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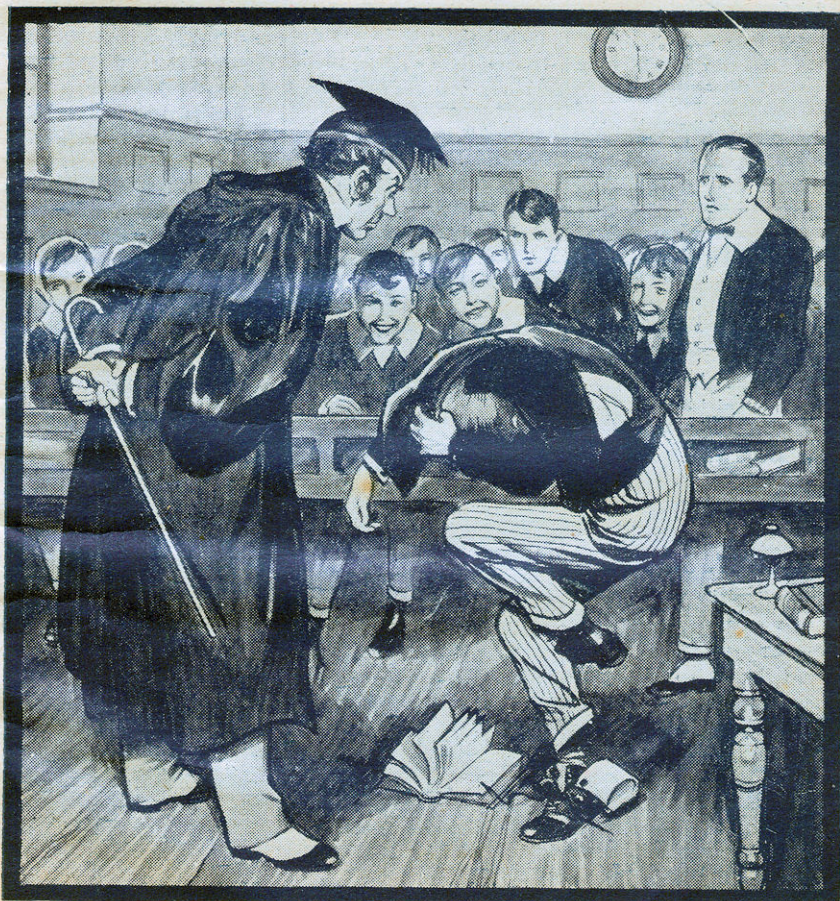
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DENOUNCED AS A COWARD!

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



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28-12-18

A Magnificent,
New, Long,
Complete School
Story of
Tom Merry
and Co.
at St. Jim's.

DENOUNCED AS A COWARD!

By
Martin
Clifford.

CHAPTER 1.

A Lesson for Racke.

"MY hat!" It was George Alfred Grundy who spoke. Wilkins and Gunn looked at their chum questioningly.

"What's the matter now?" demanded George Wilkins. Grundy pointed down the road. The three chums of the Shell were out for a country ramble, and Grundy had been expounding his views on things in general to his bored chums. They welcomed any sort of interruption.

"It's a St. Jim's fellow," said Gunn. "And the rotter's smoking!" added Wilkins.

Grundy nodded emphatically. "It's Racke," he said. "We'll hide in the hedge here and teach him a lesson!"

"Good idea!" said Wilkins. "Of course it's a good idea," said Grundy truculently, as the three ambushed themselves. "It was mine!"

"Must have been an effort for you," growled Wilkins. "You've been talking utter rot all the afternoon."

"Look here, George Wilkins," said Grundy warmly, "if you're looking for trouble, you've only got to say the word."

"Shut up, you nes!" hissed Gunn. "He'll hear you!" "Wilkins said—" "B-r-r-r-r-r!"

Grundy glanced into the lane, and relapsed into silence. Racke was near there now, and Grundy did not wish to alarm him before he was ready. The cad of the Shell was puffing at a cigarette.

Grundy snorted. "It's like his blessed cheek!" he growled. "We'll show him what we think of smoky cads. Come on!"

He stepped out of the hedge in front of Racke, and his two chums followed. The weedy slacker of the Shell pulled up suddenly.

"Hallo, Grundy!" he said. George Alfred Grundy scowled.

"I'm going to lick you, Racke," said Grundy. "You'd better take that tag out of your mouth first. It'll burn if I knock it down your throat!"

Racke blew out a cloud of smoke impatiently.

"Sort of trick that would appeal to you, Grundy," he said. "If anything happens to you there are two fellows to back you up."

"We won't chip in," said Wilkins. "Grundy can give you enough."

"What's that?" demanded George Alfred Grundy. "You're not going to do anything to this smoky rotter? Are you finking?"

"Certainly not," said Wilkins. "Then you wade in first," said Grundy magnanimously. "When you've given Racke enough for being a smoky cad, Gunn and I will bump him!"

"He, he, he!" chuckled Gunn. "Come on, Racke!" said Wilkins. Gunn's laughter stung him a little. He was not afraid of Racke, though he did not much care to be ordered to act as executive to speak.

Racke blew a puff of smoke in Wilkins' face.

"I'm not going to be ordered about by—" he began.

Wilkins did not allow him to get any further. He caught the weedy slacker a smack on the cheek which knocked the cigarette out of his mouth. Racke's fists went up.

The cad of the Shell was no great fighting-man. But he was roused now.

He gave Wilkins a glancing blow on the forehead which knocked his cap off, and then retired before a volley of blows rained on him from every point of the compass.

"Groooh!" roared Racke, as something weighty hit his cheek and sent his own cap flying.

Wilkins followed up his advantage. The tables might have been turned if Racke had been in condition, but he was not.

The knowledge of what was waiting for him when Wilkins had finished gave him a distinctly uncomfortable feeling, and suddenly seeing his opportunity he took it.

He broke away from Wilkins and snatched at his cap. Then, before the three fellows could grasp what he was doing, he turned and tore down the road with all the energy in him.

"Catch him, Grundy!" said Wilkins. "Catch him yourself!" snorted Grundy.

"You haven't licked him yet."

"Too much fog to finish it," said Wilkins, looking round for his cap. "The bumping is your bizney."

"He's had enough, anyway," said Gunn. "He won't have enough wind for another fog for an hour at least."

"You ought to have caught him!" said Grundy hotly.

"Rats!" "Don't I know best?" growled George Alfred omnisciently.

"Look here—" "Ring off, Grundy!" growled Gunn. "We're out for a walk, not a fight. Racke has had enough."

"I'm the best judge of that," said Grundy. "You ought to have caught Racke and finished licking him."

"Why didn't you catch him yourself?"

"Because I told you to lick him," said Grundy. "You'd better go and catch him now!"

"Rats!" Grundy's hands clenched.

"If you don't do what you're told," he growled, "you'll get the licking instead of Racke!"

"Don't be such an ass, Grundy!" snapped Gunn.

"You're talking out of your hat," said William Cuthbert. "Why don't you shut up? We've had jawbone solos from you all the time!"

Grundy glared. "If you fellows are looking for trouble," he said, "you can have it!"

"But I'm supposed to be looking for Racke!" protested Wilkins. "He, he, he!" tittered Gunn. Grundy's fist clenched.

"I'll start on you, Gunn," he said. "I think you'll soon see my point!"

"You'll soon see that!" growled Gunn. "You're a nuisance, Grundy!"

"Wh-a-a-t?" "Collar the silly chump!" roared Gunn.

Wilkins and Gunn closed. Grundy found himself whirled off his feet, and he descended on the road with a crash.

"Yarough!" he roared. Grundy's two chums lifted George Alfred and bumped him again. They were fed up with him. Grundy roared lustily.

"I'll spifficate you two!" he howled as he got up at length.

Wilkins and Gunn chorled from further down the lane.

"Good-bye for the present!" sang out Wilkins. "Sorry to leave you, Grundy. We're just off to catch Racke!"

CHAPTER 2.

Five!

WILKINS and Gunn pressed on. They did not pause until a good distance separated them from their irate study-mate.

"Grundy's a blessed nuisance!" growled Wilkins, as they dropped into a walk. "He's too jolly high-handed!"

Gunn grinned. "Pride goes before a fall!" he chuckled. "Grundy must have known that proverb. He certainly made it true."

Wilkins nodded, and relapsed into silence, and the two chums continued on their walk.

They saw nothing of Racke as they went on. He had evidently taken the short cut back to St. Jim's, and as they were going a longer way round, in the direction of Wayland, they were not likely to meet him again.

Grundy followed them at his own pace. He had quite forgiven his two chums for the bumping, but he did not intend to run after them.

Wilkins and Gunn, on their part, did not intend to stop for Grundy, in case he should want to continue the argument. Nearly an hour passed before they pulled up, and only then to have a word with the Terrible Three of St. Jim's, who were coming from the opposite direction.

"Where's Grundy, Gunn?" asked Tom Merry.

Gunn chuckled. "Coming on behind," he said. "He's looking for someone to slaughter!"

"Let's turn back!" said Monty Lowther, in mock alarm.

Tom Merry grinned. "What's up with him?" he asked.

Gunn told the story of their meeting with Racke.

"He escaped down the road," he finished. "Have you seen anything of him?"

"No," said Tom. "We've come straight from St. Jim's. He hasn't passed us at all."

"That's strange," remarked Wilkins. "Even if he took the short cut back he

would have been at the main road by now, and you ought to have seen him."

"No sign of him anywhere," said Manners.

"Well, we're going on," said Wilkins. "Look out for the cinema people," said Tom Merry as they were moving off.

"They're taking a film in a field along there. There's some interesting binney going on."

"Really?"

"Yes; it's a fact. I think they're going to burn a house up with an old man in—take it anyhow. The house is going to be burnt, I know."

"Thanks for the tip," said Gunn.

"Tata!"

The two chums pressed on again. Grundy had nearly caught them up now, and he did not stop to speak to the Terrible Three. He was a little bit tired of his own company.

Wilkins and Gunn, however, did not notice this. A little column of smoke which was rising to one side of the road attracted their attention.

"The film people are getting on with it," Gunn remarked.

Wilkins nodded; and as they turned a corner they had a full view of what was in progress.

The smoke was coming from what was obviously an old barn, with a dummy front to make it look like a house for the purposes of the film. In front of it was a camera, and grouped on either side were people who were evidently taking part in the production.

Wilkins and Gunn hastened their steps, and paused in front of the dummy house. They started a little as a face suddenly appeared at one of the windows.

"This is the chap who's supposed to be trapped," said Gunn wisely. "The smoke is all a blind, I expect. They won't set fire to the place properly until he's managed to get out."

"Hope not," said Wilkins nervously. "I don't like these things. They've got a knack of going wrong."

"Oh, rats!" said Gunn. "Nothing could go wrong with all these people standing about. See, the producer's telling him to shout for help!"

Wilkins nodded his head. A man smoking a fat cigar, and evidently directing the whole show, was hawking something to the figure at the window.

The man there opened his mouth, and a piercing shout for help rang out.

"Coming!" roared a voice from behind the two schoolboys.

Gunn spun round, to see that Grundy was sprinting down the road.

"Stop, you duffer!" he shouted, barring Grundy's path. "It's only a film; that they're doing. You'll go and spoil the whole thing if you butt in!"

"Eh?" said Grundy, pulling up sharply.

"We just heard the producer tell the fellow to shriek," said Gunn. "If you use your eyes you'll see what's happening."

Grundy paused and watched. Gunn stayed with him to see that the impetuous Shell fellow did not do anything rash.

Wilkins had moved farther on, however. He was filled with a vague uneasiness about the scene, and he stood watching nervously from just inside the field. He was relieved as the old man at the window suddenly turned in response to an order from the producer to leave the house.

A moment later his heart seemed to miss a beat. The old man had returned, and was looking again. And now there was a look of earnestness which had not been there before.

"Bring a ladder—quick!" he shouted. "The place is on fire!"

The producer waved his hand impatiently.

"We've had enough!" he returned.

"I've got that bit!" shouted the man at the window. "Help!"

Wilkins darted forward.

He noted that the camera was not working now. And he was the first to understand exactly what was wrong. Something which was not in the programme had happened.

As he dashed towards the disguised barn he saw a tongue of red flame leap from somewhere, and out round the window where the old man had been standing. The crackling of dry timber came to his ears.

"Water!" roared the producer. "Ladders! What fool has set the house on fire?"

Wilkins darted across the grass, scarcely heeded. Everyone was in a panic. The

smarter from the smoke, and stooped to prevent more suffering than necessary, he swarmed up the ladders.

He reached the top in a few seconds, and clambered through the small, square hole. As he did so he was conscious of something moving. Nodding sharply to the right, he cannoned into another person.

Trembling hands gripped Wilkins, clutching him with the terror of a scared man. Wilkins shook the hands roughly off.

"Down you go!" he said. "The ladder's up!"

"Something like a whine answered him."

"Help me!"

Wilkins started. He knew the voice.

"Racke!" he gasped. "What are you doing?"

He stopped. A thunderous knocking sound came from just beside him, and in



A Film Fire!
(See Chapter 2.)

producer was shouting orders and commands to a dozen men, and telling everybody not to lose their heads. He had lost his own badly.

Smoke was curling from the doorway as Wilkins darted through it, and for a moment the pungent reek struck his eyes and choked his nostrils. He snatched a handkerchief from his pocket, and held it up, to enable him to breathe more freely, and then started forward again.

Outside, the shouts still rang on the air. But Wilkins knew that everything now was a matter of seconds, and he could not afford to pause.

CHAPTER 3.

Denounced!

WILKINS stumbled upon something which was stretched on the ground. In the red glare he saw that it was a ladder, which had evidently been used to reach the loft above.

He stopped, and raised it into position with an effort. Then, with his eyes

the lurid glow of the burning timbers he made out a small door.

Wilkins groped across to it. He felt that he was choking, and the heat was terrific. The crazy roof was already on fire, and might be expected to cave in at any moment.

Blazing sparks shot out from the walls. The roar of the flames grew every moment in intensity. Feeling that he scarcely knew what he was doing, Wilkins staggered to the door, and ran his fingers round the edges.

His hand encountered a stout iron button which had evidently been turned by mistake, for it was fastening the door. It jerked back at the schoolboy's touch, and the door opened towards him.

As it did so Wilkins heard someone fall with a thud on the floor. He darted forward, and through the curling smoke he made out the faint shape of a prostrate man.

Wilkins stooped, and snatched up the limp figure. As he raised it he heard the sound of feet on the ladder. Racke

was escaping, heedless of any but himself.

Wilkins staggered through the doorway with his burden, and blundered across the floor to the top of the ladder.

He felt that he was nearly spent. The exertion had been great, and his lungs were choked with the foul smoke. They ached as though a thousand hot needles had stabbed them. His eyes were sore and smarting, and the smoke blinded him.

By good fortune he found the ladder. He managed somehow to get his burden on to the slope of it, and to slide the unconscious man down. Then with a great effort he crawled through the hole, and half clambered half fell on the floor below.

