

THE CONSCRIPTS OF ST. JIM'S!

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



THE WRATH OF THE CONSCRIPTED THIRD-FORM MASTER!

(A Stirring Scene in our Grand School Tale of TOM MERRY & CO. in this issue.)

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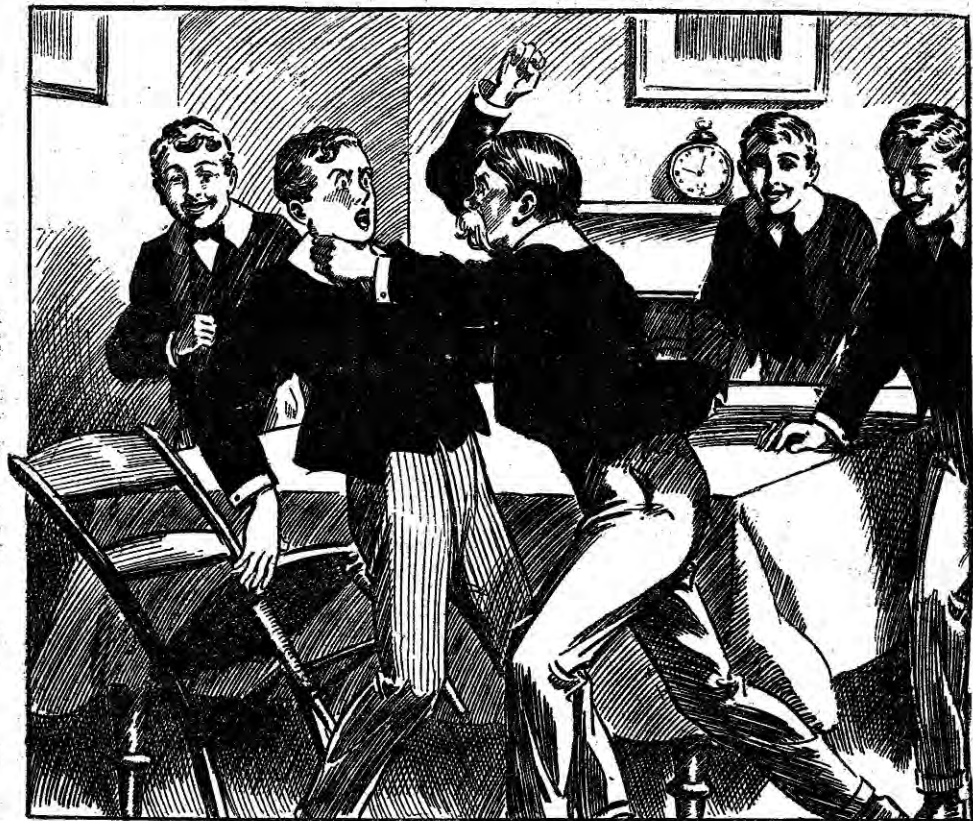


COMPLETE STORIES
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THE CONSCRIPTS OF ST. JIM'S!

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

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.



Grundy burst into Tom Merry's study, and clasped Lowther round the neck. "Yah! You spoofing rotter! You—you—you—!" he howled. (See Chapter 4.)

CHAPTER 1. Grundy's Latest.

"I'M going!"

George Alfred Grundy, of the Shell, made that announcement in a loud, determined voice. The great Grundy had been deep in thought for several minutes—quite an unusual circumstance with Grundy. Wilkins and Gunn, his study-mates, were at work on their prep. It was not easy to work with Grundy in the study. Grundy never kept still for a minute at a time, and he never moved without bumping the table, or knocking over a chair, or making something or other rattle or rock. Grundy's announcement that he was going came, therefore, as a relief to Wilkins and Gunn, who wanted to get their work done.

"Right-ho!" said Wilkins. "We'll come down when we've finished."

"You haven't done your prep, though," remarked Gunn.

"Blow prep!"

"What about Linton in the morning?"

"Blow Linton!"

Grundy was evidently in an independent mood. He jumped from the table, and strode about the study, his big hands driven deep into his trousers-pockets. His brow was corrugated, and his eyes gleamed.

"I'm going!" he repeated.

"Well, good-bye!" said Wilkins.

"I'm wanted. I feel that."

"Don't bump the table!" roared Gunn.

"Blow the table!"

Next Wednesday,

"D'ARCY'S DEBT!" AND "THE PRIDE OF THE FILM!"

"If you're wanted, go where you're wanted, and let a fellow get his work done!" said Wilkins.

"Hang work! What's work at a time like this?" demanded Grundy scornfully.

"It's time for work, ain't it?" said Wilkins, glancing at the study clock. "Getting on for half-past eight!"

"Fathead!"

"Same to you, and many of 'em," said Wilkins. "Now, is this verb passive? It doesn't make sense—not that there's much sense in Virgil, anyway!"

"Bust Virgil!"

"I wish I could," said Wilkins fervently. "I've often wished I could have the gloves on with Virgil for five minutes. I'd give him Georgics!"

"I'm going!"

"Well, why don't you go?"

"I can't go to-night, fathead! I'm going to-morrow. I've made up my mind about it," said Grundy determinedly. "Look at me!"

Wilkins and Gunn looked at him.

"I'm a big chap, ain't I?" demanded Grundy.

"Too big for a study this size!" agreed Gunn.

"Bigger than some chaps you see in khaki!" continued Grundy.

"Ye-es."

"And I've got brains," said Grundy.

"Have you?" ejaculated Wilkins, in astonishment.

"Yes, I have!" roared Grundy. "All the brains in this study! If you're going to be funny, George Wilkins—"

"I'm going to do my prep, if you'll give me a chance," said Wilkins. "I don't want old Linton to scalp me in the morning, if you do. This beastly verb must be deponent, now I come to think of it!"

"Just like you!" said Grundy bitterly. "Talk about Columbus fiddling while Carthage was burning!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What are you cackling about now?"

"Well, I thought it was Nero who fiddled while Rome was burning. My mistake!"

"I think it was Columbus," said Grundy. "But I don't care a dashed button whether it was Columbus or not! I'm sick of prep, and lessons, and old Linton, and all the rest of it, while there's a whacking big war going on! They've brought in conscription now, and they've fixed the minimum age at eighteen. Just like 'em!"

"Well, I suppose you don't want to be conscripted at fifteen and a half, do you?"

"Yes, I do."

"Oh, my hat! Well, I jolly well wish they'd conscript you! I might get my prep done before bedtime then!"

"I'm going!" repeated Grundy. "This war has been mismanaged. They want young blood—and brains. Now, they're conscripting all sorts of old Johnnies of forty, and—leaving me out, when I want to go!"

"You want to go!" yelled Gunn. "What for?"

"To kill Huns, of course. It's every decent man's duty to kill Huns! Think of me fooling at 'em! But here mugging up Latin, when I might be killing Huns!"

Grundy snorted indignantly, and his study-mates gasped. George Alfred Grundy was a fellow with many ideas, all of them extraordinary. But the idea of going out to kill Huns at fifteen and a half fairly put the lid on, so to speak. True, Grundy had often pointed out to his study-mates how much better the war would have been managed if his advice had been taken.

Grundy always knew exactly what ought to have been done. But he had chafed in vain so far, the war running on its own course in utter indifference to Grundy. And, so far, he had never proposed taking a hand in it himself.

"I'm going!" said Grundy. "Think of it! Conscripting all sorts of crocks, and leaving me here! They want brains in the Army; you can't deny that!"

"No, I suppose that's undeniable," agreed Wilkins. "But your joining wouldn't make any difference on that point, would it?"

"Then I'm a big, strong chap. They've conscripted the village milkman," said Grundy. "Now, you fellows know that I could knock the milkman out in one round. If they take him, why shouldn't they take me? The fact is, I'm fed-up, and I'm going, whether they like it or not!"

"You silly ass!" said Wilkins. "They won't take you!"

"They'll have to."

"Are you going to wallop Kitchener?"

"Don't be a funny ass, Wilkins! I'm going. The only difficulty is to make the chumps think I'm over eighteen! That's the point. Old Selby thinks the military age ought to be lowered to seventeen. He says so."

"Old Selby's nearly fifty!" chuckled Wilkins. "You'll find that most of the red-hot conscriptionists are over forty-one!"

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

"Well, what's the good of yanking unwilling chaps away by the neck, and leaving me here?" demanded Grundy. "I want to go, and I'm jolly well going! I shall have to work it somehow to make myself look older. That's what I've been thinking out. Then I'm going over to Wayland to enlist!"

"Enlist!" shrieked Gunn.

"That's it. I'm not going to fiddle while Rome's burning. I'm jolly well going into khaki!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What are you cackling at?" roared Grundy.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Wilkins and Gunn couldn't help it. As a rule, they were very tactful with George Alfred Grundy. George Alfred had a four-point-seven punch, so it was necessary for his study-mates to be tactful. But the idea of Grundy of the Shell going over to Wayland to enlist was too much for them. They laid back in their chairs and yelled.

Grundy glared at them angrily. When his King and country needed him, and he had made up his mind to do his duty, whether the authorities liked it or not, it was distinctly unpleasant to be yelled at in this manner. Wilkins and Gunn ought to have said, almost tearfully, "We don't want to lose you, but we think you ought to go." Instead of which, they were howling like hyenas, as if the thing were a joke!

"You silly chumps!" roared Grundy. "What is there to cackle at, I'd like to know?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Can't you see this is a serious matter?"

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

Grundy's patience was exhausted. He rushed at Wilkins, and yanked him over the back of his chair. Wilkins came down with a terrific bump on the study carpet, and yelled in quite a different manner.

"Yaroooh! Yooop! Oh! 'Yah!'"

"Hero, keep off!" yelled Gunn. "I—I think it's a ripping idea, Grundy! I do, really! I think— Yaroooh! 'Oh, crumbs!'"

