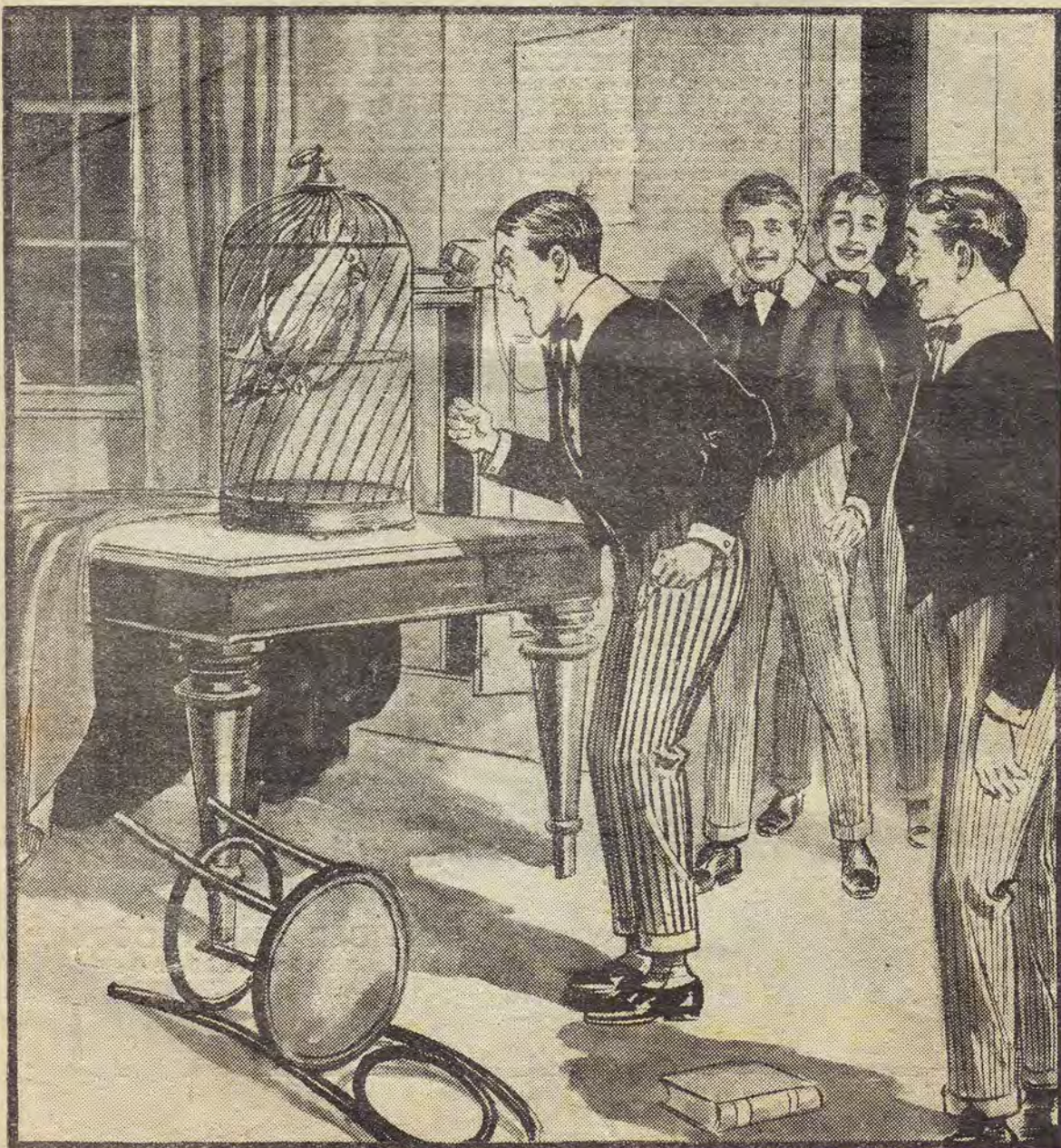


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By **MARTIN CLIFFORD.**



Mr. Lathom dropped the ring, and stood before the cage, stooping to examine the bird more closely. He looked very angry indeed. "What a face!" said the parrot, "How's your poor feet?" (See Chapter 12.)

CHAPTER 1.

Grundy's Disappointment.

WE simply must lick them!" said Tom Merry. "Those bounders have got too cheeky for anything lately."
"They're playing up jolly well, you know," answered Jack Blake. "They haven't lost a match this term yet."

"All the more reason why they should make a start to-day," remarked Kerr. "It doesn't do anybody much good to go on too long without a bit of a set-back."

"Unless it's us, of course!" put in Talbot, smiling.

The St. Jim's junior eleven were playing Rylcombe Grammar School on the Grammar School ground that afternoon, and it was on the way there that this conversation took place.

Next Wednesday:

"THE STUDY WRECKERS!" AND "THE PRIDE OF THE FILM!"

No. 418. (New Series.) Vol. 10.

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St. Jim's mustered strong. With Tom Merry, Talbot, Manners, Blake, and Lowther in the forward line, Noble, Redfern, and Reilly at half, Figgins and Kerr at back, and Fatty Wyna in goal, they had not a weak man on their side, and some really capable players had been obliged to stand down.

Among those who were not included, although he was scarcely to be numbered among the capable players—except in his own estimation—was the great George Alfred Grundy.

At this moment Grundy rode past on a bike. The players were walking.

"My hat! What's Grundy doing in footer togs and with his boot, hung on the handle-bar?" inquired Manners. "You've never asked him to play, Tom! Not off your rocker yet, are you?"

"Not quite, my son! I certainly haven't asked Grundy to play. We want to win this match."

"Hi, Grundy!" sang out Jack Blake.

Of late Grundy and the Tom Merry circle had been on better terms. Conceited boulder though he was, Grundy had his good points, and the other fellows had come to see that. On his side, Grundy had learned a few things—one of them being that he could not hope to have his own way in everything at St. Jim's.

But Grundy still cherished the delusion that it was sheer jealousy of Tom Merry's part that kept him out of the junior eleven.

Now, when Blake called out to him, Grundy slackened his pace for them to come up.

Grundy prided himself on his cycling, as on everything else he did. He fancied he could slow down gradually until he brought his machine to a standstill without having to dismount or letting it topple over.

He tried to do this now, with the result that, just before they reached him he had to get off hastily. In getting off, he stepped upon the right foot of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

Grundy took a large size in boots, and filled it. Consequently it was no joke to have one's foot trodden upon by Grundy. It might be considered an honour, if one could accept Grundy's own estimate of his importance. But D'Arcy couldn't, and wouldn't, and didn't want to. In spite of his readiness to see the good in anyone, if there was the least little bit of it to see, Gussy was somewhat less reconciled to Grundy than were the rest.

The fellow did shove himself forward so brazenly! To anyone gifted with the modest and retiring disposition that all knew the swell of the Fourth to possess, that was a fault not easily to be forgiven.

"Weally, Gwundy, you are quite the clumsiest boundah I evah met!" he said hotly. "You have simply ewushed my foot. I doubt whethah I shall be able to play if wequahed, and that may vewy likely mean a howwible licking for ouah side! And you don't even apologise!"

D'Arcy was the reserve forward for his side.

"I said 'Sorry,' didn't I?" retorted Grundy. "I can't help it if you're deaf. And I can't play in your place, if your foot is crushed, so you needn't count on that!"

"You certainly can't!" answered Tom Merry cheerfully.

"What do the boots mean, Grundy?" inquired Talbot.

"Oh, I'm playing for the other side, that's all!"

"What?"

"Rot!"

"Rats!"

"Piffle!"

"You can't do that, you know, Grundy!"

Grundy fairly beamed. He had made them sit up and take notice at last!

"Why can't I?" he asked loftily.

"Great Scott, that's an easy one! Because you're not a Grammarian," said Herries.

"But if they like to elect me a—what-d'ye-call-it—honourable member, isn't it?—I suppose you can't stop it?"

These fellows would not give Grundy a place, but they seemed quite alarmed at the prospect of his playing against them, he thought.

"You'll have to raise an objection, Tom," said Lowther.

Grundy looked at him suspiciously. He disliked Monty Lowther's habit of chaffing everybody.

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"Why?" growled Grundy

"The Grammar School ground isn't quite as big as ours, and—well, you know, some feet are like yards."

"Nuff said!"

Grundy snorted.

"I sha'n't object," said Tom Merry. "I shall leave that for somebody else."

"Who?" asked Digby.

"Gay. He's jolly sure to!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Jack Blake.

"All right," said Grundy. "Wait and see!"

Grundy remounted his bicycle and rode on.

When, five minutes later, they reached the Grammar School ground, they found quite a crowd around Grundy, who seemed to be in a very bad temper indeed.

"What's the row, Gay?" asked Tom Merry.

"Oh, this champion idiot of yours! The thing ought to be muzzled."

"You don't mean Grundy, surely?"

"You bet I do! Says he's going to play for us! Did anybody ever hear such rot?"

"I've heard bigger, old chap. He wanted to play for us!"

"Well, he's St. Jim's, isn't he, so that could hardly be bigger rot!"

"Couldn't it? I think it could. I'd very much rather have him playing against us than for us!"

"So would I!" replied Gordon Gay, grinning.

"But he says you asked him to play," remarked Lowther.

"Do you hear that, Monk? 'This chap Grundy says I asked him to play for us!'"

"I thought the boot was on the other foot!" replied Monk.

"How do you mean?" asked Tom Merry.

"Why, the boulder blew in yesterday, and said he was willing to play for us."

"So I did. And Gay said he'd be glad to have me!" shouted Grundy.

"Not on your life, I didn't! I simply gave you an evasive answer."

"Like the Irishman," said Lowther, shaking his head solemnly. "It's no go, Gay. Grundy's mind's altogether too great for that sort of thing."

"What was it about the Irishman?"

"He didn't like telling visitors his master wasn't at home when the thing happened not to be true, so his master said he might give an evasive answer. Next day he saw somebody going away from the house in a towering rage, and called Patrick up. 'What did you say to Mr. Smith, Patrick?' 'Shure, sorr, he axed were you in, and it wasn't a lie I'd be afther tellin', so I gave him an evasive answer.' 'And what was the answer?' It seems to have annoyed him! 'He said to me, 'Is the Professor at home?' he says. And I says to him, 'Was your grandmother a hoot-owl?' I says. 'It's quare indade, sorr, but he didn't seem to be afther likin' it at all, at all. But you tould me to give him an evasive answer, an' I did that same!'"

"I'll remember that one," said Carboy. "Let's see—'Was your grandmother a poll-parrot?' Isn't that how it goes?"

From the Grammarians there came a roar of laughter, which scarcely seemed accounted for by the feeble joke Carboy had attempted. Later, their rivals understood why the change made in the story had tickled them so much.

"What was your evasive answer, Gay?" asked Tom Merry.

"What did I say, Frank? I don't exactly remember."

"You said, 'I'm awfully obliged. It's very noble of you, really,'" answered Monk.

"There you are! If that isn't an acceptance, I'd like to know what is!" roared Grundy.

"I'm afraid you'll have to play him, Gay," Tom Merry said, looking very serious. "You were a bit too evasive, you see. Grundy's grandmother wasn't a hoot-owl, so naturally he didn't tumble to it."

"Oh, rats! It would rot up the whole thing. Suppose he did play for us, and we won? You chaps—"

"No, Gay, no! We're prepared to take a solemn affidavit that if Grundy plays and you win, we won't say it was because of him—aren't we, you fellows?"

The loud chorus of assent was not very flattering to Grundy. But he failed to see that. Grundy wanted very much to play, and he began to think that after all there was some hope for him.

Gay soon put that notion out of his head, however.

"He won't play. I'll see him hanged first!" he said. Tom Merry felt almost sorry for Grundy, in spite of the fellow's absurd self-conceit. Grundy really had expected to play, and he was woefully disappointed.

"See here!" Tom Merry said. "Why shouldn't he referee? It needs a chap who can cut about pretty quickly, and as he's willing to play for either side, he ought to be impartial enough. Do you agree, Gay?"

"Right-ho!" answered the Grammar School leader, who had begun to wish that his answer had been more decided. Gordon Gay did not know Grundy as the St. Jim's fellows did, or he would have made it so. Sarcasm rebounded harmlessly from Grundy's thick hide.

Grundy consented to referee. He consented with rather an ill grace, but when once he was provided with the necessary whistle he looked better satisfied—as proud as a peacock with two tails," Manners said.

CHAPTER 2.

Off-side.

GRUNDY performed a fantasia in three notes on the whistle, and the game began.

Tom Merry kicked off, and passed out to his left wing, where Lowther received the ball, and ran it down smartly.

He centred weakly, however, and Frank Monk got the leather and sent it downfield with a long, strong kick.

Gordon Gay, with Wootton major on his right and Wootton minor on his left, went for the St. Jim's goal. But Figgins pulled the Grammar School leader up, got the ball, and put it neatly and precisely to his forwards.

But it soon came back.

The Grammarians were in great form.

Individually, their players scarcely equalled those of St. Jim's. But they were rather better together. Circumstances had forced Tom Merry to chop and change his team about a good deal of late, and some of the fellows had hardly settled down into their places.

Gordon Gay and the other two Australians—the three Wallabies, as they were sometimes called—were putting in some excellent work, and Mont Blong, though he over-ran the ball now and then in his eagerness, centred accurately and strongly after making ground along the touch-line.

Fatty Wynn fisted out a hot shot with great coolness. The ball came in again, hard and high, and he tipped it over the bar.

From the corner-kick, nicely taken by Mont Blong, disaster befell St. Jim's.

The ball fell right in front of goal. There was a moment's mix-up, and then it was seen to be in the net.

"Hooray! The Grammar School for ever!" roared half the crowd.

"Buck up, St. Jim's!" roared the other half.

From behind the home goal sounded a queer, high-pitched voice.

"Strafe St. Jim's! Rotten show! Strafe St. Jim's!" it said.

Nobody took much notice at the moment. They all thought that some over-excited Grammar School fag had forgotten his manners, and was letting himself go too freely.

Grundy's whistle went "Pheep!" and the teams lined up again. Once more Tom Merry kicked off.

Talbot, Jack Blake, and Manners, all shared in the run that followed, which took the ball right down to the Grammarians' goal. But just as Tom Merry had trapped and was shooting, that queer voice called:

"Strafe St. Jim's! Rotten show! Strafe St. Jim's!"

It may have been the voice, or it may not, but anyway Tom's shot went just outside the post.

Tom Merry said nothing. But he made up his mind he would score before long. And he did.

It was from a capital centre by Lowther, who made no mistake this time. Tom Merry and Frank Monk both went for the ball, which was about midway between them; but Tom was a fraction of a second quicker, touched it past Monk deftly, and put in a pile-driver that gave the Grammar School goalie no chance at all.

A ding-dong game up to half-time resulted in the teams crossing over with the score one all. Talbot had put St. Jim's ahead; but a few minutes later Wootton minor had tricked Figgins and beaten Wynn with a hot shot.

"Does that prize idiot of yours know off-side when he sees it?" asked Gordon Gay of Tom Merry.

"My hat, what's the use of asking me? He thinks he knows it all, of course. Why? Talbot wasn't off-side."

"No. But Blake was a few minutes ago, and the whistle didn't go. And a little before that one of our men was, and it didn't go then. Will you speak to him about it?"

"I'd rather you did," Tom Merry answered. "He might take it better from you. Anyway, there doesn't seem much harm done yet, and I hate a game where the whistle keeps going all the time."

"Nobody knows when the idiot's ignorance might upset our chance—or yours," said Gay. "I'll speak to him."

Now, it was from no disinclination to perform on the whistle that Grundy had turned a deaf ear to off-side appeals.

The fact of the matter was that Grundy really didn't know off-side when he saw it.

Most people who follow the game think they understand the rule; a good many do understand it, but not all who imagine they do.

"There must be three opponents between you and the other side's goal-line when you play the ball," some people will tell you.

But the rule does not say just that. There are two very important saving clauses.

If the ball was last played by an opponent you cannot be off-side in playing it.

And if the ball was last played by one of your own team who was then nearer the enemies' goal you cannot be off-side. That is why passing back is so important when the defence has been beaten, and why, in a run up, forwards who know the game keep a few yards behind the man with the ball, to dart forward as soon as he passes it.

Even a moderate referee knows all this, of course. A good referee not only knows it but acts upon it—keeps his eye always upon the forwards' position, not only with reference to their opponents, but to each other.

Grundy was not even a moderate referee. But he was very far from realising the fact. Grundy would have argued the off-side rule with anyone, but when it came to a decision on the spur of the moment he got so fogged that he was always too late with his whistle, and so refrained from sounding it.

Strutting about the pitch with immense importance, full of the notion that everyone's eyes were upon him, had improved Grundy's temper, and he took Gay's remarks in a better spirit than might have been expected.

"Right-ho!" he growled. "I'll watch it. You don't mean I'm not fair to both sides, do you?"

"Great Scott, no! Of course I don't. But those two cases really were a bit glaring."

"Strafe St. Jim's! Rotten show! Strafe St. Jim's!" came the voice again.

"That chap wants a clout of the head, whoever he is!" remarked Grundy, frowning.

Grundy had begun to feel a sense of loyalty to St. Jim's.

"Oh, you couldn't very well clout his head," answered

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NEXT
WEDNESDAY:

"THE STUDY WRECKERS!"

Gay, with a mysterious smile: "He's our mascot, the fellows say!"

"Pity he can't be more civil, anyway!" Grundy retorted.

Lemon time was over. The teams lined up once more, and Gay kicked off.

Now for a while things seemed to be going St. Jim's way. The forward-line had got nicely together, and, while Lowther and Manners made good pace along the touchlines, Talbot, Jack Blake, and Tom Merry did some clever short passing inside.

But no goal came.

It was not for want of shooting, though Frank Monk often stopped a promising movement just as it began to look deadly.

They shot hard enough and often enough. But the boy in the Grammarian goal seemed capable of dealing with anything.

Mumford was this fellow's name. Tom Merry & Co. knew very little about him, for he had only come to Rylcombe this term, and so far had not shared in the frequent collisions between the juniors of the two schools.

Rather a heavy-faced, dull-looking fellow, but a rare good goalkeeper. If St. Jim's were beaten after doing rather more than their share of the pressing, it would be largely due to him.

The best of goalkeepers is not unbeatable, however. Tom Merry got one past him at last, and Grundy's whistle sounded as though he felt quite pleased.

"Strafe St. Jim's! Rotten show! Strafe St. Jim's!" sounded the queer voice again.

Tom Merry saw Mumford look round, but there was nothing in his heavy face to suggest what he thought.

"Buck up, you chaps! You've got them set now, if you can only stick to it!" called Digby from the goal-line.

Digby, D'Arcy, and Herries had come round to the Grammarian school goal because they were getting rather interested in that voice.

One can have too much of even a good thing. But this wasn't a good thing, and the trio felt that they were getting a great deal too much of it.

"Whoever it is moved when the sides changed over at half-time," said Herries.

"Yaas. But that doesn't tell us much. Theah was a cowed behind the othah goal then, and theah's a cowed behind this one now," answered Arthur Augustus.

"A jolly dense crowd, too," remarked Digby. "I don't mean their heads; all the Grammarians are a bit that way. But just twig how they've packed themselves together—just as if they'd got something they didn't want to have spotted among them."

"Strafe St. Jim's!"

"Bai Jove! It came wight from the middle of that pack!" whispered D'Arcy in the ear of Herries.

"I heard it, ase! Now, which of them was it? We can stand a good deal of their rot, because we know that they don't know any better, not having our advantages, poor little dears! But 'Strafe St. Jim's' is getting a bit off my nerves, and the chaps in the middle are jolly sick of it, I'm sure."

"Let's get in among them," suggested Digby.

But that was easier said than done.

Without using considerable force, indeed, it seemed impossible.

The crowd of Grammarians held closely together. Efforts to get among them by gentle pushing were fruitless, and before long it became apparent that this was not accidental. For the members of the crowd giggled and chortled. And ever from among them came at intervals that queer voice calling:

"Strafe St. Jim's! Rotten show! Strafe St. Jim's!"

The three began to feel quite annoyed.

They drew off, and took counsel together, forgetting for the moment all about the game.

"It isn't really worth bothering about, I suppose," said Herries. "If we make a fuss they'll only think it a bigger score to them."

Then they heard that voice—or what seemed like it—again. But this time it yelled:

"Off-side!"

"Pheep!" went the whistle.

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But Grundy had made a mistake. It was not off-side, for Talbot had been some yards in rear of Tom Merry when Tom, tackled by Monk, passed to him. But Mumford had appealed loudly, and Grundy had whistled.

The St. Jim's fellows did not dispute the decision, of course.

"Jolly well off-side, I should say!" cried Digby hotly. "If that new chap of theirs has been amusing himself in goal with singing out 'Strafe St. Jim's!' it's a bit too thick for anything. We could stand it coming from some silly kid, but—"

"I don't think it was Mumps, or whatever his name is," said Herries.

"But I'm jolly sure it was!" retorted Digby. "Didn't you hear him sing out 'Off-side!' loud enough for a dozen?"

"Yes; he called 'Off-side!' But he didn't call 'Strafe St. Jim's!'"

"It was the same voice."

"You mean it sounded like it. It didn't come from the same place, though."

"Are you quite suah, Hewwies?" asked Arthur Augustus.

"Yes, I am. But let's get up close again, and see if we can spot anything. There's a bit of a mystery about this, and the clue to it is in the middle of that crowd!"

CHAPTER 3.

The Mystery Solved.

FROM the free kick for off-side followed a determined raid upon the St. Jim's goal.

The three Wallabies, passing from one to another, went down the field in fine style, while the Grammarians cheered themselves hoarse.

Even the crowd behind Mumford forgot their special interest for the moment, and, while they shouted lustily, did not notice that Herries had managed to squeeze in among them.

"Hurrah! Oh, well shot, Gay! Goal! Goal!"

It was even so. Gordon Gay had beaten Fatty all ends up, and the score was even again.

"Strafe St. Jim's! Rotten show! Strafe St. Jim's!" sounded in a lull of the cheering.

Herries slipped out of the crowd.

"They've got something in there," he said. "I can't quite make out what it is, but I could see wires, and a ring at the top. Oh, I know—a bird-cage!"

