotten tricks!" said Grundy. "I advise you fellows to chuck smoking."

"Woooooh-er!"

"Come on, Wilkins! Come on, Gunn! Much obliged to you young rotters! I dare say you'll feel better presently."

Grundy & Co. quitted the room. Mellish and Levison did not move. They couldn't. They sat and moaned.

CHAPTER 10.

Fairly on the Track!

TOM MERRY & CO. had forgotten all about Grundy the detective, while cricket was on. But having beaten the Fourth Form by a margin of 12 runs, and cricket being over they remembered him.

Manners had played for the Shell, and for a time his missing camera had been dismissed from his mind. But as the chums came off Little Side, tired and ruddy, Manners

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remarked that something might have been heard of his camera.

Tom Merry and Lowther did not groan, though they felt inclined to do so whenever the camera was mentioned. Their belief was that it would turn up in the course of time, when the practical joker was tired of worrying Manners. They really wondered why Manners couldn't wait patiently till that time arrived. But he couldn't, so they bore with him like good chums.

"I dare say Grundy's on the track by this time," Lowther remarked. "Let's see Grundy. He may have made some discovery."

"Not likely!" growled Manners. "Oh, I shouldn't wonder!" declared Lowther. "He may have discovered that the ash belongs to a bike-lamp, instead of a cigarette."

"Ha, ha, ha!"
The Terrible Three went into the School House. In the upper passage they came upon Lumley-Lumley and Trimble, looking into their study and chortling.

"What's the joke?" asked Tom. "I guess Levison and Mellish are the joke," chuckled Lumley-Lumley. "Look at the scallywags!"

The Terrible Three looked in. Levison was stretched in the armchair, and Mellish was sitting by the table, leaning on it. Both of them were very white and dispirited. They glanced at the visitors with lack-lustre eyes.

"Over-done smoking—what?" grinned Lowther. "Br-r-r-r!"

"It was that beast Grundy!" moaned Mellish. "He got us to the old tower for a smoke, and made us smoke a heap of rotten cigarettes to get silly rotten ash for his fat-headed experiments! Ow! I shall never get over it!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
"You can't have too much of a good thing!" grinned Lowther. "I've heard you say that a smoke is simply delightful, Mellish."

"Oh, go to Jericho!" growled Mellish.

The Terrible Three went their way, grinning—but not to Jericho. Tom Merry knocked at Grundy's door and opened it. Grundy was in the study alone. Wilkins and Gunn had succeeded in escaping at last, Grundy not requiring their services in the analysis of the ash. Indeed, Grundy had told them he would rather have them out of the way for a bit, as they were clumsy. They were only too glad to get out of the way for a bit.

Grundy was very busy now.

He had the varied assortment of cigarette-ash on the table, each little heap on its separate sheet of paper. He was examining them under a big microscope, which the juniors recognised as Mr. Lathom's property. He was comparing them, one after another, very carefully, with the original ash discovered in Tom Merry's bookcase. Grundy was bringing the whole force of his powerful brain to bear on the problem, but he had not yet discovered that the ash from the bookcase had been spilt there from Lowther's carbide lamp. The peculiar aroma that clung to it, even in its spent state, might have enlightened him if he had not been so very keen after clues. But Grundy would probably have laughed Lowther to scorn if he had told him the real nature of the powder. Not that the humourist of the Shell had any intention of

telling him. Monty Lowther was keenly interested in the progress of Grundy's discoveries, founded on that tell-tale ash.

Grundy glanced up carelessly as the Shell fellows looked in. The Terrible Three maintained as much gravity as possible—but it was not easy, under the circumstances. Grundy fondly imagined that he gave an impression like Sherlock Holmes in his laboratory. But that wasn't how he impressed the Terrible Three.

"Got the man yet, Grundy?" asked Monty Lowther affably. "Not yet. Close that door—a draught might scatter this ash. It's a bit tiring work," said Grundy, resting from his labours for a moment or two. "You see, I haven't the apparatus for making a thorough analysis. But I've borrowed old Lathom's microscope, and I'm getting on all right. There's a lot of difference between the ash of different makes of cigarettes—surprising. Sherlock Holmes has classified about fifty kinds—or a hundred and fifty—or something. Holmes would very likely penetrate this mystery at a glance. But, of course, a fellow wants practice."

"You've found out the exact nature of the original ash?" asked Lowther gravely.

"Yes; I've examined it very thoroughly. It's Turkish!" "Ha, ha, ha!"

The Terrible Three were overcome for a moment. The discovery that the carbide-of-calcium ash had come from a Turkish cigarette was a little rich, even for Grundy.

Certainly, the powder, which was quite dry and white, bore a resemblance to cigarette-ash. But that it resembled the ash of a Turkish cigarette any more than that of any other kind of cigarette was certainly a surprising discovery, if true.

"If you've come in here to cackle, the sooner you buzz off the better!" said Grundy crossly. "I've no time to waste on silly, cackling asses!"

"Yes, shut up, you fellows!" said Lowther reprovingly. "Laughter in court is quite out of place here. Sherlock Holmes himself wouldn't like it. Besides, Grundy is awfully interesting! How did you prove that that ash was the ash of a Turkish cigarette, Grundy?"

"I don't mind explaining." As a matter of fact, Grundy was glad to explain. He liked the role of Sherlock Holmes explaining to admiring listeners. "By examination under the microscope, I have detected certain characteristics—"

"Good word!" murmured Lowther.

"Certain characteristics," repeated Grundy firmly, "in the texture, so to speak, of that particular ash. Similar characteristics appear in the ash of a Turkish cigarette I have here, specially smoked by Levison—"

"Oh, good!"
"There is also a slight aroma attached to the ash," pursued Grundy. "The aroma is the same in both cases."

"My hat! I wonder what the Rylcombe tobacconist makes his Turkish cigarettes of?" murmured Tom Merry.

"I have established, therefore, that the ash left in your bookcase, Merry, was the ash of a Turkish cigarette. This is irrefragable!"

"Another good word!" said Lowther admiringly. "I am going to finish examining these ashes to the very end, but I have the case pretty clear. The thief was a chap who smoked Turkish cigarettes!"

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"Bravo!"

"That narrows down the ground considerably, my dear Watson—I mean, you chaps," went on Grundy. "Most of the silly cuckoos here who play the giddy ox smoke some mild kind of Yankee tobacco! A chap who smokes Turkish cigarettes ought to be spotted pretty easily. That's the next step in the investigation!"

"Wonderful!"

"Oh, quite elementary!" said Grundy, who seemed almost to imagine that he was the real Sherlock Holmes by this time.

"Let us know when you denounce the villain!" said Lowther. "I want to see his face when you state the evidence you convict him on!"

"I may want you to lend me a hand in securing him," said Grundy. "It might be a senior, of course. Knox of the Sixth, perhaps; or Cutts of the Fifth—"

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Tom Merry. "You'd better let the seniors alone, Grundy. You won't find them appreciative of your kind of humour!"

"A detective cannot afford to be a respecter of persons," said Grundy calmly. "When I have worked out the case, I shall denounce the thief, even if he turns out to be a master!"

"Great Scott!"

"You see, the evidence will be unanswerable, and there will be nothing for him to do but confess," explained Grundy. "To save a scandal, I may give him the chance of handing back the camera, and taking a licking. That's better than letting people know that there's a thief in the school. A jolly good licking would be a sufficient punishment, in my opinion!"

"I'll give him the licking, if he's ever found out," said Manners grimly. "I've got a licking saved up for him!"