"Bump!"

Gunn sprawled on the floor. Grundy glared at the two gasping juniors, and went out of the study, and closed the door behind him with a bang. Wilkins and Gunn sat up, and blinked at one another.

"After him!" gasped Gunn. "Why, I'll—I'll— Then he burst into a chuckle. "Grundy in khaki! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Grundy killing Huns!" gasped Wilkins. "Oh, my hat! Ha, ha, ha!"

And Grundy's affectionate chums yelled again. Grundy had often furnished meriment for his study-mates, but this time he had surpassed himself.

CHAPTER 2.

Lowther is Willing to Oblige.

"TOM MERRY!"

Tom Merry waved his hand at the intruder without looking up from his work. The Terrible Three were doing their preparation, and they were in a hurry. A four-handed mill had been arranged in Study No. 6 after prep. Naturally, Tom Merry and Manners, and Lowther hadn't any time to waste on George Alfred Grundy.

So Tom Merry waved one hand reprovingly and dismissively. But Grundy was not a person to be easily dismissed.

"It's rather important," he said.

"Not so important as prep," said Tom Merry. "I don't want to hear thee you want a place in the House team when the cricket comes on. I know the wonderful kind of cricket you play. Move on."

"I haven't come about the cricket."

"Go and tell Talbot how to bowl lobs," said Monty Lowther.

"Blow Talbot!"

"Shut the door," said Manners.

Grundy shut the door. He shut it behind him, however. "I want to speak to you, Tom Merry. 'Taint the cricket. I know you won't ever do the sensible thing about that. I want your help."

Tom Merry groaned dismally.

"Oh, all right! What is it?"

"You chaps have done a lot of amateur theatricals," said Grundy. "You've got a Junior Dramatic Society, and so on."

"And no title-roles for you," said Monty Lowther. "Don't tell us you're as ripping at theatricals as you are at cricket, Grundy. We know it already."

"I said I want help," said Grundy. "I want to be made up."

The Terrible Three stared.

"Made up?" asked Lowther. "Like a serial story?"

"No, you ass; like an actor."

"Oh! You want to be disguised?"

"Exactly."

"As a human being?"

"You silly ass!" roared Grundy. "I didn't come here for rotten jokes. I want to know whether you chaps will help me, as I want to be made up, and you've had some experience in that line."

"All serene," said Tom. "What's the little game, though? Are you getting up theatricals in your study?" Grundy sniffed.

"Certainly not. Is this a time for theatricals, with the blessed war going on like jiminy?"

"I didn't know it was going on like jiminy," said Tom pacifically. "I—I've never really seen jiminy going on. What's it like?"

"I've got an idea," said Grundy. "The question is, could you make me up as a chap about twenty?"

"Easily enough," said Tom, in wonder. "You're as big as some chaps of twenty—"

"Especially about the feet," said Lowther, with a nod.

"That's all right, then," said Grundy. "I'll go off to-morrow and get some man's clobber, and then you can make me up. I'll stand anything it costs."

"It won't cost much, and we'll do it free of charge," said Tom, with a smile. "But what's the little game?"

"I'd like you to make me up this evening for practice, so that I can see how it goes," said Grundy. "I don't want them to smell a rat at the recruiting-office."

"At the which?" yelled the chums of the Shell.

"The recruiting-office. I'm going to enlist to-morrow afternoon."

"Great Kitchener!"

"Enlist!" said Manners faintly.

Grundy nodded emphatically.

"That's the game. I'm sick of sticking here grinding Latin while chaps are wanted to kill Huns. I've decided to go."

"You—you—you've decided to go!" said Tom Merry. "Oh, my merry Aunt Sempronia! You won't ask Kitchener?"

"Certainly not. I'm going into the recruiting-office as a chap of twenty, and going to sign on for three years or the duration of the war," said Grundy. "Every extra man in the trenches helps, you know. It's now or never, with a chap my age—the war may be over before I grow up, and I shall die without having killed a Hun. It's sickening, I think of it! Well, I'm going, but it's necessary to look over eighteen."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look here, if you're going to begin cackling like Wilkins and Gunn—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Shush!" said Monty Lowther, reprovingly, as Tom Merry and Manners roared. "There's nothing to cackle at. Grundy is wanted in the trenches, just as he says; he'll brighten them up with his wonderful sense of humour. I'm jolly well going to help Grundy."

"Good for you, said Grundy. "That's sensible."

"Why, you ass, Monty—" began Tom.

"I'm going to help Grundy," repeated Lowther, closing one eye at his chums. "I don't want to lose him, but I think he ought to go. When Grundy's grand-children say to him in future times, 'Grandpa, what did you do in the Great War?' Grundy will be able to reply, 'I played the giddy ox, my children!'"

"Look here—" began Grundy.

"You come in after prep, and I'll start on you," said Lowther. "I'll get the make-up box ready. I'm quite at your service, Grundy. As for you, you cackling duffers, a blessed peacefulness will settle on the School House when Grundy's gone to the war."

"Gone to the war!" gasped Manners. "Ha, ha, ha!"

"Very likely he'll rise to be Commander-in-Chief—they give the biggest jobs to chaps with brains like Grundy's," said Lowther. "I back up Grundy. You rely on me, Grundy, and don't mind those cackling duffers."

"I don't," said Grundy, with a glare at Tom Merry and Manners. "I'll give you a look in at nine, Lowther."

"Right-ho! I'll have the things ready." Grundy nodded and quitted the study. Tom Merry and Manners wiped their eyes.

"Grundy grows richer every day!" gasped Tom. "I wonder what they'll say to him at the recruiting-office?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Private Grundy!" chuckled Lowther. "I suppose he won't put in for a commission? His moustache might come off while he's interviewing the Army Council—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But he's bound to be picked out for promotion."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But—but he can't be allowed to go!" exclaimed Tom.

"Look here, Monty—"

"I'm going to disguise him, as he asks me," said Lowther. "Perhaps when I've finished he will be sorry he spoke. You never know."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Terrible Three chuckled gleefully as they resumed their prep. When work was done, Tom Merry and Manners proceeded to Study No. 6, to acquaint Blake & Co. with the great news. Monty Lowther remained—to get the make-up apparatus ready—all ready for George Alfred Grundy!

CHAPTER 3.

Mr. Selby is Unpleasant.

"WALLY!"

"Rats!"

"You cheeky young wascal—"

"Bosh!"

"If you want me to thwash you, Wally—"

"Bow-wow!"

That cheery dialogue was taking place in Study No. 6 when Tom Merry and Manners arrived in that celebrated apartment. Blake and Herries and Digby were looking on, grinning. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, of the Fourth, was evidently lecturing his minor—Wally D'Arcy, of the Third. To judge by D'Arcy minor's replies, the lecture was not doing him any good.

"Hallo, trouble in the family?" asked Manners.

"This cheeky young wascal—"

"This blithering old fogey—"

"Shush!" said Tom Merry. "Don't be disrespectful to your elders. Remember that Gussy is practically a grandfather to you, Wally."

"The utah young wapsallion!" said Arthur Augustus.

"I refuse to let him leave this study till he has promised to give up his wotten ideah."

"Catch me!" said Wally disdainfully. "You can lend me the tanner or not, and you can go and eat coke!"

"I do not object to lendin' you a tannah, you young wascal, but I distinctly disapprove of your playin' twicks on Mr. Selby."

"Fathead!"

"Better go easy, Wally," said Tom Merry seriously.

"Your Form-master isn't a safe man to play tricks on."

"He's got to have it," said Wally doggedly. "Old Selby's gone too far. He's been walloping young Manners—"

"My minor!" exclaimed Manners.

"Yes. Reggie did practically nothing—only chuckled an ink-ball at Piggott, and if Piggott hadn't moved his head, the blessed thing wouldn't have gone in old Selby's eye—"

"In his eye! My hat!"

"Well, accidents will happen," said Wally argumentatively.

"Selby wouldn't even have got it then if he hadn't been sneaking behind us quietly. You know his sneaky way. And he simply skinned young Manners. Young Manners is rather a beast in some ways, but we're not going to let Selby treat us like Prussians. He's going to have it. And I want somebody to lend me a tanner to get some bloater-paste."

"Bloater-paste! What on earth for?"

"To paste in his topper. He's going to the meeting in Wayland to-morrow afternoon, and he will run up for his topper last thing. My idea is that he won't discover the bloater-paste till he's fairly started—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There is nothing to laugh at, you duffas. Wally's ideah is uttably diswepful, and vewy wisky."

"I thought Gussy would like the idea, or I wouldn't have mentioned it," said Wally, in an injured tone. "He's preached at me a lot of times to look after young Manners, and see him through."

"Yaas, but not to the extent of puttin' bloath-paste in your Form-masth's toppah."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, if you won't lend me the tanner—"

"I refuse to lend you sixpence for such a purpose, Wally."

"Who's going to lend me a tanner?" asked the scamp of the Third, looking round the study.

"Nobody, for bloater-paste," said Blake. "Don't be a young ass. Selby will skin you when it comes out!"

"Yes; but think of him at the conscription meeting, with bloater-paste oozing over his head!" urged Wally. "It's worth it!"

"Weally, Wally—"

"He's in his study now, writing his speech," said Wally.

"They're going to let him make a speech at the town-hall."

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

NEXT
WEDNESDAY:

"D'ARCY'S DEBT!"

You know he used to make speeches there, backing up conscription. Now he's attending meetings in favour of raising the military age to forty-five, and lowering it to seventeen. I jolly well wish they'd raise it to forty-nine and take him! Blessed old funk, too, shivering in his shoes when there was an alarm of Zepellins. There isn't a chap in the Third who doesn't despise him. Yah!"

"I do not approve of Mr. Selby, Wally, but I cannot allow you to play a disrespectful twick on your Form-mastah."