Water splashing hard on him roused him again. The firemen had got to work, and they had done well. One of them lifted Wilkins, and carried him into the open. The fresh air revived the Shell fellow, and after a minute he opened his eyes and looked round.

Two voices hailed him.
"Bravo, Wilkins!" said Grundy and Gunn in one breath.

Wilkins staggered to his feet. Beneath his mask of dirt he was blushing.

"I did nothing much," he said modestly. "I just went in and fell down again. I was lucky."

"You did jolly well," said Grundy, "and I don't want you to contradict me. I couldn't have done better myself."
"Shut up!" snapped Gunn. "You couldn't have done half as well. Wilkins is a brick!"

He turned as a figure approached on the producer's arm. He recognised it as that of the little man who had been rescued from the blazing building. Behind him came Racke, looking as badly scorched as the other two.

"I am glad to see that the boy is better," said the actor, who did not appear to be half as old as he had looked in his make-up and wig. "I am indebted for my life to one of those two boys."

"Here's the chap!" said Grundy proudly. "Wilkins did it, sir."

"Just a minute!" said the actor slowly. "There were two boys in that horrible place with me. One was a wretched coward, and that fellow nearly cost me my life. The other saved me."

"Here's the chap!" repeated Grundy.

"Let me finish, please," said the actor. "When I was trying to make my way from the burning room I encountered someone in the doorway. He was trying to escape, and, without considering me, he thrust me back again."

The actor paused, and no one else spoke.

"The catch of the door then got fastened in some manner," he proceeded. "We will call it an accident. As I was pushed back into the room I grabbed and happened to catch the fellow's cap. I have it in my pocket."

"That's Racke's cap!" said Grundy confidently. "It's the sort of thing that Racke would do."

The actor eyed the Shell fellow sternly.

"You are wrong there," he said. "Another cap was found beside me when I was picked up inside that blazing barn. The name in that is the one which you just mentioned—Racke."

"Racke!" gasped the three chums.

"Racke is the fellow who saved me," said the actor. "Which is Racke? I owe him a debt of gratitude which I shall never be able to repay."

"Here I am!" said the cad of the Shell, stepping forward.

Racke had certainly not expected the

words which he had heard. A dreadful fear of exposure had been gripping at his heart, but he was not slow to seize his opportunity now.

"I am proud to shake hands with you!" said the actor. "You have saved my life, my boy."

Grundy faced round. His eyes glittered wrathfully.

"You're all wrong, absolutely!" he said. "Show us the cap you snatched off, the fellow who pushed you into the room."

"Certainly," said the actor, producing the other St. Jim's cap. "Here it is. Read the name for yourself. My eyes are not very good."

Grundy stepped forward and looked at the cap. Then he fell back with a little cry of dismay.

"Wilkins!" he gasped.

"Yes," said the actor, "that is the name of the cowardly fellow who—"

"It's wrong!" rasped Grundy. "There is some big mistake. I know Wilkins, and I know that he could not do such a thing as that. You have mixed the caps."

"I certainly have not!"

"I tell you're all wrong!" raved Grundy. "You are making a charge you can't prove. I tell you Wilkins wouldn't."

The producer held up his hand.

"Cold fact is enough for me," he said. "How do you account for Wilkins being in the burning building?"

"He dashed in to save this gentle man," said Grundy.

"Racke tells me that he did that," replied the producer quietly. "We only see one boy enter the door. Did you see your friend go in?"

Grundy heated, and looked at Gunn.

"N-no!" he said.

CHAPTER 4. Playing the Part.

THERE was a moment's tense silence. The three chums felt stunned by the words they had heard.

"I am too grateful for the service which—which Racke has rendered me," said the actor slowly, "to say what I should like to say about Wilkins. But—"

"You're off your chump!" roared Grundy. "You're all off your chumps! You're a howling lot of asses! We didn't actually see Wilkins go in, but we know he did. He was with us."

"Then how do you explain the caps?" asked the producer.

"It—it's a mistake!" roared Grundy.

"Racke says that he did it."

"Then Racke's lying!" bellowed Grundy. "I'll knock his head off! I'll—"

"You'll leave here at once!" said the producer sternly. "The evidence is sufficient for me. This shall be reported to your headmaster."

"No, not that," said the actor quickly. "There has been no harm done."

"I'll jolly well wipe the ground with you!" Grundy roared at the producer.

You burbling idiot! You chattering jabberwock! I'll—

"I, Mr. Mervin is satisfied, and so am I. I, I, in the other. 'Leave here at once, or I'll have you all three thrown out!'"

"I'd like to see you!" shouted Grundy, clenching his hands and stepping forward. "Why, I'll knock you into a cocked hat!"

Gunn and Wilkins kept their heads.

The accusation was a terrible one, but Grundy could do no good by committing assault. They caught Grundy by the arms and drew him back.

"Come away!" said Gunn in a low voice. "This makes me sick!"

Grundy saw Racke's grinning face. He was filled with wild rage. Grundy might have been pig-headed and obstinate enough, but he was loyal to his chums, and he had plenty of pluck. He would have tackled an army in his present mood.

"Leave me alone!" he howled.

Wilkins and Gunn drew their chum away by main force.

"Let me get at him!" roared Grundy.

But Wilkins and Gunn did not. And even in his present state they were strong enough for Grundy.

They led him away under protest. There was something in what the producer had said. The evidence, so far as he was concerned, was complete. There was no one who could swear that he had seen Wilkins enter the doomed building at the eleventh hour. It was the unswerving loyalty of Grundy and Gunn against Racke's word and the evidence of the caps.

Grundy was a little calmer when he reached the road. But he was angry with his chums for not letting him carry out his warlike intentions.

"The utter rotters!" he growled.

"I'd have given them something!" said Wilkins quietly. "I don't mind, as long as you chaps believe in me."

"Course we do!" howled Grundy.

"That's what I was trying to show them."

"Well, you showed them," said Wilkins. "Come away now. I've had enough of it."

Mervin, the actor, watched the three arguing in the road, and then turned to Racke. There was an amused smile on that worthy's face, which seemed rather out of place when one of his schoolfellows was under such a charge.

"I'm more than obliged to you, young man," said Mr. Mervin, "and I am very sorry that this has occurred. But all's well that ends well. You can go over there and get a wash and brush-up, and then perhaps you might care to come and watch some of the business. We are doing some more filming in a bit."

"Right you are!" said Racke easily.

He made his way over to the hut indicated and washed. When he came out, a quarter of an hour later, he saw that another film was in process of being taken. He lounged up to Mervin's side.

"Getting on with it?" he inquired.

"Yes."

Racke eyed the players critically.

"That fat woman is not very good," he observed.

"Fat woman!" gasped Mervin.

"That's my wife!"

"Well, she's no good for this job, you know," said Racke loftily. "I could do as well myself."

Mervin said nothing. He was grateful to Racke for what he was supposed to have done, but the "hero" was certainly trying to trade on that friendship. Racke was straining his gratitude badly.

Racke did not see that he had blundered. He saw the producer standing near, and he attracted his attention with a short whistle.

"This film won't be a success," he observed, as the man turned round.

"Eh?"

"The whole thing is amateurish. Now, the fat woman—"

Mervin interrupted.

"I must ask you to speak more respectfully of my wife, please!" he said frigidly.

"Well, my candid opinion," said Racke, "is that she is no good. I know

you people like candour. I see the thing with different eyes from you others."

"You do!" snapped the producer.
He looked meaningly at Mervin; then, catching that gentleman's eye, turned his back on Racke. He had been on the point of boxing Racke's ears. There was a minute's silence.

"Dixon Grayne is my favourite film actor," Racke said suddenly. "He does the same sort of thing that you do, only he's much better."

"Oh!" said Mervin.
"You know," continued Racke confidently, "I think you'd do better if your wife didn't act with you. She—"
"I think you've said enough already," said Mervin, in a voice that shook with suppressed rage. "You've done me a very good turn, but I cannot stand here and listen to such insulting things about my wife!"

"What do you mean?" said Racke loftily. "I don't like her acting, and I'm telling you so. You don't object to that, I suppose?"

Mervin bit his lip, but did not reply. Mrs. Mervin was just coming before the camera again. Racke eyed the scene critically. He was under the delusion that he was impressing his hearers profoundly.

"Now, I call that clumsy," he observed casually.

"And I call you an ill-mannered cub!" said Mervin angrily. "If you want paying for what you've done I will pay you. But please leave me before I forget myself, and smack your face!"

Racke sprang back.
"That's your gratitude, is it?" he gasped. "You're a precious old humbug!"

Mervin turned his back deliberately. It cost him an effort. But he did not want a scene with his rescuer. He was pleased to note, out of the corner of his eye, that Racke was mooching away.

Mervin's expression was peculiarly stern just then, for a dreadful thought had struck him with the new insight which he had got into Racke's character. Suppose he had blundered? Suppose he had made a wrong accusation? Mervin thought very hard for a few minutes.

"I'll do it!" he muttered at length.

CHAPTER 5.

Kangaroo Asks Questions.

"IT'S all round the school!"

William Cuthbert Gunn made the remark as he came into Study No. 2 in the Shell passage.

"What is?" demanded Grundy.

"Racke's story," said Gunn wearily. "Racke ain't a Georgie Washington, I know. But Taggles has got a verbatim account from one of the workmen who was there."

"I'll go down and smash Taggles!" roared Grundy, getting up.

"Too late!" said Gunn. "The yarn's round the school. But no one will swallow it."

The three had returned to St. Jim's about a couple of hours earlier, and Wilkins, having washed and changed, was getting on with his prep. But at Gunn's news he went rather white, and dropped his pen.

"No one had better believe it!" said Grundy fiercely. "I'll jolly well sash them if they say anything!"

Wilkins interrupted him.

"This is my business, Grundy," he said. "I—Hullo! Come in!"

There was a knock at the study door, and in response to the invitation Kangaroo came in.

Harry Noble looked uneasy. His brow was puckered. He glanced at Wilkins, but turned his eyes away.

Wilkins saw the look, and he flushed sudenly.

"What's the trouble, Kangaroo?" Gunn asked. "You look worried!"

The Cornstalk coughed.

"The fellows have been spinning a rotten yarn about—about Wilkins!" he said.

Wilkins looked up. Grundy growled.

"So, I came along here to let Wilkins know what the fellows are saying," said the Cornstalk.

"I know it," said Wilkins very quietly.

Kangaroo hesitated.

Why didn't someone say something? He noted Wilkins' flushed expression.

There must really be something in the yarn which was going round the school.

Taggles' story had tallied with Racke's version too clearly for it to be entirely untrue.

Kangaroo spoke just at the moment that Gunn was going to say something. He spoke tactlessly.

"It isn't true, of course, is it?" he said.

He didn't mean to put it as a question. But Wilkins was already feeling his position very keenly, and the words suddenly roused him.

"You mean that you believe it!" he flashed.

"Not without confirmation," returned the Cornstalk quickly.

Wilkins' eyes flashed.

"You wouldn't come here," he said bitterly, "if you didn't believe that I pushed the old fellow over!"

"I—!" began Noble.

"You're a rotten cad, Kangaroo!" snapped Wilkins. "You can think what you like."

"And if you don't get out of here," thundered Grundy, "I'll jolly well scalp you!"

"Look here," said the Cornstalk warmly, "you'd better be careful what you're saying! I don't stand being called a cad! That's what you're being called at the moment, Wilkins, and it's up to you to explain things before you start slinging mud at other fellows!"

"Of all the confounded cheek—" began Grundy, springing up.

Wilkins darted from his chair and pushed him back.

"Leave it to me!" he snapped. "This is nothing to do with you!"

Grundy subsided. Wilkins faced the Cornstalk. He was mad with rage, for the strain of the afternoon and the restraint which he had kept on himself so far was beginning to tell.

From strangers Wilkins had borne this doubt. But from a fellow he had always liked and respected it was more than he could bear.

Kangaroo looked at Gunn.

"What's the matter with the idiot?" he asked.

"Oh, buzz off, like a good chap!" snapped Gunn.

"That's all very well," said the Cornstalk, "but I came along here to talk to Wilkins. A charge has been made against him, and I don't mind saying that it's a rotten charge. We've heard one side of the tale, and it's up to Wilkins to give his version."

"And if I don't choose to," growled Wilkins, "you'll believe Racke's story?"

The Cornstalk flushed.

"Well, that's what half the school believes already," he said. "I came along here in quite a friendly way, and you start abusing me. What am I to think?"

"Think what you like!" gritted Wilkins.

"And I'll give you a hiding if you say it again!" thundered Grundy.

"Don't be such a crowd of fatheads!" protested Gunn. "Why can't you be civil to each other? Wilkins, don't be

an ass! Kangaroo, go away and kick yourself!"

Gunn's remarks were unheeded. The Cornstalk was facing the angry junior.

It was only his real faith in Wilkins which had brought him to the study to get an emphatic denial.

But he was beginning to lose faith now, and he was determined, if there was anything in the story, to give his opinion before he left the study.

"Look here, Wilkins," he said, his temper rising. "I'm not going to waste time being slanged by you! Is this all a put-up yarn, or was—was it an accident?"

"You want an answer to that?" gritted Wilkins.

"Yes!"

Slap!

Wilkins' open hand caught the Cornstalk a ringing hit on the cheek.

"That is my answer!" he snapped.

"And that is mine!" returned the Cornstalk.

He repaid the blow with interest. But Wilkins was prepared, and he struck out. In another moment the juniors were hard at it.

The study door opened, and the Terrible Three looked into the study.

"Who the—what the—!" gasped Tom Merry.

Gunn pulled him into the study.

"For goodness' sake help me separate these two burlers!" he gasped. "They'll wreck the study!"

"But what's the row?" asked Lowther.

Gunn explained quickly. The Terrible Three understood, and swooped on the combatants, hauling them apart by main force.

"You ought to know better, Kangaroo!" growled Tom Merry, as he held the angry junior.

"Don't argue with him, Merry!" snapped Wilkins suddenly. "I'll save you the bother. They all believe it, so it must be right. I'll say I shoved the old man into the fire!"

"What?" echoed Tom, aghast.

Wilkins laughed hysterically. The strain and the suspicion had told on him.

"I'll admit it all for your benefit, Kangaroo," he cackled foolishly. "Go and tell the whole school!"

Kangaroo did not move.

CHAPTER 6.

Guilty or Not Guilty?

THE silence in the study was only broken by Wilkins' laughter. Its uncanny sound held the Cornstalk.

"Look here, Wilkins," he said suddenly, "I'm sorry! I never ought to have tackled you like that! I'm—I'm sorry, and I apologise!"

Wilkins looked up. He had stopped laughing. Now his eyes were curiously moist. He was half hysterical.

"Very good, Kangaroo!" he said quickly. "Shake!"

The Cornstalk gripped his hand heartily.

"That's the way!" said Tom Merry warmly. "Put it there, Wilkins. Of course we believe that it's all a pack of lies!"

Manners and Monty Lowther shook as well.

"As a matter of fact," said Wilkins slowly, "Racke has not been romancing. He didn't make the mistake. I was actually told of—of locking the old man in the room!"

"Really?"