"Well, I expect to be able to give you his name early this evening, and you'll have your camera back all right—or the pawnticket," said Grundy. "Of course, the thief may have pawned or sold it already. But once the thief is found, it will be easy enough to get the camera back. And with such a clue—"

"The clue of the Turkish cigarette?" asked Lowther.

"Yes; with a clue like that, even one of you fellows might be able to do the trick. I cannot fail!"

"Let's get out," murmured Tom. "I shall explode soon!"

The Terrible Three left Grundy at work on his analysis, and did not yell till they were in the passage.

Grundy, in blissful ignorance of the fact that the tell-tale ash came from a carbide lamp, and certainly wasn't Turkish, went on with his labours in a very satisfied frame of mind.

When Wilkins and Gunn came in to tea he had finished, and he proudly explained to his chums the result of his investigations.

Wilkins and Gunn regarded one another doubtfully.

They had their own suspicions about that tell-tale ash, though they had not ventured to state them to Grundy.

"All I've got to do is to find a chap who was smoking Turkish cigarettes on Monday afternoon," said Grundy. "That's the next step."

"But where are you going to find him?" said Wilkins dubiously.

"I deduce that it's a School House chap."

"More likely a New House chap, if it's really a thief!" averred Gunn, jealous for the honour of his House.

Grundy shook his head decidedly.

"Impossible! I've thought that out!"

"Oh, if you've thought that out, of course, there's nothing more to be said!" yapped Gunn.

"Nothing at all," agreed Grundy. "But I don't mind explaining, Tinker—I mean, Gunn! The thief was smoking when he committed the theft. Now, I know there are smoky cads in the New House—chaps like Clampe. But a New House chap couldn't have come into the School House smoking. He'd have been spotted. Neither would he have stopped to light a cigarette while engaged in stealing a camera. It stands to reason that he'd have been as quick about it as possible!"

"Wonderful!" said Wilkins. "What are we going to have for tea, Grundy? It's up to you!"

"Never mind tea!"

"It's tea-time, you know, and I'm hungry!"

"Yes; never mind," said Grundy, unheeding. "Now, as I work it out, a chap went into Merry's study and stole that camera. He wouldn't light a cigarette while he was on the job, so he must have had a cigarette in his mouth at the time. That bars out the New House. A New House chap couldn't have come in here smoking. It was some chap who was already in the House. Some cad was sticking indoors smoking, instead of going out, and he took advantage

of everybody else being out of doors to sneak in and bag that camera. That's another clue. You see, the chap was indoors when most of the fellows were out!"

"Why, you were indoors!" said Wilkins. "You were here when Manners missed his camera! You scrapped with him about it!"

"Looks rather black against you, Grundy!" chortled Gunn.

Grundy frowned.

"None of your silly jokes, Gunny! This isn't a joking matter! Of course, the camera might have been taken some time before Manners missed it. He wanted it in a hurry because the soldiers were going by. Now, I've narrowed it down to a School House chap, and a chap who was indoors after lessons on Monday when everybody was out, and a chap who smokes Turkish cigarettes!"

"That's three chaps, then!"

"One chap, you ass—the same chap!"

"Oh, I thought you said—"

"You're rather dense, Wilkins. Now, the question is, to find that chap, and that's what we're going to do next," said Grundy. "Come on!"

"Going to the tuckshop?"

"Tuckshop! Bless the tuckshop! I'm going to find the thief!"

"But what about tea?"

"Blow tea!" roared Grundy.

"Look here, suppose you go and find the Turkish cigarette—I mean, the chap who smokes Turkish cigarettes, while we get tea?" proposed Wilkins, as if struck by a sudden brilliant idea.

"Suppose we don't do anything of the sort!" snorted Grundy. "I should have thought you'd want to be in at the death. Dr. Watson always did!"

"Dr. Watson mayn't have wanted his tea!"

"Are you coming, or are you not coming?" demanded Grundy.

"Oh, I'm coming!" said Wilkins resignedly.

Tea in the study depended on Grundy, so there was really no help for it.

And Grundy & Co. marched forth, fairly on the track of the thief at last—if Grundy's clue of the cigarette ash was worth anything.

CHAPTER 11.

Tracked Down!

"B AI Jove! Heah's Gwunday!"

Study No. 6 were at tea when the amateur detective of St. Jim's looked in. Grundy nodded affably to Blake & Co.

"Just a question to you chaps," he said.

"Pway wiah in, deah boy!" said Arthur Augustus politely.

"Do you smoke cigarettes of Turkish manufacture?"

"Eh?"

"Don't all speak at once," said Grundy. "I want to know whether one of you chaps smokes Turkish cigarettes. Not Egyptian or Virginia—Turkish!"

"You uttah ass!"

"Are you looking for a thick ear?" asked Blake, getting up. "You've come to the right study for it if you are."

"I don't want any prevarication," said Grundy.

"Prevarication!" roared Blake.

"That's what I said. I don't accuse you. I merely ask whether any fellow in this study smokes Turkish cigarettes. Never mind why—just answer."

"You mustn't merely ask questions like that in a respectable study," explained Blake. "You are liable to be chucked out on your neck, you know."

"Your answers are very unsatisfactory, Blake. It's rather suspicious, in fact. Digby, are you aware whether Blake smokes Turkish cigarettes?"

"Manilla cigars, I think," said Digby, after some reflection. "Black Manilla cigars, when he hasn't a pipe on."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I didn't ask you for any rotten jokes, Digby. It looks to me as if you may have had a hand in this, too. Innocent chaps don't prevaricate."

"Prevaricate!" howled Digby.

"Yes. Herries, listen to me. Do you happen to know whether Blake or Digby smoke Turkish cigarettes?"

"Of all the uttah duffahs—"

"Certainly," said Herries blandly. "They're demons at it. They prefer shag, but when they can't get shag; they smoke cheroots. When the cheroots run out, they come down to Turkish cigarettes."

Wilkins and Gunn emitted a chuckle from the passage. Grundy gave them a glare, and reduced them to seriousness.

"Prevarication all round," said Grundy sternly. "I admit

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that I didn't suspect this study—I was only beginning here. But it's beginning to look pretty black. As I can't get the truth out of you, I shall have to search the study."

"Bai Jove!"

"Search our study!" gasped Blake.

"Yes. I have no doubt that I shall find Turkish cigarettes here, and that will settle the matter. Come in and help, you chaps."

Wilkins and Gunn had no time to help. Blake and Herries and Digby and D'Arcy, as if worked by the same spring, hurled themselves on Grundy. The amateur detective was swept off his feet, and before he knew what was happening, he was projected through the study doorway like a stone from a catapult.

Gunn and Wilkins dodged too late. Grundy crashed fairly into them, and hurled them headlong. The three investigators sprawled in the passage, roaring. And a roar of laughter from Study No. 6 followed them.

"Come in and have some more, Gwunday!" called out Arthur Augustus. "We are quite willin' to keep this up as long as you do, deah boy!"

"Yow-ow-ow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The door of Study No. 6 slammed.

George Alfred Grundy staggered to his feet. He was feeling hurt. Wilkins and Gunn sat up and groaned. Grundy wasn't a light weight.

"Oh, crumbs! The rotters!" gasped Grundy. "Come on, you fellows—we'll wipe out the whole study!"

"Yow-ow! My nose! My napper! Ow-wow!"

"Grooh! My funny-bone! Wow-wow-wow!"

"Are you coming?" shouted Grundy.