"Well, I sha'n't ask you," said Wally. "If there's no tanners going, you can go and chop chips. I'm off!"

Arthur Augustus stepped quickly between his minor and the door.

"Stop, you young wagamuffin!"

"Clear off, Gus!"

"I refuse to allow you to wotire frowm this studay, Wally, until you have given your pwomise not to play that wotten twick on Mr. Selby!"

"Go and eat coke!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Lemme pass, Gus, you ass! I shall biff you if you don't!" said Wally.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy detached the eyeglass from his eye, and pushed back his spotless cuffs.

"I am sowwy, Wally, to have to administah a feashul thwashin' but you leave me no othah resourcée."

"You'll be sorry if you begin," agreed Wally.

"Pway hold my eyeglass, Tom Mewwy. Now, you young yavoooh—yoop—goop!"

Wally had not waited for the fearful thrashing. He made a sudden charge, with his head lowered. The fag's hand had smote Arthur Augustus in the ribs as he turned to hand his monocle to Tom Merry.

Bump!

Arthur Augustus rolled most inelegantly on the study carpet, and Wally whipped through the doorway. He turned there for a moment, and grinned.

"Poor old Gussy! You'll get dusty down there," he said. "Gwooh!"

Wally vanished down the passage, and Arthur Augustus struggled to his feet. He jumped through the doorway, but his cheerful minor was gone. The swell of St. Jim's came back into the study, gasping for breath.

"There is nothing whatever to cackle at, you duffals!" he said stiffly. "That disrespectful young boundah is encouraged by your wibald mewmwent!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You fellows come for that mill?" asked Blake, slipping off the table. "I've got the gloves here."

"Something better on than a mill," said Tom. "Grundy's going to be a soldier."

"What!"

"He's going to disguise himself as a grown-up chap and enlist. Lowther's going to make him up experimentally this evening. He will be worth seeing when Lowther's made him up!"

"Gweat Scott!"

"We want all the fellows to share the treat," said Tom. "Grundy oughtn't to blush unseen, and waste his sweetness on the desert air, you know. He's gone to our study now to be made up."

"Pass the word round," grinned Blake. "Grundy will be worth seeing!"

"Bai Jove! I wegard Gwunday as an uttah ass!"

The Shell fellows went down to the common-room with the news. Blake scouted along the passages, telling it in the studies. The news was received with yells. Grundy had often surprised the School House fellows, but this time it was admitted on all hands that he took the cake.

In a very short time a crowd was gathered in the Shell passage to see George Alfred Grundy when he emerged from the humorous hands of Monty Lowther.

Tom Merry and Manners, and Study No. 6, and Talbot and Gore and Skimpole, and Kangaroo and Dane and Glyn, and Kerruish and Reilly and Julian, and a dozen more fellows, blocked the passage, all eager for the show. As Blake remarked, it would be at least as good as a cinema. There was a buzz of voices and laughter in the passage when Mr. Selby came along.

The master of the Third frowned at the crowd of cheery juniors. As none of the fellows there belonged to his Form he had no right to interfere with them. But Mr. Selby was an interfering gentleman. He had strict ideas about discipline, and was indeed a good deal of a Prussian in many ways. His discipline in the Third Form was very severe. The fags called it tyranny, but that depended on the point of view.

"What is all this?" exclaimed Mr. Selby.

"All which, sir?" asked Manners politely. Manners had a minor in the Third Form, who sometimes suffered severely

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under Mr. Selby's discipline, and he did not like the Third Form-master.

"This crowding and shouting," said the Form-master, frowning.

"I haven't heard any shouting, sir," said Manners. "Have any of you fellows heard any shouting?"

"Bai Jove! Not at all!"

"Divil a shout!" said Reilly.

"Not the ghost of a shout!" said Tom Merry cheerily.

Mr. Selby's greenish eyes glittered.

"Don't be impertinent, Merry!" he exclaimed.

"Certainly not, sir!"

"Disperse at once!"

"Eh?"

"Go into your studies," said Mr. Selby. "I disapprove of this crowding in the passage!"

The juniors stood quite still. Some of them were looking a little grim now. The other fellows looked to Tom Merry for guidance, and Tom stood firm.

"We are doing no harm here, sir," said Tom.

"You heard my order, Merry?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, go into your study!"

"If my own master orders me to go into my study, sir, I will go," said Tom coolly. "There is no rule against standing in the passage."

Mr. Selby's thin cheeks flushed.

"Do you venture to disobey me, Merry?" he snapped.

"I have answered you, sir!"

"I shall report this to your Housemaster!"

"Very good, sir!"

Mr. Selby went on his way, quite baffled. His uncalled-for interference had drawn upon him a rebuff that was lowering to his dignity. But there was no help for it. He could not make such a frivolous complaint to the Housemaster. The juniors were left victorious, and the Third Form-master went downstairs frowning darkly. In the lower passage he came upon Wally and Manners minor talking, and astonished them by boxing their ears.

Wally rubbed his ears and glared at Mr. Selby in amazement and furious indignation.

"The—the beast!" he gasped. "I—I'll make him sit up for that! The awful beast! He ought to be a Prussian! Why don't they conscript single men up to fifty?"

"I wish they would!" sighed Manners minor.

"Wouldn't it be gorgeous to see the notice of it in the paper, and then watch his face?" said Wally. "Ow, ow! My ear!"

And the two fags moved away, rubbing their injured ears, to relate their wrongs to a sympathetic crowd in the Third Form-room, and concoct plans of dire vengeance upon the tyrant—plans which were full of ferocity, but, unfortunately, impossible to carry out.

CHAPTER 4. Grundy in Disguise

"GO it!" said Grundy.

Monty Lowther was ready for his victim. There was not the ghost of a smile on the face of the humorist of the Shell. Monty Lowther was looking as serious as an owl.

Grundy was serious, too. It was a serious occasion. Grundy had fully decided to go to the war like older fellows; but he realised that the matter was serious. He thought of himself as coming back to St. Jim's with a glorious Victoria Cross, or an equally glorious wooden leg. Grundy would have given a good deal to be able to "swank" about the quad with a wooden leg as a veteran of the wars. And he was quite satisfied that his scheme was feasible. Ordinary fellows, perhaps, wouldn't be able to hoodwink the recruiting authorities in that way. But George Alfred wasn't an ordinary fellow. George Alfred was brainy—at least, he was quite satisfied that he was.

Monty Lowther had his materials all ready, and he proceeded to "make up" George Alfred in a workmanlike way. He started by giving him a deep-red complexion; then he darkened his eyebrows, and tinted his nose crimson.

Grundy looked in the glass and raised an objection.

"You've made me look like a chap who drinks," he said. "That's all right. You see, some Wayland people know you by sight, and you mustn't be recognised," said Lowther.

"Now for a moustache."

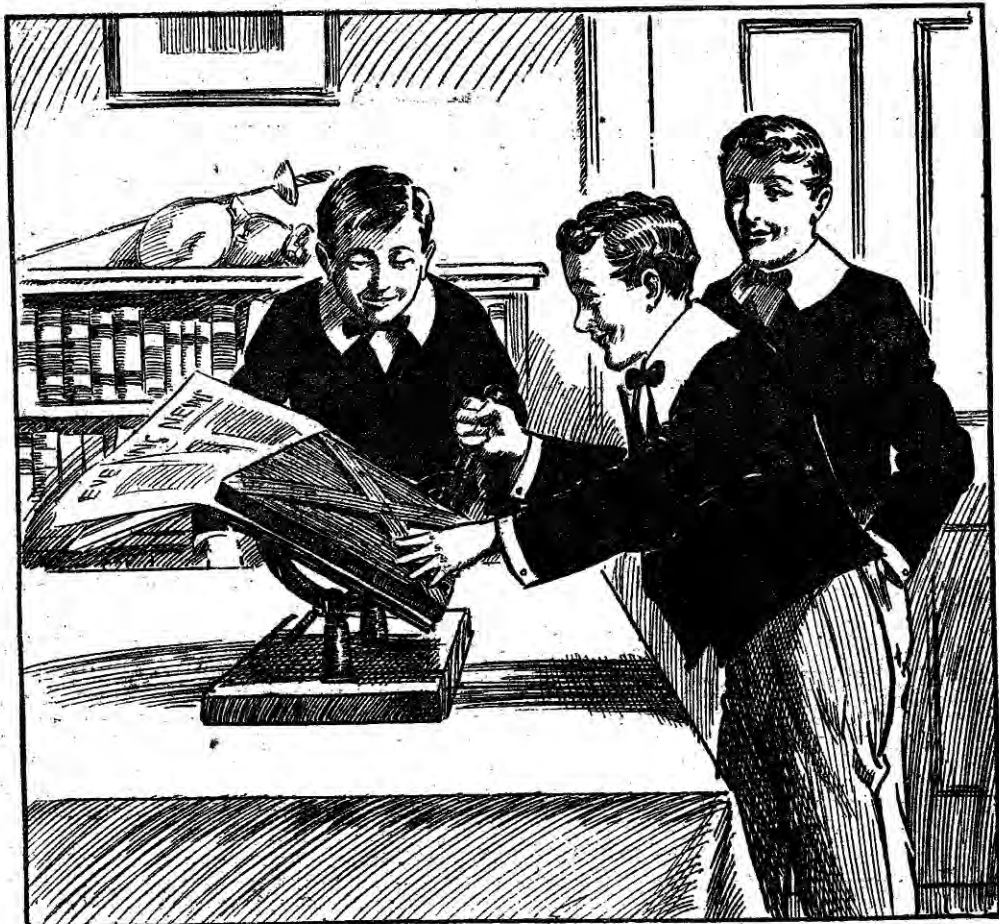
"I—I say, isn't that a rather big moustache for me?"

"The bigger the better."

It was a long, fair moustache, and the drooping ends curled under Grundy's chin. Then Lowther fastened a black wig on his head.