Wilkins explained in his own words what had happened. Grundy chirped in several times. And, with Gunn's explanations when the others failed, the

Terrible Three managed to understand pretty well what had happened.

"It's a rotten mistake!" said Tom Merry finally. "Of course, Racke was the rotter who did it. No one saw him go in, so he must have been in the barn smoking before the film started. Then I suppose he went to sleep, and set the place on fire with his bag."

"That's about it," said Gunn. "The producer fellow didn't intend to have it set on fire when it was. They were only making smoke then, and no one understood that the real thing was happening."

There was a pause.

The door opened to admit Jack Blake, with D'Arcy, Herries, and Digby. They had taken the same attitude that the Terrible Three had taken, and quite fell in with Tom Merry's view when he explained things.

Wilkins felt a pleasurable thrill at these fellows' confidence. The support had backed him up tremendously. He felt the charge very keenly, and Kangaroo's bluntness had stung his temper.

But that was over. Wilkins knew that he could rely on the good opinion of those fellows whose opinion he really valued, and that was a lot. But he understood, as well, that there would be a lot of fellows who would be disposed to believe Racke's story. The future did not look rosy.

He turned with a sigh, and sat down.

"Going to get on with prep," he said laconically. "I am much obliged to you fellows for your support."

"Rely on us to back you up!" said Tom Merry. "Come on, you chaps! Wilkins doesn't want to be worried."

The visitors filed out of the study, and Wilkins drew his Virgil towards him.

Then he frowned at Virgil.

Of all the tiresome and prosy old men, Virgil was the worst, to Wilkins' way of thinking. And the Eclogue were worse than the *Æneid*, which was at least a story. Virgil's system of farming seemed chiefly to consist of telling all sorts of deities what he was going to do, and blaming them if things went wrong.

"When the gentle zephyr comes down," Wilkins growled, "then is the time to plough the trees—"

"Shut up," growled Grundy.

"And when the young leaves—"

"Hang the young leaves!" snapped Gunn.

"The young leaves are sprouting—blossoming—"

"Ring off!"

And Wilkins proceeded to wrestle with Virgil in silence after that.

Events, however, were happening in the Fourth and the Shell. Racke's story had become the general talk of every study. And there were plenty of fellows ready enough to believe, or pretend to believe, a yarn like that about Wilkins.

Mellish said that there was not the slightest doubt that it was true. Trimble agreed emphatically that it was so, and stated that he was ashamed of Wilkins. Wilkins had refused Trimble a loan on the previous day, and Baggy was feeling revengeful. But he did not think of mentioning a small thing like that when such big issues were at stake.

Other fellows who did not bear Wilkins any special malice, but were not particular friends of his, were inclined to believe the story on the strength of the evidence, which seemed to them overwhelming. Gore was one of them, and he held a hot argument on the subject with Talbot, who shared Study No. 9 with him and Skimpole.

Things went on towards a climax very quickly. The fellows who believed that Wilkins had been guilty of the very mean action attributed to him waxed warmer in their opinions as time went on. Racke

encouraged them, and Crooke, his study-mate, proved an able lieutenant.

Crooke knew too much of Racke really to believe that he had been anything like a hero that afternoon, but it was an excellent opportunity for the odds of St. Jim's to cause strife in the camp of the decent fellows, and they were not slow to avail themselves of the opportunity.

It was not often that Aubrey Racke had the opportunity of appearing in the light of a hero, and he was determined to make the most of it. The more complete the discomfiture of Wilkins the more complete his own triumph.

Wilkins, meanwhile, worked on in silence. He knew that there were going to be many ordeals for him in the coming hours. But he had the satisfaction of knowing that the best fellows would back him up, come what might, and that was the main thing that mattered.

But when the Shell fellows went to bed Wilkins had his first opportunity of seeing exactly how things stood.

Scrope passed him on the stairs, and favoured him with a cold scowl, saying to Lucas, in an unnecessarily loud voice, that it was a rotten disgrace to the House, that the New House fellows wouldn't forget to talk about it.

Talbot, on the other hand, slipped across and gripped Wilkins' hand silently.

There was something very friendly in that grip, and Wilkins felt more than grateful.

But once the dormitory was reached there was an outburst of conversation.

"I don't reckon we ought to stand Wilkins in here!" said Racke loudly.

"He's a disgrace to the dormitory!"

"What?" that? blazed Grundy.

"Why, you smoky cad, you set the barn on fire yourself, and you're the rotter who nearly killed the old man!"

"And that's why the fellow himself was able to prove that Wilkins did it!" sneered Racke.

"He didn't prove it!" snapped Grundy. "It was all a mistake. Only a rotter would believe it of Wilkins, and I'm going to thrash anyone who says anything more about it!"

"You'll have to get busy!" answered Racke tartly. "There's Lucas, Frere, Finn, Lennox, Crooke, Gore, and Scrope think the same as I do. Boulton and Walkley, I expect—"

Boulton interrupted him.

"You can count us out of it," he said calmly. "I'll back up Wilkins any day against a thousand like you!"

"And you can leave Dane and me out!" said Bernard Glyn, the St. Jim's inventor.

Tom Merry chuckled.

"You'd better sing small, Racke," he said. "There's a heavy majority here who prefer to trust Wilkins to you. I suppose you're a neutral, Skimmy?"

"I refrain not to express a hasty decision until I have taken full measure of the predominant facts of the case," said Skimpole gravely.

Racke growled.

"Well, I don't feel like sleeping in the same place as a rotten outsider like—Ow! Shut up, Grundy!"

"You needn't!" roared Grundy, as he grabbed the cad of the Shell. "Open the door, you fellows!"

Tom Merry jerked the door open, and Grundy sent Racke spinning into the corridor.

"Simplest thing in the world to avoid sleeping in the same place," said Monty Lowther sweetly.

Racke picked himself up, and dashed into the dormitory again.

"Really, you chaps!" he shouted.

"Back me up!"

But, seeing the odds were too heavy, Racke's supporters did not rally to their

hero's cry. It was left to Grundy to back him up, and he did it heartily. Racke was spun round, whirled through the door again, and landed with a heavier crash in the corridor.

He returned to the dormitory in a meek frame of mind, and there was nothing further said that night about Wilkins and the charge made against him.

CHAPTER 7.

Excitement in the Shell.

"MY hat!" Tom Merry nudged Monty Lowther as the door of the Shell Form-room opened.

Mr. Linton had got about half-way through the first lesson, and things, so far, had proved quite unexciting. But something out of the ordinary was evidently about to happen.

A new boy was coming in. It was not exactly that fact which caused Tom Merry's exclamation, but the sight of the boy in question. He was a most remarkable-looking fellow. Mr. Linton put down his book, and an excited buzz went round.

"Who left the menagerie door open?" someone asked.

"I presume that you are Wiggins?" said Mr. Linton to the new-comer.

"You presume correctly!" said the new boy simply.

"Cheek enough for a thousand!" muttered Tom Merry. "Look at him!"

Wiggins was a tall, thin youth, with large round glasses and a very ruddy face. And there was something about his expression which struck one as being very funny.

"Then sit down, Wiggins, at the front desk," said Mr. Linton.

"Right you are!" said the new boy. Mr. Linton's expression hardened a little, and he gave the new boy a searching glance. But he looked perfectly innocent.

The Fourth watched him cross the room in silence for a moment, and then suddenly burst into a roar of laughter.

There was something in the gait of the new boy as he ambled to his desk which struck them as irresistibly funny.

"Oh, my giddy aunt!"

Mr. Linton went crimson, partly from anger, partly from suppressed amusement. He had never seen anything which was quite so funny.

He kept from laughing by an effort, and looked sternly at Wiggins. The new boy eyed him with a look of injured innocence. His face had not moved a muscle.

"This is no place for foolery, Wiggins!" snapped Mr. Linton. "Take your seat at once!"

"Ay, ay, sir," said Wiggins. He placed his hands on the edge of the desk, and did a neat backwards-somersault, landing gently on the seat.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Shell roared again.

Mr. Linton stared in speechless anger.

"Wiggins," he gasped at length, "you will be caned if I have any more of this fooling!"

"Ay, ay, sir."

And do not say "Ay, ay" to me. I am not," said Mr. Linton, with withering sarcasm, "a sailor!"

Wiggins blinked innocently through his glasses.

"Aren't you, sir?" he asked.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Mr. Linton frowned.

"That's enough!" he cried. "I will not brook such impertinence. Wiggins, hold your tongue till I speak to you!"

Wiggins put his hand to his mouth.

"What are you going to do now?" the master demanded.

"Hold my tongue, sir!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"My only aunt! He'll kill me!"
Mr. Linton went nearly purple with anger.

"Silence!" he roared. "Silence, I say! Come out here, Wiggins!"

The laughter subsided, except for a few giggles. Mr. Linton looked round and spotted Racke as one of the offenders. "Two hundred lines, Racke!" he snapped.

"Oh!" said Racke, suddenly looking serious.

Wiggins was still sitting holding his tongue. Apparently he had not heard the master. Mr. Linton repeated his remark.

"Come out here, Wiggins!" he said. "Thall I thill hol' my thongue?" asked the new boy, with his hand to his mouth.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Shell laughed again. They were enjoying the joke. This new boy was either very ignorant or a splendid actor. The juniors could not decide which.

Mr. Linton seized hold of Wiggins by his arm, and practically dragged him out of his seat in front of the class. The laughter subsided.

"I have had too much of this buffoonery!" Mr. Linton said acidly. "Hold out your hand!"

"Which one, sir?"

"The right one!"

"Is this the right one, sir?" asked Wiggins, extending his left.

"It will do!" said Mr. Linton. Smack!

"Oo-er!" roared Wiggins. "Yooooop! That hurts! Yaroooooh!"

"Now go to your place!" said Mr. Linton.

Wiggins turned round and solemnly winked at the Form.

Tom Merry gasped. By the noise which the new fellow had made the fellows quite expected to see him in tears by now.

"He's been spoofing!" gasped Tom.

CHAPTER 8.

Wiggins' Sacrifice.

WIGGINS resumed his place, apparently in a very subdued frame of mind, and the Form settled down to work.

Wilkins felt rather sorry. Until the arrival of Wiggins lessons had been by no means pleasant. There had been an undercurrent of nasty remarks directed at him by Racke and his supporters all the time, and if the remarks themselves did not hurt the Shell fellow, they at least served to remind him that he was in the black books of more than half of the school.

The New House fellows had believed the story readily. It was not that they wished to give Racke any credit—Racke, as a matter of fact, was ignored. But as was a distinct score over the School House, and in that light the New House fellows did not lose any opportunity of expressing their opinions.

George Wilkins was keeping a stiff upper lip—he would have done that if all the school had believed him guilty. But that did not help to relieve the bitterness of it all.

Mr. Linton's voice suddenly cut in on the junior's thoughts. His mind had strayed far from the lessons. He pulled himself together with an effort.

"S-sir?" he stammered.

"Start construing!"

Wilkins rose to his feet, and looked at the page ruefully. He had not the vaguest idea where to start.

"Er—er, the—er—"

"Wrong!" said Mr. Linton acidly.

"Wilkins, you were not attending! You will write two hundred lines!"

"My hat!" muttered Wilkins, as he sat down.

Racke turned round in his desk.

"Serve you right, you cad!" he muttered.

"Good job, too!" another voice hissed. In the silence which had fallen the two whispers reached the sharp ears of Mr. Linton. He looked up quickly.

"Racke!" he thundered. "Stand up! What was that you said?"

Racke stood up, an evil suggestion of a grin upon his face. Wilkins blushed to the roots of his hair. Racke, he knew, would not neglect such an opportunity to blurt out the story to the master, and then—well, it was not difficult to imagine what would happen. Dr. Holmes would be informed, and he would start making inquiries.

But at that moment there was a startling interruption. The new boy, Wiggins, rose suddenly to his feet.

"Please, sir," he said plaintively, "my coat is hurting me."

"Silence!" snapped Mr. Linton.

"But it hurts!" protested Wiggins.

"Hold your tongue—er, I mean, be silent!" snapped the Form-master.

Wiggins started to dance about from one foot to the other.

"Doesn't half hurt!" he mumbled.

"Silence!"

"Tain't half shooting!" groaned Wiggins.

Mr. Linton glared.

"Will you be silent?" he snapped.

Wilkins looked at him in genuine dismay.

"Can I take my boot off, sir, please?" he asked.

Mr. Linton relented.

"Yes," he said.

"Thank you, sir!" said Wiggins.

With a dexterous bow Wiggins perched himself on the back of the desk, and stooped to remove his boot. In doing this he managed, somehow, to get his cuff caught in the boot.

Apparently this flustered the new boy. He jerked up quickly to free his hand, with the result that he pulled his foot from under him, and fell with a thud on the floor.

"Yarooooh!" he roared.

Red-faced and panting, Wiggins gathered himself up off the floor, his cuff still fastened on his boot, and made a few frantic struggles to free himself.

Then he proceeded to wrestle earnestly with the problem. Mr. Linton watched with heightening colour, and the Form commenced to titter. But the more Wiggins struggled the more involved he seemed to become. He fell on the floor with another resounding bump, and when he struggled up it was seen that his jacket had got jerked over his head, and was hanging across the front of him.

"Wiggins!" thundered Mr. Linton.

"Sh'n't be a minute, sir!" gasped Wiggins, apparently at his wit's end and what to do. "Would you mind holding that sleeve a minute, sir?"

Mr. Linton frowned.

"Cease this fooling at once!" he rapped.

Wiggins made another frantic struggle, and the coat slipped farther down his arms and got mixed up with his hands. Whatever the new fellow grabbed at seemed to result in his getting a handful of sleeve. And his cuff was still fastened to the boot.

The Shell roared at his struggles went on. But Wiggins seemed in deadly earnest. He wrestled with the coat, and tugged at his boot. Getting tired of that, he tried to put the coat back over his head into its proper position, with the result that he got it screwed round the back of his neck, and his arms were thrust out far apart. But his cuff was still clinging to the boot.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Stop the ass! I shall have hysterics!" murmured Tom Merry.

The Shell roared till they were nearly crying. Wiggins certainly presented a curious spectacle. He was now sitting on the desk facing the class, with his arms wide apart and one of his feet pulled right up and clinging to his cuff.

Mr. Linton strode forward with a very red face. He could only keep from laughing by a very great effort. He was exceedingly annoyed, but he saw at the same time that Wiggins, whether he was ignorant of the fact or not, was a born comedian.

"Keep still!" he snapped.

He caught hold of the new boy's sleeve, and jerked it away from the tag on which it had caught. The foot dropped down free. But the coat difficulty was not settled yet. It was still tightly stretched across Wiggins' back.

Mr. Linton found that he could not stand it much longer. He caught hold of the coat, and by main force pulled it down over Wiggins' back and freed him. Wiggins turned round to him with a grateful smile—the first smile that the juniors had seen cross his face.

"Thank you, sir!" he said.

"Come out here!" snapped Mr. Linton. "You have been fooling, and you will not escape so lightly this time. Hold out your hand!"

Wiggins held out his hand nervously, and, as the cane descended, roared in anticipation. But he did not escape by that means. Mr. Linton laid it on heavily.