"Go and tell your grandmother that yarn!" scoffed Digby. "A jolly likely sort of thing, isn't it? Might as well say a frying-pan, or a Dutch-oven, or a step-ladder, or a greenhouse!"

"Or a fat-headed idiot!" snapped Herries. "The thing is a bird-cage, I'll bet, and I can guess what's in it. Do you remember what that ass Carboy said when Lowther told them the yarn about the evasive answer?"

"My hat, though, there's something in that!"

"In the cage, do you mean, idiot? Yes, there is—a parrot!"

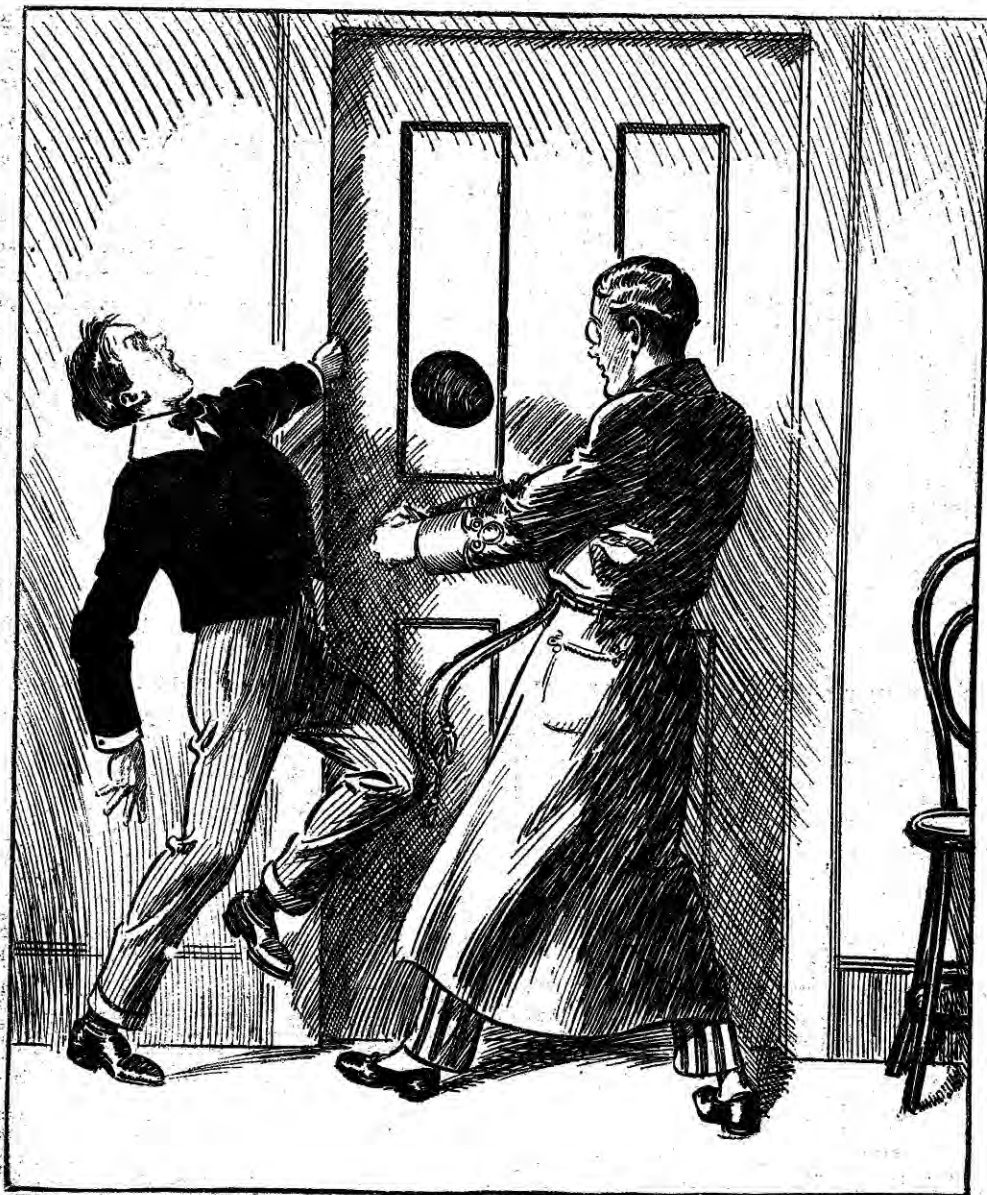
"But—but I weally don't undahstand, deah boys! How is it that the pawwot's voice is exactly like Mumford's?"

"We'll find that out presently. We've got something to be going on with, anyway. Let's shift now, or the parrot-gang will be smelling a rat," replied Digby.

"I say, this isn't going to be any easy thing for our chaps," said Herries. "Those boudners have taken the ball down again! If they once get ahead, they may pull it off, for though old Fatty's no end good, I don't think he's quite up to the form of that ugly Mumford specimen."

"Wonder where they picked him up?" said Digby.

"Oh, I suppose he came here more or less by chance, like any other chap does to any other school," answered Herries. "I'd forgotten all about it till just now, but I remember one of the Woottons saying earlier in the term that they'd got the queerest sort of a new beggar. Scarcely ever said a word, and yet didn't seem exactly potty. They named him 'Mum' because of that, and from his name, I reckon."



"Yarook! Oh you frightful idiot!" howled Grundy. The coconut dropped, and clattered down the corridor.
 "Now, you have weally woke up the house, Gwunday!" said D'Arcy in alarm. (See Chapter 13.)

Now pressure on the St. Jim's goal had been relieved by Figgins, and the forward line brought the ball up in capital style. Tom Merry had passed out to Lowther, who ran along until on the point of being tackled, and then made a fine long pass right across to Blake at inside-right. Blake in turn transferred to Manners, who put all he knew into a sprint, and centred beautifully.

Talbot met the ball with his head, and sent it into goal. But Mumford fisted out.

Tom Merry, running forward, received it on his chest, and, as it rolled down, got his knee to it, and lobbed it over the goalkeeper's head into the net, while Mumford yelled "Off-side!" with all the strength of his lungs.

Evidently the fellow either did not understand the rule, or was one of the sort who are always ready to appeal when their goal is in danger. As Mumford himself had last played the ball before it came to Tom Merry, the St. Jim's leader could not have been off-side.

Grundy's whistle sounded.

"Goal, of course!" said Talbot.

"No," answered Grundy. "It was off-side."

Everybody gasped.

Gordon Gay came up.

"It wasn't off-side, you know, Grundy," he said. "It couldn't have been, under the rules, for the ball came straight from our man's fist to Merry."

"But Merry was off-side!" protested Mumford.

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NEXT
WEDNESDAY:

"THE STUDY WRECKERS!"

"My good ass, if he was you put him on-side! Can't you see that?"

"It's no good arguing about it," said Grundy, in his very largest manner. "I'm ref, and I say off-side. That settles it!"

So it did—in a sense. They argued no more. The free kick was taken, and again the struggle waxed hot, up and down the field, with everybody putting in all he knew, for time was drawing near, and the score was still two all.

Within five minutes of time a bad kick by the Grammarians' left-back went out towards the corner flag. Lowther rushed for the ball, secured it, and, turning, seemed as if he meant to make tracks for his own goal.

But Lowther only ran it ten yards or so, to get into position for a shot.

The shot came—hard and high. The ball dropped within three yards of the goal-line, and as Mumford ran out, Tom Merry, who was on the spot, hooked it calmly past him and into the net.

The whistle blew, and Grundy pointed to the middle.

"Oh, hang it all!" said Tom to Talbot. "I never do go in for off-side tactics knowingly, but I was caught napping that time, and I was clean off-side. When Monty put across I was five yards or more nearer goal than he was, and there wasn't anybody but the goalie in front of me."

"Never mind, old man! It squares us up for the other one. And you can't blame Grundy for this, because nobody appealed."

"I don't half like it, though. It's not a satisfactory kind of winning goal."

But, as it turned out, it was not a winning goal at all. Tom Merry had spoken too soon.

For, in the very last minute of the game, Gordon Gay dribbled brilliantly down the field, tricked Figgins, and bore down upon Kerr, behind whom waited the vigilant Fatty, hands on knees, eyes on ball.

Forward and back met. Kerr's foot slipped on a greasy patch, and he went down before Gay's charge. Fatty ran out, but the ball was patted past him into the net. Three all!

It was the first match the Grammarians had failed to win that term; but they were satisfied with the draw. Beating their old rivals was no easy task, they knew. And, apart from the referee's mistakes, it had been a fine game.

"Strafe St. Jim's! Rotten show! Strafe St. Jim's!"

"See here, Gay," said Tom Merry, walking off the field with the rival skipper, "haven't we had enough of that stuff? I don't know who the ass is, but—"

"It's not an ass. It's a parrot," broke in Gay, grinning.

"It's our giddy mascot," added Carboy.

"Oh, rot about a mascot! I've told you fellows before that it's a mistake to fix your faith on things like that. It only means we shall go down some time or other, because we haven't got Mumford's bird with us, and your superstitious asses don't play up to form!" said Gay.

"So the parrot belongs to Mumford, does it?" asked

Digby, who had just come up with Herries and Arthur Augustus.

"Yes. The chap brought it here with him. There was a bit of a difficulty at first. The Head couldn't quite see it Mumford's way."

"Thought that there was more than enough talk without any brains behind it at your show already, I guess!" said Lowther.

"Oh, I dare say! Or, perhaps, that the other show—I won't mention names, because I don't want to hurt the feelings of you chaps—was the parrot-house. But Mumford refused to be parted from the bird. He's a pig-headed boulder, and he can't be properly argued with, because he won't answer."

"So Dr. Monk let him keep it?" inquired Tom Merry.

"Yes; on condition it shouldn't become a nuisance about the place. It's not that. I can't say the thing was ever popular, until lately, because the only notice it took of any of us, except its owner, was to peck bits out of our fingers if we put them near enough."

"Couldn't you teach it anything?" asked Herries.

"Great Scott, no! You might talk, talk, talk to it for a week, and it would be as dumb as its master."

"And yet somebody's taught it to be rude to St. Jim's," remarked Talbot quietly.

"Oh, yes! But that was Mumford. It was a surprise to everybody when he sprang it on us two or three days ago. It came so nice and pat—just in time for the match!"

"What's Mumford got against St. Jim's?" asked Figgins. "I never heard the chap's name till to-day, and we haven't met him in any of the little affairs we've had with you fellows lately?"

"No. That's not in Mum's line," answered Frank Monk. "When he's bumped he's apt to get nasty. But there was some yarn—I never heard the rights of it—about his being bullied by some of your fellows when he had only been here a day or two."

"It's news to us," said Tom Merry. "And I'm jolly sure it was none of our lot."

"My hat, no! Crooke and some of that crowd, I guess. It don't matter much. Mum's had time to get over it now. But he's a perfect leech for sticking to things, and I don't suppose he'll forget till after he's got even with the fellows who mauled him."

"I don't see how teaching his wretched bird to say things like that is getting even," said Herries hotly.

"Dare say you don't. Not sure that I do myself," replied Gay, in his bluntest manner. "But you've no idea how popular it is with a lot of our fellows. They think such a heap of the parrot that they've even taken to Mumford, who, between you and me, isn't an easy chap to cotton to. Look! There goes the bird's escort!" Mumford had just passed them, the cage winging in his hand, the parrot perched on his shoulder. Around him and the bird was a crowd of twenty or more.

The parrot, a fine green specimen, with a cruel-looking beak, took no notice of any there except his master. They saw him tweak Mumford's ear playfully with his beak.

"If he did that to anybody else," said Wootton minor, "he'd take a bit clean out. But he never hurts Mum."

"And the chap won't go anywhere without him. I think it's because he daren't leave him behind, for fear he should be stolen," said Carboy.

"Do you mean to say you take the giddy bird to your out-matches?" asked Jack Blake.

"We don't. Mumford does."

"Same thing, isn't it, Gay?"

"Not quite. I don't reckon much of the mascot theory myself. I put a good deal more down to Mumford's goalkeeping. But there's this much in it—he wouldn't be a scrap of use if the bird wasn't close handy, because he'd be worrying all the time for fear something might have happened to it. And he is some goalkeeper, isn't he?"

"He is. But he don't know off-side when he sees it," answered Tom Merry.

"Neither does your prize idiot Grundy! Oh, beg pardon, Grundy! I didn't know you were so close handy."

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Grundy scowled. "Your prize idiot Grundy" wasn't a polite thing to say, and Gordon Gay felt a bit ashamed of himself for his slip.

"Hurry up!" he said. "You fellows are to come in and have tea to-night. It's the Head's birthday, and we always have a special spread in Hall for that, so we asked him whether we couldn't invite you in. All that like to come, I mean; not just the team."

If all who would have caught at the chance of sharing that spread had heard, the Grammar School dining-hall might have been inconveniently crowded. But most of the St. Jim's fellows who had been looking on were gone by now, and there only remained the eleven, with Grundy, Digby, D'Arcy, Herries, and some half a dozen others.

Grundy wasn't sure that he ought to accept after what Gay had said. But his chums, Wilkins and Gunn, insisted on going, and Grundy thought he might as well go, too.

After all, there was no need for him to talk to that rude fellow Gay!

CHAPTER 4.

Mumford Gets Angry.

TEA was over, and the visitors had dispersed themselves about the place for half an hour or so before returning to St. Jim's.

Tom Merry and some of the rest had gone to Gay's study to see some special war pictures in the Australian papers. But Digby, D'Arcy, and Herries, to whom Manners and Lowther had now added themselves, went in search of the parrot.

They didn't know which was Mumford's study, and they were not inclined to ask, lest suspicions should be aroused.

But they meant to find out.

And by-and-by they came upon it. From behind an open door, right up in a corner of a corridor, sounded that queer voice.

"Strafe St. Jim's!" it said. "Rotten show! Ha, ha, ha! Pretty Polly! Pre-etty Polly! How's that, umpire?"

"Seems its vocabulary isn't so limited as we were given to understand," remarked Lowther.

"Been fed with dicks, perhaps, like you," said Digby.

"Weally, Dig, anybody might imagine that you were a Digghah Indian!" said D'Arcy. "What is theah in 'vocabulary' that is in the vewy least difficult of comprehension? I considah it a pitay that Lowthah, who weally has more than a nodding acquaintance with the tongue that Shakespiah wrote, should descend, as he so frequently does, to the level of vulgah slang!"

"I eat tongue, when I can get it," answered Digby. "And I talk with it. And the doctor looks at it sometimes. But as for writing it, I don't believe Shakespeare or any other ass could!"

"Great Scott!" said the parrot.

"There's your answer, Dig," said Lowther, grinning.

"Don't see it."

"Scott could. Twig?"

"Oh, rats! I say, this is no end of a parrot, though, isn't it?"

"Rats!" said the parrot. "Long-tailed rats! How's your poor feet? Go it, you cripples! What a face! My word, what a face!"

The parrot had cocked his head on one side in the most knowing way, and seemed to be looking straight at Arthur Augustus as he spoke.

Gussy flushed, and, forgetting that it was a mere bird that was responsible for the insult, answered hotly:

"I am not awaah that theah is anything the mattah with my face!"

"Go hon with you!" said the parrot. "Rats! Long-tailed rats! Strafe St. Jim's! Rotten show! Do you ever wash the back of your neck? If not, why not?"

He swung himself to and fro in his ring as he talked, ruffled his feathers, and seemed to be enjoying himself greatly.

"Shut the door, Dig," said Herries. "I should like to have a conversation with this chap."

Digby not only shut the door, but put a chair under the knob to prevent its being opened from the outside.

If Mumford was responsible for the condition of that room, Mumford was a very untidy fellow. The parrot's cage was clean. Nothing else was. Books, scraps of paper, dirty boots, and crumbs littered the floor.

Manners looked inside several of the books. They all had Mumford's name scrawled in them, and there was nothing to indicate any joint tenancy of the study. It was a very small and dark one, right up in a corner, with a view of a blank wall, and a great water-butt close under the window.

As a matter of fact, Mumford had this study to himself. It had been empty for some time. No one else wanted it, and, until his prowess in goal had made him more popular, any of the rest would have objected strongly to pig in with its occupant. No one was keen even now.

Lowther approached his right forefinger to the bars of the cage. Then he snatched it away hurriedly, and put it to his mouth.

"Hang the bird!" he mumbled, sucking it. "The thing's got a beak like—"

"Strafe St. Jim's!" croaked the parrot.

"He might be a bit friendlier if we fed him," said Digby, and produced from his pocket a bar of chocolate.

Digby put this near the cage. The parrot cocked a knowing eye at it, then made a sudden peck—but not at the chocolate!

"Owww!" yelled Dig. "Yaroooh! Oh, you beast! He's taken a piece right out of my finger!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Manners. "You ought to have had more sense!"

"I'll wring the beast's neck!" mumbled Digby.

"Strafe St. Jim's! Pretty Polly! Rotten show! How's your poor feet!" rattled away the parrot.

"Gweat Scott!" said Arthur Augustus. "I—"

"Great Scott!" said the parrot, very distinctly, as if correcting him.

"Look at the beggar!" remarked Herries. "Hasn't he got a wicked eye? I wish he belonged to me."

"Strafe St. Jim's! Rotten show!" said the parrot, as if to imply that he could not think of belonging to anyone connected with such a very low-class establishment.

"Look heah, deah boys, why shouldn't we bag him?" suggested Arthur Augustus. "We owe that boundah Mumford one for teaching him to be so wude, don't cherknow."

"I seem to remember that there are laws against that sort of thing," remarked Lowther, still sucking at his finger.

"Oh, wats! I don't mean to steal the brute; I only mean to collah him and make Mumford sit up."

The door-knob turned. Then came a fierce push at the door.

"Here comes Charley! Charley is my darling!" said the parrot.

"Charley" was Mumford, beyond all question. His voice was heard now, though it was so like the parrot's that one could not easily distinguish between them.

"Who's in there? What have you fastened the door for? This is my study!"

"The silent Mumford," said Lowther, "appears to be able to find words when it suits him."

"I wathah thought 'off-side' was the only thing he could say," remarked Arthur Augustus.

"Go away!" shouted Herries. "We don't want you!"

"You touch my parrot, that's all, and I'll—"

"Oh, hang your parrot! The beast is quite capable of taking care of itself. It's taken about an ounce of flesh out of one of my fingers!" broke in Lowther.

"Jolly good job! I wish he'd take the nose off your face!"

"Mumford," observed Lowther, "is evidently a student of the old nursery rhymes—a class of literature which merits more attention than it receives. You know the one I mean, you fellows?"

"The maid was in the garden, hanging out the clothes;—Up came a blackbird, and pecked off her nose."

"Are you going to let me in?" howled Mumford.

"We'll think about it, and let you know in a day or two," answered Manners, playing with the catch of the cage door.

"Come back in half an hour or so and we'll tell you," added Lowther.

Mumford flung himself against the door with all his weight and force. The back of the chair broke, and the seat, pushed forward, struck Manners behind the knees. It startled him so that he pressed the catch hard. The cage door flew open, and the parrot stepped out.

Arthur Augustus made a grab at him. The parrot pecked. Arthur Augustus yelled, and began to suck his knuckles.

Mumford plunged in, his heavy face red with fury, his eyes blazing. He snatched up the chair, and brought it down upon the head of Manners, who tumbled over, taking the cage with him.

Only the fact that the contents of the parrot's seed-can had been shot into his mouth prevented Manners from saying things. He did try to say them, but the result was chiefly splutter.

The new-comer seemed to have exhausted his flow of speech. He gave Manners one glance, then lifted the chair again, and bashed it upon Herries.

"Here, stop that, you idiot!" cried the second victim of his fury.

"Just you leave my parrot alone, will you?"

"We're not touching your silly parrot, you madman!" roared Digby. "Owww! Yaroooo! Stop it! I say— Oh!"

Dig had got it now. Mumford must have been pretty powerful. He wielded his awkward weapon as if it were a mere featherweight. But it did not feel at all like that when it came down.

Lowther and D'Arcy made a rush at him.

Mumford struck right and left, knocked the swell of the Fourth fairly off his feet, and broke the chair on Lowther's head.

"Strafe St. Jim's! Rotten show! Strafe St. Jim's!" cried the parrot. "Charley is my darling! Hallo, Charley!"

Charley didn't look like anybody's darling as he went down before the combined assault of the five. Digby and Manners sat upon him. His eyes rolled furiously, and he fairly gnashed his teeth, but he would not cry for mercy.

"The fellow's right off his rocker!" said Lowther. "Stark mad!"

"Mad as a hatter! Mad as a March hare! Mad as a— Rotten show! Strafe St. Jim's!" said the parrot.

"Will you go away if we let you up?" asked Herries. "We weren't hurting the bird. We're not that sort."

"On the contrary, it hurt us," said Lowther, showing a bleeding finger.

"Serve you jolly well right!" growled the parrot's master.

Mumford spoke as if speaking hurt him. They thought they had never met so sour a specimen. Compared with him, Crooke or Grundy might be considered quite civil and pleasant.

Now footsteps were heard in the corridor, and Gordon Gay, Frank Monk, Tom Merry, Blake, and Talbot appeared.

"You fellows appear to have been enjoying yourselves," remarked Talbot, surveying the scene.

"Better let that chap get up, you two, or he may have a fit," said Gay.

Dig and Manners got up in a hurry.

"Does he have fits?" asked Manners.

"Not that I know of," replied the Grammarian leader.

"But he looks as if he might have, doesn't he? What was it all about?"

"Better ask him!" replied Lowther.

"No giddy good! When he's like that he won't answer questions. Did you meddle with the parrot?"

"Not really. We heard the thing, and came in here to have a look at it," explained Herries. "It pecked three chaps, vicious brute! Don't matter much, of course, as I wasn't one of them! But you'd better hear the whole yarn. Then Manners let the thing out, and Mumford rushed in and tried to slaughter us all."

"One to five! We shall have to warn him against bullying you poor kids!" said Monk, with a touch of sarcasm.

"He picked up that chair and smashed it on Monty's head," retorted Manners crossly.

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"Mustn't do that sort of thing, Mum," said Gay, shaking his head. "Queer chaps, these. They don't like playfulness. Besides, they're visitors. Did you forget that?"

Mumford made no answer. The parrot was on his shoulder now, and he looked at the bird as though he cared for nothing in the world but that.

"Rotten show! Strafe St. Jim's!" said the parrot.