"I should think my own hair would do," objected Grundy.

"Better cover it up," said Lowther. "You see, your top-



Wally D'Arcy carefully laid the newspaper page over the type, with the blank of the stop-press column in the right place. A moment more, and it was printed. The fags jerked off the sheet, and looked at it. (See Chapter 10.)

knot looks like a schoolboy's. You don't want them to smell a rat."

"Oh, all serene! Whatter you doing now?"

"Just giving your ears a touch."

"My ears are all right."

"Look here, who's doing this make-up?" demanded Lowther.

"Oh, go ahead!"

Lowther coloured Grundy's ears red, and behind them—out of sight of George Alfred—he painted a bright blue. Grundy was beginning to look quite remarkable by this time. Black hair and blonde moustache, deep-red cheeks, and blue behind his ears, made a surprising tout ensemble.

"I suppose that'll do," said Grundy, squinting into the glass.

"Just a touch to your hair behind."

The "touch" to the hair behind consisted in attaching a ticket to the back of the wig. The ticket bore the inscription, in prominent letters:

"PLEASE TAKE A FREE KICK!"

"Now, that's simply ripping!" said Lowther. "Put this coat on and cover up your Etons, and you're quite convincing—quite! Now, my idea is for you to go about the House a bit, and see if the fellows recognise you."

"I hardly think they will!" said Grundy. "If it answers, this will do for me to-morrow for the recruiting-office."

"Ha, ha! I—I mean, exactly! Trot along!"

Lowther opened the study door.

Grundy, feeling a little sticky and nervous, stepped out into the passage.

There were twenty fellows there at least, and twenty grinning faces were turned towards Grundy. Grundy certainly did not look like Grundy; he looked like a comedian who had "made up" in a state of intoxication.

"Bai Jove!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus. "Is that—that—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Grundy passed along the passage with a lofty brow. There was a fresh yell of laughter as the ticket on his wig was seen. There was a rush to accept the invitation inscribed on it.

Kick, kick, kick!

Grundy gave a roar.

"Yaroooh! Wharrer you at? You silly owls——"

"Ha, ha, ha! Take a free kick!" roared Blake.

"Why, I'll—I'll——"

Grundy fairly fled. There was no arguing with a dozen yelling. He rushed down the passage, leaving the juniors yelling.

"He's going downstairs!" shrieked Blake. "He'll be seen! Oh, my hat, suppose he meets Railton!"

"Or Lanton! Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors yelled at the thought.

Grundy, determined to test his disguise, was going downstairs. In the lower hall there was a general exclamation from the fellows who sighted him.

"Who on earth's that?" exclaimed Kildare of the Sixth.

"Hallo! What are you doing here, my man?"

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NEXT
WEDNESDAY:

"D'ARCY'S DEBT!"

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

"My man" was very agreeable to the ears of Grundy. His disguise was evidently good; at least, he was taken for a man.

"It isn't a man!" exclaimed Darrel. "It's one of the kids got up! Why, it's Grundy of the Shell!"

"Grundy!" yelled Kildare.

Grundy would have passed on, but the captain of St. Jim's caught him by the collar and swung him round. Then he saw the ticket.

"Please take a free kick! Certainly! I'll take free kicks all the way back to your study, you young ass!"

"Yow-ow!" roared Grundy, as Kildare's boot came into play. "Stop! Yooop!"

Kick, kick!

Grundy ran for the stairs. Kildare followed him, still letting out with his boots, as if he were dribbling Grundy like a football. The unfortunate George Alfred no longer thought of putting his excellent disguise to the test. He went up the stairs three at a time, with the prefect after him. A roar of laughter greeted him from the crowd in the Shell passage.

"Well kicked, Kildare!"

"Put it on, Grundy!"

Grundy "put it on" with a vengeance. He bolted into his study, gasping. His wig was sideways now, and his moustache was awry—one corner under his chin, and the other tickling his ear. Wilkins and Gunn stared at him. Kildare shook a finger at him from the doorway.

"Now, clean that rubbish off, you young donkey!" he exclaimed. "If you show yourself like that again I'll take you to the Housemaster!"

"Yow-ow-ow!"

Kildare walked away, and Grundy collapsed into the armchair.

"What the merry thunder—" gasped Wilkins.

"Are you off your rocker?" yelled Gunn.

Grundy panted.

"I was only trying my disguise—"

"Disguise!" yelled Wilkins. "Is that a disguise? You howling ass, you're got up like a merryandrew!"

"Lowther did it for me—"

"Pulling your leg, you jumping idiot!"

"Grooch! I'll mop up those rotters! What were they all kicking me for, I'd like to know?" gasped Grundy.

"Because you were asking them to!" roared Wilkins.

"Look at that!" He jerked the ticket off the wig and thrust it into Grundy's astonished nose. "Look at it, you burbling jabberwock!"

"P-p-please take a free k-k-kick!" gasped Grundy.

"Why, the beast—the villain—pulling my leg all the time, the rotter—the spoofer! I'll—I'll—"

Words failed Grundy! He jumped up and rushed out of the study.

A yell in the passage greeted him.

"Here he comes!"

"Here's the Wild Man from Borneo!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Grundy did not heed. He rushed straight for Tom Merry's study, to interview Monty Lowther. He burst into the study and clasped Lowther by the throat.

"Yah! You spoofing rotter! You—you—you—"

"Yarook! Draggimoff!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Three or four fellows grasped Grundy and dragged him off. The great George Alfred was hurled out of the study. Monty Lowther gasped, and dabbed his nose with his handkerchief. The handkerchief streamed red.

"Ow, ow, ow, wow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Sure, that's the crame of the joke, intirely!" yelled Reilly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You silly ass, there's nothing funny in this—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The humour of the situation had departed for Monty Lowther. But the other fellows persisted in regarding the climax as funny—the funniest part of the whole thing, in fact.

CHAPTER 5. Caught in the Act.

"**S**HUSH!" breathed Wally.

"Hold your row!" whispered Frayne.

"Look here, young Frayne—"

"Dry up!" said Manners minor.

Wally breathed hard through his nose.

The three fags were on the war-path. They were approaching Mr. Selby's study very cautiously. On Mr. Selby's study table, as they knew, lay the speech he had composed for the morrow's meeting at the Wayland Town Hall. It was the

intention of the fags to make some playful additions to that speech, but it was absolutely necessary that they should not be discovered doing so.

There was no light under the door, showing that Mr. Selby was not in his study. Wally opened the door cautiously, and the fags glided in.

"No want a light," mumbled Frayne.

"Don't jaw!" hissed D'Arcy minor. "Do you want anybody passing to hear us in here, you young ass?"

"You're saving yourself," said Manners minor.

"If you want a thick ear, young Manners—"

"Bow-wow!" said young Manners disrespectfully.

Wally breathed hard again. But he controlled himself, and struck a match, and lighted the gas over the table.

"It's all serene," said Joe Frayne. "Old Selby's gone in to jaw to Mr. Linton, and he won't get back yet. Ere's the speech."

The manuscript lay on the table. The fags glanced over it and grinned.

"Every man's duty!" read out Wally. "King and Country need every man! Raise the military age to forty-five! Crowds of slackers and shirkers over forty! Every man to be called to the Colours. Cowards of forty-two forty-three! My only Aunt Jane, old Selby's going strong, isn't he?"

Joe Frayne sniffed.

"Why don't he make it fifty instead of forty-five?" he asked. "They've got it up to fifty in Germany."

"Jolly good reason, my son!" chuckled Wally. "If the age went up to fifty, they'd take Selby himself, as he's single."

"Well, he's so jolly keen on conscription—"

"Not for himself, my boy. That's a horse of quite another colour," said Wally. "He can call other chaps cowards and slackers and shirkers, as much as he likes, at forty-nine. That's the nature of the beast. Like his cheek to jaw like this, I think, when he's on the safe side himself. It's up to us to improve his speech a bit, I think. I'll put in 'Rats!' here and there—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Shush!"

The study-door suddenly opened. Wally, who was bending over the manuscript, jumped back. Frayne and Manners minor stood rooted to the floor.

Mr. Selby entered the study.

He started at the sight of the three fags, and a steely glitter came into his cold, unpleasant eyes.

"Well, what are you doing here?" he asked grimly.

"Ahem! We—we—we—" stammered Wally, utterly taken aback.

"I am waiting for your answer."

"We—we wanted to see your—your speech, sir," said Wally.

"Indeed!"

"Yes, sir. We—we should like to hear you make it to-morrow, sir," said Wally, more confidently. "I—I hope you'll be able to buck up the old slackers who're sticking safe at home, sir, while the young men go to the Front."

Mr. Selby's cheeks flushed a little. Perhaps he saw a double meaning in D'Arcy minor's remark. He picked up a cane.

"You came here to play some disrespectful trick," he said.

"Hold out your hand, D'Arcy minor!"

Swish, swish, swish, swish!

"Yow-ow-ow-wow!"

"Now you, Manners minor—"

Swish, swish!

"Your hand, Frayne—"

Swish, swish!

"You will take a hundred lines each," said Mr. Selby, laying down the cane. "You may go."

The three unhappy fags limped out of the study. Mr. Selby slammed the door after them, and sat down to put finishing touches to his eloquent speech, which was to help on the movement for conscripting all men younger than himself. Wally & Co. limped away down the passage with homicidal feelings.

"Oh, the beast!" groaned Manners minor, rubbing his hands. "Oh, the awful beast! It's no good trying to get even with him. Ow! Wow!"

Wally gritted his teeth.

"I'm going to think of a dodge," he mumbled. "Something that'll really make him sit up. Yow-wow!"

"Oh, don't give us any more of your dodges!" said Frayne, in a tired voice. "I'm jolly well not going to put any bloater paste in his hat, either—yow-wow! Blow your dodges! Yow-ow!"