"Groooogh!" roared Wiggins.

Smack!

"Yooop! Oo-er!" wailed Wiggins.

"Now go to your place!" thundered Mr. Linton.

Wiggins turned, and the juniors noted that his expression was as serene as ever.

There was no sign of tears. Instead, he looked quietly over the class, and caught Wilkins' eye.

Then to that worthy's surprise, Wiggins winked very solemnly and sat down.

Wilkins then became aware of the fact that Racke, in the excitement, had sat down again, and it was evident that Mr. Linton had quite forgotten about him.

And as Mr. Linton took up his Virgil again Wilkins suddenly saw daylight.

"Wiggins made that interruption to save me!" he muttered to himself. "But why on earth should he?"

CHAPTER 9.

The Decey.

THE morning passed fairly quietly after Wiggins had received his second licking. The new boy sat and rubbed his hands furtively once or twice, but promptly desisted as he caught the Form-master's eye. He had apparently forgotten his corn.

At dinner-time Wilkins began to realise exactly what his position was going to be at St. Jim's. More than half of the Fourth cut him dead, or gave him withering looks of contempt. A few—among them D'Arcy, Herries, Digby, and Blake—talked to him as though nothing had happened.

Racke was not long in assuming the lauds of a hero. He took an opportunity of explaining, to any who cared to hear him, exactly how he saved the old actor from burning.

"I don't know how Wilkins came to be in there," he said, as Mellish started pressing for details. "But I darted up the steps to the top floor, and found him shoving the old chap back into the room. I don't suppose he really knew what he was doing. He seemed in a dashed panic."

"Yes!" said Mellish.
 "So I darted past him and pushed him out of the way, you see," said Racke.
 "He-he, he!" tittered Baggy Trimble.
 "Nothing funny in that," growled Gore, favouring the fat junior with a scowl.

Baggy tittered again. He was not laughing at Racke's story at all. He had just caught sight of the great George Alfred Grundy striding up to the group. And Baggy knew that there would be fireworks very shortly.

"Of course," Racke proceeded, "I shouldn't have said anything about what he did. It was a caddish trick to do, I know. But I should have given Wilkins the chance of owning up if the old actor Johnny hadn't found out all about it first."

"What's that?" demanded Grundy, pushing his way through the group. "Say that again, Racke!"

Racke paused. He had not known that the great George Alfred was so near. But Grundy did not wait for Racke to repeat his statement.

"Put up your paws!" he snapped.
 "Wh-wh-what's the matter with you?" gasped Racke.

Racke said nothing.

"You will write me two hundred lines, to make you more careful in future," Racke!" said Mr. Railton, as he swept on.

"Two hundred lines!" gasped Racke.
 "And all through that cad Grundy!"

Racke was considerably subdued during the afternoon. Several other fellows had indicated their intention of punching his head at the earliest possible moment, and it seemed that the role of "hero" left much to be desired as things stood at present.

After school he had a meeting of his supporters, and explained his views. But it was Gore who took charge of the meeting. Gore was fed up with the idea of giving Racke any glory, but he considered that Wilkins had cast a slur upon the Form by the action which was credited to him, and he was of the opinion that their feeling should be conveyed to Wilkins in a more forcible way than they had adopted at present.

And the meeting broke up.
 The first indication that Wilkins had that anything was happening was while the three chums were doing their prep in Study No. 3.

by the scruff of the neck and propelled him towards the door.

"I'll teach you to call me a cad!" he cried.

He kicked the door open, and marched Baggy into the corridor. As he did so he was conscious of several rushing forms, and the next moment he smote the ground with a thud.

CHAPTER 10.

Racke is Sore About It.

"M O B the cad!"

"Give it him!"

"Pile in!"

"Go it, Racke!"

There was a chorus of shouts from the ambushed juniors.

"Yaroooh!" roared Wilkins.

"We'll teach him to disgrace the school!" said Mellish virtuously.

Wilkins had been caught in a trap. The unwilling Trimble had been the bait, and he had escaped practically unhurt.

Wilkins hit out wildly, striking right and left, and as he did so there came a roar from Study No. 3, and Grundy, followed by Gunn, dashed into the fray.

"Rescue!" he roared.

Grundy charged the throng like a bull at a gate. The odds were four or five to one, but Grundy did not worry about that. Racke, however, had brought a considerable force with him, and the garrison of No. 3 soon found things going badly with them.

But help was forthcoming. Tom Merry & Co. were just coming up the stairs with D'Arcy, Herries, and Digby. They took in the situation at a glance.

"Charge 'em!" roared Tom Merry.

The Terrible Three, supported by Gussy and Herries, dashed into the fray. Digby turned and nipped down to the Fourth Form passage. He saw that the attackers were heavy, and he intended to summon all available forces.

A minute later he led a crowd of loyal Fourth-Formers up the stairs to the Shell passage. A battle royal was in progress. The occupants of nearly every study had turned out to throw in their weight on one side or the other.

Wilkins found himself hauled up and bumped twice before the fighting got too hot for the ambush party to concentrate the whole of their attention on him. He picked himself up, and sought Racke. That worthy was valiant enough with numbers on his side.

"Swat him!" he roared.

Wilkins landed a heavy left on Racke's nose, and the "hero" leapt back with a cry of alarm, gripping his nasal organ. But Gore was ready to take his place, and he sprang forward and started punching Wilkins.

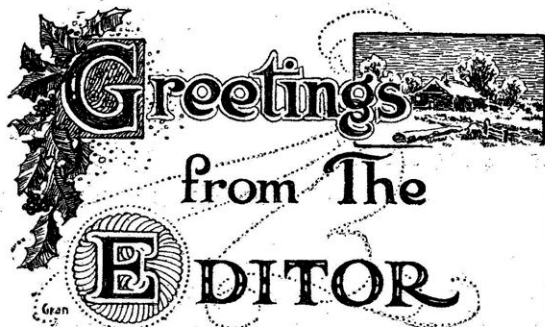
George Wilkins found himself heavily pressed. Trimble and Mellish were taking the opportunity of attacking him from the rear, quite regardless of any idea of fair play. And there seemed no help for Wilkins at the moment. He was separated from the main body of rescuers.

There was a shout suddenly from Study No. 5, and Gibbins and Scrope dashed out and joined in the fray, going in on opposite sides. A third figure looked timidly out of the door. It was Wiggins, the new fellow, who was sharing the study with them.

His eyes lit on Wilkins, and he saw how things stood. Wiggins pulled his glasses off, stuffed them into his pocket, and sailed in.

What he did next astonished everyone who saw it, Gore particularly. Wiggins literally sprang into the fight, and started landing out in all directions. Gore got a heavy punch on the nose. He turned round, breathing furiously, and drove at Wiggins.

But the blow did not reach its mark.



Slap!

"That," said Grundy, as he caught Racke a ringing smack on the cheek, "is for slandering Wilkins. You've spread enough rotten lies already about that affair yesterday. I know just what happened, so you'd better be careful what you say in future!"

And in order to give weight to his feelings, Grundy emphasised his remarks with a tap on Racke's nose.

"Yaroooh!"

Racke made a feeble attempt at return, and Grundy sailed in. Before the supporters of the cad of the Shell could interfere the "hero" himself turned and made a bolt for safety.

Grundy followed him across the quad, breathing furiously. The great George Alfred was very angry. He held Wilkins' honour as jealously as his own, and he was quite determined to make mince-meat of anyone who impugned it.

Racke fled for the School House, and dashed through the door at the most unfortunate moment that he could have chosen. Mr. Railton was just coming out, and he received Racke's weight right on his chest. He staggered back against the wall.

"S-sorry, sir!" gasped Racke, drawing up.

Mr. Railton gave him a frigid glare.

"Why are you running about in this foolish and dangerous manner, Racke?" he demanded.

THE NEW LIBRARY, No. 368.

There was a knock at the door, and Baggy Trimble of the Fourth shuffled uneasily into the study.

"What's up, Baggy?" demanded Gunn shortly.

Trimble's eyes settled on Wilkins for a moment, and then lifted in an expression of assumed horror.

"I've come to tell Wilkins that it will be impossible for me to take any further notice of him!" he said impressively.

"That's good!" grinned Gunn. "You might include me in it as well, Baggy." "And if you stop to take any notice of me," added Grundy, "I'll give you a thick ear for a souvenir!"

"I am disgusted to find that a fellow in the same school would act like—a coward!" proceeded Trimble virtuously, ignoring the remarks of William Cuthbert and the great George Alfred.

"The fact is," said Trimble, "we have a very high code of honour at Trimble Hall. We—"

"Have to throw all your customers out at half-past nine," suggested Gunn. "That's the law for all public-houses."

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Grundy, highly amused. For once Grundy had seen a joke.

"Trimble Hall is not a public-house!" growled Trimble. "It is my people's country estate. I expect they'll take me away from here when they know that I have to associate with a cad like—Ow! Whizzer doing!"

Wilkins jumped up. He seized Baggy

Wiggins stooped at that moment and clutched Gore. The fist sailed past the spot where his head should have been, and caught Trimble. Then Gore found himself simply lifted up and thrown into the middle of his supporters.

"Yaroooh!" roared Gore.

Wiggins turned quickly and grabbed Trimble. That worthy was roaring and rubbing his ear, and he put up no resistance. He found himself suddenly jerked in the air, and following the path which Gore had taken. He landed on that worthy just as he was trying to struggle up.

"Grooooooh!" howled Gore.

And Baggy Trimble added:

"Yaroooh!"

Trimble might not be much good as a fighting man, but as a battering-ram he was the last word. He scattered the supporters of Racke right and left, and landing squarely on Gore, knocked all the fight out of him for several minutes: "Pile in on them!" roared Tom Merry to his supporters.

Wilkins' champions waded in without further invitation. The crowd of avengers began to give ground, and suddenly the majority of them turned and broke into a disorderly retreat. The remainder followed quickly, Trimble bringing up the rear on the heels of the winded Gore.

Racke suddenly looked round, found himself deserted, and cut off. He turned, and tried to make a dash for it, but Wiggins thrust out a foot and neatly tripped him up. Racke went flying on hands and knees.

"Yaroooh!" he roared.

Tom Merry & Co. closed in on him.

"Rescue, you chaps!" howled Racke.

But Racke's scratch forces were retreating at full speed.

"Let me deal with him!" cried Wilkins.

Wilkins had been almost forgotten. But from his dishevelled appearance it seemed that he had managed to bear a hand in the fray.

"When we've finished!" grinned Tom Merry. "Bump him!"

Racke was seized by four strong pairs of hands and raised.

"Leggo, you brutes!" he howled. "I'll—Yaroooh!"

The cad of the Shell smote the floor several times in quick succession. He roared again and again.

"What you're getting now," said Tom Merry severely, "is for your plucky deed yesterday afternoon!"

"I tell you I—!" began Racke.

Biff! Crash!

"Ow!" roared Racke, as he smote the ground again. "I'll pay you for this, you sweeps!"

"Don't trouble about that," said Tom Merry lightly. "This is a gift. You'd better get used to it, because you're going to get some more for telling lying yarns about a decent chap!"

Racke roared to no avail. He was bumped until the juniors considered that he had received enough for a lesson. Then he was released.

The cad of the Shell scrambled to his feet with tears in his eyes. He certainly did not look much like a hero at that moment.

"You rotters!" he growled. "Just you wait!"

"Don't intend to wait, Racke!" said Wilkins grimly. "You called me a cad just now! Perhaps you'd like to finish the argument?"

But Racke felt that he had had quite enough for the moment. He made a sudden bolt for it. Wilkins dashed after him, but Racke, in spite of his bruises, shifted in surprising style.

Wiggins turned back at the end of the

passage, and rejoined his chums outside the study.

"I say, it's jolly good of you fellows to rally round like that!" he said a little huskily.

"Oh, rats!" said Tom Merry quickly.

"Ring off, Wilkins. I haven't finished my prep yet!"

CHAPTER 11.

Sounds at Midnight!

"WILKINS!" George Wilkins looked round as he heard his name.

It was about half an hour after the intended ambuscade of Racke & Co. had been spoilt, and the avengers scattered in confusion. Wilkins was just going down to Tom Merry's study to borrow a book.

Wiggins, the new boy, was standing in

"Yes," said Wilkins. "Well, it was very decent of you. There are not many fellows who would have done what you did."

Wiggins winked.

"That's all right," he said. "I say, will you have a fag?"

Something silver flashed in the new boy's hand, and, pressing a button, he displayed a case filled with expensive cigarettes.

"Great Scott!" said Wilkins. "You don't smoke, do you?"

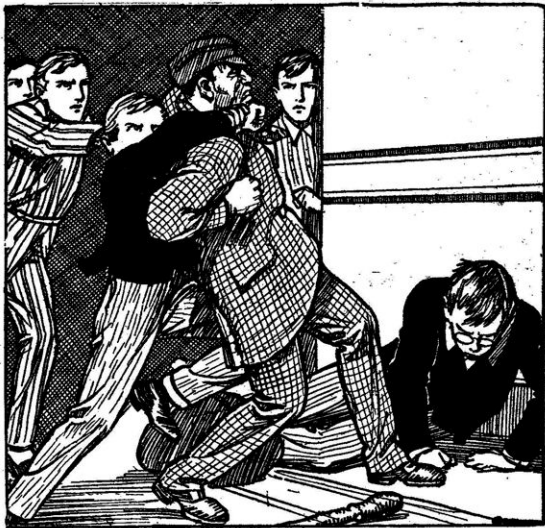
"No," said Wiggins. "But have one, if you care to."

"Nothing doing. I'm not a smoky cad."

"Same here," said Wiggins, returning the case to his pocket.

"Why do you carry those?" Wilkins asked curiously.

"Just for those who like it," said



Run to Earth!
(See Chapter 13.)

the doorway of Study No. 5, and he beckoned as Wilkins looked round.

"Gibbons and Scrope have gone down to the Common-room," he said. "Can you spare me a minute, please?"

"Certainly," said Wilkins, crossing to the study.

He followed Wiggins in and shut the door.

"I wanted to have a word with you, Wiggins," said Wilkins. "I understand exactly what you did this morning, and it was jolly good of you!"

"What was that?"

"Why, you made an interruption, and stopped that rotten story of the fire coming out. It was jolly good of you, and I'm very grateful. And you stepped in pretty pluckily just now when those cads tried to ambush me. Considering that you don't know very much about me, I reckon it was very decent of you."

"Oh, that's all right!" said Wiggins easily. "It was all of it good fun, you know. Linton didn't hurt, and it saved the situation."

Wiggins. "Sorry if I've offended you."

"Oh, that's all right!"

"Well, look here, said Wiggins, "I wanted to have a yarn with you about something else. I'm in a bit of trouble, and I can't quite explain things here. I've done you a good turn, will you do me one?"

"Certainly!"

"Well, I want you, if you will, to meet me outside the dormitory at midnight."

"Why?"

"I can't tell you now," said Wiggins earnestly. "But you can take my word there's nothing dishonourable in it. I think you've known enough of me to trust me."

Wilkins thought.