It was almost as though the bird were answering Mumford's unspoken thoughts.

"Come along, you fellows!" said Gay. "Better leave him to it."

They went, fingering various bumps and bruises.

"The chap's a regular Hun!" said Digby.

"A madman—that's what he is!" corrected Lowther.

"Weally, Gay, I think he ought to be made to apologise for his wudeness and bwutality!" chipped in Arthur Augustus.

"If we had him at our show, we'd teach him!" remarked Manners.

"Well, I dunno," said Herries. "He seems fond of the parrot, anyway!"

"The parrot's worse than he is!" cried Digby.

"They're a pair," Tom Merry said. "Come along, you chaps! We'll have to hustle, or we'll be late for call-over!"

CHAPTER 5.

Plans to Get Even.

"PASS the cake, Dig," said Jack Blako. "I say, you fellows are a cheerful lot to-day, and to mistake! Anything in particular happened to account for the wherefore of the why?"

"Oh, don't talk rot!" said Digby, rather morosely.

He had a finger bound up, and D'Arcy's right-hand second knuckle was ornamented with a bit of black sticking-plaster. Each had a bump on his forehead also, and Herries possessed a right ear which did not match his left, being at least twice as big.

Mumford and his parrot had done fairly extensive damage between them.

"What riles me," said Herries thoughtfully, "is that those Grammarian bounders seem to think it's all right. Gay took it as coolly as a cucumber. The only thing he was worried about was whether Mumford wouldn't have a fit. I'd give the rotter fits!"

"Still grouching about that?" inquired Blake. "I thought you'd forgotten the whole bimeby by this time. Of course, it was a bit of a take-down for fire of you to be licked like that by one Grammar School lout, but—"

"Shurrup!" cried Digby hotly.

"Wing off, Blake, or I shall refuse to regard you as a friend!" said Arthur Augustus.

"Right-ho! I don't want to rub it in, I'm sure! I won't say anything about your letting St. Jim's down."

"How did we let St. Jim's down, I'd like to know?" howled Herries.

"It wasn't quite the cheese to go poking about in a chap's study when he wasn't there, I should say. And then—"

"Do you want a thick ear, Blake?"

"If you can give me one, Herries! I won't ask you exactly the same question. But you do want another?"

"Children, children," said the voice of Tom Merry at the door, "remember it's Sunday!"

"Oh, come in, you fellows!" said Blake. "I want protection! They're all down on me because I—"

"Because you are a wotten ass, Blake, and refuse to see things in a pwopah light! Manners and Lowthah will agree, I am suah, if Tom Mewwy does not."

When the matter in dispute was explained, it appeared that Manners and Lowther did agree. They were every bit as sore as Digby, Herries, and D'Arcy.

"Here's a chap whose blessed name we didn't know till yesterday goes lamming into us with a chair!" said Manners, feeling the bump with which Mumford had ornamented his forehead.

"And teaches his parrot to say, 'Strafe St. Jim's! Rotten show!'" added Herries.

"And sets about strafing as much of St. Jim's as he

can get near himself instead of leaving the whole bizney to the parrot," put in Blake. "Glad I wasn't there, aren't you, Merry?"

"Not particularly! But I'm glad I wasn't."

"That's what I meant, duffer!"

"Right-ho, idiot! I thought you were calling upon me to be joyful that you hadn't got slogged."

"We've got to get our own back," said Digby.

"Heah, heah, Dig!"

"What have you lost?" asked Blake. "As far as I can see, you've a big balance. There's a bit of skin gone here and there, but the bumps Mumford handed round so freely more than make up for that. Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, dwy up, Blake! Youah wretched cackle makes a fellow feel positively ill!"

"Mumford's got to be punished," Digby said doggedly.

"Why not use the German word? The language isn't popular just now," said Tom Merry; "but, considering the parrot's watchword, I think—"

"Wing off! You are every bit as bad as Blake! I quite agree with Dig. Mumford must be punished in an exemplary mannah. The only question is how to do it!"

"Oh, if that's all—"

"Will you wing off, Tom Merry? We do not wequiah youah wotten chaff! This is a sewious mattah, and funny cackle is quite of the walls."

"There's only one way," said Manners.

"What's that, old man?"

"Bone his giddy parrot! I don't mean we should keep the thing altogether, and, of course, I don't mean we should do it any harm; but collar it, and let him hunt for it!"

"The fellow would go mad!" objected Tom Merry.

"Don't see how he could be any madder than he is," answered Herries. "A bigger lunatic I never saw. Of course, he's fond of the bird. But if he wasn't, there would be nothing in the notion."

"It would be rather a happy idea to get hold of it, keep it for a week or two, and teach it to spout, 'Down with the Grammarians!' or some tripe of that sort," said Lowther.

"Dare say it would," Tom Merry answered. "But I don't see who's going to teach it. I don't suppose the thing would learn from anybody but Mudhead, or whatever the sulky boulder's name is."

"Oh, I dunno! I guess I could teach him," said Herries.

"P'raps—p'raps not! Anyway, you can't teach him unless you can get hold of him, and it don't strike me that's going to be exactly an easy one. Have you got any scheme?"

"They had not. But they were all sure that one could be thought out."

"While they were thinking it out, Tom Merry absent-mindedly cut himself a big hunk of cake."

"Tea in No. 1 Study, which the Terrible Three shared, had not been a very lavish meal that day."

"He thrust the cake-dish across to Lowther, who was not so occupied with plans that he had no time for eating. Lowther, in the kindness of his heart, cut off a bounteous portion for Manners also."

"The window of Mum's study is easy enough to get at," said Herries. "It's right up in the corner near the kitchen premises. There's a big water-butt just under it. Anybody could get on the top of that and reach the ledge."

"My hat, yes! And the wall's low there!" said Digby. "That part's shut off from the playground by a gate."

"Oh, it's as easy as shelling peas!" put in Manners, talking with his mouth full.

"It sounds easy enough," remarked Tom Merry, suffering from absence of mind again, and cutting another slice of cake."

"Let me have the leadship of the attack, and I will guarantee that it shall be cawwed through without a single hitch," said Arthur Augustus. "What is needed is a leadwh with bwains. Given that, the west is as easy—"

"As the east!" put in Lowther. "Not to mention the north and the south. And if the west is as easy as the east, is the east as wheezy as the west? Conundrum,

home-made—no prize for an answer, because there isn't any answer!"

"I should think this cake's home-made," said Manners, who had also helped himself to a second sample. "It's jolly good, anyway!"

"Eh? Oh, you bouncers!" cried Blake. "If these three haven't wolfed all the cake, you chaps!"

"Why, we thought you had finished," protested Tom Merry. "And we knew it could only be forgetfulness that kept you from offering it to us. Yes, it's a first-rate cake, Manners!"

"You mean it was," said Blake, with an accent on the verb. "Never mind! It belonged to Herries, really! Part of a hamper from home."

"Oh, hang the cake!" Herries said. "You chaps are welcome, I'm sure. Look here, Merry, are you in this scheme?"

"On the whole—yes! I don't know that I approve of it entirely. If it was only Mumchance, or whatever his silly name is, I'd say it wasn't worth while. But the rest think they scored over us no end, and they reckon that absurd bird a mascot, so I really think it wouldn't be a bad idea to collar it—if possible."

"Are you on, Blake?"

"Oh, I suppose so! If I don't come in, you'll muddle the whole show up for want of brains!"

"Excuse me, Blake, but I cannot dweam of allowing you to adopt that tone! You are entirely wrong in your calculations. While you have been wotting I have been elaborating my plans, and all I have to say is that if they are cawwed out with a modicum of intelligence on the part of those to whom the inferior woles are allotted—"

"And you reckon Merry and I are going to take the inferior roles? Yes—I think not!" snapped Blake.

CHAPTER 6.

First in the Field.

"I KNOW the rule as well as you do, you idiot!" growled Grundy.

Grundy was feeling badly fed-up with the things people had been saying about his refereeing.

It seemed to Grundy as though some of the fellows in the Shell and Fourth would not talk about anything else. And Grundy would have preferred almost any other topic of conversation.

Not that Grundy had yet admitted having made any mistakes. But everybody else seemed sure he had, and it had begun to dawn upon him that when both sides were agreed upon a matter of that sort, there might be something in it.

"Yes," answered Clifton Dane. "About the same way as Reilly knows the Pons Asinorum. He's learned it off by heart, but he don't begin to understand it."

"Oh, rot! Footer isn't Euclid."

"My hat! Grundy's brain-box is coming on no end!" said Kangaroo. "He knows the Pons Asinorum is Euclid!"

"Did you suppose I thought it was algebra, fathead? I'll bet I know more Euclid than you do, and a heap more about footer!"

"That goal Tom Merry got from Figgins' pass was a rank off-side one," said Glyn. "I'll show you. When Figg passed he was—"

"Oh, ring off! If Merry was off-side, it was his fault, and he ought to be jolly well ashamed of himself," answered Grundy.

"That don't clear the referee. Besides, Merry wasn't off-side until—"

"You said he was just now. Why can't you stick to one yarn?"

"Oh, you ass! A fellow may be on-side one minute, and off-side the next."

"Yes, that's just where it is. And you're talking about the wrong minute!"

"Then the other time," said Reilly. "That was when Tom Merry got the ball on his knee, and put it clean over Mumford's head, and this prize-packet specimen of a referee was after givin' it off-side!"

"So it was, chump!" roared Grundy. "Merry was

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right up in goal, with no one but that chap in front of him."

"But the ball came straight from Mumford's fist, Satchel!"

"What difference does that make, you idiot?"

The roar of laughter that followed that question made Grundy more furious than ever. To the rest it was evident that Grundy did not understand the rule. But he still thought he did, though he had begun now to have just a little doubt about it.

"If I did make a mistake or two," Grundy growled, "though, mind you, I'm not admitting I made any, it was all the fault of that beastly parrot. My hat, the chap who taught it those things ought to be jolly well lynched!"

"Isn't he your brother?" asked Kerruish.

"My brother? What beastly rot are you talking, you idiot? What made you think he was my brother?"

"You're so much like him!" answered the boy from the Isle of Man.

"Like that chap? Why, the boulder's ugly enough to be put in a museum!" roared Grundy.

"Yes," replied Kerruish, "I noticed that."

"Well, then, what on earth are you saying he's like me for?"

Another roar of laughter followed. A little joke went a long way when it was against Grundy.

"That parrot of his is the giddy limit," remarked Bernard Glyn.

"If a thing like that had happened to us at Redclyffe, where I used to be—"

"Place you got sacked from for kicking a prefect's shins, Grundy?" put in Kangaroo.

"Rats to you! It wasn't anything of the sort. I gave a prefect a jolly good hiding in a fair stand-up fight, and if the chaps here don't look out, something of the same sort may happen again!"

"Sure, I'll be after warning Kildare!" said Reilly.

"It's not Kildare I'm thinking about. He's not really a bad sort."

"You were telling us how you and the other heroes at Redclyffe would have lynched Mumford," said Clifton Dane.

"There weren't any other heroes at Redclyffe," growled Grundy.

"Ah, how lonely you must have felt!" remarked Glyn.

"Oh, rot! And I didn't say we should have lynched him, either. But we'd have collared his giddy parrot."

"I believe some of the chaps mean to do that," said Mellish.

Nobody else present had yet heard anything about the scheme evolved by the Terrible Three and the fellows in No. 6 Study, so Mellish became the centre of interest at once, although more than one there had a shrewd suspicion that if Mellish knew more than other fellows, it was because he had found out things in his old mean way.

Percy Mellish was the sneak of the Fourth. He had a nasty habit of listening at keyholes or behind doors. Of late he had really been trying to go straighter, but he did not find it easy, and now and then there was a backsliding.

"Who?" asked Kangaroo.

"I say, Mellish, who told you?" demanded Dane.

Mellish shuffled his feet and flushed.

"I—I— Oh, I happened to hear somebody say something about it," he answered.

"Lowther and Digby and D'Arcy all had a taste of the parrot's beak," said Lumley-Lumley. "And Mumford bashed all three of them, and Manners and Herries too, with a chair. It was a regular slaughter, they say."

"It would be some of them, then," remarked Reilly, "but I don't think they'd be after tellin' Mellish."

"I didn't say they told me. I happened to hear, that was all," protested Mellish.

"Some of these days, when you're happening to hear, there'll be a squirt on the other side of the keyhole, and then you'll get one ear washed, anyway!" said Kangaroo meaningly.

"Oh, you dry up! Who says I don't wash my ears?" whined Mellish.

"Of course he does!" put in Glyn. "It's only reasonable that a workman should keep his tools clean."

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Mellish had had enough. He slunk off.

But the news he had told seemed to stir up Grundy.

"My hat, I'm not going to have those fellows get in ahead of me," he said. "I'll have that rotten parrot before they do, you bet! Who's game to help me?"

No one there, it appeared. Somehow they did not seem to care about Grundy's leadership.

"Oh, all serene! I can do without you. But see here, don't go letting on about it to Merry and that crowd, will you?"

The half-score or so present promised that they wouldn't. Grundy looked them over.

"I can take your words for it, I know, now Mellish has gone!" he said in his most magnificent way.

"If you'll write that out and sign it, we'll get it framed," answered Dane.

"What for?"

"Oh, a testimonial from George Alfred Grundy. Why, the thing would be an heirloom! Some day, when you're Commander-in-Chief or Prime Minister, my grandkids will be no end proud of it!"

"Rot!" said Grundy; and he went to look for Wilkins and Gunn.

Wilkins and Gunn were his study-mates, and were always ready to follow his lead. They honestly liked Grundy, too—a sure proof that, for all his brag and bluster, the fellow had his good points, for Wilkins and Gunn were not spongers, but decent, honest fellows enough.

Their consent was given at once.

"We'll have to be first in the field," said Grundy.

"When's the best chance, do you think?"

"If it stops raining, I should say after classes this afternoon," answered Gunn.

There had been such a deluge of rain that forenoon—the Monday after the match—that football had been quite out of the question.

"Why? We can't do it while they're all about the place."

"But they won't be," answered Wilkins. "They won't have had any footer practice this morning, any more than we have, and they're sure to put in half an hour or so before it gets too dark to see. They're no end keen just now."

"All right!" said Grundy. "We'll go along then."

CHAPTER 7. Rival Expeditions.

IT chanced that the seven who were also on the quest of the parrot had chosen that afternoon for an attempt to get possession of it.

Grundy and his chums started first, the weather having cleared up. But they were only a few minutes ahead of the seven.

At this season of the year the daylight left when classes were over was not much. Already some of the St. Jim's windows showed lights; but from the playing fields came the shouting of many voices, and the lusty thud of boot against ball. There could be little doubt but that the Grammarians would also be at footer practice.

"What are we going to do with the giddy bird when we've got it?" asked Tom Merry.

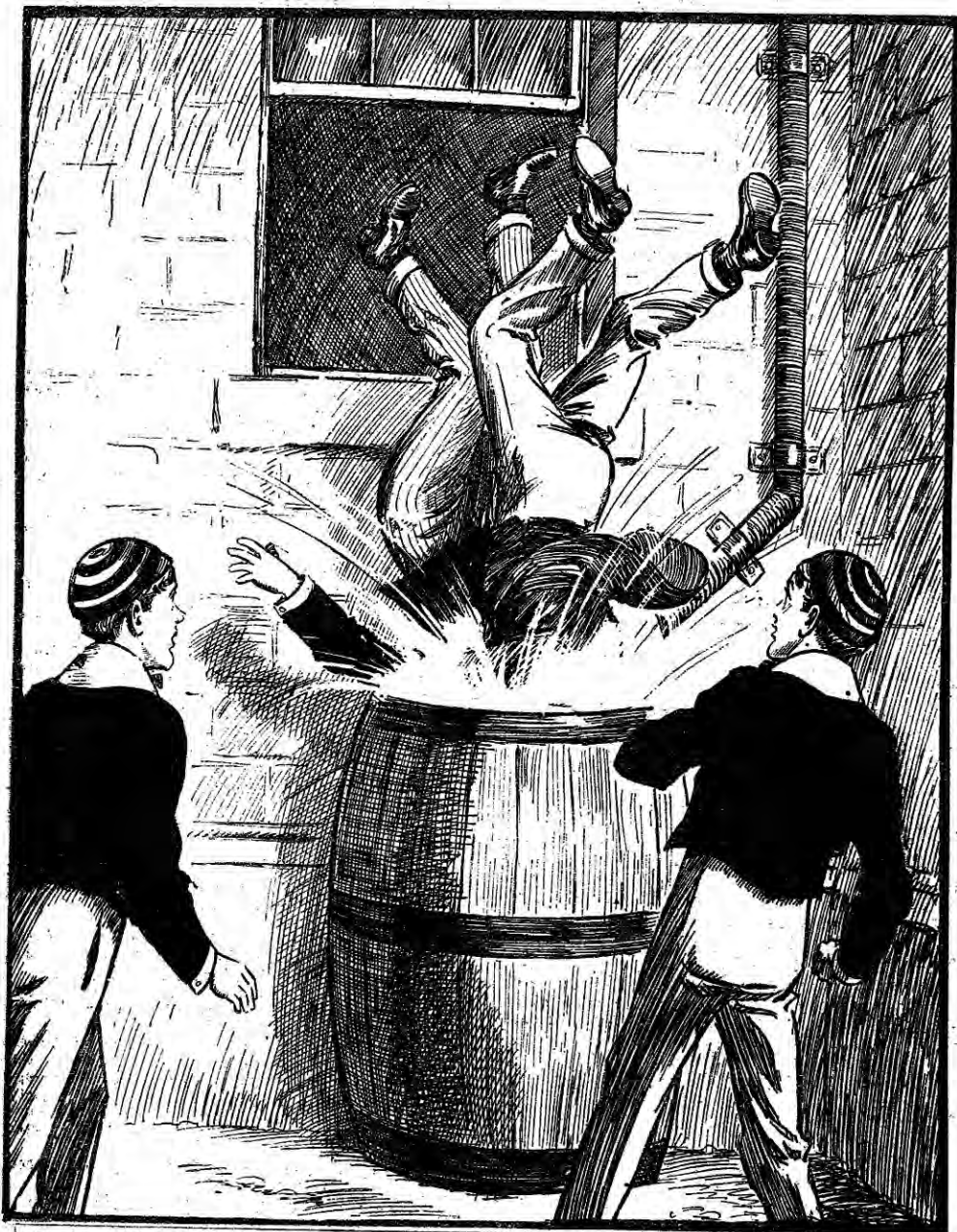
"Oh, that's an easy one!" answered Blake. "We'll have the thing in our den. We won't bother you chaps with it."

"Rats!" said Manners. "You're not going to bag it in that cool way. It's as much ours as it is yours."

"I was under the delusion that it belongs to Mumpface, or Mudhead, or whatever they call the fellow," remarked Lowther.

"That's all right," replied Herries, with a grin. "It isn't going to much longer. At least, he'll have it back some time, of course."

"I really think that I could instruct the bird better than any of you Fourth-Form kids," said Lowther. "You disregard all the principles of elocution. Now, in the case of this parrot the personality of the instructor is evidently a matter of importance. At present the creature talks in the very grating tones of that objection-



Grundy and Mumford fell out of the window locked in each other's embrace. Their heads smote the lid of the water-butt, which Grundy must have partly dislodged in making his entry, for now it tumbled off, coming down with a whack upon the foot of Wilkins. "Ow-ow-ow!" howled Wilkins, while Grundy and Mumford splashed into four feet of water, heads foremost. (See Chapter 7.)

able person Mumhead, alias Mudface, alias Mumchance. If it is allowed to find a temporary abiding-place in No. 6, it may learn to talk with a lisp, like— But I will refrain from mentioning names, lest I give offence—

"What licks me is where old Lowther digs it all up," said Digby meditatively. "I guess he mugs up dicks in the holidays. Catch me, that's all!"

"It is tolerably evident," remarked Lowther blandly, "that neither in the holidays nor at any other time does our friend Digby pursue lexicographical studies."

"I wathah imagined we were talking about the pawwot," said Arthur Augustus.

"Ah, let us return to our muttons!"

"Ass! A parrot ain't a sheep!"

"No, Digby, no! Most assuredly a parrot is not a

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NEXT
WEDNESDAY:

"THE STUDY WRECKERS!"

sheep. By the way, it was goats Robinson Crusoe kept, not sheep, I think."

"What in the giddy world has Robinson Crusoe got to do with it?" asked Herries.

"He had a parrot. He also had a man Friday. But this is Monday. I trust Mumfhead, alias—oh, never mind that!—has no objection to having his parrot bagged on Monday. I will not say boned, because if you boned the parrot the bird's feelings might be hurt—to say nothing of its gramophone works being deranged, which is quite possible."

"Great Scott! There's one thing that jolly well isn't possible, and that is to make you talk sense," said Blake.

"Who's that ahead?" asked Manners.

"Has your eyesight failed you, old man?" returned Lowther. "Who should it be but the great Grundy, the faithful Wilkins, and the loyal Gunn?"

"Now, I vopdah what they are affah?" said the swell of the Fourth.

"They're not likely to be up to our game, anyway," answered Tom Merry.

But there, of course, Tom Merry was wrong.

A dim suspicion of this began to creep into his mind when he saw the three steal round to the back of the Grammar School. But even then he thought it more likely that their errand was a different one. It scarcely seemed possible that the notion of kidnapping the parrot should have occurred to Grundy, who had not, as far as they knew, any special feeling against either the bird or its master.

"My hat, though, it looks as if old Grundy really was up to the same game as us!" said Digby.

"Shouldn't think he can be," answered Tom Merry. "But we'll soon see. Don't let those three twig us, that's all."

It was fast growing dark, though football was still in full swing in the Grammar School field.

The three ahead moved cautiously through the twilight. The seven behind moved more cautiously still, keeping in the gloom of the wall.

"They are!" whispered Herries.

It was now evident to all that they had been forestalled in the adventure.

"We can't do anything," said Tom Merry. "If we try to stop them, and kick up a blessed row, we'll have all the Grammarians down on us in half a tick."

"They'll never bring it off," answered Jack Blake. "Trust old Grundy for mucking up anything. Let 'em try. We'll wait, and see how they get on, and it may happen that we get a chance to waltz in and collar the parrot while they're playing games with Mudhead and the rest."