"Same here!" groaned Manners minor. "I'm fed-up! I'm going to let Selby alone. Yow-wow-wow-wow!"

Wally snorted. He was half-inclined to agree with his comrades. Mr. Selby did really seem rather too hard a nut

to crack. But D'Arcy minor was a stickler. As he rubbed his smarting hands, his brain was busy—with a glimmering of a scheme that had come to him as he looked over Mr. Selby's speech in the study. When the Third Form went up to the dormitory that night, Wally was seen to be grinning.

"I've got it!" he whispered to Frayne.

"I've got it, too!" mumbled Frayne. "And it 'urts!"

"Fakhead! I've got the wheeze!"

"Blow the wheeze!" said Frayne dispiritingly. "I'm done with Selby!"

"It's simply ripping——"

"Let it rip!"

And Frayne turned in. Wally grunted and went to bed. His followers were not enthusiastic at present; but when the effects of the licking had worn off, he knew they would be prepared to back him up. Several times chuckles were heard proceeding from D'Arcy minor's bed, before the Third went to sleep. The great wheeze, whatever it was, evidently struck the scamp of the Third as uncommonly good.

CHAPTER 6.

Mr. Selby is not Grateful.

THE next day, George Alfred Grundy was the cynosure of all eyes in the Lower School.

Grundy's wheeze was the one topic among the juniors. That Grundy should be as enough to imagine that he could pass the recruiting-officers in a false moustache did not surprise anybody. Grundy was as enough for anything. And, much as they chuckled at the wheeze, the fellows could not help feeling a certain amount of respect for Grundy.

At least, he was in deadly earnest, and prepared to share the perils of the trenches—if only he could contrive to get there. Quite different from Mr. Selby, who was, behind his back, the subject of endless derision among the juniors.

Mr. Selby's enthusiasm for conscription, and his "blue funk" at the time of a Zeppelin alarm, caused the juniors to make merry speculations as to what Mr. Selby would say, and do, if the age of compulsion was raised to fifty. But what George Alfred Grundy would do if the minimum age were lowered to fifteen and a half was not at all doubtful. George Alfred would have rushed to the nearest recruiting-office and enrolled.

So while the juniors laughed at Grundy, it was in a very good-natured way; while their jokes at Mr. Selby's expense were generally rather caustic.

Grundy, in fact, in the innocence of his heart, was Mr. Selby's only admirer. It did not occur to Grundy's simple mind that Mr. Selby would not be willing to "go" himself if he had a chance. Grundy couldn't understand anybody not being willing to go, if he had the supreme happiness of being able to. Grundy, while hoping that some day the military age would be lowered to fifteen and a half, hoped also for Mr. Selby's sake that some day it would be raised to fifty. Mr. Selby probably would not have thanked him for his kind hopes.

During morning lessons, Grundy was in some trouble with Mr. Linton, the master of the Shell. With that great wheeze working in his brain, he had neglected prep the previous evening. What was prep at such a time, when even Cabinet Ministers were beginning to realise the seriousness of the situation?

But Mr. Linton took a different view, and he expected his pupils to take the same interest in the "pious Aeneas" as if there were no war raging in Flanders. Which was impossible—for Grundy, at least—and Grundy earned two hundred lines that morning.

"Lines!" snorted Grundy, as he left the Form-room after lessons. "Lines! Lines at a time like this, Wilkins!"

"Rotten!" agreed Wilkins. "It's a ripping afternoon."

"Do you think I'm talking about the weather?" snorted Grundy. "I mean, lines—in war-time! The only lines I'm thinking about are the British lines in Flanders—where I'm going."

"Oh!" murmured Wilkins.

"Well, those lines won't be done!" said Grundy. "No blessed lines in the Army! I shall come and see Linton when I'm in khaki, and tell him to go and eat coke."

"Oh dear!" said Gunn.

"I'm going this afternoon," said Grundy. "I sha'n't ask that rotter Lowther to help me again, the funny beast! I'll call in at Wigg's in Rykcombe. I sha'n't tell him I'm going to enlist, of course. There's only one thing that worries me."

"Only one?" asked Wilkins blandly.

"Yes. I shall put my age down as twenty. That won't be true. The trouble is, will it really be a lie?" said Grundy thoughtfully.

"Well, if it isn't true, it will be a fib at least, I should say."

"That's what worries me," confessed Grundy. "But on the

whole, I'm really older than most fellows of my age. I've got more brains, frinstance. Then, I'm bigger. Properly speaking, I can describe myself as twenty, in everything except—except actual years."

"But that down on the paper in a footnote," said Gunn.

"They wouldn't pass me if I did," said Grundy, blind to Gunn's attempt at humour. "I shall have to keep it dark. I don't really consider that it will be untruthful; and if it is, wouldn't it be justified by the circumstances? I think I shall ask Selby. He's so jolly keen on conscription, and shoving everybody into khaki, that I think he'll back me up."

Wilkins and Gunn jumped.

"You're going to tell him your dodge?" gasped Wilkins. "Oh, no! As a Form-master, he couldn't approve of that. I shall put a case, you see, in a general sort of way, and ask his advice."

Grundy thought it out during dinner, and was pleased with that idea. After dinner he made his way to the Third Form-master's study, leaving Wilkins and Gunn giggling like a pair of lunatics. Wally & Co. met Grundy on the way, and they greeted him with a loud chortle. The Third Form had waxed very merry over the idea of George Alfred in khaki.

"I say, Grundy, stop a minute!" exclaimed Wally. "I want you to give me some advice."

Grundy stopped.

"Certainly," he said. "I'm in rather a hurry, but what is it?" Grundy was always condescending to fags, when they were respectful.

Wally closed one eye to Frayne and Jameson and Manners minor.

"The fact is, Grundy, I want to go into the Army," he said seriously.

"You?" ejaculated Grundy.

"Yes. Would you advise me to go in a grey beard, or to put on a pair of spectacles?" asked D'Arcy minor, with owl-like gravity.

"You young ass!"

"Then there's another point. If I go in Etons, would they suspect that I'm only a kid?" asked Wally. "On the other hand, should I look quite convincing if I borrowed old Selby's frock-coat?"

The idea of Wally in Mr. Selby's frock-coat made his comrades shudder, and their merriest enlightened Grundy. The humorous Wally was actually making fun of his military aspirations.

"You cheeky young rascal!" roared Grundy, and he made a dive at Wally.

The fags, laughing loudly, melted away down the passage. Grundy shook his fist after them, and strode on to Mr. Selby's study in a ruffled temper. It was inexplicable to Grundy that fellows should look upon his ripping scheme in this persistently humorous spirit.

He tapped at the Form-master's door, and Mr. Selby's thin, acid voice bade him enter. Mr. Selby seemed surprised to see Grundy. He had no business with the Shell. He was giving the finishing touches to his speech for the town-hall meeting, too, and was not pleased at being interrupted.

"Excuse me, sir," said Grundy; "I hope I'm not interrupting you. I wanted you to advise me, if you'd be so kind, sir."

"Your Form-master would probably do so," said Mr. Selby.

"Yes, sir; but he does not understand these matters as you do, and isn't interested in such things," explained Grundy. "We all know, sir, how keen you are on conscription and things like that. It's a question of a chap not of military age joining the Army, sir."

"Indeed!" said Mr. Selby, relaxing a little as his favourite topic was started. "An acquaintance of yours, Grundy?"

"Ye-es, sir—a fellow I know extremely well," said Grundy. "He's not of full military age, but he wants to join. He wants advice about it from a man of experience who thoroughly understands such things, sir, like yourself."

"Well—well, Grundy, I am quite willing to advise. He is too young for enlistment, I presume?"

"Yes, sir; but he's a very big chap, and very strong, and as brave as a lion," said Grundy modestly. "What bothers him is, would he be justified in putting down his age at nineteen or twenty, when he's not quite—er—not quite eighteen."

Mr. Selby coughed.

"Well, Grundy, many young fellows have done so," he said. "It reflects great credit on their patriotism and their courage. At the same time, an untruth is an untruth. Yet it would be very difficult to blame the lads who have been led away by their patriotic enthusiasm. The paper is, after all, largely a matter of form, and personally I should not blame such a lad."

"Suppose, sir, Kildare, for example, wanted to go. I

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know he wants to go, only he isn't old enough. Suppose he passed himself off as nineteen, sir. You wouldn't think it wrong?"

Mr. Selby coughed again.

"That would be a matter for him to settle with his own conscience, Grundy. I can only say that, personally, I should not blame him."

"Thank you, sir. That clears it up," said Grundy. "Of course, sir, you agree with me that every fellow who can go, ought to go?"

"Undoubtedly."

Grundy beamed.

"Well, sir, if you'll excuse me, I could make a suggestion that perhaps hasn't occurred to you," he said.

Mr. Selby looked puzzled.

"I don't quite understand you, Grundy."

"Why, sir, it hasn't occurred to you, but this works both ways," said Grundy, beaming. "If a young fellow can make out that he's older, an old fellow might make out that he's younger. See? You could put yourself down as forty-one, sir, and get into the ranks."

A terrific expression came over Mr. Selby's face. The happy Grundy did not notice it.

"Wouldn't that be splendid, sir? We might be comrades-in-arms," beamed Grundy. "It would show some fellows, too, that you mean every word you say at the conscription meetings, sir; and that you don't want to send younger chaps, and stick at home yourself, sir. Of course, it would be ruin to you financially, but that applies to all conscripts. I'm sure you don't care a button for anything of that kind."

"Grundy!" shouted Mr. Selby.

"Eh?"

"You insolent young rascal!" exclaimed Mr. Selby, starting to his feet. "How dare you?"

Grundy was thunderstruck.

"I—I—I don't catch on, sir. I—I was only suggesting a way you could make your words good, sir, and prove to people that you're not one of those old shirkers who want to conscript only the young fellows."