"No, we're jolly well not coming, you silly ass!" raved Wilkins. "What do you expect when you go into a decent chap's study and ask him whether he smokes Turkish cigarettes, you howling idiot? We're not coming. Go and eat coke! Do you want to be chucked out of every study in the House, you blithering jabberwock?"

"Look here, Wilkins—"

"Oh, don't talk to me! Ow! My funny-bone! Ow! I biffed my funny-bone on something—"

"It was my nose!" said Gunn, in tones of deep anguish.

"Oh! Ow! It was my nose! Yow!"

"Oh, don't make a fuss about a trifle," said Grundy crossly. "Anybody would think a chap had never biffed his silly funny-bone before."

"My nose is jolly well knocked out of shape!" howled Gunn.

"Well, that may improve it," said Grundy sarcastically. "It couldn't make it worse. For goodness' sake shut up that row!"

"You—you—you— Oh, there ain't a word for you!"

"Come along, and don't grouse!" said Grundy. "On second thoughts, I won't make a round of the House. I'll start on the chaps who're known to be smoky beasts. Come on, I may want your help."

"You can whistle for it, then!" groaned Wilkins. "I'm done!"

Grundy snorted and strode away. His second thoughts were undoubtedly the best; his experience in Study No. 6 was really too painful to be repeated unless strictly necessary. Wilkins and Gunn limped away, growling furiously. The amateur detective had to dispense with the aid of the amateur Tinker and Dr. Watson.

Crooke of the Shell received Grundy's next visit. The black sheep of the Shell was smoking after tea, with Racke, his study mate. The two young rascals looked alarmed as the door opened, and hastily put the cigarettes out of sight; but they were relieved to see that it was only Grundy.

"What do you want?" snapped Crooke.

"I want you to answer a question or two," said Grundy.

"What kind of cigarettes do you smoke?"

"Find out!"

"I'm going to!" Grundy held a formidable set of knuckles under Crooke's nose. "See that?"

Crooke backed his chair away.

"I'm smoking Virginia," he said sullenly.

"Do you ever smoke Turkish?"

"No; too strong for me."

"What about you, Racke?"

"Mine's Egyptian. What in thunder does it matter to you?" demanded Racke.

"You haven't any Turkish here?"

"No, you ass!"

"I'll take your word—at present," said Grundy. "Perhaps you know a chap who does smoke Turkish?"

"Do you want a smoke?" said Crooke. "If you do, why can't you say so? I don't mind letting you have one."

Grundy's heavy knuckles very nearly came into play, but he restrained himself. He remembered that it was necessary for a detective to be diplomatic.

"Well, suppose I want a Turkish cigarette?" he said, with great cunning. "Where could I get one?"

"I dare say Levison could give you one," said Crooke. "He smokes that kind. He's got an inside like leather."

Grundy started.

"Levison does!"

"Yes."

"Good!"

Grundy strode from the study. A minute later he pitched open Levison's door, and strode in. His heart was beating with excitement. He was acting now from "information received," and there was no further doubt. Levison of the Fourth was the guilty party, and Grundy of the Shell had run him to earth.

CHAPTER 12.

At Last!

LEVISON was in his study, and he turned a very sour look on Grundy. Levison had recovered from his unpleasant experiences early in the afternoon. He was a much more hardened smoker than Mellish, who had gone to the dormitory to lie down, and hadn't had any tea.

Levison had recovered to such an extent that he was smoking a cigarette after tea—perhaps on the "hair-of-the-dog" principle.

Grundy came in, and closed the door. Then he fixed his eyes on Levison, with a stony glare that ought to have made the culprit shake in his shoes. There was triumphant denunciation in that glare—it was such a look as Sherlock Holmes might have fastened upon Professor Moriarty. Levison, however, only scowled.

"At last! I hold you," said Grundy, "in the hollow of my hand!"

"Mad, I suppose," remarked Levison, addressing space.

"I'll trouble you to let me look at that cigarette you're smoking," said Grundy.

"Go and eat coke!"

"Mind, I mean business. Are you going to let me look at it?" asked Grundy, pushing his cuffs back.

Levison scowled, and held out the cigarette.

"Look at it, you silly ass, if you want to. I don't see why the thunder you can't mind your own business."

Grundy scanned the cigarette.

"Turkish!" he exclaimed triumphantly.

"Yes. Is that what you wanted to know?" asked Levison, mystified.

"Now hand over the camera!"

"The—the what?"

"Manners' camera."

Levison looked bewildered.

"What the howling thunder has Manners' camera to do with my cigarette?" he yelled. "Are you right off your dot, Grundy?"

Grundy smiled serenely.

"I don't mind explaining," he said. "I've tracked you down, Levison! You stole Manners' camera."

"Stole it?" ejaculated Levison.

"Yes. I've worked out the case, and I have proof."

Levison changed colour a little.

"Proof!" he repeated.

"Irrefragable proof! You may as well own up!"

"I'd rather hear your proofs first," said Levison, recovering himself.

"I don't mind explaining. I found a clue in Tom Merry's bookcase—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Levison.

"You won't cackle soon," said Grundy, frowning. "I found the ash of a cigarette there. I've analysed it, and

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found that it's the ash of a Turkish cigarette. Now I've found the chap who smokes Turkish cigarettes. You're the man, Levison! I don't say I want to show you up to the Head and get you sacked for stealing. I think a licking will meet the case. I've undertaken to let Manners hand you the licking. I'm going to take you to him—with the camera!"

"You frabjous ass!"

"Where is Manners' camera?"

"I don't know."

"Now, prevarication won't help you in the least, Levison," said Grundy very patiently for him. "You can see that you're bowled out, and that the proof is as clear as daylight. For your own sake, you'd better produce the camera at once, and let the matter drop."

"You silly idiot! I wasn't smoking a cigarette when—I mean, I don't know anything about the camera."

"I suppose it isn't much use asking you for the truth," said Grundy. "But as I've found the guilty party, I feel justified in making him own up." Grundy turned to the door and locked it. "Now then, where's that camera?"

Levison started up as Grundy came towards him. The burly Shell fellow towered over the weedy slacker of the Fourth.

"You dangerous ass! What are you going to do?" yelled Levison, in alarm.

Grundy took a cricket-stump from a corner.

"I'm going to lick you till you hand back the stolen goods!" he said. "I could send you to prison if I liked, with my conclusive evidence. But I'm not going to disgrace the school. I'm taking the matter into my own hands. Are you going to hand that camera over?"

"Ye-es!" stuttered Levison, who was frightened at the look Grundy gave him, and the stump in his hand. "I hid it in Manners' study. It's there all the time—on top of the bookcase!"

"Come on, then!" he said. "I've promised Manners the thief to lick!"

Levison was not allowed any choice about coming on. Grundy unlocked the door and marched the wriggling cad of the Fourth out of the study by the collar and marched him into Tom Merry's study without a halt.

CHAPTER 13.

No Glory for Grundy!

TOM MERRY & CO. were at tea. They stared as Grundy marched in, dragging in the wriggling Levison by the collar.

"Hallo! What's the name of this game?" asked Tom, setting down his tea-cup.

"I happen to have detected the thief," said Grundy, with studied carelessness.

"Levison!" exclaimed the Terrible Three together.

"Exactly—Levison!"

"I shouldn't be surprised," said Manners. "I thought it was very likely Levison. But how do you know?"

"I've proved it!"

"Irrefragably?" grinned Lowther.

"Yes, irrefragably," said Grundy calmly. "You remember I found the clue of the ash of a cigarette in the bookcase—"

"Ha, ha! Yes!"