Wilkins made a back for Grundy, and that hero disappeared over the low wall. Then Gunn followed him, and, leaning over, helped Wilkins to scramble up.

"A jolly fine row they're making," said Herries, with a snort of contempt. "They'll rouse the whole place in about two ticks."

But no alarm followed. The seven crept up closer. Standing back a bit from the wall, they saw Grundy mount to the top of the big water-butt below the window.

"Look here, you fellows," said Tom Merry, "what's the use of climbing walls when the gate's open, and we can walk in just as if it was our own show?"

"Rot! We shall have the Grammarians on us at once!" returned Manners.

"Not jolly well likely! If they twig us we've just come along to ask if they'd mind playing the return on our ground next Saturday—see? We haven't a match then. And after the draw last week they'll never smell a rat. It's the most natural thing in the world that we should want to find out as soon as possible whether we can lick them."

"Good egg!" said Herries approvingly.

"Now and then, Tommy," remarked Lowther, "something remotely resembling common-sense gets into that curly noddle of yours."

"Kim on!" said Blake.

They went. They sauntered through the gates, hands in pockets, faces as innocent as the faces of the cherubim. No one showed up in the dusk of the quad. There was a light in the detention-room, and a few other windows.

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were also lighted. But the fellows on the football-field were still playing on in the dusk.

Silently and cautiously Tom Merry opened the gate which shut off the playground from the little court which the window of Mumford's study overlooked.

It was darker here. Wilkins and Gunn were barely to be distinguished at a distance of three yards. But Grundy could be seen more plainly, for he was on top of the water-butt.

Grundy had just got the window open. Next moment he disappeared into the room.

"Here you are, you chaps!" he said, and handed out an object that the watchers knew must be the parrot's cage, though they might not have recognised it as such had they known nothing about it beforehand.

Wilkins, hanging on to the water-butt, received it, and passed it on to Gunn.

Then came a howl of rage.

Mumford, bursting into the room like a tornado, fairly hurled himself at Grundy.

They fell out of the window locked in each other's embrace. Their heads smote the lid of the water-butt. Grundy must have partly dislodged that lid in making his entry. For now it tumbled off, coming down with a whack upon the foot of Wilkins.

"Ow-w-w!" howled Wilkins.

Grundy and Mumford splashed into four feet of water, heads foremost.

The situation was not without its danger. But Tom Merry kept quite cool.

Gunn put down the cage in his haste to help his leader. Tom snatched it up, and handed it to the fellow nearest, who happened to be Herries.

"Clear off with it, two of you!" he whispered. "We'll get those idiots out!"

Herries and Lowther bolted with the cage.

Tom Merry and Jack Blake went to the help of Wilkins and Gunn. They said nothing, and the other two were altogether too flustered to recognise them in the gloom.

Mumford came up first, and it really seemed as though he meant to get his enemy drowned. He struggled hard to prevent the others helping Grundy out, and did not cease to struggle till Tom Merry, losing patience, gave him a right and left that sent him reeling into a corner. "Ow-w-w! I'll pay you out for this! I'll—I'll—"

They yanked Grundy out.

Grundy was little the worse—except in temper. The whole business had occupied far less time than it takes in the telling—a matter of twenty seconds perhaps. One does not drown in twenty seconds.

"Oh, the rotter! Yaroooh! Ow-wow! Oh, lemme-getathim!" spluttered Grundy.

Mumford staggered forward, and they closed again.

Tom Merry and the remnant of his band made themselves scarce, still unrecognised by the other three from St. Jim's.

"Good egg! Those two have cleared!" said Tom.

"Where's my parrot?" howled Mumford.

"Oh, crumbe, we're caught!" said Manners. "Here comes a crowd of the Grammarians!"

"Rats! We're not caught—as long as they haven't seen those two. We're here to talk about a match on Saturday—see?"

"What, with that sweet row going on?" returned Blake. "It's a trifle too thin, Merry!"

"Well, they haven't spotted us yet; but they've heard the row. Stand back against the wall, and keep still!"

The five drew up under the nearest wall. Past them surged the Grammarians, led by Gordon Gay and Frank Monk.

"Where's my parrot? You've stolen it, you rotters!" Mumford howled.

"Hang your beastly parrot! Take that! You tried to drown me, you sweep!" roared Grundy.

"Hold on to him, Mum! We're coming!" yelled Frank Monk.

"This is where we do a bunk, before the rest come along!" said Tom Merry.

"We can't leave—"

"Rats, Blake! We can't help them, and I'm not going to sacrifice myself for Grundy, you bet! Let them once get outside, and we'll stroll up by accident, and cover

their retreat, if you like. But if we pile in here, the gates will be closed before we know where we are, and then—"

"Right-ho! Kim on!" said Blake.

They bolted, only just in time. Two seconds later, and they would have run fairly into the arms of another contingent of the Grammarians.

Tom Merry gave the curlew call that all his chums knew. It was answered from down the road towards St. Jim's.

Inside the Grammar School playground there was wild confusion. The unlucky trio of adventurers had tried to bolt; but Mumford hung on to Grundy like a bulldog, and Wilkins and Gunn would not desert their chief.

They were surrounded.

"Who are the rotters?"

"What are they up to?"

"I say, Mum, what's all this row about your parrot?"

"They've stolen it, the sweeps!" howled Mumford.

"It's that chap Grundy, for one!" said Frank Monk.

"My hat! He seems a trifle wet!" remarked Gordon Gay.

"So would you be wet if you'd been flung head-first into a water-butt by a lunatic, chump!" yelled Grundy. "Why don't you lock the maniac up? Why don't you—"

"Where's my parrot? Let me get at him! Oh, find my parrot, somebody! They've stolen it, and I can't see it anywhere!"

Mumford really did seem a little off his rocker.

They searched for the parrot. The three were held up meantime. Around them had gathered a crowd that made any attempt to break through predominate to failure.

"Where is the thing, Wilky?" asked Grundy.

"Oh, my hat! I dunno! I passed it to Gunn!"

"And I put it on the ground when you tumbled in, to go and help you!" said Gunn.

"It must have flown away," suggested Carboy.

"Idiot!" snapped Grundy. "It was in the cage!"

"Oh, you were stealing the cage, too, then?" remarked Gordon Gay. "You're pretty beauties, aren't you? I guess you'll get hooped out of St. Jim's for this!"

"The thing must be there!" said Monk. "Can't you find it, you fellows?"

"No. There isn't a sign of it—not a giddy feather!" replied Wootton minor.

"Where's my parrot? I want my parrot!" howled Mumford.

"Oh, dry up, do! What's the sense of making all that row? You're like a kid of six!" said Gay irritably.

"I don't care what I'm like! I don't care about anything, but my parrot! I'll kill those cads if they've stolen it!"

"Come and kill me for a start!" growled Grundy.

But the rest would not let Mumford get at him. The fellow was scarcely safe in this mood.

"Look here!" said Gunn. "Which of you chaps came and helped to get those two out?"

"Out of where?" asked Monk.

"Out of the butt, of course!"

"None of us. We've only just come from footer."

"But there were some of you there," persisted Gunn. "Anyway, two chaps helped, besides us. It was too dark to see who they were, and they didn't say a word. They must have sneaked off with the cage."

It was not impossible. Everybody hadn't been at footer, and there were fellows among the Grammarians likely enough to seize such a chance to play a trick on Mumford.

"The thing's on the premises somewhere, of course!" said Grundy, in his large way. He seemed to think that statement relieved him of all responsibility in the matter. "Now we'll go!"

"Rats!" retorted Gordon Gay grimly. "You'll go all serene, but not quite in the way you think. Frogs'-march them, you fellows!"

In an instant the three were seized, and frogs'-marched out of the playground. Grundy squirmed and raved, but Wilkins and Gunn took it coolly.

"Drop them on the grass!" ordered Gay.

There was not much grass, but it was a trifle softer than the road.

"There's the first bell for tea!" said Carboy. "Come along, you chaps!"

CHAPTER 8.

The Parrot's Tutors.

DOWN the road Herries and Lowther awaited the other five.

"Got it?" asked Digby eagerly, as they came up.

"Oh, we've got it all serene!" answered Herries. "What do you suppose?"

"May I inquire—not that it really matters much, except from the large humanitarian point of view—whether Grundy and Mumhead were drowned?" said Lowther.

"My hat, no! We had them out in about two ticks!"

"They were wet, though!" Digby said.

"That, Dig, is a feature usually associated with emergence from the water."

"Oh, dry up, you ass! See here! Are you sure the giddy parrot's in the cage? Has it spoken?"

"Strafe St. Jim's! Rotten show!" said the parrot in the grating tones that were so like Mumford's.

There was a cloth over the cage, so disposed that the ring at the top, by which Herries carried it, passed through a hole in it.

"Did they twig you fellows?" asked Herries.

"What, Grammarians? Not likely! We just stood up against the wall, and they rushed past us without a glance."

"No; I mean Grundy & Co.?"

"Don't think so," answered Tom Merry. "It was so near dark that I shouldn't have been sure who Wilkins and Gunn were, if I hadn't known. Grundy I might have recognised by his feet."

"Then they've had all the trouble, and we've got the giddy parrot. This is what I call jam!" said Herries.

"Plum-jam! Raspberry-jam!" croaked the parrot.

"Strafe St. Jim's! What a face! How's your poor feet? Toodle-oodle-oodle-oodle-tuppence!"

"My hat! I begin to like the thing!" said Tom Merry.

"When we've taught it to 'strafe' the Grammarians, instead of St. Jim's, it will be all right! But we'd better do a bunk now, because, judging from the sounds I hear, those three have been gently shown out, and Grundy isn't likely to linger long in his wet clothes!"

Hurrying footsteps sounded on the road behind them. It had occurred to Grundy that when one is in wet clothes running is better than walking. So he had commanded Wilkins and Gunn to run, and all three had started off.

It was not good tactics to attempt keeping ahead. Therefore, the seven let them come up. Herries carrying the cage, was surrounded by the rest, so that in the dusk his burden was scarcely likely to be noticed.

Grundy and his faithful followers drew up alongside.

"What's the row?" asked Tom Merry.

"Who said there was any row, you fathead?" retorted Grundy, whose temper still had an edge to it.

"Oh, my mistake! I thought you were running away from somebody, that's all!"

"Pity you should bother to think, if you can't do any better than that! Running away isn't my line!" Grundy growled.

"A strategical retreat is sometimes necessary," observed Lowther.

"Who said anything about— Oh, I see what you mean!"

Even Grundy read the war news.

"Strafe St. Jim's! Rotten show!" said the parrot from under the cloth.

"Hallo! What's that?" cried Grundy. "Why, you've—"

"It isn't worth while to mimic that sort of thing, Monty," said Tom Merry.

ANSWERS

"Oh, was it Lowther, then?" asked Grundy. He did not altogether believe it; but to prosecute inquiries meant that the whole yarn must be told. And as Grundy didn't exactly shine in that yarn he hardly relished telling it.

"Strafe the Grammar School! Strafe Lathom! Strafe Grundy! Strafe everybody!" croaked Lowther, in a very fair imitation of the parrot's voice.

"You are a howling ass, Lowther!" said Grundy politely. "Come on, you chaps!"

"Why, you're soaking wet, Grundy!" remarked Jack Blake, laying his hand on the other fellow's arm just as he was starting.

"That's not your business, you bounder! I suppose I can be wet if I like!"

"Oh, yes! It happens to a chap whether he likes it or not at times. But there hasn't been any rain since two o'clock."

"There was where I've been," Grundy replied.

And that was true, for the water-butt had collected the rain. It was not only true, but, for Grundy, quite smart—unless he merely intended an evasion, and not a double meaning, which was as likely as not.

The three ran on.

"We shall have to be jolly careful smuggling this thing in," said Herries.

But luck was with them, and they got to No. 6 unobserved.

"Now I'll take it," said Lowther.

"You'll do what?" asked Herries.

"Take the thing to our study."

"What thing?"

"The parrot, of course!"

"Think so?"

"Naturally. We are your seniors, and I have already impressed upon you the necessity of the bird being tutored by someone who knows how to speak."

"Rats! If you mean somebody who gets wound up and keeps on keeping on with a lot of twaddle that no chap with any sense can make head or tail of, that's you!" said Digby. "But we don't want the bird taught to use polysyllables. What's the girl's name, Gussy?"

"What girl?" asked Augustus, seeming to emerge suddenly from a brown study.

He had been singularly silent throughout.

"Oh, buzz off to sleep again, you one-eyed bounder!"

"I think you must mean polysyllables, Dig," said Blake.

"Got it! I knew it was Polly Something-or-Other. That's not what we want."

"You may as well stop arguing," put in Herries, "for I've carried the giddy cage all the way, and nobody's offered to take his turn; and I tell you straight that anybody who gets it now will have to get it over my dead body—that's all!"

"Herries," replied Lowther, "never shall it be said that I sacrificed a friend to—to—oh, any old thing! Take the parrot, with my blessing! After all, even Dig's rude,

unpolished speech would be preferable to the hoarse ravings of Mumpface. By the way, is that hamper quite cleared up?"

"No. Do you chaps want to come in to tea?"

"As an invitation, that is somewhat lacking in courtly grace. But—not to put too fine a point upon it—we do! We are on short commons chez nous."

"If the bounder isn't burbling French, now!" groaned Digby. "Oh, come along in, and stop your giddy jaw with cake!"

The seven sat down to tea on very good terms with themselves. The expedition had been a distinct success.

"Grundy fairly done in the eye!" said Digby, helping himself liberally to veal-and-ham pie.

"Grundy?" croaked the parrot.

"Hallo! The thing's beginning already," remarked Herries.

"Grundy, how's your poor feet?" said the bird.

"We don't want it Grundying too much!" objected Digby.

"That bird," said Lowther, "is going to be like the raven. I foresee it."

"What raven?" inquired Dig. "Pass the mustard, somebody!"

"Edgar Allan Poe's raven," answered Lowther.

"Never heard of the chap. Who was he, anyhow?"

"A poet—an American poet."

"Oh, a poet! And a rotten American, too!"

Digby spoke as if the famous author of "The Bells," and "The Raven" was the very last thing in small potatoes.

"You have heard me recite it, Dig," remarked Arthur Augustus.

"Have I? Well, once is enough. I never heard you recite anything that I jolly well wanted to hear twice! But what about the raven, Lowther? Never mind about the poet. It's the bird I want to hear about."

"Then this ebony bird beguiling
My sad fancy into smiling,
By the grave and stern decorum
Of the countenance it wore.

"Though thy crest be shorn and shaven,
Thou," I said, "art sure no raven,
Ghastly grim and ancient raven,
Wandering from the nighty shore,
Tell me what thy lordly name is,
On the night's Plutonian shore!"
Quoth the Raven, "Nevermore!"

recited Lowther, slowly and with emphasis.

"Piffle!" said Digby, quickly and with quite as much emphasis.

"It's good poetry," argued Gussy. "That word 'neva'moah' seems to haunt a fellow atfah he's wear it."

"What word?" asked Tom Merry, winking at Blake.

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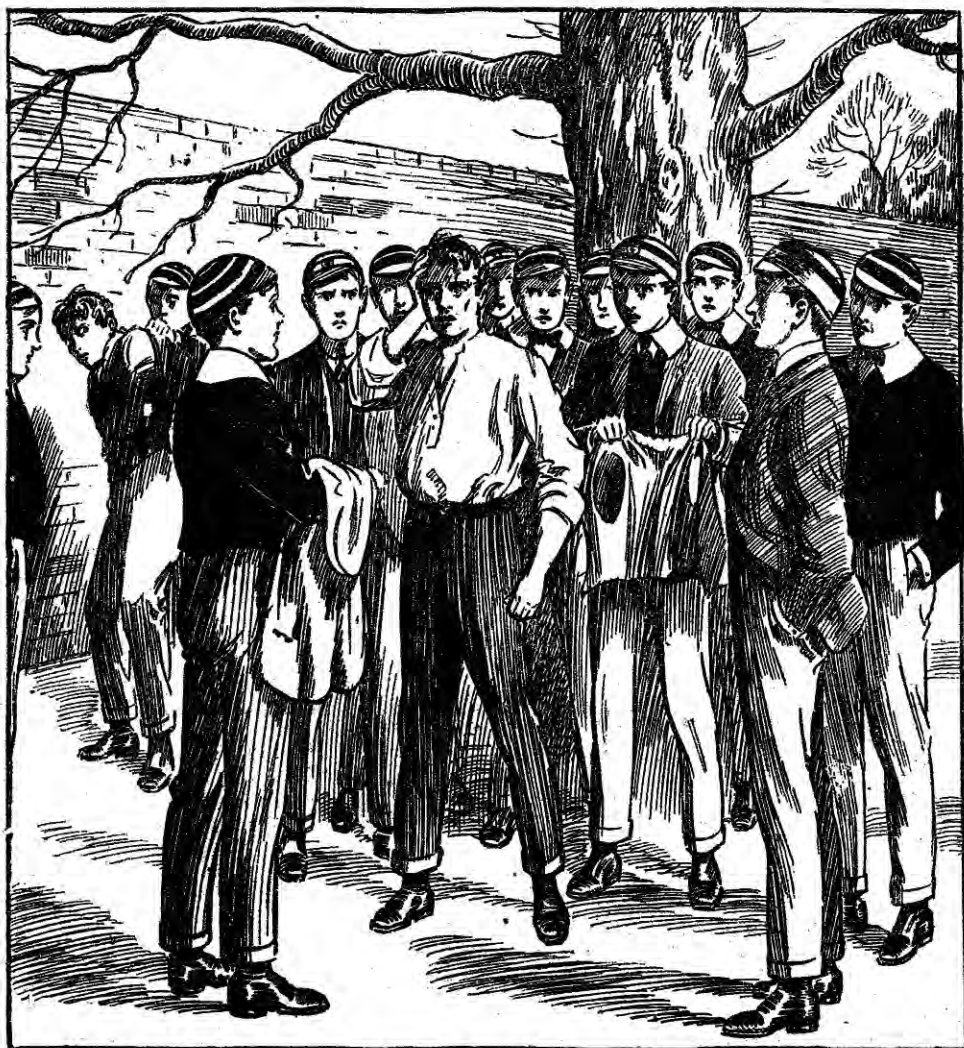


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Mumford looked round, and the light of battle faded out of his eyes, and his face drew dull again. The fight was over, and his mind went back to the subject that seemed to occupy it almost continually. "I want my parrot," he said. "I wish you chaps would give me my parrot back!" (See Chapter 10.)

"Nevahmoah."

"Ah, I don't wonder it haunts you!"

"What do you mean, Tom Mewwy?"

"Because you murdered it."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Blake.

"Pass the tarts!" demanded Digby.

"Nevahmoah!" said the parrot, in exact imitation of D'Arcy.

"One for you, Dig!" chortled Herries.

"Don't see it."

"Tarts to be passed—nevahmoah."

"Oh, rats! Tell you what, though, that giddy bird's a bit of a mule. I don't believe he'll let us teach him anything we want to. I don't believe he'll let anybody but Mumford. But he'll pick up things we say, and repeat them. We've got to be jolly careful, you know."

"Nevahmoah! Grundy, Grundy, Grundy! Nevahmoah! How's your poor feet? Strafe St. Jim's! Rotten show!" said the parrot.

Blake moved over to the cage with a piece of cake

between thumb and forefinger. Lowther, Digby, and D'Arcy watched expectantly. They had all had some.

"Pretty Poll!" said Blake. "See him cock his knowing old eye at me? Pretty Poll! Try a piece of—Owww! Yaroooooh! You—you crocodile! You—you—What are you cackling at, you idiots!"

The bit of cake had dropped between the wires. The parrot was still cocking a knowing eye. And Blake left off talking to suck his forefinger.

"The bird," said Lowther, "has a singularly human attitude to its would-be instructors."

"Call it human, if you like," snapped Blake. "I call it particularly beastly!"

"But, aftah all, he is eating the cake," remarked D'Arcy.

"Yes, the rotter! He hasn't a scrap of gratitude, but he can eat the stuff all serene."

"Strafe St. Jim's! Rotten show! What a face!" said the parrot.

When the time came for the Terrible Three to clear

out, because the hour of prep had arrived, Blake made a generous offer.

"You can take that thing with you," he said, indicating the parrot by a wave of his hand.

"Oh, no, you don't!" cried Herries.

"Not likely, dear boys," added Arthur Augustus. "We will instruct the eweatchah. I have been meditating deeply on the subject. What is needed is a plowase that is at once original and scathing. 'Stwafne the Gwammah School' is wathah too big a mouthful, and is distinctly not original."

"Well, what do you fancy?" asked Tom Merry.

"I have not yet discorahed anything satisfactow. Give me time, Tom Mewwy!"

"I shouldn't meditate too deeply during prep," said Manners, "or Latham may have something to say about it."

"Oh, hang Latham!" answered Gussy.

"Look at that bird! He's taking it all in," said Herries.

And, indeed, the parrot looked quite as if he was. His wicked head was cocked on one side, and there was a leering gleam in the one eye visible.

"There's one lucky thing about it," said Digby. "Latham never comes here. So if he does learn to say 'Hang Latham!' it's no odds, really."

The gentleman referred to was the Fourth-Form master, who was rather a severe disciplinarian, though never unfair.

The Terrible Three went. Blake & Co. settled down to work.

Every now and then the parrot spoke. The parrot did not appear to miss Mumford nearly as much as, one might reasonably suppose, Mumford missed him. On the whole, he seemed very well reconciled to his new surroundings.

Prep that night was rather a burden to Study No. 6. None of them liked Greek, and there was a particularly knotty piece to construe. Blake alone had any taste for algebra, and even Blake thought the quadratic equations set a bit too thick.

As a natural consequence, there were various uncomplimentary allusions to the master who had set the work. If anyone thought about the parrot, no one took seriously the danger that he might store up such things in memory and bring them out at an untimely moment.

When at last they had finished, Blake sat back and contemplated the bird. He had forgiven it for the peck by this time.

"Well, Polly, how goes it?" he asked.

"Strafe Latham! What a rotter! Oh, hang Latham!" replied the parrot. "What a face! How's your poor feet?"

CHAPTER 9.

An Embassy from the Grammar School.

THE St. Jim's juniors had just started a game of footer after morning classes the next day, when three Grammar School fellows appeared on the ground.

The trio was made up of Gordon Gay, Frank Monk, and Mumford.