"Grundy!" gasped Mr. Selby. "You—you insolent knave! I shall report this insolence to your Form-master. Leave my study at once!"

"But you quite misunderstand, sir," stammered the dismayed Grundy. "I—I only meant—"

"Begone!"

"Oh, very well, sir; but really—"

Mr. Selby snatched up a cane from the table. The astonished Grundy beat a hasty retreat from the study, and closed the door hurriedly. He went down the passage in a state of amazement.

Wilkins and Gunn and several other fellows were waiting for him at the end of the passage, grinning.

"Well?" said Wilkins.

"Blessed if I understand Selby!" gasped Grundy. "He must be off his rocker, I think. He gave me some good advice—quite agrees that a chap under age might sign on as nineteen or twenty. That's all right. Then I suggested to him that he might sign on as forty-one himself and squeeze in—"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Oh, very well, sir; but really—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"He seemed to think I was getting at him, somehow," said Grundy, quite perplexed. "I wasn't, you know. But he seemed to think I was."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I thought that, as he's so keen to go—"

"Is he keen to go?" gasped Tom Merry.

"Why, of course! He wants the age raised to forty-five—"

"Not to fifty, though," grinned Monty Lowther.

"I suppose he hasn't thought of that—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I thought he'd be jolly glad when I pointed out that he had a chance of going, but he wasn't. He cut up rusty."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors yelled. They could understand it all quite easily. But to George Alfred Grundy it remained an impenetrable mystery why Mr. Selby had cut up rusty.

CHAPTER 7.

Going for a Soldier.

TOM MERRY & CO. were waiting for Grundy to come out that afternoon.

All other matters were put aside.

Grundy was going to enlist, and quite an army of fellows intended to go and see him do it. The Terrible Three and Study No. 6 were all there, and Wally & Co. of the Third. The news had spread to the New House, THE GEM LIBRARY—No. 425.

and Figgins & Co. had come over to join the party. There was immense interest in Grundy and his enlistment. Wilkins and Gunn came out with Grundy. They were going to see him through—to see him "chucked out" was what they really thought. Grundy stared at the crowd of fellows gathered about the School House steps. He seemed surprised when they marched after him down to the gates. At the gates he swung round.

"What's the game?" he demanded.

"We're coming to see you do it," explained Tom Merry.

"I don't want a crowd of kids following me," said Grundy, frowning. "Besides, it may make them suspicious at the recruiting-office."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove! I wathah think they will be wathah suspicious, anyway," chuckled Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Look here, you clear off!" howled Grundy. "With a lot of grinning kids hanging about, they may spot my little game."

"They may," said Monty Lowther. "They might. Perhaps."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Grundy strode away towards Rylcombe, with Wilkins and Gunn.

"We'll trot over to Wayland, and wait outside the recruiting-office," said Blake. "Grundy's gone to get disguised now. I wonder if we shall know him when we see him again?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The merry juniors walked away through the wood to Wayland. Meanwhile, Grundy and his chums proceeded to Mr. Wiggs' shop in Rylcombe. Mr. Wiggs was the local tailor and hatter, and he was also a costumier, and did considerable business with the Junior Dramatic Society at St. Jim's. He was just the man Grundy wanted—Monty Lowther having failed him in such a reprehensible way.

Mr. Wiggs came out of his little parlour as the shop bell jingled, rubbing his hands.

"What can I do for you?" asked Mr. Wiggs.

Grundy plunged into business at once.

"I want to be made-up, Mr. Wiggs."

"Fancy-dress ball?" asked the tailor.

Grundy snorted.

"I'm not the kind of chap to go in for fancy-dress balls in war-time," he replied. "Nothing of the sort!"

"Ahem! Private theatricals?"

"Rubbish! I want to be made-up as a chap of about twenty," explained Grundy. "It's for a jolly good purpose. I suppose you can do it?"

"I—I suppose so," said Wiggs, a little puzzled.

"False moustache, and so on," said Grundy. "I shall want some clobber, too—say, a lounge suit. I'm as big as lots of chaps of twenty, ain't I?"

"Quite!" said Mr. Wiggs. "Do you wish to hire or purchase the clothes?"

"Better buy 'em outright," said Grundy thoughtfully. "I mayn't be put into 'kaki at once."

"Khaki!" murmured Mr. Wiggs.

"Never mind! Trot out the clobber!"

Mr. Wiggs trotted out the clobber willingly enough. George Alfred Grundy had plenty of money, and could have bought up half Mr. Wiggs' shop, if he had liked. In Mr. Wiggs' little parlour the Shell fellow changed into a lounge suit of ready-made clothes, which certainly looked older than his Etons. Then Mr. Wiggs proceeded with the make-up. He had often helped the St. Jim's juniors in that line in private theatricals.

Wilkins and Gunn stood looking on, suppressing their smiles.

Mr. Wiggs had a skilled hand.

An artificial moustache and a few lines skilfully shaded in made Grundy look years older, and a very artistic bluish shade about the chin gave him an appearance of being in want of a shave.

A bowler hat added to the effect, and Wilkins and Gunn were quite impressed. Certainly, Grundy looked a good twenty years old now—to anyone who could not detect that he was made-up.

Grundy surveyed the result in the glass, with great satisfaction.

"That'll do," he said.

Mr. Wiggs rubbed his hat.

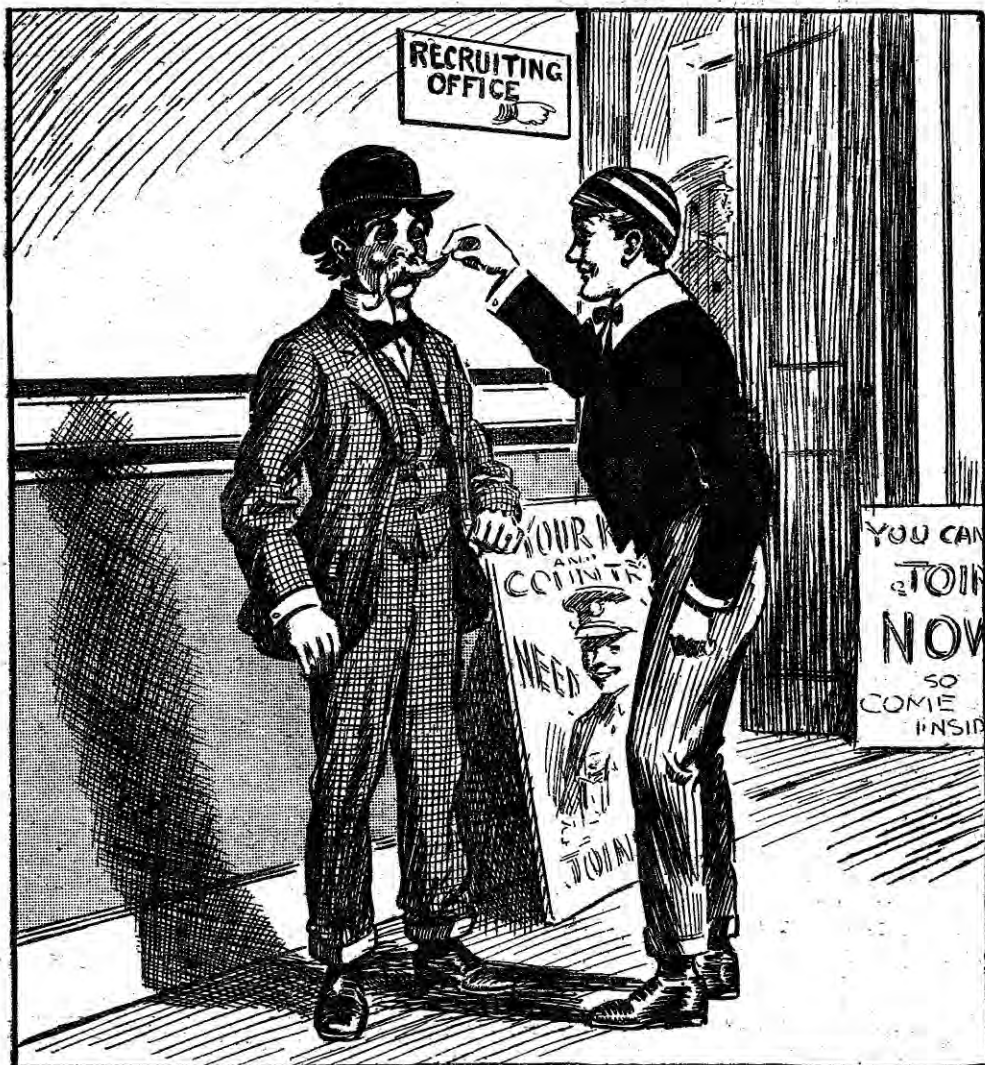
"Very good—very good, indeed!" he said.

"I think I shall pass for twenty now."

"Not a doubt about it, Master Grundy."

"Good!"

Grundy settled Mr. Wiggs' little bill, and the three Shell fellows left the shop, Mr. Wiggs gazing after them very perplexedly. Grundy was in great spirits. He had left his



"Well, what is it?" snapped Grundy, turning round. "Is your moustache quite safely on?" whispered Lowther. "There—let me give it a touch." Lowther gave the artificial moustache a touch, making it more insecure.

(See Chapter 2.)

clothes and cap at Mr. Wiggs', to be sent back to St. Jim's. Grundy was in great hopes of never wanting them again—not till the end of the war, at any rate.

They walked to the station, Grundy seeming to walk on air. Wilkins and Gunn fully expected a crowd to gather round Grundy. To their surprise, he passed muster. It occurred to them that he might pass muster at the recruiting-office, too, and the idea filled them with dismay. But there was no stopping Grundy.

"I'll tell you what," said Grundy. "Suppose you fellows do what I've done, and we'll all go together—what?"

"No jolly fear!" grinned Wilkins.