"I analysed it and found that it was the ash of a Turkish cigarette—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Levison is the only chap in the House that I've discovered who smokes Turkish cigarettes. I caught him in the very act of smoking one."

"Let go my collar, you beast!" mumbled Levison.

Grundy did not heed.

"So the case is proved against Levison," he concluded triumphantly. "Behold the criminal!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What are you cackling at, you dummies?" demanded Grundy wrathfully and indignantly. This was not the gratitude he had expected.

"You howling ass!" roared Lowther. "The ash you discovered wasn't cigarette-ash at all!"

"What! What was it, then?"

"It was some old carbide spilt from my bike lamp!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Eh!" faltered Grundy.

Even the great Grundy was taken aback for a moment.

"The carbide-lamp is kept on that shelf, when I'm not using it," continued Lowther. "It was under your silly nose all the time. I dare say Levison pinched the camera, but you've got no proof against him, you silly ox!"

Grundy snorted. He had been taken back for a moment, but only for a moment. He was quite himself again the next.

"I'm surprised at you, Lowther—surprised that you should resort to prevarication to detract from my success," said Grundy sternly. "I really should not have expected you to equivocate like this, Lowther. I had a better opinion of you."

"You silly, frabjous, burbling jabberwock!" gasped Lowther. "You—you Hun-headed dummy! It was carbide-ash."

"It was nothing of the sort," said Grundy calmly; "and the proof is that I've discovered the thief, and that he's confessed!"

"Confessed?" shouted Manners.

"Yes," said Grundy triumphantly. "Now, perhaps Lowther will apologise?"

"Ass! Duffer! Hun! It was carbide-ash."

"Having proved Levison's guilt, I felt justified in walloping him till he owned up," said Grundy. "He says he hid the camera for a lark, and it's on top of your bookcase all the time. If it's found there, I regard Levison as cleared of the charge of theft. My decision is final!"

Manners ran to the bookcase. It was rather a tall bookcase for the study, and the top nearly reached the ceiling. Naturally, it had never occurred to Manners that the missing camera might be on top of the bookcase in his own study—it was the last place he would have been likely to search. He dragged the table to the bookcase, mounted on it, and peered over the top, unheeding a bump of his head on the ceiling.

Manners groped over the dusty bookcase top, dragged the hidden camera into view. He jumped down from the table, the big camera in his hand, triumphantly.

"And it was there all the time!" exclaimed Tom. "Well, I must say you're an ass, Manners! You've been turning our hair grey about a dashed camera that was in your own study all the time!"

"How was I to know?" demanded Manners. "How could I guess this rotter would hide it in my own study?" Manners put the camera on the table, and advanced upon Levison. "Now, you rotter, put up your hands! You won't hide my camera again, after I've done with you!"

The next five minutes were exciting and interesting. Levison was in for it, and he put up a good fight, and Manners was not so formidable a foe as Grundy. But Levison had no chance. In five minutes he was licked to the wide, and he lay on the floor gasping, with his nose streaming, and one eye closed.

Manners mopped his own nose with his handkerchief.

"Had enough, you cad?" he gasped.

"Wow-wow-ow-ow!"

Manners opened the door, and helped Levison out—with his boot. Never had a practical joker felt so sorry for himself as Levison did as he limped away to his study.

"Much obliged to you, Grundy!" said Manners. "I suspected that beast, and I'd have licked him into owning up, only I couldn't go for him without some proof."

"Exactly," said Grundy. "I had the proof, you see."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It was carbide-ash!" yelled Lowther. "It happens to be Levison; but you went for him without an atom of proof."

Grundy smiled—a bitter smile.

"I've taken up this case, and worked it through to a successful conclusion," he said. "I've revealed the rascal and discovered the missing goods. I've handled this case in a way that Sherlock Holmes himself couldn't have beaten. And now, with my splendid success staring you in the face, you won't admit it. I won't say I'm surprised. I'm disgusted! I despise you!"

Grundy strode wrathfully from the study, and closed the door after him with a terrific bang.

Tom Merry & Co. said no word. They couldn't! Grundy the Detective had left them in hysterics.

Wilkins and Gunn were astonished to learn of Grundy's success. So was everybody else. To Grundy's intense indignation, his success did not lead in the slightest degree to the chorus of admiration he had confidently expected. He was generally considered as big an ass as ever, if not a little bigger. Wilkins and Gunn, indeed, said that it was wonderful—life wouldn't have been worth living in the study if they hadn't. Privately, they howled over Grundy's Sherlock Holmes' methods, as merrily as anybody else in the School House. Which was really a very poor reward for the powerful intellectual efforts of Grundy the Detective.

THE END.

(Do not miss next Wednesday's Grand, Long Complete Yarn of the Chums of St. Jim's, entitled "EVERY INCH A HERO!" by Martin Clifford.)

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

NEXT WEDNESDAY!

"EVERY INCH A HERO!"

The Opening Chapters of a Great New Story!



New Readers Begin Here.

Old TOM HILDER, a cattle farmer of Katfarit, Australia, is faced with ruin for the want of £1,000. At his son BOB'S suggestion, he visits an old friend, HENRY NORMAN, of Sydney, for the purpose of seeking assistance. Bob waits anxiously at home, but several days pass, and he receives no news from his father. Then, one day, KERR, a bullock-driver on the farm, informs him that BOARDMAN, a scoundrel, who has plotted to ruin Tom Hilder, has been seen to leave for Sydney in the company of DICKSON, a wastrel who has been discharged from the farm.

Bob starts at once in search of his father, and on inquiry at Henry Norman's house, discovers that he has been there some days previously and obtained the £1,000.

With the help of BENNETT and CLIFF, two men whom he meets, he traces his father, who explains that the notes had been stolen from him, and in recovering them he had become mixed up with the gang in the eyes of the police, and was obliged to lie low, until Henry Norman, who was away, returned home. He hands the notes to Bob, and immediately leaves him.

Bob sets off at once to see SUMMERS, the bank manager, and hands over the notes to him; but he gathers from his attitude, that he is in league with Boardman.

Later, he is pursued and captured by the police, with the help of Boardman, who had thrown him from his horse by means of a rope across the road. He is charged with passing bad notes at the bank.

Freedom Again.

As Bob's senses faded away, Boardman's evil laugh kept ringing in his ears. Then the lad remembered no more until he awoke in the dark, his head racked with pain.

He flung out an arm, and his hand struck a wall. Then he remembered what had happened. He was a prisoner and in a cell!

He lay perfectly still, trembling with anguish. Boardman's last words came back to him—that he, the villain, would be quit of him and his father for ever. Was his father, too, arrested already, and was he also charged with passing false banknotes? The lad asked himself. Oh, the scoundrels in Sydney who had let them into this trap! If he could meet them! But here he groaned again. That was out of his power. Nothing lay before him now but years in gaol.

In his agony of mind he could lie, still no longer. He stumbled out of bed, and crossed to the barred window. Dawn was breaking; he could hear the cockatoos stirring and chattering on the trees close by. In half an hour the sun would be shining down the village street, smoke would be curling from the chimneys of many happy homes, old friends of his would go cantering to work in the scrub around. Tightly he clasped the bars, and felt as if he must choke. His liberty was gone.

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The lock turned in the door, and a constable walked in carrying a jug of tea and a loaf of bread. Bob looked at him in desperation.