"You're horribly mysterious!" he said, with a laugh. "But you've done me two jolly good turns without questioning me. I'll do what you want all right. Midnight, outside the dormitory, you say?"

"That's right," said Wiggins. "You won't fail, will you?"

"No. Depend on me."
 "And don't mention a word to anyone else."
 "As you like."
 Wilkins left the study with a thoughtful brow. Wiggins grinned as the door shut.

"I don't think I'm far wrong," he said. "Everything has fallen out well so far. I've made friends with Racke, and found out that he smokes and that Wilkins doesn't. That's something. Now I must write a note."

The new junior scribbled out a note in pencil and folded it up, sticking it with a piece of stamp-paper, and addressing it to Racke. He watched through the door, which he put slightly ajar, until he saw Racke and Crooke leave Study No. 7. Then he slipped out, and popped the note on to Racke's table.

After that he made himself scarce till bed-time. Racke came back to the study a few minutes later, and, finding the note, opened it.

"Don't tell anybody about this," the note ran. "I have got a brilliant stunt on hand to rack that rotten cad Wiggins. If you will meet me outside the dormitory at midnight, you will see what to do.—M. WIGGINS."

Racke read the note three times, and then chuckled.

"He's a deep bouncer!" he muttered, rubbing his hands. "He pretended to chum with him to-day just to put him off the track. He told me himself that he hates these dashed goody-goody cads. By Jove, we'll let the bouncer know what's what!"

Wiggins had certainly played his cards well. Wilkins might have had his doubts about the new fellow's sincerity if he had seen the note, but Racke had none.

The new fellow had already sought his company, supplied him with cigarettes, and praised his supposed plucky action of the previous day, giving his opinion of Wilkins at the same time.

So Racke resolved to keep the appointment at any price.

There was plenty of excitement at bed-time, and Racke did not get a chance of speaking to Wiggins. The rival factions were fighting a wordy battle over the part which Wilkins was supposed to have played in the affair of the cinema fire. But Racke's party had been taken aback by their locking in the corridor, and when Grundy suggested to his followers that guerrilla war should be started the argument fell through.

Wilkins and Racke turned in, and dozed off. There was a good long wait to midnight.

Wilkins woke when the old clock struck the half-hour before midnight, and he did not go to sleep again. He lay for a few minutes, and then rose and dressed in his outer garments.

Racke watched him. "He, too, was awake; but, being convinced that the idea was to rag Wilkins, he gave him time to leave the dormitory before he rose and dressed hastily."

He noticed that the bed which Wiggins had slept in was empty. Evidently the new junior had risen before any of them.

Wilkins had crept out into the corridor, to find it deserted. The faint moon behind the clouds cast sufficient light for Wilkins to feel certain of that. He walked along into the shadows, and then looked back.

A figure was coming towards him from the dormitory. Wilkins retraced his steps, and started a little as he recognised Racke.

"Racke!" he whispered. "What are you doing here?"

Racke hesitated. He had come to mob Wilkins, but he did not feel like doing it single-handed. The ill-conditioned slacker was no match for the athletic Wilkins.

He opened his mouth to say something, and then closed it with a snap. The sound of a stifled sob came from the darkness of the passage ahead.

"By Jove!" murmured Wilkins. "What was that?"

He turned and looked at Racke. Racke was trembling like a leaf.

"Come on!" snapped Wilkins. "Someone's in trouble!"

"Help me!" came faintly from the end of the passage.

And almost immediately a second voice answered.

"Shut that!" it said roughly. "Shut it, or I'll throttle you!"

Wilkins started forward.

"Wiggins is in trouble!" he muttered. "Come on, Racke!"

Wilkins plunged into the mysterious gloom of the passage, but Racke did not move. The sound had completely unnerved him. He stood, with blanched face and trembling knees, leaving it to Wilkins!

CHAPTER 12.

The Burglar!

"HELP!" The voice was muffled this time, but there was no mistaking it. It was Wiggins' voice.

Wilkins hurried along silently in the gloom of the passage. He looked round at the head of the stairs. There was nothing to account for the sound he had heard.

"Racke!" he called softly.

There was no response.

Wilkins ran softly down the stairs, still without discovering any cause for the noise. He came up the stairs again and looked round. Still there was no sign of Wiggins.

The silence after the eerie cry was a little unnerving.

He turned, and made his way down the passage again. As he did so he bumped suddenly into a dark figure.

Wilkins was instantly on the alert, and as the other leapt back he sprang forward and held on. For a few seconds the two swayed backwards and forwards in the darkness, and then, coming within the rays from a window, saw each other for the first time.

It was Racke again!

Racke released his hold, and dropped back against the wall. There were beads of perspiration on his forehead. He looked beaten to the world.

"T-thank g-goodness it's only y-you!" he stammered.

Wilkins regarded him with a look of withering contempt.

"Why didn't you come and see what it was?" he demanded. "There was something jolly fishy happened."

"Did you find anything?" asked Racke hoarsely.

"No. I can't understand it."

Racke pulled himself together with an effort.

"I don't believe that anything was the matter!" he said. "I believe that that cad Wiggins was ragging us."

Wilkins looked at him.

"I suppose that's why you didn't come," he asked acidly.

"Yes," said Racke sullenly. "Of course."

"You would have done, otherwise," said Wilkins cuttingly. "You are a bit of a hero in a real emergency—I've heard you say so!"

Racke said nothing. Wilkins stood listening.

It certainly did seem funny that he had discovered no cause for the noise which he had heard. And Wiggins was a queer customer. It was quite possible that he had enticed him out of bed to rag him. But why? And why was Racke there?

Wilkins looked hard at the waster of the Shell.

"What are you doing here, Racke?" he asked.

Racke hesitated.

He did not like the trick which Wiggins had played on him, and, as the more enterprising Wilkins had found nothing to account for the noise, he was beginning to believe that the whole business was a hoax. Like a true coward he resolved to turn upon his new-found pal.

"I came here to meet Wiggins," he said. "He was going to rag you. But as he's given us both a bit of a start for nothing, I vote we rag him instead!"

Wilkins whistled softly.

"Is it true about the ragging?" he demanded.

Racke motioned him suddenly to be silent. He pointed a trembling finger down the passage.

"I s-saw something," he whispered. "Look! A light!"

Wilkins looked. At the head of the stairs showed a faint light which flickered curiously.

"What is it?" gasped Racke.

"Shut up, and watch!" retorted Wilkins quickly.

The light wavered and went out. Wilkins watched intently. And in the gloom at the end of the passage he suddenly imagined that he saw a figure. But who could it be?

The figure moved. Wilkins turned to Racke. The cad of the Shell had seen it, too.

"There's s-someone there!" he breathed.

Wilkins waited again for the light. He had a feeling that it had not come from the figure that he could see. Then there was another somewhere! What did it mean?

The answer came suddenly. The fitful light gleamed out again from the stairs. Its rays picked a lanky figure out of the darkness, and it was not difficult to recognise him. It was Wiggins!

Wiggins turned with a start, and Wilkins caught a glimpse of his face, evidently startled by the sudden light.

There was a hoarse exclamation from the stairs, and then a rush of padded feet. Wiggins threw up his hand as though to protect his head from a blow.

Wilkins' heart nearly stopped beating. Something dark and shadowy was raised to strike. It loomed for a second in the rays—heavy and menacing. Then the light went out.

At the same moment there was a muffled cry from Wiggins, and the sound of a dull blow. Wilkins heard the soft thud of a falling body, and then—silence.

He braced himself, and turned to Racke. What they had witnessed was a tragedy.

"Come on!" he breathed savagely. "It's a burglar, and he's stunned Wiggins! Two of us can tackle him!"

Racke did not move.

Wilkins grabbed at him, and pulled him from the wall. He felt the waster of the Shell trembling in his grasp.

"He'll kill me, too!" whined Racke.

"He'll kill Wiggins!" retorted Wilkins hoarsely. "Come along!"

Racke thrust out a hand to steady himself against the wall.

"I—I'm not coming!" he whispered. "It's too dangerous!"

Wilkins slipped silently down the passage alone. He would go by himself if Racke was too frightened to come with him. Somewhere ahead of him in the gloom was the burglar, and now the St. Jim's fellow could make out the outline of his body.

He was stooping over Wiggins. It looked as though he was trying to choke him.

Wilkins covered the few remaining feet. The hot blood thumped in his ears, and perspiration broke out on his forehead. Now he nerved himself for the effort and sprang.

He landed squarely upon the burglar, and let out an ear-splitting yell.

"Help! Shell to the rescue! Burglars!"

There was a furious oath from the burglar. The man started to struggle like a maniac, lashing the air wildly with his heavy club. It caught Wilkins' shin, and seemed nearly to break it.

"Yarcoop!" yelled Wilkins. Then he shouted again, "Help! Shell to the rescue! Racke!"

There was a sound of movement from the dormitory. Wilkins was fighting like a madman. The burglar was nearly frantic with rage, and capable of anything—given the chance.

But he was underneath, and Wilkins had the better position. So far he had held his own. But his strength was not sufficient for the terrible strain. Why didn't Racke come and help him?

Racke was still leaning against the wall in the corridor, shivering with fear, scarcely able to stand without support.

He had left Wilkins to fight it out alone.

CHAPTER 13.

Mervin Again!

"RESCUE!" The shout rang down the passage as the Shell fellows came tumbling out in response to Wilkins' shout.

"Hurry!" panted Wilkins.

The burglar had forced him away from the top of him, and was struggling to rise. Wilkins fought furiously.

With an effort the burglar rose to his feet. Wilkins clung to his back desperately.

A blow caught him in the ribs, but Wilkins still held like a leech. And now the fellows were charging down from the dormitory.

The burglar shook himself violently, and thrust backwards with his elbows. Wilkins fell to the ground. But as he did so Tom Merry and Talbot flung themselves forward on the man, and grappled, and Manners added his weight the man fell.

Someone came along with a candle, and by its light the rest of the fellows joined in the scrap. The burglar gave in, fairly and squarely caught.

"Got him!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

Then he caught sight of Wilkins.

Wilkins was on his feet, looking very white. There was a stream of blood from his nose, and his face bore traces of the conflict.

"Are you hurt, Wilkins?" Tom asked quickly.

"It's—it's nothing much!" exclaimed Wilkins. "I—I—"

He reeled, and nearly fell. Tom Merry thrust out an arm, and caught him.

"What is the matter?"

The juniors turned as they heard the familiar voice. Kildare, the skipper of St. Jim's, had come upon the scene. But before anyone could answer him from the crowd a figure which had remained in shadow till now stepped forward. The lamp-lens saw the white face of Wiggins, the new boy.

"Can you tell me, Kildare," said the

juniors, and the skipper noticed at once that he was holding his hand to his head.

"I can explain everything."

He paused, and awayed slightly. Then, pushing himself together with an effort, he gave the shadow of one of his familiar grins.

"My real name," he said, "is Mervin—not Wiggins. I am the son of the man who accused Wilkins of being a coward. My pater sent me here to find out, if I could, whether it was possible that he had made a mistake in his accusation."

"I came here with the intention of getting friendly with both Racke and Wilkins, and I succeeded. I found out that Racke was a smoky cad, and that Wilkins was not. Then, to put their nerves to the test, I made arrangements to meet both of them in the corridor here at midnight."

"I worked a little trick in ventriloquism, shamming that I was being attacked by a burglar. The trick worked, and they both believed it. As soon as I had done it I nipped out of the way, and I was only just in time. Wilkins came down here alone, and looked all round the place. Racke—the coward—hung back in the corridor!"

Cadet Notes.

Are you a member of a Cadet Corps? If you are, congratulations. If you are not, what is the reason? We cannot help thinking that with many boys the answer to this question would be either that they do not know the advantages of a Cadet Corps, or that they do not know how to join one. We will take the first point to heart with Cadet Corps are open to boys between the ages of fourteen and nineteen. They are, as a rule, inexpensive; in some cases the uniform is provided free, and in some cases it is partly paid for by small instalments. Usually there is a small weekly subscription of a few pence. Members are expected to attend one or two nights in the week, Saturday afternoons, and occasionally for some kind of special parade on Sunday.

The new junior paused. Every eye was turned on Racke, who had joined the group.

"It's a lie!" exclaimed the cad of the Shell hoarsely. "It's all a—"

"Silence!" said Kildare sternly. "I have heard this story of the cinema fire. Please go on—er—Mervin!"

"Wilkins behaved like a brick!" he said. "And I was just returning to tell him what I thought, when I suddenly came face to face with this burglar chap here. He sprang at me, and partially stunned me. Then he tried to throttle me!"

Mervin paused. His hearers were listening intently.

"I was powerless to do anything," pursued Mervin. "If help had not come I don't know what would have happened to me. But Wilkins risked everything and came. You know the rest, Kildare. That is all."

"And what did Racke do?" demanded Tom Merry.

Wilkins looked quietly at the cad of the Shell.

"He stayed in the corridor," he said.

"Racke wouldn't come!"

"My hat!" said Tom Merry. "Bump the cad!"

Racke flushed, and retreated.

"Lies!" he said hoarsely. "It's all lies!"

"Bump him!"

"Scrag him!"

A chorus of howls interrupted the cad's protestations. A dozen eager hands

caught hold of Racke. He was frog-marched down the corridor, and then bumped until he howled for mercy.

Monty Lowther finished the ceremony by pouring a jug of cold water over him "to heal the bruises," as he put it.

Kildare did not interfere. He had turned to Wilkins.

"Shake, Wilkins!" he said warmly. "I'm jolly glad to hear this! I heard the yarn that was going round the school, but I didn't pay too much attention to it!"

Kildare, meanwhile, with the help of Lowther and Manners, escorted the burglar downstairs, where he could be detained till the police arrived.

Mervin, of course, received congratulations all around on the manner in which he had managed to vindicate Wilkins. But as soon as breakfast was over next morning he disappeared from the school. He had gone back to his proper occupation—that of a film actor. And the Shell fellows agreed that, as a comedian, he ought to be a great success.

Mr. Linton was half-way through the second lesson when the Head swept into the room.

"Excuse me, please, Mr. Linton!" he said. "This gentleman with me particularly wishes to say a few words to the class. I think that he is entitled to speak. Come in, Mr. Mervin!"

Wilkins' heart jumped slightly as the old actor walked in.

Mr. Mervin said something to the Form-master, and then turned and faced the class.

"I am glad of this opportunity of speaking to you boys," he said quietly, "because I wish to make a public apology."

"Two days ago I accused one of your schoolfellows of a very cowardly action. I am thankful that since then I have been convinced of his innocence, both by what my son tells me and by a discovery made in the ruins of the barn which was burnt down. It was a silver cigarette-case marked with the initials of the boy I thanked—Racke."

"It is evident to me now that Racke was smoking in the barn while the film was in progress, and accidentally set it on fire. He, too, was responsible for the accident which nearly cost my life."

He paused. Racke's face was livid.

"I am now," said the actor slowly,

"going to ask Wilkins to accept my humble apology for what I said in a moment of passion. I hope that he will accept it in the spirit in which it is offered."

Tom Merry sprang to his feet.