Mumford walked between the other two, his head hanging, his shoulders hunched. By contrast with them, he looked a particular disagreeable specimen, with his heavy, sullen face and his deep-set eyes.

"Come for a game, you fellows?" called Tom Merry.

"No, thanks," replied Gay. "We want to see one of your chaps—Grundy. Is he here?"

"I'm here!" growled Grundy.

And he lumbered forward, with a face almost as sulky and every whit as hostile as Mumford's. Play ceased, and a crowd gathered.

"What is it?" asked Tom Merry, trying hard not to look guilty.

But the Grammar School embassy had no suspicion of Tom Merry & Co. They had not even begun to suspect that their old rivals had had a hand in the looting of Mumford's much-prized parrot.

"Now, then, Mumford, speak up!" said Gordon Gay.

But Mumford remained obstinately silent.

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"Look here," Frank Monk said, "it's a bit too thick, you know! This chap thinks no end of that parrot, and it's hardly the cheese for you chaps to bag it. We've told him that it's only a joke, and he'll get the thing back, but he don't seem able to believe it somehow."

One or two hearts smote their owners. Poor Mumford looked horribly weebe gone. Had it been quite a fair thing, after all?

But the parrot had been taught to make abusive remarks about St. Jim's. And Mumford had taught it. The fellow couldn't expect to have everything his own way.

"Oh, don't talk rot!" said Grundy. "You know jolly well we haven't got the parrot. There were three of us in the bizney—Wilkins and Gunn and me. I got up into Mumford's study, and passed the cage down."

"And I took it and passed it on to Gunn," said Wilkins.

"That's right. And when Grundy and Mumford fell into the water—but I put the thing down and went to help," added Gunn. "Somebody must have collared it then. I don't see who it could have been if it wasn't one of your chaps, but it was too dark to spot anybody."

Gordon Gay shook his head.

"The parrot isn't anywhere about our show," he answered. "We've made jolly sure of that. And, what's still more curious, it's quite certain that none of our chaps helped Grundy and Mumford out of the water—but."

"Here, I say, not so much about the water—but!" growled Grundy, who did not appreciate the broad grin he saw on the faces around him.

"Can't tell the yarn without it," answered Gordon Gay off-handedly. "If you didn't want to hear anything about it you shouldn't have let yourself be yanked out. There would have been plenty said at the inquest, but you wouldn't have heard it: And I'm not sure you'd have been any great loss to St. Jim's!"

Grundy glared at him. Then he wheeled round, and saw something in the face of Tom Merry that made him suddenly suspicious.

"Those chaps were hanging about near your show," he said. "Merry and Blake and the rest of that gang. Better ask them. You must be idiots if you think we could have smuggled the parrot out, considering that we—that we—oh, I mean, you know very well we couldn't have done!"

"Yes, I know we had you all frogs'-marched out," answered Gay, grinning, while all around the grin grew broader. "But one of you might have dropped the cage over the outside wall first, so that you could get it afterwards. It don't sound a very sensible thing to do, but, then, the whole thing's off the rails."

"Is there a reward offered for the parrot?" asked Tom Merry.

"Yes, a thick ear, or as many of them as you like! Are you claiming it?"

"No, thanks. Anyway, I don't see how the best man among you could give me more than two thick ears. But we haven't got the thing."

This was true, limiting the "we" to the Terrible Three, for the parrot was in No. 6, of course.

"What are you going to do about it, Grundy?" inquired Monk.

"Nothing!" roared Grundy. "It's no affair of mine. Yes, I will do something, though! I'll fight any one of you!"

"My hat, I'm inclined to take you on!" flashed back Monk. "What's the use of saying it's no affair of yours when you have to admit you did all you knew how to steal the thing? You did steal it, practically. If you haven't got it, it's because there was somebody sharper than you about, that's all!"

"Right-ho!" snapped Grundy. "We can't fight here. Let's go to some place where we can!"

Mumford tugged at Gordon Gay's arm.

"And I'll fight him!" he said, nodding towards Crooke.

Now, Crooke had not said a word. He seemed to all there the merest spectator. But Tom Merry and his chums remembered that Mumford's animus against St. Jim's was said to have been aroused by rough treatment given by some fellows wearing the school colours.

and that the Grammarians had fancied Crooke might have been among the aggressors.

Mumford did not know Crooke's name, but he knew Crooke's face. He had just spotted it. Now he wanted to alter it.

Crooke's face would bear altering, though perhaps Mumford's work upon it would scarcely be likely to improve it.

The cad of the Shell did not ask why the queer fellow from the Grammar School wanted to fight him. Probably Crooke preferred not to have explanations made. And Mumford, not being a talkative person, preferred not to make them.

"Right-ho!" said Crooke, flushing beetroot red. "I'm on!"

Everybody felt rather surprised. Crooke, though a bully by nature, was usually not at all keen on fighting.

Crooke became more popular at once. There was a distinct feeling against Mumford among the St. Jim's juniors; and, as most of them had no notion why Mumford had singled out Crooke, they put down his doing so to the fact of his being a bit off his rocker.

"My hat, this is awful rot!" said Tom Merry, who felt a trifle guilty in the matter.

"If you chaps won't play the game——"

"Who says we're not playing the game, Gay?"

"Don't take that tone with me, Merry! I say you're not, if it comes to that! I don't say you personally, but some of you aren't. We're absolutely certain that no one in our crowd collared the parrot—hang the thing!—and I don't see who it could have been if it wasn't some of you St. Jim's rotters!"

"My hat, Gay, I don't want to lose my temper, but rotters is a word——"

"You are rotters, some of you, and you know it! I'm not going to take the word back! I'll put my fists up with you first!"

Talbot's hand fell on Tom's Merry's shoulder. Talbot knew nothing as yet about the bagging of the parrot, and he did not want his chum to quarrel with Gay.

"It isn't likely Merry had anything to do with it, Gay," said Talbot.

But that had the unfortunate effect of heating Tom Merry's wrath instead of cooling it, for it made him believe that Talbot would have held him in the wrong if he had known.

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"I'm not going to excuse myself to Gay!" he said. "I'd much rather fight him! It's absurd—all this fuss about a lout like Mumford!"

"Mumford is one of our fellows," answered Gay quietly. "I don't say I'm nuts on the chap. As he's out of hearing, I don't mind owning that I'd just as soon he'd gone somewhere else—say, to St. Jim's. But we're bound to back him up when he's wronged."

There was a good deal in that. Tom Merry saw it. Tom Merry did not fear Gordon Gay, any more than Gay feared him. A fight between them was bound to be a tough contest. Perhaps some day they might meet, but if they ever did it would be in some more important quarrel than this.

"You're right there, Gay," said Tom Merry; "and I was wrong. I don't think we'd better fight. There's enough of it with those four."

Quite a crowd was accompanying the combatants to a secluded field between the two schools.

Grundy scowled in determined fashion, and Crooke looked a trifle nervous. Frank Monk's face was only a little more serious than its wont, and Mumford's heavy countenance showed no change whatever.

Gay would second Monk, it was thought. But he chose instead to second Mumford, and some at least of the opposition understood and appreciated the chivalry that prompted his choice. Monk asked Talbot to do duty for him, and Talbot readily consented, in the absence of any other Grammarian. Before the two fights began, as it happened, a crowd of the Grammarians, headed by Carboy and the Woottons, arrived upon the scene. But Talbot kept his place.

Grundy chose Wilkins, and Crooke was seconded by Gore, who didn't seem to value the honour highly, however.

CHAPTER 10. Crooke in Hot Water.

THE two fights went on at the same time. At first interest was centred mainly on Monk v. Grundy. But soon it became evident that neither's heart was quite in the battle. Perhaps Grundy felt himself in the wrong, though if he did it was a rare attitude for him. The Grammar School fellow, a good boxer, and a fighter too, when put to it, seemed content with defensive tactics in the main, only now and then putting in a telling punch.

So gradually the chief interest became transferred to the other affair.

Here there was little enough of science.

Mumford went at his enemy like a bull at a gate, head down. His arms seemed to swing wildly, and his punches to have little direction.

But they were hard. When they lighted they hurt. And Crooke did not like being hurt. Bullies seldom do, though the old notion that they are all cowards has long since been exploded.

Crooke barked his knuckles on Mumford's head, which seemed as hard as any nigger's. Now and then he got in an upper-cut on the other fellow's face.

But, though Mumford's nose bled and one eye was going into mourning, he did not appear to feel the damage done. He pressed on, swinging his arms, hitting wildly, but hitting hard.

"You ought to be able to put the kybosh on that chump in a couple of rounds," said Gore to Crooke, in an interval. "He don't look where he's coming or what he's doing, and he never knows where his fists are going to land."

"Rats! I don't know, either!" snarled Crooke. "It's all very well to talk as if it was a dead easy thing, but I tell you it's not. How can I guard a punch that seems coming for my ear and then hits me in the chest?"

A fellow who could box well might have made short work of Mumford. An active fellow with even a rudimentary knowledge of the game could have thrashed him.

But Crooke could not box well; though he always talked as if he were a dab at it. And Crooke wasn't active. He was slow and lumbering.

"Shall we call it a draw?" inquired Frank Monk of Grundy. "There isn't any special cause why we should

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fight to a finish, and by what I can see there's something a good deal more interesting going on over there."

"All right," growled Grundy. Grundy would never have made the suggestion. He was far too stubborn for that. But Grundy had grace enough to realise that the spirit which prompted it was not that of cowardice, and, though he might not have been willing to own it, he thought the better of Monk.

They shook hands, put on their coats and waistcoats, and joined the crowd around the other pair of combatants.

"What's it all about?" growled Grundy to his late opponent. Grundy seemed disposed to be really friendly—in his way. "I didn't know that chap knew Crooke even."

"He does, though. Only the day after he came he was set upon by three of your crowd, and Crooke seems to have been the leader. Poor old Mumford couldn't tumble to what it was about. He hadn't heard of the feud, and it puzzled him that he should be slogged just because he wore our colours. Now he's getting his own back a bit."

"Serve Crooke jolly well right!" answered Grundy. "Who were the other two?"

"Not sure. We thought Gore and Levison, perhaps, but it doesn't seem to have been. Ah, that was a good one! Go it, Mumford! He's a blind swiper, Grundy; but when his fist lands it seems to hurt."

"Crooke's a funk. Deserves all he gets," Grundy growled.

"Go it, Mum! You've got him set!" howled the Grammar School crowd.

Mumford pressed on. Crooke gave ground continually. He scarcely tried now to hit back; he seemed to care for nothing but to avoid further punishment.

No one shouted for Crooke. There had been little keenness to yell him on even at first. Now there was nothing to shout for.

Crooke was letting St. Jim's down, and the other fellows resented it. The story of what had originated the fight was being passed round, and it was generally felt that the cause of quarrel was one that did no credit to St. Jim's. But the least to be expected from Crooke, having let himself in for this, was that he should put up a decent fight, for the school's honour.

That was a matter which had never concerned Crooke greatly, however; and as Mumford's hard fists landed again and again on his face and body Crooke had no thought for anything except his own bruises and his own disgrace.

"To be beaten like this by a lout whom everyone despised!

Well, if one knew one was to be beaten, why not make an end of it? The fellows would sneer, of course. But they would do that, anyway.

Let them sneer! Where was the use of going on when one knew that there was no chance of winning?

"I've had enough!" muttered Crooke, at the end of the seventh round. "I can't go on! Look at my knuckles!"

"Oh, rats! They're chipped a bit, but that's nothing," answered Gore.

"Well, I'm going to chuck it, anyway."

"Crooke's going to throw up the sponge!" shouted Gore.

A howl of indignation came from the St. Jim's contingent, a roar of applause for Mumford from the Grammarians.

Mumford lifted his heavy head, and shook it. And now they saw that a new look had come into his face. It gleamed, somehow. Between the thick lips the teeth gleamed white; under the heavy brows the eyes gleamed with the light of battle.

Mumford would never have given in, never, as long as he could stand. He might be dull of wit, sulky, obstinate, a bit off his rocker even; but the fellow had grit. In him was the true British bulldog strain, that never knows when it is beaten.

And they saw it—friends and foes alike. Certain fellows there felt more or less guilty in the matter of the parrot. Even Grundy did not feel as surely and absolutely right as usual.

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"You'd better slink off, Crooke!" said Tom Merry, with contempt.

Crooke did not feel equal to a retort. But Crooke would not forget that. Some day he would have revenge for it.

Crooke put on his blazer over his footer-shirt, and went off, alone.

They crowded round Mumford. It was difficult to know what to say to such a fellow, but they would have said something civil and congratulatory if they had known how to do it. They wanted to show him that everybody was not really against him.

Mumford wiped the blood from his face, caressed his bruises with his fingers, and slowly donned waistcoat and coat, still saying no word to anybody.

Then Mumford looked round, and the light of battle faded out of his eyes, and his face grew dull again. The fight was over, and his mind went back to the subject that seemed to occupy it almost continually.

"I want my parrot!" he said. "I wish you chaps would give me my parrot back!"

CHAPTER 11.

Good Intentions—and Bad.

"WE must let the chap have his parrot back," said Tom Merry, as they walked back from the field of battle after the Grammarians had gone.

"My hat, yes! I'm almost sorry now we bagged it," replied Blake.

"Bai Jore, I freely admit that I am quite sorry," said D'Arcy. "Aftah all, theah must be a good deal in a chap who sticks to it like Mumford."

"Gussy's going to take the lout to his bosom," scoffed Lother.

"Don't be widic! Theah's no question of anything, like that, seeing that he is a Gwammawian."

"Who's going to take it back?" asked Digby, who usually came pretty directly to the point. "I'm not on, I can tell you!"

"Nor me," added Herries. "I suppose the thing must go. I'm sorry about that, because I'd begun to like it."

"We shall look pretty cheap," remarked Manners. "because we let Gay and Monk believe that we knew nothing about it."

"About what?" asked Talbot, coming up with Noble at that moment.

"The parrot," replied Tom Merry.

"Do you mean to say you fellows have got the thing?" Talbot spoke sharply. Tom Merry answered him with a touch of defiance.

"Yes. Have you anything to say against it, Talbot?"

"No, Tom. Yes, I have, though! I'm sure neither you nor any of these chaps would have carried it off if you'd properly realised all that it meant to Mumford. But I think, seeing that, it's rather a pity."

For the second time that day Tom Merry was disgraced when feeling ready to quarrel. It had been Gay before, now it was Talbot. Each was able to look at things from the other fellow's point of view, and Tom himself had a measure of the same faculty. When you can do that—even when you are only trying to do it—quarrels are not so easy.

"But do you think it does matter all that to the chap, Talbot?" asked Blake.

"I do. The fellow's mind isn't in a normal state. I fancy something or other must have happened to put it a trifle off its balance. Of course, I don't mean that he's insane. I haven't any doubt that he would readily risk his life for the bird, but perfectly sane people have done that for animals before now."

"If nobody else is weedy to take it back, I will!" volunteered D'Arcy, whose sympathy was readily touched.

"Oh, I guess we're all willing, after what Talbot has said," Tom Merry answered.

"Yes," said Herries thoughtfully. "It makes you see things a new way."

And yet Talbot had not preached. He had trusted to

their own generosity to draw the right inference from what he said. Talbot knew more of human nature than these fellows. He had not lost his capacity for boyish enjoyment, but in the trials and struggles through which he had passed, something of the heedlessness of boyhood had passed from him, never to return.

They were all willing to face the scorn of the Grammarians; though, for that matter, it was not likely there would be much scorn shown.

Their intentions were of the best. All that was needed was that they should carry them into effect.

But that was just where they failed, for when they trooped into No. 6, neither parrot nor cage was to be seen!

They were badly taken aback.

"What's it mean?" asked Blake. "The thing was here at five past twelve. That's only an hour ago. It's gone now!"

"My hat, what does the time matter!" returned Herries crossly. "In an hour it might have been moved a hundred times. The question is, who's taken it?"

"A master or a prefect might have looked in and seen it," suggested Noble. "I suppose a parrot wouldn't be allowed in the studies."

"No. But they wouldn't carry the thing off without a word to anybody. What could they do with it if they did?" Tom Merry returned.

"It might make a pigeon-pie," said Lowther. "Depends upon the age of the bird. I believe parrots live to be centenarians sometimes. This one—"

"Oh, stop rotting, you chump!" cried Herries. "No one wants your piffing jokes just now—if anybody ever wants them!"

"What are we going to do?" asked Talbot, accepting his share of responsibility, like the true chum he was.

"Find out where it's gone. Get it back by explaining things, if it really has been taken by a master or a prefect, and then buzz off with it to the Grammar School," answered Tom Merry.

But the first part of this fairly full programme had not been carried out when the dinner-bell rang. The parrot had vanished, cage and all—and did not seem to have left a clue of any sort.

The parrot meanwhile was in Crooke's study!

Returning bruised and sulky, the cad of the Shell had crossed the quadrangle without encountering anybody. But inside the School House he ran against Mellish.

"Hallo, Crooke! Been in the wars, haven't you?" said Mellish with a snigger.

"Ring off! I'm not so done but that I can give you a hiding, and I will, too, if you aren't careful!" snapped Crooke.

"Oh, I didn't mean anything. I say, Crooke, you want a bit of raw steak for that eye. Shall I cut along to the kitchen and see if I can get a bit?"

"Yes, do, and look sharp about it!" Crooke snarled.

Mellish was sticking up, he felt sure, for Crooke never gave anyone credit for a good-natured motive.

The sneak of the Fourth came back with a piece of raw beef. He found Crooke in his den, contemplating his face in a small mirror, and looking as if he didn't quite fancy it. Other people didn't at ordinary times, but Crooke did.

"Here you are, old chap!" said Mellish. "I say, who did that?"

"That fellow Mumford. Reminds me, you'd better keep out of his sight. He hasn't forgotten how we put him through it."

"Oh, I say, thanks for warning me, Crooke. I sha'n't risk anything, you bet. Of course, you licked him?"

"I should have done if he'd fought decently," growled the defeated bully.

"Did he foul? But surely the other chaps wouldn't stand that?"

"Foul? No, don't talk rot! Don't talk at all unless you can tell me some way to get even with the cad and with our rotters here, who don't half back a fellow up as they ought to. If you'll believe me, Mellish, there was hardly a shout for me all the time, and there must have been more than a score of them there."

"Too bad, Crooke!" said Mellish; and then he lapsed into silence for a minute or two, while Crooke went on applying raw beef, and growling like an ill-tempered dog.

Before Mellish spoke again, he went to the door, and made sure that it was shut. Then he began, with a nervous giggle:

"I say, Crooke, I can tell you a way to get even with Mumford, and that gang here, too!"

"Eh? What's that you're giving me? No rot, Mellish, or I'll warn you up!"

"I can, really, Crooke. That chap's off his rocker about losing his parrot, they say. Well, I know where it is!"

"Where?"

"In No. 6!"

"Oh, rats! What's it doing there?"

"I don't know—at least, not for certain. But, as far as I can make out, Grundy and those fellows collared it out of Mumford's den at the Grammar School, and Tom Merry and some more of them got it away from them. I can't understand how, because Grundy doesn't seem to know that they've got it."

Mellish had been at his old game of prying, of course.

"If I get hold of the thing, I'll wring its neck!" growled Crooke. "Buzz off and fetch it, Mellish! There's nobody about just now."

"Oh, I say, Crooke, I can't do that! It isn't my business, is it? And if you do kill it, there'll be no end of a row. I don't want to be in that. And I haven't anything against Mumford."

"Haven't you? He says he'll jolly well slay you when he catches you alone. If I were you, I'd get in one on him first!"

The statement was a lie. Mumford had not mentioned Mellish. Indeed, he had not spoken twenty words in all.

"Well, I reckon I'll wait till he does," answered Mellish, who knew that Crooke was not remarkable for truthfulness.

It was no use appealing to the sneak's spite against Blake & Co. or the Terrible Three. Mellish had plenty of faults, but he was not really spiteful. So Crooke tried threats.

Mellish resisted at first, but when Crooke took him by the back of the neck and squeezed hard he gave way, as the cad of the Shell had hoped he would.

"I'll go!" he said. "Oh, stop it, Crooke—stop it! I'll go! But you must come and keep cave."

There was little need for that. They did not meet anyone in either corridor. Within two minutes, parrot and cage had been transferred to Crooke's den.

"But what about the other chaps?" asked Mellish, who knew that Crooke was not on very good terms with either of the fellows who shared his study.

"Don't you worry about them. They come in here to prep, because they have to," answered Crooke. "But they nearly always have tea in one of the other dens, and hardly ever put their ugly noses in here except in the evening. The bird will be a deader before they see it. And that cad Mumford will never see it again."

"Nevahmoah!" spoke the parrot.

"Why, that was D'Arcy!" said Mellish, looking round at the closed door in alarm.

"No, it wasn't, ass! It was this giddy bird mocking him! Talk some more, you beast! You may as well, because you won't have much longer to talk in!"

And, to encourage the parrot's conversational powers, Crooke thrust a ruler between the wires and stirred it up on its perch.

"What a face!" said the parrot.

Crooke was furious. For the remark was a pointed one under the circumstances, and the fact that it seemed to be in Mumford's voice made it all the more galling.

He pulled open the door of the cage, and thrust in his hand.

The parrot pecked viciously.

The hand was withdrawn in haste.

"Yaroo! Look what the brute's done!" cried Crooke.

Mellish had difficulty in choking down a giggle.

"I say, I shouldn't kill it, though," he said.

"I would—if I could see any way of getting at it without having holes jabbed in me. Oh, I've got it!"

Crooke made a loop in a piece of string, and, dangling it through the wires, tried to catch the parrot's neck with it.

"I'll hang the rotten thing!" he said, grinning cruelly.

"Oh, I say, don't, Crooke! I'm sorry I said anything about it. It seems a shame to kill it! Almost like—like murder!" pleaded Mellish.

"Strafe St. Jim's! Rotten show! How's your poor feet?" cried the parrot, hopping about on its perch.

"Oh, hang the rotten bird! I can't catch it!" snarled Crooke.

"Hold still, won't you?"

But the parrot refused to hold still.

"Strafe Lathom! What a rotter!" it called, running to and fro quickly on its perch. "What a face!"

Crooke threw down the string, and flung the cloth over the cage, for he heard footsteps in the corridor.

"You can take it from me that the execution's only postponed, though," he said grimly.