"Feeling better, eh?" the constable asked. "Nice sort of a chap you are for your age! What next, I wonder! Passing a thousand pounds' worth of false notes when you're all but a kid! You may thank your stars you've been caught. A few years under lock and key will learn you sense. You would have turned bushranger in no time if you had scored on this job."

"I didn't know the notes were false!" Bob cried wildly. "They were given to me by—"

He stopped.

"By your father!" The constable laughed bitterly. "That's what you were going to say, but you thought better of it. Well, hold your tongue, if you like, until you're fetched to court. Then take my tip, and round on the old man; he doesn't deserve better, after leading you into a mess like this. And have your breakfast; you'll need to keep your nerve up, and, anyhow, you showed pluck, and led us a long dance, so I don't grudge a bit of grub to you."

He laid down the tea and bread, and left the cell. Bob's eyes were blazing with indignation, his fists were clenched. He stood staring at the door, whilst the sun arose, and the cell was filled with its golden light. He had no wish for food, but in time he calmed down, and knowing that the constable had at least spoken the truth when he had said he would have need for all his courage, he swallowed the tea, and ate, but without much appetite. After that, he felt better, and sat down on the plank bed, determined to face the worst without shrinking, and to try to think out what he should say when he appeared before the magistrate.

The hours dragged on. He heard the laughter of the children as they thronged to school, the crack of whips, the clatter of horses, cheery greetings, and the rolling of bullock-waggons, and, far off, the shriek of an engine as a train sped through the bush.

Worn-out and heart-broken, he fell into a doze, only to awake with a start as gruff voices echoed beyond the door. He heard stifled laughter, hoarse mutterings, and the tramp of many feet, Jumping up, he listened. Were the police making arrangements to take him to court?

As he stood listening, a shadow fell across the narrow window, and, turning, he saw a splendidly-built man, with hawk eyes, gazing in at him. The stranger whistled.

"You're in the jug!" He said, and his voice rolled deep and melodious. "What can a chap like you have done to get that?"

Bob crossed to the window.

"I've been arrested on a false charge," he began. "If you have any influence with the magistrates—"

The stranger grinned. His teeth were white and even, the lad noticed, his face deeply tanned, and the sombrero hat on the side of his curly hair gave him a look of daring and joviality.

TUCK HAMPERS ARE GIVEN AWAY TO READERS OF THE "BOYS' FRIEND," 1^d.

"Influence with the magistrates!" he chuckled. "Great Scott! That's the best I've heard for years!"

"Then if you can get round the police——" Bob began.

"I've got round 'em already. You are a nailer for hitting things on the head!" he gurgled. "What did they lock you up for?"

"For passing false notes. My father gave them to me in Sydney, but he didn't know about them, either."

The man gazed fixedly at the lad. He passed his hand along his hooked nose, rubbed his chin, and gasped.

"Want to get out of this?" he asked.

"Of course I do! But that's hopeless. Still, if you would put in a good word for me, perhaps, later on——"

"Half a mo'!"

The stranger disappeared. Disappointed that he had not been given an opportunity to plead further, Bob turned from the window. In half a minute he heard a firm step along the passage, the fumbling of keys, and the door was flung open by the stranger. Now he could get a better view of him. His riding-trousers were new and well-cut, his high boots shining with polish, and he was wearing a smart coat and vest. An athlete every inch, he had the appearance of a man with plenty of money whose life had been spent in comfort and sport. And he was jingling the police-station keys as if he had a right to them.

"Come along, and look sharp!" he said. "Your name is Hilder, ain't it, and you live at Katfarit?"

"Yes. How ever do you know?"

"No matter. I give you your liberty."

"You do?"

"See here, sonny," the stranger rapped out. "if you have the time to stop here jawing, I haven't. Scoot while you can!"

He turned back. Bob followed him without a moment's hesitation. Imprisoned on a false charge, there was no reason why he should not escape if he could. But who was this stranger with the power to—— He gasped as he walked into the charge-room.

The policeman who had brought him his breakfast was there. He was gagged and bound, and secured to a bolt in a wall. His face was purple, his eyes gleaming with rage. The stranger pointed his whip at him.

"He can't hurt you!" he said. "The sergeant and the other trooper are on a wild-goose chase out Roondok way after me. I fixed that up all right. And now I'm off to the bank; my chaps have managed there all right by this time, I reckon."

Bob went white. Now all that had puzzled him was explained. This man was a bushranger. He had "stuck up" the bank. His mates had gone there, had levelled their revolvers at the manager and his clerks, had locked them up, and seized all the money on the premises. Half a dozen times in the last two years this had been done in broad daylight in different parts of Australia, and always only by the one gang whose leader's name had struck terror into all the police-force.

"You are Captain Dashwood?" Bob gasped.

"And very much at your service, young fellow," the other replied, bringing his whip to his hat in a mock salute, whilst his eyes twinkled. "I and my mates will be out of this in twenty minutes, and no one the wiser till the sergeant gets back; for the chaps in the bank will have to wait to be released. Won't there be a hullabaloo—eh? You'd better be gone, too. Can you get a horse?"

"I had one, but——"

"Try the yard. There are some there. One is a black beauty, and if I was sure I could ride through the town with it without being spotted——"

"Black!" cried Bob. "Perhaps it is Brave Bess, my horse!"

He rushed out and round to the yard. Flinging open a door he heard a welcoming neigh. Brave Bess, with ears cocked, had turned her head; she had recognised his footsteps. Overwhelmed with joy Bob patted and talked to her, whilst she rubbed her nose against his shoulder. He rode out of the yard and looked up the street. All was quiet; as yet the bank robbery had not been discovered. He turned in the opposite direction, and soon took to the scrub.

He had, of course, to avoid the usual route to his home, for fear of meeting people, and thus giving a clue to the police, who were certain to follow. He was an outlaw now, for he had escaped from custody, and, until his innocence had been proved, he would have to hide. Freedom was essential, for without it he could never track down the scoundrels who had forged the banknotes and prove their guilt. But he had to get home, too, if only for a few minutes, for he had no money; and he knew that some was there.

He rode off at an angle, and presently began to swing round in a half-circle. Ten miles from Katfarit he off-saddled in a thick wood, and lay down to rest till nightfall, while his

gallant steed browsed around. When darkness fell he rode on. Giving Boardman's house a wide berth, he dismounted, when a mile from home, and led Brave Bess forward cautiously. It was a strange home-coming, with the house empty and in darkness, and his father's fate unknown.

He led Brave Bess into the stable, and as he came to the homestead he saw a man moving outside. For a moment he hesitated. Then a soft whistle made him hurry forward.

"Kerr!" he cried.

The good-hearted bullock-driver grasped his hand cordially.

"I was making sure that the place was properly secure for the night, when I saw you and the horse passing," he explained. "How have you managed to return? Has everything been cleared up?"

Bob hurriedly told his exciting experiences. Kerr listened intently.

"You'll have to clear out, of course," he agreed. "But keep in touch with me, and I'll let you know how things go on. It's that scoundrel Boardman we'll have to watch. Now that he has got you and your father out of the way, he'll try to grab this place."

"And those scoundrels who forged the notes. If I can't get hold of them I'll never be able to clear myself," Bob urged.

Kerr looked dubious.

"That would be a mighty big job," he remarked. "A youngster like you to tackle one of the sharpest sets of rogues in all Australia! How do you even hope to find them?"

Bob became crestfallen. Suddenly Kerr spoke again.

"Captain Dashwood knew you, it seems," he said quickly. "That's very curious. If Dashwood was in this swindle——"

"I don't think he's that sort," Bob interjected. "He's just a highwayman out and out. He wouldn't play a mean trick; whatever he does is open and daring and at the risk of his life."