"I suppose you're not afraid of the Germans?" hooted Grundy.

"Nunno! I'm afraid of being booted out of the recruiting-office."

"Don't you think I shall pass?"

"I hope you won't," said Wilkins. "Your folk will have to fish you out if you do, and you may get sent to chokery for fooling the recruiting people."

"They won't bowl me out, till it's too late," said Grundy confidently. "I don't care what happens, so long as I get out to Flanders. When I'm there, they'll see that I'm jolly useful, and they'll keep me there. I'll send you chaps a German helmet to stick up in the study, if I can."

"Oh, do!" gasped Gunn.

"Just think of it!" said Grundy, with gleaming eyes. "In a few months I may be killing my first Hun!"

"Or he may be killing you!" suggested Wilkins.

"Well, that's a risk every chap takes—I'm not a funk!" said Grundy. "I'd rather be killed in Flanders than sit at home here while other chaps are taking all the risks. Chap must die some day, and it's better to die like a man! I'm surprised that Selby didn't jump at the chance when I pointed it out to him. I can't understand Selby. My hat! Here he is!"

The Shell fellows had arrived at the village station, intending to take the local train for Wayland. Mr. Selby was just entering the station. Grundy stopped, a little dismayed.

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

NEXT
WEDNESDAY:

"D'ARCY'S DEBT!"

What if the Third-Form master saw him, and recognised him?

"Blow!" said Grundy uneasily. "I forgot he was going over to his blessed conscription meeting this afternoon. Do you think he'd say anything if he spotted me, Wilkins?"

"I rather think he would," chuckled Wilkins.

"Well, we've got to chance it!"

Mr. Selby had gone on the platform. Grundy took the tickets, and the juniors did not go on the platform till the train was in. Then they hurried on, and jumped into a carriage some distance from Mr. Selby's.

"All serene," said Grundy.

The train moved out of the station. Grundy was plunged into happy thoughts during the short journey. Wilkins and Gunn were also plunged into thought. Grundy had passed in public view without attracting any special attention. Suppose he should pass muster at the recruiting-office? Grundy fervently hoped that he would, but the bare idea of it filled his chums with dismay.

If Grundy passed muster at first, he was certain to be discovered in a short time, and trouble would follow. Grundy had about as much chance of getting to Flanders as of getting to the moon, even if he succeeded in enlisting. But Wilkins and Gunn did not even attempt to dissuade Grundy. They knew it was no go.

CHAPTER 8.

Grundy Means Business.

"HERE'S the train!"

There was a crowd of fellows in the entrance of Wayland Junction station. They were waiting for Grundy.

"Bai Jove! There's Mr. Selby!" remarked Arthur Augustus, as the Third-Form master came in sight. "Goin' to the town-hall meetin'. And there's Wilkins and Gunn, and— Gwea, Scott!"

The juniors stared at the young man in the bowler hat who accompanied Wilkins and Gunn, keeping well behind Mr. Selby.

It was Grundy of the Shell! They recognised him, but he looked like an elder brother to himself.

"Grundy!" chuckled Blake.

"He means business," said Tom Merry, laughing. "Wilkins and Gunn ought to stop him. There'll be a row if he isn't stopped."

Mr. Selby glanced at the grinning crowd and glanced round to ascertain the cause of their merriment. His glance fell idly on Wilkins and Gunn and their grown-up-looking companion. Then he started.

"Bless my soul!" exclaimed Mr. Selby.

"He's spotted him!" murmured Wally.

Evidently Mr. Selby had spotted Grundy. Instead of leaving the station, he strode directly towards the three Shell fellows.

"Grundy!" he exclaimed. "Is that you, Grundy?"

"Ahem!"

"Grundy!"

Mr. Selby stared blankly at the junior. Grundy faced him composedly. Mr. Selby was not his Form-master, and he didn't mean to be interfered with by him.

"What does this masquerade mean?" exclaimed Mr. Selby sternly.

"Nun-nun-nothing, sir!"

"How dare you appear in public, got-up in this ridiculous manner, Grundy?"

"Merely a private affair of my own, sir!" said Grundy, with dignity.

"I shall report this to your Housemaster, Grundy!"

"Very well, sir."

"Go somewhere and remove that ridiculous get-up at once, and return to the school! You hear me, Grundy?"

"Sorry, sir! I have very important business in Wayland this afternoon," said Grundy calmly. "Business connected with recruiting, sir."

"Don't be absurd, Grundy! I command you to return to the school at once."

"Under the circumstances, sir, I cannot do so, as my King and country need me," said Grundy.

"Grundy! How dare you?"

"A British soldier, sir, dares anything."

"A— a British soldier! Are you out of your senses, Grundy?"

"Not at all, sir. Good-afternoon, sir!"

"Will you return to the school immediately?" exclaimed Mr. Selby.

"No, I won't," said Grundy. Grundy felt that he was practically a soldier already, and St. Jim's seemed very far-off to him.

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TUCK HAMPERs ARE GIVEN AWAY TO READERS OF "THE BOYS' FRIEND," 10.

"You—you won't!"

"No, sir! Quite impossible!"

Grundy walked out of the station. Mr. Selby stood gasping for a moment, and then he rushed after Grundy. He was almost due at the town-hall, at the meeting which was to demand the raising of the military age to forty-five. That was very important. But Mr. Selby felt that he could not allow a St. Jim's boy to parade the streets of Wayland in this amazing get-up.

He caught the big Shell fellow by the shoulder.

"Grundy, I order you—"

Grundy shook his hand off angrily.

"Let me alone, you dashed civilian!" he exclaimed.

Mr. Selby fairly staggered.

Grundy strode away, with Wilkins and Gunn, who were looking rather scared.

"Bless my soul!" ejaculated Mr. Selby. "The boy is mad; he must be absolutely out of his senses. Bless my soul!"

He swung round angrily as the chuckles of the juniors caught his ears.

"What are all you boys doing here?" he exclaimed.

"Disperse at once! I suppose you are all parties to this?"

"Only lookers-on, sir," said Figgins.

"Go back to the school at once."

Figgins shrugged his shoulders, and walked out of the station. He hadn't any intention of obeying that most unreasonable order. The other fellows followed him. Mr. Selby was baffled again, as he often was when he exceeded his authority. But there were some members of the party who were under his thumb, and Mr. Selby did not mean to let them escape.

"D'Arcy minor! Frayne! Jameson! Manners minor! Hobbs!"

The fags stopped reluctantly. They were under the orders of the Third-Form master, and they could not resist.

"You will return to the school at once," said Mr. Selby.

"You are detained within gates for the afternoon."

"Yes, sir," said Wally, with gleaming eyes.

Mr. Selby walked out of the station, and made his way to the town-hall. The meeting there was for the afternoon. Mr. Selby and his friends preferred afternoon meetings. In the evening there was real or imaginary danger of Zeppelins.

"Awful rotter!" muttered D'Arcy minor. "Never mind. We'll comb his hair for him presently."

"What ho!" grinned Jameson. "If it works!"

"Of course it will work! Haven't I thought it out?" grunted Wally. "We've only got to get an evening paper, and borrow Blake's printing outfit, and there you are."

"Wally, dear boy."

"Hally, Gussy!"

"You had better return to the school, Wally. I heard Mr. Selby direct you to do so," said Arthur Augustus.

"Go on! Can't be did," said Wally cheerfully. "I'm waiting here till the evening papers come down."

"What do you want with an evening paper, Wally?"

"Oh, the racing reports, you know!" said Wally affably. "I've got a bob on Bonny Boy for the Swindleton Handicap."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You uttah young wapsallion—"

"Are you coming, Gussy?" yelled Blake, from the street.

"Yaas, dear boy."

Arthur Augustus hurried after his chums. The fags remained in the railway station; cheerfully disregarding their Form-master's order, now that Mr. Selby was out of sight. It was necessary for Wally's deep-laid plans to obtain a copy of the earliest edition of a London evening paper; and he did not mean to return to St. Jim's without it. Little did Mr. Selby dream, as he addressed the meeting in the town-hall, of the trouble his pupils were taking to provide him with a pleasant surprise that evening.

CHAPTER 9.

Grundy Does Not Enlist!

"HERE we are!" said Wilkins.

They had reached the recruiting-office, which was a department in the town-hall itself. While Mr. Selby was pouring forth eloquence in one part of the building, the recruiting-officers were busy in another. Probably their labours were more useful than his: Mr. Selby was one of the many gentlemen who believe that an excessive amount of talking is a necessity in war-time; and, indeed, he would have been quite in his element in the august assembly at Westminster.

Wilkins and Gunn exchanged hopeless glances. They had hoped that something would turn up to stop Grundy. Mr. Selby had turned up; but Grundy had gone on his way regardless. There was no stopping him now.

"Better not come in with me," said Grundy thoughtfully.

"I don't want to risk making them smell a rat. You stay outside."

"I say, Grundy, old chap," said Wilkins persuasively, "hadn't you better think it over a bit?"

"I've thought it over."

"They'll find you out afterwards, if you pass now."

"I don't care, if I get as far as Flanders."

"But you won't, you know."

"I'm going to try. My King and country need me," said Grundy loftily. "It's the duty of a strong young fellow to go, now they're conscripting all the old crooks. Don't talk rot, old fellow! I'm going to sign on."

"You'll find it a bit rough in the camps," hinted Gunn.

"Do you think I'm afraid of roughing it?" snorted Grundy.

"I'm not soft."

"They'll vaccinate you," urged Wilkins.

"That's optional," said Grundy. "I shall refuse."

"They'll inoculate you."

"That's optional, too. I shall refuse. They'd better not try to stick their blessed instruments into me!" said Grundy, with a warlike look. "I know I'd dot 'em in the eye fast enough!"

"It's optional, but you have to be done all the same," said Wilkins, with a shake of the head.