And Percy Mellish did not feel at all happy or pleased with himself as he slunk out.

CHAPTER 12.

Trouble for Crooke.

CROOKE chanced to have an urgent and unexpected engagement after classes that afternoon.

It came through a slight difference of opinion with Mr. Linton, the master of the Shell, as to the use of ink.

Crooke's view appeared to be that a clean collar was improved by black spots. The collar was not his own, of course. It belonged to Skimpole—which is a fact worth noting in connection with its being clean. For Skimpy's collars were never clean long.

Mr. Linton did not see the inking of the collar. But he was dissatisfied with both the quantity and the quality of an essay on "Sea Power," at which Crooke was supposed to have been working; and, chancing to notice the collar, he made inquiries, evidently directed at Crooke, who sat immediately behind the inventive genius.

Others had seen the deed done, so Crooke could not deny it.

Consequence—a spell in detention; otherwise, the urgent engagement before referred to.

The end of the Shell was on pins and needles during the whole hour spent in the detention-room.

He had hidden the parrot in its cage as well as he could, but anyone searching for it in good earnest would almost certainly find it. And he dreaded that. He was half sorry now he had interfered with the thing.

The other fellows would be down upon him for his malice against Mumford. They would say that he couldn't take a licking decently.

The best thing to do, Crooke resolved, would be to kill the parrot and bury the body, and then take the cage back by night to No. 6.

When he got out of detention at last he hurried off. No sooner had he opened the study door than the parrot's voice was heard.

"Strafe St. Jim's! Rotten show! Strafe Lathom!" it said.

"It will be 'Strafe Polly' presently!" said Crooke viciously. "And after that I guess all the 'strafing' will dry up."

But when it came to killing the parrot Crooke faked it—in a double sense. For he was afraid of the creature's beak, and he also feared the chance of someone's coming in and catching him in the act.

So Crooke put it off. After all, it would be better not to do the deed until he could be pretty sure of getting rid of the corpse at once.

Pity Mellish knew about it! If it had not been for that, Crooke would have strangled the parrot and left it inside the cage in No. 6.

But Mellish was not to be trusted a yard. Even as it was, he might let on.

Not for a long time had Crooke thought so hard. But all his thinking only made his head ache. It failed to get him any forwarder.

The parrot seemed to have dozed off. It did not say a word during tea, and the other fellows, who were there for once in a way, failed to twig its presence in the room.

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Prep!

For half an hour of prep nothing happened. Crooke failed to make much headway with his Greek. Crooke was not great on Greek at the best of times, and the dread that at any moment the parrot might reveal its presence kept his mind off his task.

"Strafe St. Jim's! Rotten show!"

Crooke started, and his battered face went crimson.

"You are a rotter, Crooke!" said one of the other fellows. "So it was you that stole the parrot from Blake's den!"

By this time everybody in the Shell and the Upper Fourth knew about the parrot.

"That's a lie!" retorted Crooke. "And, anyway, it's no business of yours!"

"It's not much odds!" retorted Marden. "You'll have to hand it over again."

"Oh, shall I?" snarled Crooke.

The sound of footsteps came from the corridor, and talk ceased. It might be a prefect outside, or even a master, though Mr. Ralston had little taste for promenading the corridors during prep.

But, as it chanced, Mr. Ralston was not in charge of the School House that evening. He had been called up to town suddenly, and Mr. Lathom, the Fourth-Form master, was acting for him. It was Mr. Lathom, one of the strictest of disciplinarians, who was now pacing the corridors.

"Strafe St. Jim's! Rotten show! Nevahmoah!" said the parrot.

The footsteps paused.

Crooke got up in a hurry, and tiptoed to the place where he had concealed the cage.

"Strafe—"

"Shut up, you brute, or I'll wring your neck!" muttered Crooke vengefully.

"No, you won't!" said Marden.

"Strafe Lathom! Strafe Lathom! Strafe Lathom! Strafe Lathom!" cried the parrot, in its loudest tones.

The door opened, and the Form-master appeared. His face was a storm-signal.

"What does this mean?" he demanded angrily.

No one answered. Crooke stood still with his back turned. The other two looked at one another.

"Do you hear me? Which of you was guilty of that gross insult to me—the grosser because of the language in which it was couched?"

Still no answer.

These boys did not belong to Mr. Lathom's Form. But he knew a good deal about them, for he and Mr. Lintou, the Shell Form-master, were very friendly, and, being also very keen on their work, often talked to each other of their pupils.

"Was it you, Marden?" Mr. Lathom asked sharply, knowing what answer to expect.

"No, sir."

Marden met the master's eyes frankly, and spoke respectfully, in level tones that seemed to suggest his thinking it no business of his. But, of course, Mr. Lathom did not expect anyone there to turn informer.

"Why do you keep your back to me, Crooke? Turn this way!"

Crooke obeyed with great unwillingness.

"Ah, you have been fighting, I see. But never mind that now. Was it you who spoke those insulting words?"

"No, sir; of course it wasn't."

"Was it you, Carter?"

"Strafe St. Jim's! Rotten show! Strafe Lathom!" cried the parrot, with a sudden access of energy.

The voice came from somewhere inside the room, yet most certainly it came from none of the three boys.

For a few seconds Mr. Lathom was completely non-plussed. Then he noted the fact that Crooke had turned again, and, probably without realising in his nervousness that he was giving the show away, was gazing at a certain corner.

Next moment the Form-master had the ring of the cage in his hand, and had swung the thing up on to the table. The parrot made a savage peck at his fingers, and managed to inflict a nasty scratch.

Mr. Lathom dropped the ring, and stood before the

cage, stooping to examine the bird more closely. He looked very angry indeed.

"What a face!" said the parrot. "How's your poor feet?"

"Whose property is this abominable bird?"

No one answered. The bird did not belong to anyone there, and most certainly no one there was anxious to lay claim to it.

"Strafe Lathom!" said the parrot.

"Someone must have taught it to say that!" snapped the master.

It was queer, too. He saw that at once. These boys were not in his Form. If it had been "Strafe Linton!" he would have understood better.

But such fellows as Crooke came into collision with most masters at some time or another, and Mr. Lathom had had occasion to drop upon Crooke.

"Whose bird is this?" Mr. Lathom asked, fixing Crooke with an eagle eye.

"It—it—it don't—I mean—it's not really—it doesn't belong to any of us, sir!"

"Oh! You have merely borrowed it in order to teach it vulgar abuse, I apprehend?"

"Nun-no, sir! I didn't teach it that!"

"Has anybody here except Crooke any responsibility for the presence of this objectionable bird in the study?" asked Mr. Lathom.

"No, sir," answered the other two together.

"Come with me, Crooke!"

The cad of the Shell cast a baleful glance at Marden as he followed Mr. Lathom out. It was difficult to see how the trouble into which Crooke had got was in any way Marden's fault; but logic was scarcely one of Crooke's strong points.

As soon as he had gone Marden slipped out, and went to No. 1 Study. It seemed to him that the fellows there ought to know.

"The parrot's in our den, Merry!" he said.

"What?" asked Tom Merry, scarcely believing his ears.

"Oh, I didn't take the thing there, if that's what you mean. Crooke seems to have eloped with it," answered Marden.

"My hat! I guess I shall have to talk to Crooke," said Tom Merry, looking decidedly warlike.

"I shouldn't do that sort of thing during prep, if I were you," replied Marden. "I'd only just found out when Lathom came along, and the bird yelled 'Strafe Lathom!' Naturally, he looked in to make inquiries. He has now gone off with Crooke, and I thought I'd see what you fellows mean to do about the bird."

The Terrible Three grinned. They had no sympathy with Crooke in his trouble.

"It's hardly our business, is it?" said Tom Merry. "Inquire at No. 6 in the next corridor."

"No, thanks! Lathom will be back directly, I fancy, and I'm not risking long journeys. Perhaps it would be as well if you let Crooke take all the blame. He deserves it, for bagging the thing. But if you do that, you'll have to risk what may happen to it."

"Right-ho! Nothing much is going to happen while you're there," answered Tom Merry.

"All very well to shove it on to me!" said Marden, with a laugh. "I don't mind so very much. But I can't guarantee to hang on to the thing if Lathom takes a fancy to it."

"Jolly likely, after the way it's got his mad out—I don't think!" replied Manners.

Marden went off. Crooke had not returned. But Grundy had come in.

"So it was Crooke who played that low dodge on me!" he growled.

"What dodge?" asked Marden.

"Never you mind! I'm waiting for Crooke, that's all."

"You're welcome," Marden replied, and sat down to his prep again.

Evidently Grundy thought that the parrot had passed straight from the Grammar School to Crooke's study. Marden did not consider that it was up to him to explain. Crooke was not in danger of getting more than he deserved, though it was quite likely he would get more than he wanted.

Crooke came in, his hands pressed under his armpits.

"Put your fists up!" roared Grundy.

"What for?" demanded Crooke. "Here, I say— OH, chuck it, Grundy!"

"Because I tell you to!"

It scarcely seemed a sufficient reason. On the other hand, Grundy's attitude made the putting up of Crooke's fists appear a very necessary measure in Crooke's own interests.

But Crooke was slow, and Grundy had no patience. He gave Crooke's face a stinging slap.

Then they piled in. The caning and that slap seemed to have warmed Crooke up. He tackled Grundy with far more resolution than he had tackled Mumford.

Proceedings had reached a stage at which the two were rolling together on the floor, and Grundy was complaining that Crooke had tried to bite his ear—which was not true, though he believed it—when Kildare looked in.

"Mr. Lathom's been complaining about the row in this corridor," he said. "I seem to have located the storm centre. Come with me, you two!"

"Fine chance for Grundy to fight a prefect, like he says he did at his old school," remarked Carter, as the door closed behind the three.

But Grundy had sense enough to recognise Kildare as above his fighting weight, and if he did not take his dose meekly, he took it without struggling.

CHAPTER 13.

In the Dead of Night.

WHEN Blake came in after prep, with Herries, Digby, and D'Arcy at his heels, Crooke said nothing. He sat at the table, with his elbows upon it, and his head in his hands.

Mumford, Mr. Lathom, and Kildare, had among them given Crooke all the trouble he had any use for. If the parrot had really belonged to him, he would scarcely have raised a finger to prevent its going.

"You are really a most wotten cad, Crooke!" said Arthur Augustus.

Crooke merely groaned.

The four departed. Herries went along to No. 1 Study on the Shell corridor.

"We've got the parrot back," he announced.

"You're welcome to it," said Tom Merry, grinning.

"You can have it here if you like."

"No, thanks. We wouldn't deprive you fellows."

"It's your turn, anyhow."

"But we're not standing on our rights," replied Lowther.

"I say, though, don't be rotters! Remember, Lathom's our Form-master, and if he finds the bird in our den there'll be ructions. He'll think we taught it to say 'Strafe Lathom!'"

"Well, didn't you?" asked Manners.

"No. At least, I suppose we did, in a way. Though of course we didn't mean to. But that only makes it all the worse, because we can't deny it."

"We don't want the thing," said Tom Merry. "I don't believe it's a parrot at all. It's a—what do they call the birds that come before a storm, Monty?"

"Stormy petrels, you mean."

"See here, if you won't take it in we're going to ask Talbot to," Herries said.

"Rot! It isn't fair to drag old Talbot into the bizney!"

"Just as fair as for you chaps, who were in it as deep as we were, to try to shirk your share!" retorted Herries.

"Something in that. Oh, bring the thing along!"

Herries wasted no time. He was back with the parrot within three minutes.

"It's no great odds," said Tom Merry, when he had gone. "We'll take the beastly bird back to-morrow, and there will be an end of it."

"Nevahmoah!" spoke the parrot.

"What's he mean?" asked Manners, staring at him in a fascinated way.

"That there'll never more be an end of it," answered Lowther.

"Rats!" said Tom Merry. "He doesn't mean anything at all, any more than a giddy gramophone does."

But, whether the parrot was capable of meaning or

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not; certainly there was to be no such easy end to it as they hoped.

The parrot was a burden upon the minds of all those who had shared in its kidnapping.

Wilkins and Gunn admitted frankly that they wished they hadn't had anything to do with it. Grundy only growled, but it was evident he shared their views. The Terrible Three had not told Grundy yet of the part that they had played, so he still supposed that Crooke was one of the two mysterious figures who had helped to pull him out of the water. He felt no gratitude to Crooke for that, however. In fact, that was not the way in which he thought of the affair, and if he had told the story he would very likely have represented himself as getting out by his own unaided efforts, even if he had referred to the butt at all.

As for Crooke, he felt that kind of remorse which consists in bitter sorrow for punishment received!

He had had nothing to do with bringing the parrot to St. Jim's, and yet he had suffered heavily, while others had gone scot-free.

Crooke did not go far enough back. But for him there have been carried inside the walls of

the chief aggressor in the wanton and provoked attack upon Mumford.

And Mumford had taught the parrot to say "Strafe St. Jim's!" because of that attack.

And the Terrible Three and their chums of the Fourth had been moved to the seizure of the parrot by the insult to St. Jim's—not to mention the havoc made by the parrot's wicked beak and Mumford's feats of strength with the broken chair.

It was all House that Jack Built."

In the F. House there was quite a lot of talk about Jack Blake and his chums admitted the part taken in the kidnapping, but Mellish had nothing to say.

The talk died away after a time, and most of them slept. But Arthur Augustus lay awake quite a long time, worrying.

Gussy's tender heart was troubled by fear that Mumford's parrot might not get enough to eat.

The Terrible Three had very likely forgotten all about feeding it, and the poor creature would be suffering all the pangs of hunger.

There was a cocoanut in No. 6. It belonged to Herries, but that was a minor detail. D'Arcy was so certain that Herries would not grudge it to the parrot that he did not consider it at all worth while to wake his chum in order to ask him about it.

He got up, put on a dressing-gown over his pyjamas, stuck his feet into slippers, and stole out of the dormitory.

All was quiet—so quiet that it gave Gussy a queer, shivery feeling. It was curious to think of all those fellows asleep behind the closed doors, and himself perhaps the only one awake in all the House. The swell of the Fourth began to feel quite poetical about it, but that did not make him feel quite comfortable.

The familiar study did not look itself in the flickering light of a match. There were dim corners in it that might hold all sorts of things. Herries' footer boots gave the adventurer quite a shock. They were rather large boots, but it was not their size that shocked Gussy. He took them for—well, he didn't quite know what he did take them for. All he knew was that he was very much relieved when he discovered what they actually were.

"I must tell Hewwies not to be so rowy careless in the manual in which he leaves his clobber about," said D'Arcy to himself, as he lit a bicycle-lamp; and his voice sounded so hollow that it fairly made him jump.

But Herries had not been so careless with the cocoanut, it seemed.

The cocoanut wasn't in the hamper. In fact, there was nothing in the hamper but straw and sawdust and wrapping-paper. The good things they had served to pick were gone "like the snows of yesteryear."

And the cocoanut wasn't in the cupboard. There wasn't much else in the cupboard, either.

Eureka!

D'Arcy had picked up a cap from the mantelshelf. The cocoanut was under it.

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He turned the milk from the cocoanut into a glass, and then looked round for something wherewith to break the shell quietly.

"If I wap Hewwies' cap all wound it, and then knock it with a hammah—yaas, that might do the trick."

The hammer was found. The cocoanut was wrapped up in the cap. D'Arcy struck.

"Oh, confound it all! I ought to have put the beastly thing on the doohah!"

The blow had caused two inkpots to tumble over. One of them had spilt its contents all down D'Arcy's dressing-gown, and the ink from the other was soaking Herries' cap.

Gussy put the nut on the floor, and was preparing to deliver a second blow, when a voice from the door said:

"Hallo! I thought all that row came from here."

"Is that you, Gwunday?"

For it was the great George Alfred who had appeared.

"Of course it is, you idiot!"

Arthur Augustus let the insult pass. He had never before been so pleased to see Grundy.

"Did it weally make a wow?"

"Row enough to wake the giddy House, I reckon! What are you up to, chump?"

"Only getting something for the parrot to eat."

"The parrot, do you say? What's the thing got to do with you? I've been to Crooke's den, but it's not there."

"What do you want it for, Gwunday?"

"Oh, I dunno! I think p'raps that chap Mumford ought to have it back. Where is it?"

"In Tom Mewwy's study."

"But—but—"

"You see, Gwunday, it wasn't Cwooke who collared it frowm youah lot at the Gwammah School. It was us."

"You mean—"

"Tom Mewwy and Lowthah and Mannahs and we fowah."

"Oh, the rotters! I suspected Merry at one time, but—Oh, what rotters you are!"

"Wing off, Gwunday! I don't see that we were any biggah wotters than you."

"Something in that, p'raps," answered Grundy.

"Anyway, it was decent of you to come down and get stuff to feed the thing. Does Merry want to starve it?"

"No, of course not. But I was afraid it might be hungry."

"You won't break that nut on the table—not without making an awful row."

"No, Gwunday; but I have just thought of another way. Suppose we put it in the doohah and squeezed it!"

"H'm! Yes, that might do. I'll help."

"You hold the nut while I push the doohah, then."

Perhaps Grundy was clumsy, or perhaps D'Arcy was, or perhaps both of them were.

Anyway, it was not the nut that got squeezed: it was George Alfred Grundy's fingers.

"Yaroooh! Oh, you frightful idiot!" howled Grundy. The cocoanut dropped, and clattered down the corridor.

"Now you have weally woke up the House, Gwunday!" said D'Arcy, in alarm.

For there came the sound of someone moving in the darkness beyond the door.

CHAPTER 14.

To Get Back His Parrot!

GRUNDY stifled the caustic comment on D'Arcy's clumsiness which he had been about to make. That would keep.

"Put that lamp on!" he hissed, and D'Arcy instantly obeyed.

They stood still and waited.

It did not seem that the whole house had been aroused, after all. Someone was moving in the corridor; but if there had been a general alarm, a rush of feet would have followed.

And there was no rush of feet; only the sound of someone approaching slowly, cautiously, as if unfamiliar with the ground traversed.

"It's a burglar, I do believe!" whispered Grundy.

"What had we bettah do, Gwunday?"

"Collar the beggar, sit on him, and shout like blazes!" In pursuance with this plan of campaign, Grundy opened the door more widely.

Arthur Augustus thrilled with excitement. He was game for anything, as Grundy evidently recognised.

It did not occur to either that this was a queer sort of burglar—this unknown person who felt his way along as if he were lost.

"Now!"

Grundy gave the word. D'Arcy obeyed. They rushed upon the supposed burglar; they gripped him in the darkness; they dragged him down.

He struggled, but scarcely with the force D'Arcy had expected. The swell of the Fourth began to think that this was rather an undersized burglar. He had always imagined burglars as big, powerful fellows.

D'Arcy said nothing. The burglar said nothing. He only groaned. But Grundy, by no means inclined to delay for an unnecessary moment the recognition by St. Jim's of his ability as a burglar-catcher, gave out a yell that might have aroused the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus.

"Hi! Wake up, everybody! Burglars! Murder! Thieves! Fire! Wake up!"

"Strafe St. Jim's! Rotten show!" came a distant voice from somewhere along the Shell corridor.

The supposed burglar wriggled hard, and muttered something that sounded like "my parrot!" Though it was not until later that D'Arcy realised what the words were, and as for Grundy, he was making far too much noise to hear them.

Now came the rush of feet.

First to arrive on the scene were the Terrible Three and Talbot.

Crowding behind them came Jack Blake, Herries, Digby, Levison, Mellish, Clifton Dane, Glyn, Noble, Reilly, Kernish, Lumley-Lumley, Wilkins, Gunn, and the rest of the Fourth and the Shell in the School House. Their dormitories were nearer. But soon the seniors began to push through the horde.

"Show a light, somebody!" ordered Kildare. "Let's see what these two have really captured!"

There were many lights shown already. But Grundy and D'Arcy were sitting on their captive so effectively that it was impossible to see what he was like.

"Strafe St. Jim's! Rotten show! How's your poor feet?" sounded the voice of the parrot in the distance.

"Get up, you fellows! You'll smother the chap!" said Kildare.

"Suppose he makes a wush at us with a wevolvah?" suggested Arthur Augustus.

"I'll smash his face if he does!" growled Grundy, getting up.

But their captive did not make a rush with a revolver. He sat up with some difficulty, being nearly squashed, and revealed to everybody the heavy face of Mumford!

"Who's this?" asked Kildare, who did not know him, but saw that he was a mere boy, and decently dressed.

"It's a chap from the Grammar School—Mumford's his name," answered Tom Merry, in response to several nudges, which seemed to suggest that he was expected to be spokesman.

"And what's the chap from the Grammar School, Mumford by name, doing here in the dead of night?" asked Kildare, looking down at the intruder.

"Come for my parrot!" mumbled Mumford.

"What? Speak up, can't you? Come for—"

"Strafe St. Jim's! Rotten show! Strafe Lathom!" called the parrot.

At this moment Mr. Lathom appeared.

A few words from Kildare, helped out by Tom Merry and Arthur Augustus, enlightened him as to the situation.

"Really, my boy," he said, regarding Mumford with less sternness than they had expected, "you must know that this sort of thing won't do at all! How did you get in?"

"Over the wall, and through a window!" replied Mumford. His eyes were on the master's face, and it seemed as though he saw something there that melted his stubbornness, for he answered at once, and not as if a reply was being dragged out of him.

"But you might have been taken for a burglar! You were actually taken for one, I gather! Did you not think of that risk?"

"I wanted my parrot!" answered Mumford. And how many there seemed to discern in the plea a note of pathos, where before they had seen nothing but the obstinacy of a fellow "a bit off his rocker!"

"Well, well, you shall have it!" answered Mr. Lathom. "Go and fetch the wretch—the parrot, one of you!"

Herries went. He came with the cage dangling from his hand, and the parrot inside ruffling his feathers, and screaming, "Strafe St. Jim's!"

"I'll see him back, if you like, sir," said Kildare.

"I think you had better. We will postpone further consideration of this mysterious affair till to-morrow," answered Mr. Lathom. "But"—he turned to Mumford—"do not be afraid that you will incur heavy punishment, my boy! I will see that you do not!"

"I don't mind much, sir; I've got my parrot!" Mumford answered, and once again his face gleamed as they had seen it gleam after the fight with Crooke.