"Then if he's not in the swindle, he knows about it," Kerr affirmed. "As soon as you told him about the banknotes he mentioned your name. Now, perhaps, through him you might be able to find out a lot."

They stood both in deep thought. Presently Kerr looked sharply to the left.

"What's that?" he asked sharply.

A Strange Messenger.

Bob listened, and heard the snapping of a twig. He stepped back, whilst Kerr sprang forward and dived into a small thicket. There was a scuffle, a sharp gasp, and Kerr emerged, dragging a boy by the coat-collar.

"A black tracker!" the lad gasped in amazement. "Whatever has brought him here?"

The black boy, whose eyes had been rolling with terror, grinned when he had glanced at Bob. He stood without struggling any more.

"Don't know. But I reckon he ain't up to much good," Kerr remarked dubiously, gazing down at him and keeping a firm hold on his collar. "Hi, there, possum! What's your game?"

"I be no possum. My name be Bogong," the boy replied. "Verra good fellar I be, and a friend of Bob Hilder. My word, but I am glad to see him! Let me go, you, with the Kangaroo grip, and I tell all. Don't scratch! Why don't you cut your claws?"

Kerr grinned. He was amused by the aborigine's speech.

"So you know Bob Hilder, eh? Came here by special invitation, I suppose?" he suggested.

"Not to meet you!" Bogong snapped. "Massa sent me."

"And who is your master?"

"He be worth ten of you, anyhow. Yah! Don't rattle my ivories. Bob Hilder has met him."

"I never saw this chap before, to my certain knowledge," Bob said gravely. "Yet he knows my name. Have the police put him on my track to ferret me out?" he added in alarm.

"The police!" Bogong guffawed. "Golly, if that ain't funny! Bogong working for the police! Ha, ha, ha! Does the wild cat hunt with the tame dog? Oh, lay me down, that I laugh without pain. What would my massa say if I told him that?"

A strange thought sprang into Bob's mind. He had heard a hearty laugh that day already, when he had mentioned the police. He seized the black's wrist.

"Who is your master?" he demanded tersely.

"Yah! But now you have guessed right," Bogong replied. "If this bone-crusher of a white man will take off his paw, I can give you proof of what I say. My massa is lord of the bush, and does what he likes."

"Is he Captain Dashwood?"

Bogong grinned and nodded.

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"And he has sent you to me?"

The black nodded again.

"Why?"

"To give you money that is no good."

He tried to fumble in the pocket of his old coat. Kerr released him, and stepped behind, ready if necessary to cut off his retreat. After some searching, the black drew out a bundle of notes and handed them to Bob.

"Massa said to give these to you," he explained. "They are false as the man who made them. Now, can I go, for my message is over?"

Bob looked at the notes and then at Kerr; his eyes were round with astonishment.

"The forged notes for the thousand pounds!" he gasped. "Dashwood's gang must have found them when they 'stuck up' the bank to-day. And he has sent them to me? Why has he done that?"

"He means it well, scamp though he is," Kerr replied. "They're no value to him, of course; and he sees how they may be useful to you, and so do I, for that matter. Well, Bogong, I'm sorry if I rattled your ivories, as you call them, overmuch; but I reckon you'll be able to bite your grub with them still. Now scoot! You are free!"

"Good-bye, Bob Hilder! We shall meet again! Massa says so, and he's always right," the black remarked. And, noiseless as a cat, he sprang into the thicket and was lost in the night.

Bob turned the notes over in his fingers. Bogong's last words had sounded ominous, and a feeling of impending evil had begun to oppress him.

"What do you think I ought to do with these, Kerr?" he asked. "They have brought tragedy already on my father and myself. Do you think I had better destroy them?"

"No! Give them to me, and I will take charge of them. No one is likely to suspect that they can be in my possession," the bullock-driver explained. "Don't you see that through them you may be able to clear yourself some day? That is why Dashwood sent them to you. And now have a meal, take some grub with you, and clear out. The police are certain to search for you here before daybreak."

Half an hour later Bob had left the homestead, with a feeling in his heart that, at the least, a long time must pass, and much would happen before he ever saw it again. But at least he was free, with a large continent over which to roam if necessary, and a splendid horse to take him wherever he wished. Travelling by the stars, he struck north-east by arrangement with Kerr, and made for the Goobana Mountains, thirty miles away.

He off-saddled about midnight, and, wrapped in his blanket, lay down. Camping out in all weathers was no hardship to him; often for weeks at a time he had been on the road with his father, driving a mob of cattle.

Awaking at dawn, he lit a fire, filled his small can—called a "billy"—from a neighbouring creek, and made tea. After a hearty breakfast, he again saddled Brave Bess, now quite refreshed, and jogged along. Around this neighbourhood he wished to stay, so that he could hear from Kerr from time to time. He knew that an extension of the railway was in progress, and he meant getting work there for a while, if possible, to save the money he had. About noon he caught sight of the line.

The big camp was pitched on a wide plain; some thousand tents dotted the scorched grass. The workmen were returning for the midday meal, and those amongst themselves whom they had appointed as cooks were busy around the hundred fires lit everywhere.

Bob's arrival did not attract any attention. Horsemen come and go through the bush without notice; many of those in this camp had horses of their own. He jumped down where half a dozen men had gathered around a fire, and, as is the custom, was at once welcomed to their meal.

"Going on to a station, mate?" one of them asked. "No, I'm not looking for work with any of the big squatters," Bob replied. "There's nothing much to be got with any of them just now."

"You're right!" another agreed. "Things will be slack till the shearing season, and riding round looking after the fences week in and week out without a soul to speak to all the month is a lonely job. Are you on for work, though, or have you just knocked off?"

"I'd like a job here if there's one going," Bob replied.

"Done any pick and shovel work?"

"Yes, off and on."

"Well, there's the ganger yonder. He'll take you on, I reckon. He's a bit of a slave-driver, but straight as a die."

Bob crossed over to a strongly-built man, dressed much as the rest, but without the signs of toil on his clothes. The ganger eyed him up and down swiftly, listened to his request, and nodded.

"You can come on the afternoon shift," he said. "I'll

know in an hour if you are of use to me. I'll find you a pick and shovel."

"Likely sort of youngster that, Gell," he remarked to a surly-faced man to whom he had been talking. "He'll shape all right in a day or two."

Gell grunted.

"Mebbe!" he assented. "I've seen him somewhere before to-day. I'm trying to puzzle out his name."

"Anything against him?" the ganger asked, with a grin. "It would be better for you, Gell, if you stuck to your own job, and weren't always meddling in other folk's business. I've never heard you yet say a good word of anyone, and I'm getting fed up with it, I tell you, for your tongue is making unpleasantness, and I don't want any more here."

"I ain't no meddler!" Gell snarled.

"It's just what you are, and that's what I sent for you about," the ganger now said with sternness. "I've been watching you all the morning, and you've been upsetting your mates. I'm going to put you on another job, so hand over your pick and shovel to the youngster."

"What?" Gell raved.

"If you don't like it you can lump it!" the ganger replied. "Choose for yourself."

For a moment Gell hesitated. Then, with a muttered imprecation, he strode away.

The ganger smiled.

Ten minutes later Bob, having finished his meal, was lying on his back, his hands knit behind his head, and talking to his new friends, who were snatching a hurried smoke before returning to work, when Gell approached, the pick and shovel across his shoulder.