"Three cheers for Wilkins!" he shouted.

And, while the Shell cheered itself hoarse, Wilkins got up and shook with the man who had accused him of being a coward!

The great George Alfred Grundy, having seriously set to work to solve the riddle of the caps, remembered suddenly the incident in the road where Wilkins and Racke had scrapped, and how the caps must have got changed. That supplied the final proof which was needed.

Before afternoon school the same day there was a general assembly in Big Hall, and Racke received a public flogging from the Head for his misdeeds.

Nothing could lower Racke much in the estimation of the Shell and Fourth; but the affair had certainly made them all think more of George Wilkins.

THE END.

(Don't miss next Wednesday's Great Story of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's — "LEFT BEHIND!" — by Martin Clifford.)

THE GEM LIBRARY, No. 568.

THE ST. JIM'S GALLERY.

No. 29.—William Cuthbert Gunn.

GUNN is not as important a personage as George Alfred Grundy, of course.

But to the boys who are so important than Gunn, in addition to Grundy. Some of these have already been dealt with; others will come later.

Wilkins might have been taken with Gunn; but, on the whole, I think each deserves to be treated separately. And there is really quite a lot of difference between them. They are alike in one thing, it is true. That is their attitude towards Grundy. They are his chums, and he is their chum; he leads, and they follow—part of the way! Grundy generally wants them to go farther than they can see their way clear to go. They are both fond of Grundy, and they both laugh at him. If they were a good deal stronger-minded they might influence him for his good. As it is, he often gets them into trouble, though never trouble of the worst kind—by his pichedness. Both appreciate the reign of plenty—as far as permitted by adherence to the rationing orders—which prevails in the study; but neither is a sponger in any true sense.

Gunn is a bookish, rather quiet fellow, devoted to the works of Sir Walter Scott. He got the notion of the "Vehme"—Grundy's Secret Society—out of one of Scott's novels, "Anne of Geierstein". But, of course, the great George Alfred annexed the idea and claimed it as his, though he never reads Scott, or anything else much. When the three of them were in saunty together after their heavy wetting in a night expedition to Pepper's Barn, Wilkins wanted grub, and Grundy wanted to be getting back to the business of Mr. Pepper's hoard of gold; but what Gunn wanted was a volume of Scott. He got it, of course. That was quite an easy one for Sister Marie—much easier than the soothing of Grundy.

We did not hear much—if anything—about Gunn and Wilkins until Grundy came along. The great man chose to install himself in the study which Wilkins was at that time sharing with Crooke. Grundy objected to Crooke's smoky habits, and put him out; and Crooke found it convenient to change with Gunn. Both Gunn and Wilkins had already got chummy with Grundy. Perhaps at the outset the study feeds had something to do with the quick ripening of their friendship; but, after all, that is only human nature—not of the debased type, either.

After Tom Merry had licked Grundy—forced to fight him—Wilkins and Gunn led away their discomfited hero. They have led him away from more than one such scene since. It is no easy matter to lick Grundy; but it has been done, and will be done again, for he does not mind who stands up against him.

Gunn is a very pacific fellow. The bookish fellow generally—though not invariably—is. Gunn would never force a quarrel on anyone. But he would not funk the issue when a quarrel was forced on him. He was strong enough to fight in Cousin Ethel's case, though he was not among the circle of her chums. He did not catch on to the notion at once; but that was on account of the way in which it was to put to him—and to Wilkins—by Grundy.

It is not to be expected that these two should submit to being ordered about by Grundy just as he chooses, and do seem at times rather too meek in accepting commands from him; but it will be found, as a rule, that at such times something in the way of leg-pulling or goading on. Those two pull Grundy's leg quite often.

Pulling Grundy's leg is easy. Pulling Grundy back when he has made up his mind to do anything—however foolish—is quite another matter. It is, as we all already know, a pretty weighty job for George Wilkins and William Cuthbert Gunn. And that is why they often follow him farther than their common-sense approves. They know it is silly, and may be dangerous. But what can they do? Follow or desert? And loyally says "Follow!"

There is another reason why they have to give way at times. The question of physical leg-pulling.—No. 508.

force comes into the matter. At heart Grundy is not at all a bully. A bully is cruel, and Grundy is certainly not that. But he does throw his weight about; and he is as ready to throw it about in the case of his nearest and dearest pals as with anyone else. So the other two often agree for the sake of peace and quietness.

On the whole, what they chiefly bar—Gunn perhaps even more than Wilkins—in it all is the share they have to take of the ridicule which is an almost inevitable sequel of Grundy's many and varied activities. There is scarcely ever any chance that anything Grundy attempts will be other than a fiasco; and it is not exactly all violets to share in a succession of fiascos. Wherefore, when Grundy has enlisted some scratch crew to prove what great things can be done under his skilled leadership, even by duffers, Gunn and Wilkins are not too keen on taking the places that they might fill under him as first and second Lieutenant. Somewhere a bit farther in the rear really suits them better.



They were both in the very scratch team which Grundy raised to play against Tom Merry's eleven at cricket; and each made a duck—in fact, they and Levison among them provided a hat-trick for Reginald Talbot.

That is not their true form. Wilkins is the better all-round sportsman of the game; but Gunn is by no means a duffer at any game, in spite of his bookish tastes. He is far and away ahead of the great George Alfred in himself—could ever begin to convince that magnificent personage of the fact.

They were both among Grundy's Volunteers, though they were not by any means enthusiastic about the sport of it. They did not express high approval of the letter in which the great G. A. informed the Head that he had raised a Volunteer Corps—in fact, they thought it cheeky.

They were dragged into the business of Pepper's gold, hidden under the barn used as the St. Jim's House of Parliament at a time when everyone had been made aware that gold should be hoarded; but they were aghast at Grundy's patriotic scheme for getting it changed into notes. That this was eventually done was due to the fact that fellow more decision than either of them thought it up to them to help the well-meaning Grundy out of the danger he was bringing himself into. But it was through Gunn and

Wilkins that those others came into it. They did not like giving Grundy away; but they saw that the job was quite above their weight, so they went to the Terrible Three. Some of you will remember how they tried to tell something to tell something too much, and how very difficult they found it to draw the line.

They tried to put a check on Grundy the hypocrit, and on Grundy the ventriloquist. They poured cold water on Grundy the detective. But Grundy remained himself through it all, self-confident as ever. Who are Wilkins and Gunn that they should think they can tell Grundy anything?

Perhaps one of the very worst times that Gunn and Wilkins ever had was when Grundy was apparently convicted of having stolen a liver from Cardew. It was really nothing but a cruel trick played by Cardew. One might find excuses for him to some extent, for Grundy really had taken rather too high a line on the matter of the supposed disgrace to St. Jim's of harbouring a fellow who had been sacked from Wodehouse for an alleged theft, one should say. Cardew wanted to show how easy it was for the innocent to be convicted; and he showed it. But though Grundy is not thin-skinned, he suffered more hurt in the process than Cardew had intended, perhaps—quite certainly more than the other fellows, though most of them are not too sympathetic to Grundy, though fair. And it was almost as bad for Grundy's chums as for him. They did not know what to think of him. They did not know what to do about what to do. It was impossible—and yet it seemed undoubtedly true! For the moment they fell away, and averted their faces.

"You—too!—the poor old Grundy."

"You—too!—the poor old Grundy."

They did not really believe it. They were only staggered. One feels sure that when they had recovered their balance they would have stood by Grundy, no matter who was against him. For if they are not specially strong or self-reliant they are loyal, and they are not without common-sense. It could not have been true. The Grundy they knew was utterly incapable of a mean crime like theft. Arthur Augustus himself is hardly more crystal clear, more easy to read, than old Grundy, though he may like to give himself airs of mystery at times; and if anyone at St. Jim's knows Grundy, surely it is Wilkins and Gunn!

It was a source of considerable pleasure to those two, no doubt, when, in the Form Sports Competition, their chum and chief—and tyrant—really did distinguish himself. He scored well for the Shell in boxing, and he won a place in the Marathon. Gunn and Wilkins had failed to bring him up to the scratch for that; but Talbot succeeded where they had failed, and his running made all the difference to the Shell.

On the whole, this is about as much about Grundy as Wilkins is able to say. Gunn, but that can hardly be avoided. Gunn was not figured alone at all conspicuously; and the stories which tell of the trio are naturally dominated by the majestic one—as he would consider his rights and proper when Wilkins comes to be dealt with there will be much about Grundy, and something about Gunn as well, for some of the Grundyish exploits into which Gunn and Wilkins were led, not told of here, may be recounted.

A decent, quiet fellow, William Cuthbert Gunn, with sufficient sense of humour to see the absurdity of Grundy, but with enough charity to overlook it to some extent in consideration of Grundy's many good points, including his frequent remittances from Uncle Grundy! For those frequent remittances, of milk and honey, so to speak, that flow therewith, do, as we all know, Gunn and Wilkins to bear with the tyrannical ways of their chum!

No. 30
of this Series will be
RALPH RECKNESS CARDEW.

Extracts from "THE GREYFRIARS HERALD" and "TOM MERRY'S WEEKLY."

GRUNDY'S QUEST. By Clifton Dane.

I.

GEORGE ALFRED GRUNDY tapped Tom Merry on the shoulder in the Rag the other evening.

"I thought I'd mention, Merry," he said loftily, "that I shan't be able to play for you to-morrow—should you want me?"

Tom Merry smiled sweetly.

"That's all serene, Grundy, old man!" he said. "Don't you worry about that. We'll try to manage without you."

Monty Lowther and Manners exchanged winks.

"Where might you be going to-morrow, Grundy?" asked Lowther.

"I'm going out," said the great one.

"Wilkins and Gunn are coming with me."

"Oh, are we?" murmured those two youths from the rear.

"Wilkins and Gunn," repeated Grundy, glaring at his followers, "are coming with me! The fact is, you fellows, there's a lunatic escaped."

"Tell us something we don't know!" remarked Manners.

"It's all right, Grundy," said Monty Lowther, with a twinkle in his eye. "We won't split."

"Eh?"

"We'll keep mum, even though it's against the law."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What on earth are you talking about?" asked Grundy perplexedly. "Blest if I think you know yourself!"

"Ka, ha, ha!"

"As I was saying," resumed George Alfred, glaring round, "there's a lunatic escaped, and what's more, according to the papers, he's known to be in this—this—Grundy consulted a copy of the "Gazette"—this vicinity."

"Bravo!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I shouldn't go out to-morrow if I were you, Grundy," said Lowther, with a very grave face.

"Why not?"

"If you're known to be in this vicinity, it's best to be low for a bit."

Grundy suddenly caught the point of Lowther's remarks. We expected him to fly at the humorist of the Shell; but he restrained himself. All he said was:

"If you think that's funny, Lowther, you are very much mistaken!"

"I admit I can't be funny unconsciously, like you, Grundy," said Lowther meekly.

"Grundy swung round on his faithful benchmen.

"What's the joke?" he snapped. "Are you laughing at Lowther's rot?"

"Of course not!" replied Gunn. "We were laughing over a funny story we'd just remembered."

"Well, shut up," ordered Grundy authoritatively, "and listen to me! I shall want you two with me to-morrow—that is, if the lunatic is still at large."

"You're not thinking of giving yourself up?" Inquired Lowther anxiously.

Grundy ignored the remark, as also the laugh that followed.

"What do you want us for?" growled Gunn.

"In case he shows fight."

"Oh, my hat!"

"It says here," went on Grundy, "that he's a peaceable sort of chap; but you can't take all the papers say for gospel. For myself, I think it very likely he'll show fight. I dare say I could tackle him myself," he added reflectively. "But anyhow, I shall want you on hand to witness my triumph."

There was a roar from every corner.

Grundy looked round with a red face.

"What's the cackle about?" he demanded.

"Come along, you two! Let's get out of this. I can't think out a plan of action with a set of grinning asses round me!"

Grundy stalked out of the Rag, with Wilkins and Gunn behind him in a sort of procession. Wilkins serenely whistling a selection from the "Dead March in Saul."

II.

"GRUNDY gone out?"

Wilkins and Gunn accosted the Terrible Three in the quad the following afternoon. It was Wilkins who asked the question.

"Yes," grinned Lowther. "He was inquiring about you two."

"Now, I wonder what he wanted us for?" murmured Gunn.

"Perhaps we'd better go after him," suggested Wilkins, relenting. "He might get into trouble without his guardians."

"Perhaps you'd better," advised Tom Merry. "Get along now, and you may be in time to gather up the pieces."

Leaving the Terrible Three chuckling, the two long-suffering followers of the great Grundy leisurely sauntered out of the gates, and took the road for Rylcombe. They came upon Clampe and Scrope in the lane.

"Seen Grundy?" asked Wilkins.

Clampe grinned. So did Scrope.

"Ha, ha! Yes, we've seen him!" chuckled Clampe. "He's well on the way to finding that lunatic!"

"What d'ye mean?" asked Gunn suspiciously.

Clampe chuckled again.

"Saw old Bird—chap who keeps the florist's shop at Wayland, you know. He passed us up the road there. Grundy arrived just afterwards, and inquired as to whether we'd seen any suspicious characters about. Of course, we gave him all the assistance we could. He doesn't know old Bird, by the way—never seen him before, I fancy. He's gone after him."

Wilkins and Gunn grinned feebly at each other.

"Better get along," Gunn said. "Grundy looks like meeting trouble."

"Meeting it?" muttered Wilkins. "He goes all out to find it. Brrr!"

"There he is!" exclaimed Gunn, a moment later.

The pair had turned a bend in the lane, and had caught sight of Grundy, a hundred yards or so farther on, engaged in a heated argument with a tall, wizen-faced old chap whom most of us know as the florist at Wayland.

Wilkins at once recognised him at once.

"The crass idiot!" muttered Wilkins, as they quickened their pace. "He takes old Bird for the lunatic, of course. My hat! He's going for him!"

Wilkins was right.

Grundy's faithful followers were still fifty yards from the scene when Grundy evidently thought that the time called for actions and not for words, for he flung himself on the unfortunate Mr. Bird, and the pair rolled in the road together.

Mr. Bird, old as he was, fought furiously, which strengthened Grundy's belief that he was really the escaped lunatic. Grundy thought of a phrase he had seen in a book he had read:

"Lunatics frequently display superhuman strength when cornered."

"Then he's himself dragged off his antagonist, and he turned furiously on Wilkins and Gunn, who had dragged him off.

"You silly asses!" he choked. "Stop it! Let me get on! Don't let him get away!"

Mr. Bird, however, seemed in no hurry to go. He danced up to Grundy, and shook a knuckly fist in his face.

"You young ruffian!" he raved. "I'll have the law on you! He turned to Wilkins and Gunn. "He deliberately assaulted me without any provocation whatever!" he choked. "He—he accused me—me of being an escaped lunatic!"

"So you are," roared Grundy. "You can't bluff me! There's guilt written all over your face. Besides, you fit in with the description in the paper!"

"Good heavens, the boy's mad!" gasped Mr. Bird. "What is he talking about? I will go to his headmaster—"

See that he doesn't run!" shouted Grundy. "Blot the road, one of you! Mr. Bird, are you, my beauty! A likely tale!"