Just as he was going—Kildare having finished in haste—Tom Merry stepped forward. To be thinking about Mr. Lathom; had almost forgotten the master was there.

"I want to say, for all of us who were mixed up in this, Mumford, that we're sorry. We didn't know how much you'd mind, or we shouldn't have done it. And we haven't hurt the parrot. He's no end clever, and we like him!"

"He's a good parrot; but he's mine," said Mumford, very distinctly.

"Will you shake hands?"

One moment Mumford hesitated, then he transferred the cage from his right hand to his left, and held the right out to Tom Merry.

Then, one by one, they came forward—Jack Blake, D'Arcy, Grundy, Manners, Lowther, Digby, Herries, Wilkins, Gunn—all who had had act or part in the kidnapping. Not Crooke; but then he had not shared in the original enterprise; and, anyway, he was still in bed in the Shell dormitory.

They all shook hands with Mumford. And, to everyone's surprise, the fellow actually smiled.

When he had gone, under Kildare's convoy, Mr. Lathom looked at those who had confessed their guilt. His look was less severe than they would have expected; but, perhaps, that was because they had confessed.

"I have a story to tell you, boys," he said. "One that I only heard after you had gone to bed, when one of the Grammar School masters looked in to smoke a pipe with me. It concerns a parrot."

He told the story, while they listened with bated breath.

The story of an English boy living in Belgium at the time when the German hordes overran that land of heroes; of his father, shot for refusing to give information to the German leader; of his mother, dead of a broken heart within an hour; of the boy's coming to England, to unknown relations, a sulky, cowed refugee, with the parrot as sole thing left to him out of what had once been home!

"His brain is a little affected, I fear!" said Mr. Lathom, and when he paused in speaking one might have heard a pin drop. "But he will get over that in time. Do you wonder that he clings to the parrot, that his affection for the bird has become almost like a mania? I don't!"

And they didn't, either.

They felt ashamed of themselves as they went back to bed, and they owned it.

"But we'll make it up to old Mumford some day!" said Jack Blake.

That, however, might not be so easy. Meanwhile, Mumford had his parrot, and was content. Whether the Grammar School mascot would carry the school to victory when they met St. Jim's again remained to be seen.

THE END.

(Next week's grand, long complete story of the Chums of St. Jim's is entitled, "THE STUDY WRECKERS!" by Martin Clifford.)

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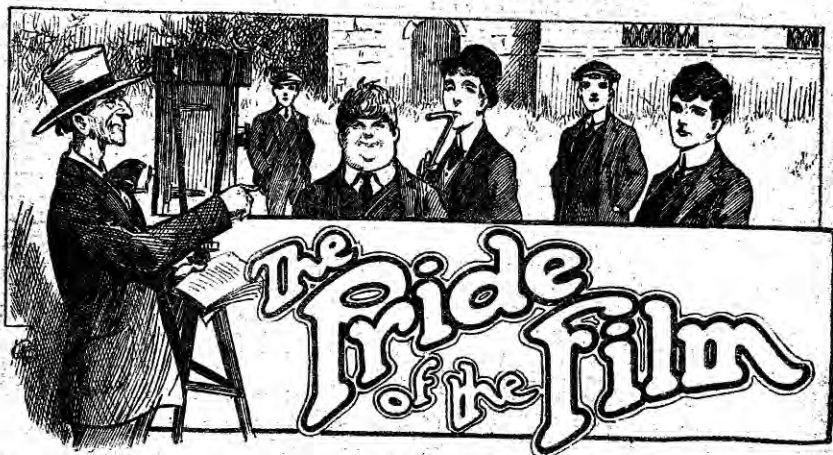
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The First Instalment.

REGGIE WHITE, an orphan, is befriended by MR. ANTHONY DELL, a millionaire film-producer, and given a position as actor in his company.

Among others in the company, Reggie makes the acquaintance of RICHARD TURNER, a boy whom he likes; HUBERT NIXON, a snobbish youth, whom he dislikes; and WILLIE BURR, a jovial, fat boy.

A scene is being filmed in an old mansion, when suddenly an escaped convict dashes from a secret recess in the wall, followed by a policeman and a detective.

Reggie, who has met the escaped man before, and is certain of his innocence, slams the door in the face of his pursuers. (Now read on.)

Dell made no effort to prevent the other man following; but the two hurled angry words at each other as they parted.

Great was the hue and cry. There was searching here, there, and everywhere, but it led to nothing, and the plain-clothes man came back to the house.

"I shall want your name and address," he said to Mr. Dell. "And I shall want yours," replied the millionaire. "And I warn you that only a full and ample apology will prevent me from taking action that will astonish you."

This was a power for the plain-clothes man. He had never been threatened with "astonishment" before, and in his cooler moments he was able to see that Mr. Dell was an important man, and not exactly the kind of person to be trifled with. This impression was strengthened when he learned Mr. Dell's name.

"My name is Detective Hooker, of Scotland Yard," he explained, more meekly, "and you must be aware that it is rather a nasty one in the eye to nearly catch an escaped convict after weeks of tracing, and have the thing foiled at the last moment."

Tony Dell always met repentance more than half-way. He saw that the detective, though hot-tempered and impulsive, was greatly upset at having put himself in the wrong by his violent action, and that he was naturally a rather amiable sort of man. If the case was as Hooker stated it, then there really was a good cause for his annoyance.

"I'm very sorry," said Tony Dell. "But how on earth was I to know?"

The two then settled down to a discussion of the affair, that was interrupted by Silas Shock.

"The camera is all right, Mr. Dell," he said; "and the film, too. I thought that you'd like to know that I think I've got the scene of the wall suddenly opening, and those three gentlemen coming through; but, of course, I can have nothing after the camera was knocked over. All the same, it ought to be rather a good little bit, and if it develops all right, I think you might work it in."

Reggie heard this, as he was standing near at the moment, but he did not wait for the reply. He had an idea that he would like to go convict-hunting on his own account, not, of course, with the idea of harming Mr. Rickfield, but rather of assisting him.

The Hiding-Place.

When Charles Rickfield, the escaped convict, darted out of the room, and Reggie managed to close the door before the two policemen could follow him, there began a scene of a somewhat noisy and turbulent nature.

The plain-clothes man and the officer in uniform were dashing for the door, having picked themselves up from their tumbles, when Mr. Dell suddenly thrust himself before them.

"I would like to know what this means!" he demanded sternly.

"Don't hinder me! I represent the law, and I—"

But Mr. Dell was boiling over with anger.

"I don't care if you represent the man in the moon!" he shouted. "What right have you to come smashing into my camera, and intruding in this house? I've a good mind to give you the biggest hiding that you ever had in your life!"

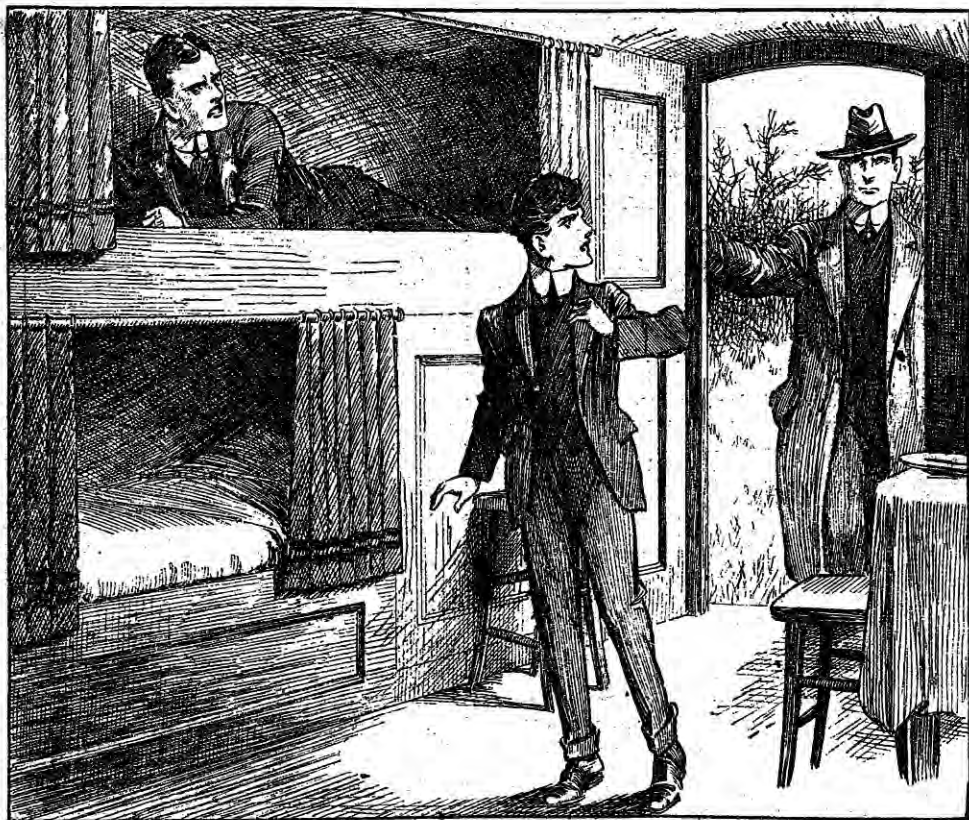
"Out of my way!" cried the plain-clothes man. "The convict is escaping!"

He made the great mistake of assailing Mr. Dell, and found himself suddenly hurled back across the room by a thrust that was more a piece of jiu-jitsu than a blow.

But the policeman seized the opportunity, and fled from the room, having deftly got to the door. After that Mr. Dell.

THE GEN LIBRARY.—No. 418.

NO. 13 "THE GREYFRIARS HERALD," 10. OUT TO-DAY! BUY IT!



"What's risky?" said a voice. Reggie turned round and saw Mr. Dell, the millionaire, standing behind him. As Mr. Dell entered the caravan the escaped convict with flew into the salter of the bunk. "I suppose that's the man the police are after?" said Mr. Dell, pointing to the bunk. (see page 28.)

"And I think I ought to go over and see the professor," he decided. "He may not know what has happened, and he may give the show away if he comes over here with his usual parcel of food."

With this idea in his mind, he made his way to the caravan in which he slept, intending to get his cap. He found the required article, and was just leaving when he heard a voice: "Boy!"

He looked around him. The caravan cars had been specially reconstructed inside, having fixed berths around the top and movable ones beneath. These higher berths were very close to the roof, and allowed very little space to the sleepers. It was almost an impossibility to sleep with one's knees drawn up.

Reggie looked up.

One of the berths had an occupant, who was looking out. It was Charles Rickfield, the escaped convict.

"I knew you in a moment," he said. "Two or three others have been in here, and each one has been a disappointment to me. I was hoping that you would come, and now you have done so I feel as if I am in luck's way."

These words were a relief to Reggie. They set his mind at rest about one point that had been troubling him.

"I say," he blurted out quite frankly, "it is awfully good of you to be so unsuspicious. Do you know, I have been worrying more than enough, wondering if you thought that I might have given you away."

Rickfield seemed surprised.

"Such an idea never entered my head for a moment," he said. "What makes you think it?"

"Well, it must have seemed rather strange," replied Reggie, "that you should be safe there all the time till you tell me your secret, and that then the police should drop on you at once."

"Well, I didn't think it, and I don't think it," said Rick-

field with emphasis. "You are a straight young fellow, and I would trust your promise anywhere. At all events, I want to trust you now, if you will let me. You know as well as I do that you have only to go outside and shout, and you could settle my fate."

It was then that Reggie understood how much confidence the ex-convict had in him.

"What can I do for you?" he asked.

"You can be a real friend to me," replied the escaped convict. "You can find out a few facts and take a message for me."

Reggie promised to do all that he could to assist, and Mr. Rickfield went on:

"I managed to hide myself here, as I thought it would be safer than in the open country; but obviously I can't stay here very long. I shall have to get away as soon as it is safe. I have scribbled a note to my brother-in-law, Professor Carless. Will you deliver it to him by hand?"

"With pleasure," said Reggie.

"You see, his letters may be opened, and his house may be watched, as our relationship is known. That is where your help will be so useful. Here is the note."

Reggie hid the paper that the ex-convict passed him, promising to deliver it at once.

"Now, next point," went on Rickfield, in a business-like tone, which showed that he had been carefully pondering the plan for some time. "Do you think that it will be safe for me to remain in this hiding-place till dark?"

Reggie understood him better when he outlined his plan. This was to start off as soon as it got dark, and walk across country through the night. It would be easy for him to get to London the next day.

"I can soon mingle with the crowd and get lost there," he went on. "It is risky, of course, but not so risky as being here."

"What's risky?" asked a voice.
Reggie turned round, and saw Mr. Dell, the millionaire, standing behind him.

"Ma" Perkins.

As Mr. Dell entered the vehicle the escaped convict, acting on some impulse of self-preservation, withdrew into the shelter of the bunk.

"I suppose that's the man the police are after?" said Dell, pointing to the bunk. And then he went on: "Show yourself, old chap. I won't bite."

Once more Mr. Rickfield's face appeared. Dell surveyed him with interest.

"You don't look like a criminal," he said. "I am a bit of a character reader. I'd trust you now with a hundred pounds. What have you been doing? How did you get into trouble? It wasn't anything to do with dishonesty, I'll bet a firer."

"I'm afraid you would lose it, then," replied the convict. "I was in prison for forgery."

"H'm! Money?"
"Yes; a series of cheques, some for large amounts, and other documents."

Tony Dell looked searchingly at the man.

"Did you agree that the verdict was a true one?" he asked.

"Certainly I didn't! I never—"

"Well, I don't either. You are an honest man, or I'll never believe my own judgment again."

Rickfield was almost overcome at the words. He had grown accustomed to the doubt and disbelief of the world, and Tony Dell's bluff statement of faith in him seemed to stagger him completely. He tried to say some words of gratitude, and broke down in the attempt.

"Keep all that sentiment till you're in better trim," said Dell. "We want to get to the bottom of the mystery, and I want to see you through with your troubles. What is your plan?"

The plan of going to London was outlined.

"Rot!" said Dell. "The police would have you in a day. Don't you see, man, your nerves are gone. You would give yourself away right and left. You want mothering."

"But what am I to do?"

"Do!" replied Dell. "Why, stay with us! It will be the sport of my life. I'll cheat the police, even if they come to live with us."

He took another searching look at the convict.

"I'll tell you what I am going to do," he went on. "I'm going to make a dear old lady of you, and I'm going to give you a leading part in my moving pictures. It's just the kind of sport I like."

Then he turned on Reggie.

"You're in the secret," he said. "But I tell you what, you young scamp, if you split, I'll break every bone in your body!"

This was said with a smile. Apparently Mr. Dell regarded Reggie as perfectly safe with the secret.

It was amazing how eagerly the convict clutched at the suggestion that his new friend had made.

"That means," he said, "that there is no immediate necessity for me to leave this district? I am glad if it is so, because my hope is in that house."

He pointed in the direction of Storm Park.

Mr. Dell wanted to know what he meant.

"But it's a long story," he said, "but had better put it off till we have fixed things up a bit. This place is only a glorified waggon, and anyone outside could hear us as easily as I heard you two just now."

So they started "fixing things up" at once. Tony Dell's method was simple. An ample supply of dresses and garments suitable for the various scenes of the proposed pictures had been brought from London with other properties. In a couple of journeys to the vans in which these were kept he managed to bring a really good wardrobe, that changed the convict into a perfectly delightful-looking old lady.

Mr. Dell laughed heartily as he surveyed the result of his industry.

"We'll have to give you a stage name," he said merrily. "How will 'Ma' Perkins suit you?"

It was said mischievously, but the name seemed to be the right one, and Ma Perkins the convict became.

"Now we'll bundle a few of those boys down to the hotel to sleep, and you shall have one of the vans," he went on, "and I must think out some pretty little fairy-tale about how I engaged you for your part."

Thus was the millionaire's plot carried through, and when Ma Perkins was introduced to the other actors, it was surprising how offensively everyone accepted the new-comer as a bona-fide picture actress.

"But what's the old lady for?" asked Silas Shock. "And THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 418.

why does she go about with a veil over her features? Is her complexion too delicate for the daylight?"

Mr. Dell had a reason or an excuse ready for any inquiry, but this was practically the only question that was asked about her.

That afternoon there was another rehearsal—in the open air this time. Mr. Dell was taking a great interest in the grouping of the boys, now dressed up as villagers, and the convict was standing on one side watching, when all of a sudden he became aware of the fact that a policeman was standing by his side.

"You in this show, mother?" asked the policeman.

"Waiting my time," replied Rickfield. Then suddenly he went on: "Are you. I've only just joined this branch of the company, and don't know all the actors yet."

"No; I'm a real meat and muscle policeman," replied the officer. "There is nothing made-up about me. But what I want is a little help. You've got some rather smart boys in this company, and I dare say you know some of them. Could you point out one to me that you think would be pretty reliable?"

"That one over there," was Rickfield's reply, pointing to Reggie White.

Just then Reggie caught sight of the policeman, and naturally feared that the disguise had failed. But the policeman reassured him as soon as he came forward.

"This lady gives you a good character," said the policeman, "and I was wondering if you could do a little job for me."

Reggie expressed his willingness, and the officer went on to outline the job.

It was a simple one. It consisted in keeping his eyes open and acting as a sort of police-agent on the spot.

"You see," explained the officer, "that convict may not have gone far away, and we can't be here, there, and everywhere, so it occurred to our chief at the station that if he tried to get back to the house again one of your party might get to hear about it, or come upon some trace of him. What I want you to do, is just to keep a good look-out and let us know over at the police-station if you come upon anything suspicious."

Of course Reggie promised to watch for the convict—he said nothing about reporting to the police—and the officer departed, highly pleased with himself. When he had gone, Reggie and Ma Perkins exchanged glances.

"We shall have to be careful," said Reggie. "It seems that the police still think it is worth while keeping an eye on this place."

"Hullo! I wonder who that swell is? I don't fancy he is one of our party. Perhaps he is a detective."

As he spoke, he pointed to a somewhat stylishly-dressed man who had suddenly appeared on the lawn, and was peering up at the house.

Rickfield caught hold of the boy's arm. "It is worse than that!" he said. "That man is here for the same reason as I am. He has come to find some papers and other things that are hidden in that house, and if he once finds them my last chance of clearing my reputation as an honest man is gone for ever."

"Who is he, then?" asked Reggie.

"He is the man who ought to be in prison in my place, and the papers I was searching for would put him there."

The Law's Long Arm.

Reggie did not ask then for any further explanation of these words. It was clear that the first thing to be done was to keep the stranger out of the house without arousing suspicion. Fortunately, the rehearsal was over, and Mr. Dell was near at hand. Hastily the boy repeated what the escaped convict had said.

"Eh? What?" replied Tony Dell. "That man over there? Why, that's Mr. Nixon, the father of that young swell who belongs to our company. He's the man who told me about this old house. Do you fancy our sad-faced friend, Ma Perkins, is romancing?"

"I am puzzled about the whole story," replied Reggie.

"Well, there is no harm in taking precautions," said Dell. "Here are the keys of the house. You go and see that it is thoroughly locked up, and I'll go and have a chat with friend Nixon."

Reggie hurried off to do as Mr. Dell had suggested. He found that only one door—a small one at the side which the party generally used—was unlocked. Before making this secure, the notion took hold of him that he would like to investigate the hole in the wall through which the convict and the police had so suddenly appeared earlier in the day.

He found that a part of the panelling opened like a door, and that the convict had simply come from another room. It was not a secret chamber, but opened on to the corridor, just as the other rooms did.

(Continued on page 28)

BRITAIN'S MOST BEAUTIFUL WOMEN PRAISE "HARLENE HAIR-DRILL."

Remarkable Endorsement of MISS ELLALINE TERRISS'S Striking Announcement.

MAMMOTH NEW YEAR GIFT TO THE NATION. 1,000,000 FOUR-FOLD COMPLETE "HAIR-DRILL" OUTFITS.

FREE: 1. A Trial Bottle of "Harlene-for-the-Hair." 3. A Supply of "Cremex" Shampoo Powder.
2. A Bottle of "Uzon" Brilliantine. 4. The secret "Hair-Drill" Manual.

THE remarkable announcement that appeared recently in the public Press by that charming and beautiful actress, Miss Ellaline Terriss, has aroused enormous interest, and the wonderful testimony given to the great value of the now-famous "Harlene Hair-Drill" method of securing and maintaining hair beauty has been immediately followed by a host of letters from all parts of the Kingdom.

The daintiest of leading

actresses, whose beauty is a household word, the most handsome of actors, have written to endorse everything that Miss Ellaline

3. A bottle of "Uzon" Brilliantine, which gives a final touch of beauty to the hair
4. The secret "Hair-Drill" manual giving complete instructions for carrying out this two-minutes-a-day scientific hair-growing exercise.

You can always obtain further supplies of "Harlene" from your chemist at 1s., 2s. 6d.; or 4s. 6d. per bottle; "Uzon" Brilliantine at 1s., 2s. 6d.; "Cremex" at 1s. per box of seven shampoos (single packets, 2d. each).

If ordered direct from Edwards' Harlene Company, any of the preparations will be sent post free on remittance. Carriage extra on foreign orders



Miss Phyllis Monkman
(Photo: Bassano)

pays her tribute to Edwards' "Harlene," and most confidently advises those who desire hair beauty to follow her example.

Terriss has said.

Others who have testified to the value of "Harlene" or the other delightful preparations emanating from this famous house are the following:—

**THE MARCHIONESS OF HEADFORT
LADY DE BATHE (LILY LANGTRY)**

MARY MOORE

CONSTANCE COLLIER

EDNA MAY

ELSIE JANIS

JULIA NEILSON

MAUD JEFFRIES

ETHEL LEVEY

YVONNE ARNAUD

ELISE CRAVEN

MRS. BROWN-POTTER

Mlle. SUZANNE ADAMS

CONSTANCE STEWART

ELSIE SMETHURST



Photo: Weather & Bush

Millions of people have taken delight in the charm of Miss Ellaline Terriss and her fascinating art. To-day this world-famous actress gives advice which will enable everyone to double their attractiveness and charm. The secret is "Harlene Hair-Drill" in connection with which a Four-Fold Gift awaits your acceptance. Fill in and post form given here.

direct from Edwards' Harlene Company, 20-26, Lamb's Conduit Street, London, W.C.

SPECIAL NOTICE.