"Them's for you!" he growled, and dropped them heavily across the lad's legs.

Taken completely by surprise, and stung by the pain, Bob sat up and stared at him. The other men's faces grew dark. They looked to see how Bob would take this; by his tone they would judge him. Courage stands before all else in the bush. The lad saw the gleam in Gell's eyes; he knew that the action had been vindictive; he knew that it had put him on the test before the whole camp. Gell weighed two stone more than him, and was a set man. For an instant the lad's heart stopped, but his eyelids did not flicker.

"Who sent you with them?" he asked.

Gell shrugged his big shoulders.

"Find out!" he snapped.

"Were you told to drop them across my legs?" Bob continued.

"I do as I like!" Gell retorted.

"Not with me!" Bob said quietly.

"Oh! So you want to take your coat off?" Gell demanded, his eyes glittering with unholy joy.

"I don't know you, and I've never upset you that I'm aware of," Bob replied, keeping his voice steady. "But if you want a row you only have to say so. And, in any case, don't you fling things at me again!"

"Here, you clear out, Gell!" a tall young fellow commanded.

The bully grinned.

"That's his kidney, is it, Josh?" he asked. "He wants to hide behind you, does he, and talk big? Then if he gives me any more cheek, I'll warm his ear, so there!"

Bob scrambled to his feet.

"Well, do it now!" he said.

At once the other men jumped up. Josh caught Gell by the throat and sent him staggering back a couple of yards. The bully rushed forward, dodged Josh, and came at Bob, who had stood his ground. He struck fiercely. The lad ducked, avoided the blow, and smacked Gell hard across the face. Dazed and furious, Gell staggered on, and all the men burst into a roar of laughter. And at that moment the gong, hanging from a tree, clanged for the resumption of work.

"Will you fight?" Gell shouted.

"Yes, I will!" Bob replied.

"Then wait till we down tools, and I'll give you a hiding you'll never forget!" he bawled. "You've struck me, and you'll go through the hoop!"

"Ay, and it won't end there!" Josh cried, in righteous indignation, after him as he strode away. "When you're through with the lad you'll have to take me on."

The Fight.

The men moved across the camp towards the railway-cutting. Bob's heart was as heavy as lead; he felt certain he would be no match for Gell, who occasionally looked back and scowled at him furiously. He would have to put up the best fight he could, and save himself as far as possible; that was all he could hope for. If he flinched now he would be

(Continued on page iii of cover.)

CORNSTALK BOB!

(Continued from page 20.)

voted a coward; but he knew also that to win was not necessary. Far from that. If he was game to the end, there was not a man in the camp who would not be his friend for ever after.

With his pick and shovel on his shoulder, he sought out the ganger. He did not hear the conversation of Josh and his mates sauntering behind. They were true types of the splendid men born in the Australian bush, fearless as lions, true as steel, and as kindhearted as honourable.

"That there Gell has come it a bit too thick," one remarked. "I'm glad, Josh, you're going to give him a hammering. We ought to clear him out of the camp altogether."

"Ay, Josh! Make rings round him!" urged another. "There's no one could pay him out as you can. But that youngster—he's game. We can see that. Just you tuck into Gell first, and—"

The young giant smiled.

"The boy must have a cut in," he insisted. "It'll be all over in two shakes. Gell will knock him down first clout, and the lad will have proved himself. Then I'll talk to Mr. Gell. Oh, won't I just!"

The work began. Picks clattered against the deep-set stones, spades clanged occasionally; farther up, hammers fell on drills against the face of a cliff. Steadily the toil went on without respite in the broiling sun, as is the Australian way. Bob worked willingly and well, though, of course, not with the complete dexterity of the older hands. Sometimes the ganger glanced in his direction, and was well satisfied. He knew he was showing the proper mettle. So the hours passed quickly enough, and the bell clanged again. At once tools were downed; the eight hours' work was over.

Lazily the men strolled back to their tents. An evening's enjoyment was before them now—a hearty meal, a long, grateful smoke, the best of comradeship, pleasant yarns and sing-songs around the fires when the sun sank, until the time came to turn in. Bob made for the spot where he had met Josh. Here Gell would come looking for him, and he meant to show he had not funk'd. Besides, Josh would see fair play, he felt sure. And a bully like Gell was capable of any mean trick.

Soon all were enjoying a hearty supper, partaken mostly in silence. After it the men lit their pipes and gathered around the fire for company's sake, though the evening was warm. Bob stretched himself a few feet away—and waited.

The men did not take any notice of him; they did not allude to Gell. Seemingly, the fight had been forgotten. They talked of many subjects dear to the bushman—of experiences with cattle, of long rides threatened by thirst and hunger, of visits to the cities, of mining and fencing, and horses and dogs—and all the time Bob looked in the direction from which he expected Gell to come. Suddenly he saw him stepping out of a tent a hundred yards distant.

Silence fell as he drew near. The men watched him narrowly.

"Well, what about that fight?" he asked, with a surly grin as he stopped. And at once Bob, a trifle pale, but with mouth set hard, stood up.

"Do you mean it, Gell?" Josh asked.

"Mean it? Of course I do! Am I to be struck, and not hit back?"

"All right!" Josh said, an odd ring in his voice as he slowly rose. "The youngster is ready, and I'll be his second."

But as Bob stepped forward and stood before the bully the difference in their breadth and depth of chest was painfully evident. The men muttered. They felt inclined to interfere at once.

Gell lazily stuck his pipe into his pocket and sauntered forward. Bob got into fighting posture, and the bully grinned again. He waited for the lad to rush in, but Bob had no intention of doing that. Finally Gell lurched forward and struck out.

Bob dodged the blow and side-stepped. With a laugh, the bully came on again, and again Bob dodged him. Now, scowling, Gell rushed like a bull, and for the third time he hit the air. The others guffawed.

"The lad's quick on his feet," one said. "That's right, youngster, don't give him a chance."

Bob had suddenly got desperately cool. All fear had fled; a vague idea had come that possibly he might avoid a knock-out blow altogether, for Gell was slow and clumsy. He had never learnt to use his hands. Round and round they went, Bob sometimes slipping under Gell's arm, sometimes jumping back or to one side. Baffled at every try, the bully stretched out his hand and caught him. At once he received a tremendous clout on the side of the head—from Josh!

"Fight fair," Josh thundered, "else I'll lay you out myself!"

Gell yelled in his pain and fury. He turned savagely on Josh, and Bob was free.

"Now go on!" Josh said coolly. "Lay into him, youngster, if he wastes time jawing me!"

"Don't you interfere!" Gell bawled to Josh. "I know the rules, and if—"

"Time's not up," said Josh coolly. "Mind your eye!"

He spoke when he knew it was too late. Bob, quite within his rights, had made for Gell. A wild hope was in his heart that he might fetch him a knock-out blow. The hit came straight on the point of the chin, but the bully did not fall. He shook all over, though, and a yell of delight went up. With a roar, he lurched forward, and a shriek of undiluted joy went up as Bob, ducking, caught him a blow in the middle that nearly doubled him in two.

"Time!" Josh said.

Gell came round, ignoring the call, but Josh stepped between him and the lad. The bully pulled up like a cart-horse sliding down a hill. Half a dozen men gathered around Bob, and were congratulating him. Gell, snorting and muttering, hitched his belt tighter, his eyes glazing, his mouth twitching.

"Time!" said Josh again.