"He is Mr. Bird, you fool!" said Wilkins angrily. "We keeps the florist's shop in Wayland, you know. Grundy wanted him for years!"

Grundy stared blankly at Wilkins.

"Eh? Are—are you sure, Wilkins?" he stammered.

"Sure! Of course, I'm sure!" roared the exasperated Wilkins.

"Apologise, Grundy, you idiot!" hissed Gunn.

"I don't want any apology!" stormed Mr. Bird. "I will see that boy's headmaster. He belongs to St. Jim's. Grundy you call him. I will see whether he can assault a peaceful citizen with impunity!"

And with that Mr. Bird stamped off, still fuming, and still, as all three noticed, in the direction of the school.

Wilkins and Gunn surveyed their leader frowningly when he had gone.

"Well, of all the fools—," began Wilkins.

"Oh, shut up!" growled Grundy, his confidence returning as he recovered himself. "You're a pretty pair, disappearing when you knew we were dead."

Everybody's liable to make mistakes. If he isn't the lunatic, somebody else must be!"

"Yes, you are!" growled Wilkins. "You ought to be in a cage or a padded room! Let's get back before you put your foot in a worse mess!"

"You can go back if you like—and you, too, Gunn," snapped Grundy. "I'm not like some fellows; I've got determination. When I start on a job I finish it!"

"It'll finish you if you go on in the way you've started!" remarked Wilkins. "Are you coming?"

Grundy marched on without replying. Gunn looked at Wilkins, and Wilkins nodded in a resigned way. The pair followed Grundy at a discreet distance. George Alfred in his present state of mind needed looking after.

III.

"SO you've changed your minds?"

Grundy had turned into the path through the woods. He had walked on some distance. Wilkins and Gunn following, when he stopped and waited for them to come up. He made the remark in rather a sarcastic tone.

"Oh, don't be an idiot!" growled Wilkins angrily.

"This is a fine way to spend an afternoon, looking for a lunatic you've not a dog's chance of even setting eyes on," added Gunn.

"If you're going to growl at me all the time, I'd far rather you didn't come at all!" said Grundy sternly. "Look here! I think it very likely this thing is hiding in the woods. It only stands to reason he wouldn't want to show himself."

"But a lunatic hasn't any reason," protested Gunn.

"That's all rot!" said Grundy. "What do you know about lunatics, William Gunn?"

"A lot, considering I live with one!" murmured Gunn.

"What's that?" asked Grundy sharply.

"Oh, get along!" said Gunn, while Wilkins chuckled softly. "Where are you going to look now, Grundy?"

"I'm going to—to scour the woods thoroughly."

"I see," said Wilkins eagerly. "We each take different directions, and meet again later!"

"That's it!" agreed Gunn heartily. Grundy eyed them.

"No! I think we'd better keep together," he said. "I don't suppose you'll do any good by yourselves. You want a leader."

"Yes, it's a pity," said Gunn, in a tone which implied that they hadn't one.

"There's a hollow farther on," announced Grundy, as he led the way. "We'll go to the first."

Gunn trod on a dry twig, which snapped loudly.

"Don't make a noise!" snapped Grundy.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 568.

"How do you know that the lunatic's not close by?"

"I know he is!" murmured Gunn.

"There's somebody in the hollow!" Grundy whispered, as they approached it.

"What of it?" Wilkins wanted to know.

"Hush!" Grundy warned dramatically. "It might be the lunatic!"

The only reply he received was an expressive snort from both Wilkins and Gunn.

There certainly was somebody in the hollow. A rough-looking man, who looked every inch a tramp of the Weary Willy variety, lay at full length on the grass.

Wilkins and Gunn needed but a glance to be convinced that he had been imbibing too freely of the wine that is red, or the whisky that is yellow. He was fast asleep, and morning misery was the sight of him Grundy gave a whoop of triumph.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed. "It's him!"

"Who?" asked Wilkins.

"The lunatic, of course!" said Gunn excitedly. "Look at him!"

"We're looking at him!" said Grundy shortly. "A booby under sleeping it off!"

"Now, look at this!" cried Grundy, unfolding the "Gazette." "Height, six feet; white-headed, clean-shaven; age, sixty."

"Well!" asked Gunn.

"Well, that's the Johnny right enough. A blind man could see that! He exactly fits in with the description."

"So did Mr. Bird!" commented Wilkins. "There must be hundreds of old fellows about who are tall and clean-shaven."

"Not!" said Grundy grimly. "Don't try to discount my success, Wilkins! And don't, for goodness' sake, get jealous!"

"Jealous! Oh, my hat!"

"Yes, jealous," asserted Grundy. "Now, the question is, how are we to get this joker along to the station?"

"Take my advice, and leave him where he is," said Gunn.

"You refuse to back me up?" roared Grundy.

"Yes, I do. I'm not going to make a fool of myself to please you!" said Gunn grimly.

"Oh, you, Wilkins?"

"Yes, you, fathead!" was Wilkins' terse reply. "Leave him alone!"

"Very well; I'll take him along myself!" said Grundy determinedly. "I must say a precious pair of beauties. You're sure you're enough to give a fellow the heart-ache!"

Grundy wasted no further time in words. He grabbed the inebriated gentleman by the collar, and hoisted him to his feet. The tramp opened his eyes and blinked round drowsily.

"I'm not going back, Mrs. Wilks!" he mumbled, and closed his eyes again.

Grundy turned to his followers.

"You heard that?" he declared. "What more proof you need than that? You distinctly heard him say 'I'm not going back'?"

"He probably imagined he was talking to his landlady!" grinned Gunn.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Don't be a bigger fool than Nature made you!" snapped Grundy. "I'm going to take him to the station if I have to drag him there!"

"Ha, ha, ha! You'll have to, I'm thinking!" chuckled Wilkins.

IV.

GRUNDY, panting, reached the lane with his burden, and hoisted it over the hedge. Then he began the walk to Wayland, Grundy half dragging and half carrying his boozey charge through the main street.

The dusk was falling quickly now, which was fortunate for Grundy, who would have been chipped unmercifully by the village kids had it been broad daylight.

As it was, Wilkins and Gunn brought up the rear, chuckling sardonically. George Alfred Grundy in the role of P.-C. Brown tickled them.

An old gentleman, wearing a top-hat and spats, besides other things, met the party half-way to Wayland Police Station. He paused, adjusted his gold pince-nez, and gazed in surprise at what was truly a surprising sight.

"My boys," he said benevolently, "what ever is the matter?"

"It's the escaped lunatic, sir!" panted Grundy—for piloting a six-foot man along the street is inclined to make one breathless,

especially when the six-footer is almost as helpless as a babe. "I've caught him, sir!" Grundy's tone was very respectful. Somehow, the bearing of the old gent inspired respect.

"Dear me!" murmured the old buffer. "Try be gentle with him, my boys! Remember he is mentally afflicted."

"Yes, sir!" said Grundy, and continued his weary way.

He was devoutly thankful when the red lantern of the police-station came in sight. Never had the grey tankard old building been more welcome to Grundy's eyes.

Wilkins and Gunn, too, were pleased to see it. They scented fun. As Wilkins remarked to Grundy, "concoctance, the sight of Grundy's face when he discovered his mistake would be compensation for their wasted afternoon."

A policeman, whose portly form almost blocked the little doorway, gazed interestedly at the spectacle hanging on Grundy's arm. He blinked closely at Grundy's charge through the gathering dusk, then he burst into a loud guffaw.

"What, Mr. Brown?" he roared. "The young gent's brought old Mike 'ome! Bring 'im in, sir! 'E can sleep it off in one of the cells to-night!"

Grundy, in his astonishment, let his package slide gracefully to the ground, where it snored in peaceful repose.

"You mean—to say," Grundy managed to gasp, "that this isn't the escaped lunatic?"

"Haw, haw!" chuckled the policeman. "That's a good 'un, that is! That's old Mike. 'Aving 'is daily doze after 'is little bust-up! 'Ave you thought 'e was the escaped lunatic!"

"You must be mistaken, my good man!" faltered Grundy. "Why, he tallies with the description exactly! He must be the lunatic!"

"There's only one lunatic 'ere that I know of!" said P.-C. Brown, putting his hands on his hips and standing with his feet apart. "And that's you, sir!"

"What! You'd better mind what you're saying, you fat fool!" boomed Grundy, taking no notice of the chuckles of Wilks and Gunn. "I want to see the sergeant in charge, not a daff imitation of a pumpkin with a face like a laughing gargoyles! Where's the sergeant in charge?"

P.-C. Brown, his face blazing with anger, was just about to commit assault and battery upon Grundy when the inspector appeared.

Grundy didn't wait for him to speak. He believed in getting in first, blow as it were.

"I've got the lunatic, sir!" he announced, dragging the dishevelled Mike to his feet and turning his face towards the inspector.

"The lunatic!" echoed the inspector.

"Yes, sir," said Grundy. "The madman that escaped."

The inspector came down the steps to get a closer view of Grundy's captive. Then he, like Brown, laughed scornfully.

"Pah!" he scoffed. "Don't be silly, boy! This is a man who has been loafing about here for the past month. He gets drunk almost daily. You can leave him here. He is becoming a nuisance to the neighbourhood."

Even Grundy could not argue against the inspector's view of Grundy's captive. He looked utterly crestfallen as he turned away, leaving P.-C. Brown to escort his prisoner inside—a job which he did not at all relish.

Wilkins and Gunn were merciful with their leader as they made their way back to the school.

It was Grundy who spoke first, and he spoke as if nothing at all unusual had occurred.

"I've had rotten luck to-day," he said casually. "I shall have better luck, perhaps, to-morrow."

"You're—you're going to keep this foolery up?" marvelled Wilkins.

"Foolery? What foolery?" asked Grundy sharply. "I'm afraid I don't understand you! And don't get envious. A fellow shouldn't be envious of another's powers, however great they are."

"Envious?" Wilkins muttered faintly. "You champion chump! What have I got to be envious about? A fat lot, I must say! I'm only too thankful I'm not such a crass idiot as to collar a drunken loafer for a lunatic—not to mention Mr. Bird!"

"Do you know who you're talking to?" roared Grundy.

"Is the biggest ass at St. Jim's!" retorted Wilkins thoroughly fed up. "The biggest fathead in Sussex!"

"My hat!" choked Grundy. "I'm not standing this! Put up your hands, George Wilkins! Put 'em up, I say!"

Wilkins put his hands up. Gunn came to his aid. Both were for the time absolutely tired of Grundy and all his works. They met Grundy's furious charge, and countered it resolutely; and Grundy, to his immense surprise, smote the earth with a loud bump. He was so angry that he counted the stars he saw, or to call them by their names. When at last he staggered up it was to find his sorely-tired henchmen gone. So, breathing threats of vengeance and other slower deaths, he traipsed off to St. Jim's.

Grundy went straight to the bath-room when he arrived at the school. After a wash and a vigorous towelling his good humour partly returned. He found Wilkins and Gunn in the study finishing off their tea. They, too, seemed to have regained their tempers. They smiled genially at Grundy as he presented himself.

"Sit down, Grundy, old man!" said Wilkins cheerily. "Plenty left! Pour yourself out some tea, old chump! We made it specially for you!"

Grundy's countenance showed that he was thawing slowly. He looked curiously at his study-mates for a moment. Then he sat down.

"Thanks!" he said, and took up the teapot. Wilkins winked at Gunn. The clouds had rolled by. Everything was merry and bright again, and harmony reigned once more.

Grundy's chums really liked him immensely. He never really trying at times, that was all. No summing-up, no Head's study.

Grundy decided that Mr. Bird had changed his mind before he reached St. Jim's, which was no doubt the case.

After the next day came the climax. Grundy had fully intended continuing his search in the evening after classes. Gore's news, however, rather altered his arrangements.

"Seen the paper, Grundy?" Gore asked him in the quad.

Grundy raised his eyebrows.

"'Loo's been captured!' Gore announced, with grin. "Captured last night. Taggles has got a paper."

"It appears," continued Gore, apparently finding a peculiar pleasure in telling Grundy all about the old chap robbed a doctor in Wayland, and stole his clothes—top-hat, frock coat, and everything. "He was caught in Rylcombe Lane last night."

"My hat!" muttered Wilkins. "That must have been the old gent who came up to us while you were—"

"Oh, shut up, Wilkins!" said Grundy quickly. "There's no need to go into all that again. Besides, he couldn't possibly have been. There goes the bell for classes!"

THE EDITOR.

By Tom Merry.

Who wouldn't be an Editor? I've heard some people say

That they'd forfeit half their fortune to be one for just a day!

I'm not sure I find it so unique, so altogether fine,

That they'd forfeit the remainder of their fortune to resign!

Who wouldn't be an Editor? Why, none of you, of course!

For you all proclaim your claims with quite an unnecessary force;

Your literary genius is known throughout the school,

And your clamourings set me wondering which is the biggest fool!

Who wouldn't be an Editor?—and live a life of ease,

Accepting or rejecting contributions as you please.

With small thanks from would-be authors whose creations you use,

And from the also-rans a perfect torrent of abuse!

But there are some compensations, and one of our rewards

Is the insight into human nature that the job affords.

So, in spite of all its drawbacks, I don't hesitate to say

I shall take a lot of kicking out of MY job, anyway!

Taking Grandfather Out.

By CEDRIC HILTON.

PRICE never does things by halves. If he attempts a thing he doesn't just merely fail—he bungles it thoroughly. So, on that bright spring afternoon when Tomlinson took us to visit his grandfather at Deddole-on-Thames, Price, as a matter of course, got left behind at Reading. Later on, however, he went through Deddole at about ninety miles an hour. He was, apparently, off to Glasgow, or some equally absurd place, by express, and Tommy and I saw him leaning out of the window, waving his arms about like an enthusiastic local preacher.

Scarcely two minutes after that we became aware of a commotion away up the line, and presently Price came running along the platform.

"Ah, here you are, you two," he said breathlessly. "Why didn't you wait for me at Reading? You knew I should find my way here somehow, for I'm not such an idiot as to go far in the wrong train. Directly I found I'd buzzed through Deddole I pulled the communication-cord and made 'em stop."

"Gave him my name and address, you wasn't?" he continued, with a chuckle. "Wasn't that guard in a stew? He fairly made sparks come out of his eyes! Said he'd get me quodded, and all that rot! I gave him old Tommy's name and address, and said that someone would look me up. Then I asked him if he'd ever used Harlene for his whiskers, and his face went every colour from cerise to indigo."

"Gave him my name and address, you chump?" gasped Tomlinson.

"Oh, that's all right! Don't argue, Tommy! Lead us along to your grandfather's! I'm ready to eat the respected old boulder out of home and bone!"

Tomlinson's grandfather inhabited a bungalow down by the river. He was a white-bearded man, who might have been Abraham with dyspepsia, only that he wore spectacles and ligged.

Tommy said he was eighty-one, but he looked at least a hundred and fifty.

While Price tackled bread-and-butter, with two ounces of currently dated jam, the old man remained silent; but as tea proceeded became quite talkative.