An innovation that will be much appreciated by travellers, and, incidentally, soldiers and sailors at home and abroad, is announced by Mr. Edwards' introduction of "Solidified Harlene," which can more conveniently be carried in one's portmanteau or equipment than when in liquid form in a bottle.

In addition to the popular Liquid "Edwards' Harlene," Solidified "Harlene" is now on sale at all chemists in tins at 2s. 9d., or supplies may be obtained post free on remittance

A WONDERFUL HAIR BEAUTY GIFT.

Mr. Edwards has decided to make a great National New Year Gift, and is preparing no less than the colossal number of 1,000,000 Four-Fold "Harlene Hair-Drill" Gift parcels for free distribution.

This is the gift that awaits your acceptance, and all you have to do to secure it is to post the form given below:—

1. A bottle of "Harlene" a true liquid food for the hair, which stimulates it to new growth.
2. A packet of the marvellous hair and scalp cleansing "Cremex" Shampoo which prepares the head for "Hair-Drill."

"HARLENE HAIR-DRILL" GIFT COUPON

Fill in and post to **EDWARDS' HARLENE CO.,**
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Dear Sirs,—Please send me your free "Harlene" Four-Fold Hair-Growing Outfit. I enclose 4d. stamps for postage to any part of the world. (Foreign stamps accepted.)

Name

Address

GEM, February 12th, 1916.

THE PRIDE OF THE FILM!

(Continued from page 26)

But while Reggie stood in that room, he suddenly heard a sound quite near him—a sound of hammering and rapping.

He listened, then he looked around him. As he did so, he saw that a light was streaming through a crack in the wall just opposite him. Closer investigation showed that there was another secret panel arrangement in the room—this time a sliding panel that was not closed home.

The next moment he had slid the panel a little more open, and was peering through. He found that he was looking into the small cupboard-room to which Rickfield had brought him when they first met.

But this was not his chief discovery. He saw that the room was occupied, and at the same time he learned the cause of the mysterious hammering and rapping which he had heard.

The person in the small room was Hubert Nixon, one of his fellow actors, and the son of the stranger he had just seen outside the house.

He must have heard Reggie, or else he must have turned, on the off-chance of being watched, for, with a swift twist of his body, he brought himself round so that not only was he looking Reggie straight in the face, but he had all the appearance of being prepared to resist an attack.

"Oh! You!" he said, with a puzzled accent in his voice. "I expect you're up to the same game as I am. Well, it's rather a lark being in a house like this."

"I came to look up the house," explained Reggie, "and I heard hammering."

Young Nixon was holding the hammer behind him as if he were trying to hide it, but at this reference he boldly brought it out.

"That's the way to find hiding-places in these old houses," he said.

Reggie made nothing of the suspicious circumstance, but quickly went on:

"Well, I suppose you are ready to go?"

"What's the hurry?" asked Nixon. "One doesn't get a chance like this every day. You get ahead and look up. There is one door that closes on the latch, so I can easily get out."

Reggie White met this with a little show of well-acted indignation.

"Do you think the boss would trust me again if he heard?" he retorted. "No; I'll be hanged if you shall stay here! When I'm trusted to do a job, I do it!"

Nixon looked intensely disappointed, and submitted with very bad grace.

The house locked up, Reggie went to find Mr. Dell. That worthy was in a very excited state.

"Don't bother me about anything, my boy," he said; "here's my sister-in-law and my niece have turned up, or are going to turn up, and I am to find rooms for them somewhere!"

He strode off, just taking the keys out of Reggie's hand. Ben Wheeler, the chauffeur, was standing near, and had overheard the remark. He came across to Reggie.

"The boss's little pile of troubles are about to begin," he remarked. "I've met that lady before. Mrs. Horace Dell is a bit barmy in the onion, if you ask me, and the boss simply can't abide her."

"Well, I suppose he needn't if he doesn't wish to," said Reggie.

"Oh, needn't he!" replied the chauffeur knowingly. "Well, he's her guardian and executor, so she thinks as how she can chase him all over England, which she does!"

"But Miss Dolly," he went on, with a sudden look of admiration. "Ah, she's a dainty little maiden! He ought to be proud to have a niece like her!"

"Are they mother and daughter?" asked Reggie.

"Not strictly speaking," replied the chauffeur. "You see, Mr. Horace, the boss's brother, married twice. The first Mrs. Horace was Dolly's mother, and they do say as how she was like a picture, which is where Miss Dolly gets her good looks. But the second lady of that name ain't of the picture postcard kind. You wouldn't pay five shillings for a seat in the stalls to look at her for a few hours."

"Oh, wouldn't he?" inquired a voice, and a lady stepped from behind a bush. "I see, Ben Wheeler, you're as rude as ever!"

"Beg pardon, ma'am! I was talking about someone else," retorted Ben Wheeler.

"Why not brazen it out, Ben?" said the lady. "What you

say is quite true, and you needn't be ashamed of it. Have you seen that daughter of mine?"

"Meaning Miss Dolly, ma'am?"

"Of course meaning Miss Dolly! Do you think I meant Mrs. Pankhurst? I've been searching for her for nearly an hour, and I feel just mad enough to treat her as a real mother would do. Who's that guy?"

She pointed at Rickfield, who, seeing Reggie, was coming forward to speak to him.

"That's Ma Perkins," replied the chauffeur.

"She marches like a grenadier!" said Mrs. Horace. "I wonder if she has seen Dolly?"

Straightway Mrs. Horace Dell questioned the new-comer. But Rickfield had not seen Dolly, and said so.

"Ah!" ejaculated Mrs. Horace. "Is this some more of my precious brother-in-law's fustery? You're not a woman, you're a man!"

Before Rickfield could reply, Tony Dell himself came bustling up. He greeted his sister-in-law with a worried look that showed that he was not well pleased with her arrival, and the two walked off side by side. Ben Wheeler looked after them with a gleeful face, and then turned to Rickfield.

"You mustn't mind what she says, mother," he said soothingly. "She's a slight bit weak in the crumpe, and can't help saying these things. You saucer her back, she rather likes it, and will think all the more of you!"

And with this good advice, he turned away, leaving Reggie and Mr. Rickfield together.

"That lady saw through my disguise," said the convict moodily.

"Don't worry about her," interrupted Reggie. "I have got something more important to tell you."

And he described in as few words as possible what he had seen in the house. Mr. Rickfield became greatly excited.

"But what is it he was searching for?" asked Reggie. "If I know, I might be able to be on the spot first next time."

"Quite right!" said Rickfield. "I meant to have told you before. It is really a very simple story. The late caretaker of that old house was a ticket-of-leave man, who had served several years for forgery. He was the cleverest forger who ever took up the profession. I have seen several documents and signatures supposed to be in my writing, and really I could not tell them from my own."

"He worked with Mr. Nixon, who was a clerk for a few months in the business in which I was managing-director. Between them they robbed my firm of thousands, and managed, by forged papers, to make it appear as if I had done it. Nixon is now very rich as a result of the swindle, and owns several picture-palaces."

"On the last day of my trial for forgery, Wilber, that was the name of the man who actually did the forging, heard from his doctor that he couldn't live a week. He must have repented of what he did; anyway, he got a message through to me while I was actually in the dock. It was a rambling, silly kind of a message, and I wasn't quite myself, and didn't understand it. People can't always think very clearly when they are being tried for crime."

"But, anyway, when I was all by myself in prison, I understood. I suppose my mind was clearer then. The chance came for me to escape, and I got here to this house, which was what the message hinted."

"What is it you expect to find?" asked Reggie.

"Wilber's diary, and all the papers on which he practised his forgeries, and perhaps a statement as to how the money was divided."

The conversation, which had taken place on the dilapidated lawn in front of the house, was suddenly interrupted by the appearance of the two Nixons, father and son. There were three other people with them, all strangers to Reggie. One of these was a woman.

They did not walk directly towards Reggie and his companion; but seemed to be looking around for someone. When they got near enough Mr. Nixon shouted out.

"Have you seen Mr. Dell about anywhere? This gentleman wants to see him."

"He was here a few moments ago," replied Reggie in the same tone.

The reply brought the whole party across in a manner that looked natural and unarranged. Neither Reggie or his companion had any idea but that one of the strangers really did want to speak to Mr. Dell. Certainly they never connected them with the mysterious circumstances of the last few hours.

But they were quickly un deceived. One of them suddenly turned to the convict.

"Mrs. Perkins," he said, "we have reason to believe that you are really called Rickfield, and that you are not a woman at all. Will you please remove that veil?"

(Another long instalment of this splendid new serial story next Wednesday. Order your copy early.)



THIS WEEK'S CHAT



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

For Next Wednesday:

"THE STUDY WRECKERS!"

By Martin Clifford.

Next Wednesday's magnificent, long, complete story of school life is one which will be thoroughly enjoyed by all. Levison and his cronies, taking vengeance for so-called wrongs, create considerable havoc in the old school by smashing up the happy home, after the manner of the Crown Prince. Of course, Tom Merry & Co. proceed to take out reprisals, and many stormy scenes and thrilling incidents ensue ere

"THE STUDY WRECKERS!"

are finally brought to a state of subjection.

ADDRESS WANTED.

Will Miss "Dick" Holgate, whose letter I published on this page some weeks ago, be good enough to furnish me with her full address?

MISCELLANEOUS ANNOUNCEMENTS FROM ALL QUARTERS.

(Inserted free of charge by the Editor of the "Gem" Library.)

C. Leutz, 150, Camberwell Grove, Camberwell, S.E., wishes to join a football club in his district. Age, 15; weight, 6st. 3lb.; height, 5ft. Can play any position on the field except goal.

Victoria Road Junior Football Club wishes to fix matches for the rest of the season within three miles' radius of Northwich. Apply to George Reid, 69, Victoria Road, Northwich, Cheshire.

L. Maguire, 36, Buxton Street, London Road, Manchester, wishes to form a "Gem" League in his district. Intending members should enclose a stamped, addressed envelope.

H. Smith, 15, Clare Street, Bristol, wishes to form a "Magnet" and "Gem" League in his district.

The Junior Apprentices F.C. wishes to arrange a match with a team at Dartford for Easter Monday. Average age, 16. Apply J. Rigden, 69, Dale Street, Chatham, Kent.

Private W. Boniface, No. 25, 2nd Royal Sussex Regiment, B.E.F., France, would be very grateful to receive spare copies of the companion papers.

Albion Rovers F.C. wishes to arrange matches with clubs in the district. Average age, 13. Apply, T. McArdle, 71, Albion Street, Everton.

Glenwood F.C. require away matches within a six miles' radius of Aberdeen. Average age, 15½. Apply, J. Guth, 79, Gray Street, Aberdeen.

Will Edward Ferraris, who was living at 78, Richmond Road, Bradford, Yorks, write to his old chum, Granville Bowcutt, 7, Blythe Street, Richmond Road, Bradford, Yorks?

North Leeds Juniors require matches within two and a half miles' radius of district. Average age, 13½. Apply, R. Niman, 47, Hamilton Avenue, Chapeltown Road, Leeds.

A football team wishes to fix home and away matches within a six miles' radius of Blackburn. Average age, 15. Apply, E. Horner, 3, Moorfield Avenue, Wilfshire, near Blackburn.

Driver J. Ladley, No. 30624, No. 1 Section, 37th Division, Ammunition Column, B.E.F., France, would be very grateful to receive spare copies of the "Penny Popular."

Hurst Cogan, 8, Richmond Hill, Rathmines, Dublin, would like to hear from any readers of the companion papers who are interested in story-writing.

Will readers who have spare copies of the companion

papers forward them to Trumpeter S. Jackson, Headquarters 110th Brigade, R.F.A., B.E.F., France?

Compstall Juniors require home and away matches within a radius of six miles of district. Average age, 13. Apply, Clarence Hibbs, 129, Montague Street, Compstall, near Stockport.

Signaller T. McCarthy, 12th Batt. S.W.B., "A" Company, Wellington Lines, Aldershot, would be very grateful if a reader of the companion papers would send him a pair of mittens.

R. D. Tyler, 163, Abbeyfield Road, Sheffield, desires to form a "Magnet" and "Gem" League. Members need not live in the district, but anywhere in the British Isles. Intending members should enclose a stamped, addressed envelope for a reply.

A CONVERT'S LETTER.

The following interesting and somewhat touching note reached me a few days ago:

"Dear Editor.—Some time ago I acted as an unscrupulous cad towards your paper the 'Gem,' and want to ask you to forgive me. I was too young and thoughtless and silly then to realise what mischief I was doing. Please use the enclosed half-crown to send a few books to our brave soldiers.—Yours sincerely,
 "REPENTANT."

The letter furnishes no clue to the writer's name, but I have pleasure in telling him that I am only too pleased to take him back into the fold. Copies of the companion papers to the value of half-a-crown have been despatched to a military base in France where the Tommies are hard up for reading matter, and on their behalf I thank "Repentant" most sincerely for his kindly thought.

REPLIES IN BRIEF.

R. K. (Lynn).—No, I don't edit the "Union Jack," but I am glad to hear you like it so much. You are indeed a keen supporter of the papers issued from Fleetway House, with a list of ten taken regularly. Wonder if anybody can beat this? Harry Wharton & Co. are not really two Forms lower than Tom Merry & Co., because the standard at St. Jim's and Greyfriars is not quite the same. Storyette not quite good enough.

T. E. L. B.—Grundy and Malpas are about equal in spelling, but in every other respect Malpas is an "also ran." Knox is not likely to keep it up.

"Gemite" (Spinkhill).—Cannot give you address, as the place you mention is wholly imaginary. Plenty of readers in your locality; not sure about your village.

S. S. (Brighton).—Certainly I don't think either the "Magnet" or the "Gem" could possibly do anyone learning electrical engineering any harm. Why should they? However hard you may work, you need some amusement, just as you need food. You can't eat electrical engineering, can you? As to smoking, make up your mind you won't. Don't talk about being a victim. Be your own master.

"A New Reader" (Hadleigh).—Sorry I cannot help you to identify button. Impossible to reproduce from so rough a sketch. You seem to be quite a musical swell. Grundy is great—but not quite in the way he thinks himself.

W. C. B. (Gateshead).—Mayne has gone up into a higher Form, and is working very hard for exams., hence his dropping out. Glad you liked "Mason's Last Match"—a capital yarn. D'Arcy's cabbages—well, well! Ask me another! Gussy has forgotten all about them by this time.

A. P. (Westminster).—You say the "Gem" is the best of all. Hear, hear!

(Continued on next page.)

REPLIES IN BRIEF (continued).

H. G. (Irechester).—There are plenty of quite simple exercises which will help to loosen arm muscles. Boxing will help, too. For leg muscles, try dancing.

H. W. (Smethwick).—Sorry about your poem. But I can't make out whether it's serious or funny.

A. A. (Northampton).—You will find the information you want in the "Gem" Supplement. In future I shall have to refer readers to that for ages, etc., of the characters.

"Pattiot" (Crofton Park).—Your family has certainly done well, but I have heard of others with more members serving the King.

J. H. E. (Dagenham).—Certainly you are not too old to read the companion papers. Why, they are read by grandfathers and grandmothers, and you have not got there yet.

"Another Tomboy" (Australia).—Thanks for your letter and high praises.

A. W. S. (Birmingham).—Quite right! Mr. Quelch's name is Samuel. You have a long, strong memory.

"Two Young Gemites" (Weymouth).—We should like to have every corner of the British Isles and the Overseas Dominions represented among the St. Jim's heroes. But it would make an awful crowd, wouldn't it? The Shell is senior to the Upper Fourth. The difficulty you have is due to the fact that there is no regular system of naming Forms.

P. W. (Sydney).—The Christmas Special Supplement answers most of your questions. Will see what can be done about bringing Kangaroo more into prominence.

"Loyal Australia".—See reply above. We are no end proud of the Australians. Anzac is a word that will never be forgotten as long as men admire real grit.

S. S. (Johannesburg).—You think the "Gem" and "Magnet" absolutely the finest value going. Shake hands, old man! So do I.

"A Girl Observer" (Melbourne).—It would not have been practicable to include Australia in our International Competition. But I know that we have many most loyal readers there.

L. A. H. (Battersea).—We cannot get badges during the war.

A. E. and P. S. (Lowestoft).—Thanks for your loyal letter. Not room to publish it. And perhaps Mahas and his kidney have had more notice than they deserve.

F. C. (Birmingham).—No. Tom Merry's team is not in any League. School teams don't usually play in Leagues. Talbot is about the same age as Tom Merry.

J. F. B. and N. R. R. (Blythe Bridge).—Don't be afraid! Mr. Clifford will not have to make way for Jules Verne. Sorry to have been so long in replying. Stephens has already been properly squashed, I think.

E. H. (Dobross).—Hardly fair to class Grundy with Crooke and Levison, is it? The great George Alfred has his little faults, but he is certainly not a cad.

J. S. (Swansea).—Glad to hear your father likes the "Gem." Probably your jokes were not up to the mark. We get a lot, you know, and can only use the best.

"Militia" (Bitterne).—No, I don't edit the "Penny Pictorial." Cannot promise you a love tale in the "Gem"—not our line. The best office to go into? Well, that depends on your tastes, and I really cannot advise you.

A. E. C. (Plymouth).—Glad to hear the companion papers sell out so quickly in your town. It looks to me as though some of the newsgents might very well order a bigger supply. Artists cannot remember everything, and perhaps Talbot has mislaid his trouser-clips. Afraid we have no space for articles.

W. J. (Plymouth).—Sorry I cannot do as you ask; we have shut down the Correspondence Exchange for the period of the war, and must not make exceptions to our rule. You don't seem to have been fairly treated by your friend, but, of course, one cannot judge properly from one side of the story. I hope he has improved by this time.

L. C. (Penarth).—So you are an admirer of the Talbot yarns. Good! But joke sent—not so good.

"Mavoureen" (Brixton).—Sorry to disappoint you, after such a long wait, too; but the characters you name are quite fictitious.

A. A. P. (Cireff).—Too many questions, and most of them of such a nature as would make the answers merely matters of opinion. We have no means of knowing our exact circulation in various towns. Don't you know that there is no professional football at all just now?

E. F. (Southampton).—So your father was a reader of the "B. E." in the old, long ago days, when it was a halfpenny paper, and started you on it when you became old enough. That's the right sort of father! You like the "Gem" best, though, you say. I shall not quarrel with you for that.

F. M. O. (Ashford, Middlesex).—Apothecary Talbotite! There are hosts of you, it seems.

C. W. (Hackney Road).—Joke below standard. Try again!

D. C. (Lee).—So you would rather read nothing at all than Jules Verne? Bit rough on the late lamented French genius,

isn't it? But you need not fear our pushing Mr. Clifford out to make room for him.

"A Girl 'Gem' Admirer" (Hull).—Sorry to hear your father is a civilian prisoner of war. The one way to become an author—I could not use the ugly word authoress—is just to write and write, and keep on writing, until you can write. It is not a calling to which you can be apprenticed, and you would not really benefit much by helping an author or editor, even if you could find one who needed help. Thanks for your offer, all the same.

"A Girl Chum" (Exeter).—Sorry your answer has been so long delayed. The Remove at Greyfriars is below the Upper Fourth and the Shell. The Shell at St. Jim's is above the Upper and Lower Fourth. Is this what you want to know? No Exeter boy at either school, I believe. Glad your father likes the "Gem."

J. L. (Nelson, Lancashire).—Your interesting letter certainly did not bore me. You are indeed a staunch supporter, with 28 recruits—all girls—to my army of readers, and an ambition to double the number. Not many people of your age have seen so much of the world as you have—South Africa, Bermuda, India, Malta, with New Zealand or Australia soon! Certainly you will be able to get the companion papers down under, though, perhaps, not quite as easily as you do here. Should very much like to see the photograph you suggest sending. Write again by all means, and, believe me, that I am sorry this reply has been so long delayed.

F. C. H. (Sydenham).—Why not get your father to read one or two of the stories himself and see what he thinks of them?

From the 2nd Battalion of the West Yorkshire Regiment comes a very cheering letter of appreciation, giving the names of half a dozen keen readers of the companion papers, and mentioning that there are many more. If Private Fred Hick will let me know where he should be addressed now—I hope he will see this—I will gladly insert a request to readers to send their spare copies. When he wrote he said that his battalion did not expect to be long in the quarters then occupied.

H. B. (Longsight).—I imagine that, before this, you will have found out at a recruiting office what you want to know, but yours is one of those cases in which stopping at home had a good deal of justification.

J. A. Scott and W. H. Fell, 25, Norwood Street, Hull, would be glad to have from readers copies of the companion papers to send to prisoners of war.

E. M. O. (Leicester).—I am afraid there is no chance of your entering the Navy as a midshipman without considerable expense to your parents for some years to come.

Bertha W. (Northfleet).—The places and characters are imaginary. It is quite correct that everybody who entered the Story Competition—and there were several hundreds—will get a consolation prize.

A. G. M. (Alta, Canada).—See reply above, which will answer your first two questions. The "Magnet" stories deal with Greyfriars School, but Tom Merry & Co. often appear in them. Of course, the boys have holidays. The Tom Merry stories first appeared in 1903.

J. T. (Newbiggin-by-Sea).—Pleased to hear that both your father and mother appreciate the "Gem" and "Magnet."

W. L. (Plymouth).—We get quite a number of letters from your town—and from nearly everywhere else, too. I don't think there is a Plymouth boy at St. Jim's.

R. J. (Sunbury).—Glad the knife pleased you. Cutis, I believe, is much as usual—that is to say, very unpleasant.

J. W. F. (East Molesey).—So your Belgian friends enjoy the "Gem" and "Magnet"? Good! Only yesterday I read letters from two Russian girls who were very keen on the two papers. We are getting quite an international celebrity. Long live the Allies, one and all!

J. B. (Kattanning).—Sketch very amusing. Joke not quite up to mark.

S. S. C. (Eastbourne).—Wasn't it Glyn who invented the automatic figure of Skimpole? You say Clifton Dane, but I think you are wrong.

E. B. (Canning Town).—Malpas is hereby informed, though rather late in the day, that you despise him. So do lots of others! A school serial does not suit all our readers. Many of them like a change from the complete story.

D. W. (Bounds Green).—No; I don't know of any place where cigarette-cards can be bought. You do not consider that the "Gem" stories are quite so good as they used to be. I am afraid you are getting old too fast!

Your Editor