Gell rolled forward impetuously. Bob dropped, and the bully, tumbling over his back, sprawled to the ground, with a heavy thud. The onlookers could not keep still in their delight; they jumped and whooped. Bob was on his feet in a trice, and when Gell, shaken and delirious with rage, had dragged himself up, his mouth smothered in earth, Bob dashed in, landed both hands quickly and hard, right and left on the bully's eyes, jumped back, ducked, planted a well-aimed blow in his middle, and side-stepped.

Yells and cheers were intermingled. Never had the bushmen seen anything more unexpected or funny. They could hardly stand for laughing, and their merriment drove Gell almost out of his senses. With maledictions on his lips, he scowled at the faces around, on all of which he saw contempt and dislike for himself, and then suddenly he grew cool.

"Mighty cute, ain't he?" he snarled. "Well, he's in for it now worse than ever!"

His breath was coming hard, his chest was heaving like a bellows. Josh whispered to Bob.

"Don't let him get his wind!" he said. "If he does—"

Bob took the hint. He dashed in, Gell's fist grazed his head, and the lad hit him in the ribs. Round and round Gell went, Bob jumping in when he got an opening, and landing a blow.

At last the lad lost some of his caution. He dashed in without a good opening, and Gell's powerful arm shot out. Fortunately, the blow did not fall full and straight. Bob got it on the side of the head. He spun round, and fell.

Grimly Gell watched him. The men hurried towards the lad. He moved at once, and struggled to his feet.

"That's enough!" Josh said.

"No, no!" Bob cried. "I want to go on!"

"Let him have another cut in!" one cried.

"He'll fix up that fooster yet!" another shouted.

Bob did not wait. Whilst the men were arguing, he squared up to Gell again, who now thought he had easy work to finish him. More cautious, but still quick and dexterous, Bob began his old tactics. Gell, waiting patiently for a deadly blow, was sorely tried. The lad kept hammering at his body, and the cheers and laughter arose twofold. So tense was the excitement, so loud the racket, that they did not notice the approach of thundering hoofs.

At last a cry went up. Again Gell had got in a blow. And Bob fell, and lay still.

As the bushmen moved towards him a loud, warning shout hailed them. Next moment three mounted troopers were almost on them. They scattered in all directions as the troopers drew rein. One jumped to the ground.

"Hallo! A fight on!" he said, with a grin. "Don't seem to be a very fair match somehow. That must be a plucky lad! Ha! He's coming round!"

Bob had raised his head, and was trying to get up. He sank back exhausted but clear-minded. He saw the troopers, and his heart almost stopped beating.

"He's game to fight still, I do believe!" the trooper continued admiringly. "We haven't time to wait, though. We're after a cove, and riding hard."

"What's his name?" Josh asked.

"Hilder!"

Bob stifled a groan. The next words almost froze his blood, for the voice was Gell's.

"Hilder!" Gell shouted triumphantly. "That's the name I told the ganger I couldn't remember. But I do now! Is it Hilder you want to nab? Tell me quick!" And he moved towards Bob.

"Yes."

"Ha, ha, ha!" the bully raved. "You haven't far to go!"

(Another grand instalment next week.)

A Cash Prize for Every Contributor to this Page.



Our Weekly Prize Page.

LOOK OUT FOR YOUR WINNING STORYETTE.

HE ASKED FOR IT!

The smart boy is sometimes intolerable, and deserves the rebuff he occasionally gets. A well-intentioned old lady and a smart youth were the only occupants of a railway-carriage. When the train had moved out of the station the youth took out a cigarette, and, lighting it, puffed away, much to the old lady's disgust. By-and-by she said:

"Don't you know, my boy, that it is wrong to smoke?"

"Oh," replied the youth, as he emitted a volume of smoke from his mouth which nearly choked the old lady, "I smoke for my health!"

"Health!" exclaimed the old lady. "You never surely heard of anything being cured by smoking?"

"Yes, I have," declared the youth, in a tone intended to set off his superior knowledge. "That's the way they cure pigs!"

"Smoke away, then!" replied the old lady. "There is probably some hope for you yet!"—Sent in by J. E. Morton, Buxton.

2 Y Y.

There is a farmer who is

Y Y

Enough to take his

E E.

And study Nature with his

I I.

And think of what ha

C C.

He hears the chatter of the

J J

As they each other

T T.

And sees that when a tree

D K K

It makes a home for

B B.

—Sent in by F. Goodwin, Dalston.

VERY CLEVER!

The son of the owner of a large estate had just returned home from school. He was very proud of his knowledge and learning, and never missed an opportunity of displaying it to his father's servants and tenants.

One day, as he was starting out with his fishing-tackle, the groom asked:

"Be ye going fishing, Master John?"

The question afforded the young master another opportunity of manifesting his smartness, and he replied:

"I am merely going to entice certain species of the finny tribe to engulf within their tenacular jaws barbed hooks, on the points of which are attached dainty allurements."—Sent in by R. L. Crowson, Lincolnshire.

TOO BAD!

An inspector was visiting the infants' department of a school, and was testing the ability of a class of boys at mental arithmetic.

"Now," he said, "what would twenty-four pounds of salmon at threepence a pound be?"

Small Boy (at back): "Bad, sir!"—Sent in by P. Huntley, Deptford.

THE LAST TRICK.

Jackson: "What are you looking so gloomy about?"

Smith: "My trick-dog has killed itself."

Jackson: "How did that happen?"

Smith: "It was making rings with its tail, and in trying to jump through them it slipped and broke its back."—Sent in by J. Riddle, Durham.

A SURE SIGN.

Willie and Johnny were having a violent quarrel, having disagreed over their game. The dispute became so heated that at last, when Johnny accused Willie of cheating, the latter challenged him to a fight. Johnny stubbornly refused, whereupon Willie derided him for a coward.

"Garn!" taunted Willie. "You're afraid ter fight—that's what it is!"

"No, I ain't!" protested Johnny stoutly. "But if I fight, my mother'll find it out, and lick me."

"How'll she find it out—eh?" demanded Willie.

"Why," responded Johnny, "she'll see the doctor goin' ter your house."—Sent in by C. Bond, Blackpool.

FRIGHTFULNESS.

Nellie's mother was entertaining visitors, while Nellie herself was engaged in studying intently the new bonnet of one of the guests. The owner of the bonnet, suddenly catching sight of the child, and noticing that considerable attention was being bestowed upon her headgear, addressed the little girl:

"Well, my dear, what do you think of my nice new bonnet?"

"Oh," replied the youthful critic, "I think it is quite all right! Aunt Mary told mamma it was a perfect fright; but it doesn't frighten me a bit!"—Sent in by Miss K. M. Westgate, Ipswich.

SIMILAR COMPLAINTS.

Smith and Brown were neighbours in a neat little suburban street. Smith was the proud father of a baby, while Brown was the happy owner of a thoroughbred spaniel. All night long the baby cried, and all night long the dog barked.

At last one day Smith dashed up to Brown and exclaimed:

"Look here! I wish you would muzzle that dog of yours at night! His barking keeps my baby awake!"

"I was just going to request you to muzzle your baby!" replied Brown. "His nightly howling annoys my dog!"—Sent in by T. Conner, New Zealand.

TOPPING.

"Dad," said Tommy, "why did you buy a golf-coat?"

"To play golf in, my son," replied the father.

"Did you need it?" asked the small youth.

"Of course I did!" responded the parent.

"Then please may I have a top-coat to play tops in? I've seen them in shops."—Sent in by C. Henson, Leeds.

As the "GEM" Storyette Competition has proved so popular, it has been decided to run this novel feature in conjunction with our new Companion Paper,

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