"Ah, my boy!" he began, with mystery in every glance, "when you get to be—'wheeze—'—

"ath old ath me"—'wheeze—'—you—"

Here he swallowed something the wrong way, and said he was going to choke.

Tomlinson thrust his back, and began some cheap method of artificial respiration, while I hurried for some water.

It was at this point that Price found a slug on the celery. Then there was a real commotion. I had a vague idea that he yelled. I'm not certain. But I do know that he caught his sleeve in the tablecloth, and then practically everything on that table went crashing down to the fender. Following that to round it off, Price put his elbow through the window.

If ever tragedy entered a bungalow it was then. I looked in through the door, and observed grandfather lying back in his chair with half a pound of best farm butter clinging affectionately to his beard.

He was moaning feebly, and Tommy fussed round him with helpless sympathy, a fellow who sees an inquest looming ahead.

That was enough for me. I went out and sat on my lonesome in the garden. Soon after that Price pointed me, and beneath a tree, that the setting sun had turned a beautiful turnip colour I learnt that grandfather had been put to bed.

"He'd no business about, at his age!" said Price with a "Seventy years is a lifetime! When fellows get past that age they ought to be put out of their misery; in fact, it's a sin to keep the boulders alive! I'm sure I shouldn't want to live on when I couldn't see, and raspberry-jam tasted like insect! No! My motto is, 'Live till you're miserable; then peg out!'"

That sermon finished, he dragged me indoors; and soon afterwards Price, Tomlinson,

and I retired to share a double bed among us.

But, bless you, grandfather next morning was behaving like a young beetle. He laughed, and he coughed, and laughed again, until Tommy suggested a trip on the river to keep him quiet. Then he got quite excited.

"Right, my lad!" he said "yously." "I'm with you in anything!"—'wheeze.' "I can throw you young'unth thomthing in the lake line, even yet!"

"But we're going sailing, grandfer," said Tomlinson.

"No matter, no matter," was the reply. "It'll all the time to me!"

He was right there. When Price and Tomlinson are in a boat the danger is always the same.

So when we approached a man named Slighter for the purpose of hiring a small sailing-boat, it required all the influence of a deceitful Price to persuade him to consent.

Even as it was Slighter didn't seem satisfied, and the way he watched us as we embarked upon our perilous voyage was an insult to experienced sportsmen.

The boat might have held two comfortably, but four made a squeeze. By the time we had got to mid-stream, and Price was struggling to get the sail up, it was all elbows, ropes, and canvas.

Grandfather sat where you couldn't move the tiller without digging him in the ribs, and he promptly began to cough.

"Right away, boy!" he said, in the breathing space. "Let her go with a vengeance. The boom—excuse big terms!—came round instantly, and knocked grandfather's hat into the water. Then the boat leaned over so frightfully that we all expected to keep the headgear company. Meanwhile, Slighter paced the bank like a caged lion, and fragments of advanced language floated musically to our ears from his Cupid lips.

And grandfather apparently didn't hear. So he wasn't shocked. Our boat began to drift down-stream. As it went so easily, we thought things over, and decided to let it continue on for the other way didn't seem safe. Accordingly, the sail was lowered—it was half down already—and we proceeded in silence.

Tomlinson noticed the landing-stage first. It was only a trail-looking wooden affair, not really open to outsiders; but it served our purpose, or, rather, Tommy's.

There was a village in the distance—a cluster of houses where there might be flappers. And he was alive to the possibility, for he'd just quarrelled with his eleventh sweetheart, and wanted, so he said, to forget the past in a fresh heaven of love.

When we were assen enough to let him have his head, and to tie our boat up, I don't know, but we did. Thereafter followed a search along a dusty street for the ever-elusive landing-stage, until we were all up-stream and irritable. There were plenty of ancients to suit grandfather, but he didn't seem appreciative. Not he! He lagged behind, coughing and grumbling, until we lost patience with him and everything, and made our way back towards the landing-stage.

Now, if Price hadn't been so colour-blind and excitable, he wouldn't have sworn that a colour-blind boat, lacking all up-stream under the control of a man in flannels, was ours. But he was obdurate, and his manner and suspicious infected all of us.

In the shape, colour, and appearance of this rapidly-creating boat we dreamed that we saw ours. And that was enough!

Price started the performance, by leaping into the air and yelling with all his might. "You're off! You're off! You're off!"

The man in flannels made no response. That confirmed it. The rascal!

A motor-boat, tied to a post near by, lent itself to the adventure of disaster. If there hadn't been one there we should have been

saved the harrowing experiences of the next few hours.

As it was, we became too excited to act wisely, and went at things with a rush. Price scrambled aboard first, and cut the mooring-ropes; then we followed.

After that it was only a question of starting the engine. That was done by tugging at every lever and handle in sight until we found the right one, and then that motor-boat throbbed away in pursuit.

The chase was interesting. Half the boats in the world seemed to be on that river, and the banks were too close together for anything. There wasn't a square inch to spare, and skiffs, tug-boats, dingies, and house-boats seemed to loom up out of the void just for the purpose of getting in the way.

Yet we zigzagged around, visiting both banks in turn, until our heads became giddy and grandfather was seasick.

An idiot standing up in a punt was our first victim. We spun him round three times, and sent him flying through the air, before he realised what had happened. After that we swam like an Englishman. Within the next ninety seconds we had upset an appreciable number of small boats.

But we caught the thief!

We took him when he was broadside on, and the rotten old sailing-boat he was in immediately became two, neither half remaining on speaking terms with the other. Our quarry in flannels made a few futile gasps at where the mast was when he last saw it, said "Dear me!" in a shocked voice, and took the plunge. His side-stroke was remarkably fine.

We ought then to have stopped and charged him with stealing our boat, but our motor was altogether too frisky. To cap the lot, Price managed in his usual bungling manner to get us all mixed up in a tangle of loose ropes, and grandfather was fastened by his neck to the tiller.

Our boat made two complete circles at full speed, accomplished a beautiful figure of eight, and then charged slap-bang at a tiny steam-launch taking some labourers to their work.

It was all over in a couple of twinks. We took the launch amidships, and pitched the whole blessed lot of men overboard. Price turned a couple of somersaults, and landed on top of the launch's engine.

Immediately after that our borrowed motor-boat heaved slightly and began to settle.

Things were terrible. Grandfather—dear old chap!—was the only cool one in the company. He stood at his post, his neck now free of the rope, gazing happily towards the sky, singing softly to himself:

"A little ship was on the sea."

After a bar or two he placed his arms round Tomlinson's neck and awaited the inevitable. Then our boat went down with a gurgle.

The time we spent exploring the river-bed seemed a complete fortnight, and it was a relief on coming to the surface to see that boats had set out for the purpose of saving those who couldn't swim. Grandfather was quickly recovered and taken ashore, where they laid him on the beach.

Oh, the comedy of it! People were as plentiful as insects, and a lot more bother. One man—the biggest of the crowd—made himself a nuisance. He towered over Price, and shook him until poor old Priceless seemed to possess six pairs of eyes.

"Where's my motor-boat?" he yelled.

"A-a-h!" replied Price. "She's g-g-g-gone!"

"Oh, she has, has she? And what are you going to do about it—eh?"

He stopped shaking Price, who, by the way, was wearing a parson's straw hat which he'd recovered from the river.

Then the man in flannels arrived in state, and the crowd made way for him.

He was still dripping from his immersion, and appeared to be a little dazed.

In spite of all this he didn't look like a thief. He was a gentleman—he could see that—and the word "clergyman" was written all over his face. He approached Price, and gazed through his gold-rimmed glasses at the clerical but so jauntily balanced upon the fellow's head.

"Ah, young man," he began quietly, "if I am not mistaken, it was your motor-boat which sank my little shell. Isn't that so?"

"My motor-boat if you please, sir," interrupted the big man.

"Well, your motor-boat, sir," said the parson courteously. "But this rascal who is wearing my hat was in charge, and I hold him responsible for the whole affair. Now, what has he to say?"

Price had a lot to say. First, he accused the clergyman of stealing our sailing-boat. Then he became shockingly familiar. "Parson or no parson," he said in conclusion, "it was your convolutions that started the blessed trouble—so there!"

Someone in the crowd shouted "Ooray!" and everybody laughed.

"Steady, steady!" said the clergyman quietly. And he could not help admiring his manner. It's hard to dignify while shivering in wet flannels, but somehow he made us feel that he was cut above the lot of us.

The wit in the crowd shouted:

"The offertory will now be taken." But he didn't turn a hair. He simply marched us off to a wooden wharf, which we seemed to recognise quite easily, and then told us to look.

There was our boat tied up exactly as we had left it!

The one we'd sunk had been the clergyman's own property.

Price collapsed like a halfpenny balloon on a holly-hub, and the crowd cheered. He started to make a speech, and said "Sorry" ten times in one sentence. Then he stumbled over a big stone and bashed the crown clean out of the parson's hat. He again started to apologise, but someone cut him short with a rotten tomato.

I thought there was going to be a riot; but the crowd, over thirsting for fresh sensations, went off to have a look at a fellow who'd received a crack on the head with a golf-ball, and left us alone for quite three minutes.

By this time the superintendent of the Deddole Steam Tug Company, together with the party of labourers whom we had upset, arrived at the spot, and their most frequently-repeated word was "Compensation."

At this Tommy suddenly remembered grandfather, who lay silent on the bank. Kneeling down, he shook him.

"I say, grander!" he shouted. "Wake up! These people want to be paid for the damage! Have you got your cheque-book handy?"

Grandfather made no movement, and the party crowded round him curiously. One woman bent down and felt his pulse.

"Good gracious!" she exclaimed. "The poor old chap's dead!"

Price shuddered.

"Upon my word," he said, "this is a rotten set-out! Fancy turning up his toes in the middle of our holiday! And I don't know how I shall manage about the funeral, for the only black I've got my name to is that of the man who died! Heed Jack I wore in the Hospital Carnival!"

He couldn't have said anything worse, and the bystanders gave vent to their feelings by howling and chucking bricks.

Tommy fortunately saved the situation by starting a fight with a labourer, and soon the crowd began to quarrel among themselves.

In the middle of it all grandfather created fresh excitement by sitting bolt upright and improving the current time.

He wasn't dead, of course. It takes a lot to kill an old man, especially if he's got anything to leave. By the time he had been dressed in dry clothes, and had refreshed himself by drinking four cups of strong tea, he was ready and eager to walk home.

Price had bolted already, and now Tommy was nowhere to be seen.

Unfortunately, I was on hand, and certain people were curious about my name and address. The bills arrived at school before me.

They were plentiful and enormous. Everybody, from the owners of the boats to a boy who had lost two teeth during the tussle,

was represented, and not one item was omitted.

The Deddole Steam Tug Company's account came along later, and it ran as follows:

Extensive repairs to steam-tug	2 s. 0
Cost of renting engine (Price must have damaged this with his head)	6 0 0
Cost of replacing the following articles: Three jackets, one set of false teeth, six pairs of braces, and the foreman's boots	5 10 6
Doctor's fee for removing clay pipe-stem from labourer's skull	5 5 6
Stimulant for men's nervous system (they bought this at the Blue Crocodile)	1 15 0
Total	£22 8 6

There was also a bill from a boatman for a new rowlock-pin in place of the one which Tommy smashed against the labourer's head.

I gave all the bills to Tommy, and he promptly posted them on to grandfather. The old fossil, however, wouldn't pay, so the bills, considerably revised, had to be shared by the three of us. It meant precious little pocket-money for a term or two, I can tell you!

And yet it was for grandfather's pleasure that we took that trip!

GOOD NEWS!

The Penny Popular

Will Make Its Reappearance on

JANUARY 24th.

Look Out for Further Particulars!

The Editor's Chat.

For Next Wednesday:

"LEFT BEHIND!"

By Martin Clifford.

Manners and Royance, on their way to Greyfriars by the St. Jim's junior footer team, get stranded at an intermediate junction, while their comrades are held up at Greyfriars by a railway strike. The two strike out on their own for the far-off school, and on the way they run against Cardew, absent without leave on his own occasions. Things happen. The rest you must wait till next week for. If I were to tell you now what things happen it would discount the interest in the story.

DON'T GET LEFT BEHIND!

There is something coming in the GEM in a week or two—something really important! If you have any chums who don't read this paper, but who support the "Magnet," you might tell them that they will be badly out of things if they fail to get the GEM of January 18th date, for in that number they will find

BILLY BUNTER AT ST. JIM'S!

Not permanently, of course, but not for a mere thing visit.

Now did he come to be at St. Jim's you may ask. Well, the "Magnet" of next week and the week after will explain that, and you ought to make sure of seeing these. In fact, it rather seems to me that any of you who do not read both papers during their coming great time are likely to get left behind!

THAT SCOTTISH POEM.

"Falkirk," to whom I replied last week, sent along a copy of some verses on the seven heroes of Mœuvres, which have been published in some Scottish paper, with what amounted to a demand that they should be republished in the GEM. I think I have made it tolerably clear before now that I don't

take any notice of readers' demands, as such. A civil request is much more likely to get anyone what he or she wants. I am printing these verses partly on account of their subject, which is one that the average Englishman does care about, though "Falkirk" may find that hard to believe, and partly as the theme of a little lecture to amateur writers—which may have to wait until next week.

SEVEN MEN OF MŒUVRES.

In the midst of the bitter battle,
When our line was broken,
From the ruined walls of Mœuvres
By a counter Hun attack,
Seven men from Scotland
Held on to a lonely post,
Which soon became an island
In the midst of the German host.

The Hun waves poured around them
Like the surge of an angry tide.
But the corporal held his ground and said:
"I'm thinkin', lads, we'll bide!"
So seven men from Scotland—
Men of the H.L.I.—
Stayed on their little island
To fight—maybe to die!

Seven men from Scotland
Said, "Ay, we'll bide an' see"
What turns up in this bit place;
Oor ain lads soon will be
Back here again!" For two long days,
They stood the battle shock,
No shifting sand of fear was there:
The island was a rock!

Seven men of Mœuvres
Faced hell on every side!
Made Scotland's name a wonder!
And their brothers on the Clyde
Were striking for more wages.
They stood the battle shock,
That carried help to Mœuvres
Unfinished on the slips

The seven men of Mœuvres

Made no demand for pay.
They didn't threat to strike unless
They got an eight hours' day!
They didn't call a strike.
And say the war might drift
Unless they got a rise. They worked
A forty-eight hour shift!

Seven men of Mœuvres

Held out against the Huns.
No sleep! No food! Their hands
For ever at their guns!
And, weak from constant watching,
And sodden with the rain,
They stood until the British line
Advanced to them again!

Yes, there their comrades found them
Unbated, undimmed!
That gate of hell and death had left them
Strong and unafraid!
Their bodies were high broken,
But their souls had not known fear:
And when their comrades cheered them
They answered cheer for cheer!

What shall we say of Mœuvres?
This first: Thank God! Glad gain!
That seven men from Mœuvres
May grip our hands again!
This next: Their deed immortal
Shall live the ages through!
Gallant men of Mœuvres,
Your Scotland's proud of you!

Yours Editor