"Rats! I shan't stand any rot, I can tell you. I never stand any rot," said Grundy. "I shall stand up for my rights. What are all you silly asses hanging round here for? Why can't you clear off?"

"We're waiting to see you kicked out," said Blake.

"We're going to gather up the pieces, and carry them home," said Herries.

"Gussy is going to hold his head, so that you can have something soft to fall on."

"Weally, Lowthah—"

Grundy snorted.

"Go and eat coke, the lot of you!"

And Grundy strode up the steps, and disappeared into the office. Monty Lowther ran after him.

"Grundy! Grundy!"

"Well, what is it?" snapped Grundy, turning round.

"Your moustache."

"What about it?"

"Is it quite safely on?" whispered Lowther. "There, let me give it a touch."

Lowther gave the artificial moustache a touch. Grundy was under the impression that he was fastening it more securely. Lowther was under the impression that he was making it more insecure. Lowther's impression was correct.

Monty Lowther retired, smiling, after performing that little service for Grundy. Lowther's action was humorous, but it was really good-natured. For everybody but Grundy knew that he would get into trouble if he enlisted under false pretences; for that was what it amounted to, though Grundy did not look at it in that light. Monty Lowther considered that it would be better for Grundy to be detected at once, and undoubtedly he was right.

A man in khaki in the office looked very curiously at Grundy, and grinned. The way Lowther had handled the moustache made it obviously an artificial one, even if it had escaped detection otherwise, which was improbable.

"This is the recruiting-office?" asked Grundy, looking round.

"Yes, sir."

"Where's the chap in charge?" said Grundy. "I want to enlist."

"Oh, my eye!"

"What did you say?"

"H'm! That table, sir."

A middle-aged gentleman, with a face like iron, was seated at a long table, and he was staring at Grundy, doubtless much interested in the moustache.

Grundy took off his bowler hat.

"Good-afternoon, sir! I want to enlist."

"You want to enlist?" said the recruiting-officer, staring at him.

"Yes, sir. I want to get to the Front."

"What is your age?"

The officer had eyes like points of steel, and they seemed to look right through Grundy of the Shell.

"My—my age?" said Grundy. He had not expected that question first. He had a vague idea of filling in a paper, which would have been easier. It did not occur to him for a moment that the official had detected his imposture.

"Yes. How old are you?"

Grundy drew a deep breath. He remembered what Mr. Selby had said, and tried to feel justified in a prevarication. He could not feel quite justified, however, and he flushed as he blurted out:

"Twenty, sir!"

The official smiled grimly.

"How long have you worn that moustache?"

"This—this moustache?" stammered Grundy.

"Yes."

"I—I—I—"

"A recruiting-office is not a place for playing tricks!" said the official severely. "You had better go!"

"Tricks?"

"Yes. Do you think that you look twenty, you young donkey? Take that moustache off and go back home! Boys of your age cannot enlist!"

"Oh, crumbs!" said Grundy.

He took the moustache off, as bidden; it was evidently useless to keep it on now. But he did not retreat.

Grundy had come there to enlist, and if he couldn't enlist, at least he meant to give his honest opinion on the subject.

"Look here!" he said. "As a matter of absolute fact, I'm not quite military age; but I want to go all the same."

"That does you credit. But you cannot go, and you are wasting my time!"

"Couldn't you pass me in, sir, as a special favour?" urged Grundy. "I'm as big as lots of chaps of twenty, and I've got more brains than most."

"You may go!"

"Brainy chaps are wanted in the Army, too," urged Grundy. "I've no doubt I should soon get promotion. I'm not at all satisfied with the way the war is conducted—that awful blundering in the Dardanelles, Frinistance—and if I were on the spot, I'm sure I could make a lot of useful suggestions."

"You—you could—"

"Certainly. You see," said Grundy confidentially, "the War Office wants bucking up a lot. They're mostly duffers. A fellow with my brains would be an acquisition."

The recruiting-officer signed to the soldier at the door, and the man came up.

"Take this boy outside!"

"I—I say, I'm not finished yet!" said Grundy. "Don't lay your paws on me, my man, or I shall punch your nose! Look here, sir, I'm in earnest, and I know I'm needed out there! I'm simply determined to go! I—leggo my ear!"

The grinning soldier fixed a large finger and thumb upon Grundy's ear, and led him to the door.

"Leggo, I tell you! I shall jolly well punch you! Leggo!" roared Grundy.

The unfortunate Grundy was led in a grip of iron to the outer door, and there was a yell of greeting from the juniors outside.

"Here he comes!"

"Good old Grundy!"

"Have they taken you, Grundy?"

The man in khaki jerked Grundy off the steps to the pavement, released his ear, and went back grinning into the building. Grundy stood rubbing his ear, in a state of mingled rage and astonishment.

"Declined with thanks?" asked Tom Merry.

"They've refused me. Somehow the chap spotted that I was got up—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'm going to punch that fellow's head! I'll show 'em what I think of 'em, anyway!" roared Grundy.

He charged back up the steps. What would have happened next would certainly have been exciting, but the juniors simply hurled themselves on Grundy and dragged him back. The burly Shell fellow struggled in their grasp, but he struggled in vain.

"Leggo! Leggo, I tell you! Wilkins, I'll smash you! Tom Merry, I'll pulverise you! I'll wallop you black and blue. Figgins! Yaroooh!"

With wild but futile expostulations Grundy was marched away down the street by the crowd of juniors.

"We're not going to let you get into trouble," grinned Tom Merry. "You've got off pretty cheaply as it is. You might have been pitched out on your neck."

"Leggo! I'll—I'll—"

"Bai Jove! What a wuff wettah! Bump him!"

"Pull him along by his ankles if he won't come quietly," said Manners. "Now, Grundy, are you coming quietly?"

"No!" roared Grundy. "I'm not! Leggo! I'll wallop you! I'm going back to smash that chap, and to tell that old donkey what I think of him! Yaroooh!"

"Yank him along!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yaroooh! Leggo! I—I—I'll go quietly."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And Grundy went quietly. He did not smash anybody at the recruiting-office, and the officials there never learned what Grundy thought of them.

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NEXT
WEDNESDAY:

65 D'ARCY'S DEBT!

CHAPTER 10.
Stop-press News.

"BETTER lock the door!" said Manners minor.

"What ho!"

Three cheery members of the Third Form had entered Study No. 6, in the absence of the owners. Wally and Reggie Manners and Joe Frayne were the three. Wally had the early edition of the "Evening News" under his arm. Immediately after obtaining that paper at the railway-station the heroes of the Third had hurried back to St. Jim's to carry out the great scheme which had been simmering in D'Arcy minor's fertile brain, and which was to cover the tyrant of the Third with confusion as with a garment.

Wally locked the door of the study. The fags were likely to be busy there for some time, and if Blake & Co. returned they could not be admitted. It was necessary to be a little high-handed.

"Now, where's the blessed printing-machine?" said Frayne.

"Here it is!"

Blake's hand-press was dragged out of the cupboard.

It was a useful little press, and at one time the juniors had printed "Tom Merry's Weekly" upon it. The "Weekly," however, had grown beyond the powers of the amateur printers, and was now turned out at the office of the local paper in Rylcombe. Wally's scheme necessitated the borrowing of the printing-press.

"Get some ink on the roller," said D'Arcy minor.

"Lemme see! I'd better jot down the stop-press paragraph."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Wally took pen and paper, and wrinkled his brows thoughtfully. But his brain was active, and he soon jotted down a paragraph.

"It has been decided that the military age be raised to fifty-one. All single men coming under this category are directed to report themselves at the nearest recruiting-office within two days!"

"Good!" said Frayne. "That word 'category' looks ripping! They won't think a fag thought of a word like that!"

"No fear!" agreed Manners minor.

"I got it out of the paper," answered Wally. "It's a jolly good word. Now let's set it up in type."

The amateur printers proceeded to set that precious paragraph in type. Wally unfolded the evening paper at the "stop-press" page.

There was a third of a column blank in that page.

It was headed "STOP-PRESS NEWS!"

It was the column that was kept empty to the last moment of printing, so that the latest news, arriving while the printing was under way, could be inserted in a brief paragraph or two.

There was already some "stop-press" news in that column, such as:

"GATWICK.
BONNY BOY.
SNOOKER'S PRIDE.
BLUE DIAMOND.

Also ran: Mahomet, Paris II., and Thunderbolt."

Then there was:

"Situation unchanged on the Western Front—Official."

But there was plenty of space left for the insertion Wally meant to make in the "stop-press" news.

The paragraph he had written down was carefully set up in the forme, at a width to fill the column. The forme was placed carefully in the press, and the type inked.

Then Wally carefully laid the newspaper page over the type, with the blank of the stop-press column in the right place.

A moment more and it was printed.

The fags jerked off the sheet and looked at it.

Wally's paragraph now appeared in the stop-press column, printed there exactly as if it had been printed at the newspaper works.

That was Wally's deep scheme.

No one glancing at the stop-press news would have suspected that that item of news had been added after the paper left the printer's.

It looked perfectly in order.

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The three fags chuckled loud and long at their success.

"It's ripping!" said Wally. "Why, if I saw that there myself, I shouldn't dream that it had been shoved in on a hand-press after the printer had finished. And Selby won't, you can bet your boots."

"Besides, he'll be in such a funk, he wouldn't think of it if it were as plain as his face," chuckled Manners minor.

"What will he do, though?" said Frayne. "What will he do, by gum?"

"I only want to see his face," said Wally. "That'll be enough for me. Get this printing-press back. We're done here."

The press was replaced in the cupboard, and Wally folded up the evening paper and put it in his pocket. All was ready now for the tremendous joke to be sprung upon Mr. Selby. According to his own principles, certainly, Mr. Selby ought to have been glad to see such an item of news in the paper. Having backed up conscription from the very beginning, and having addressed meetings calling for the military age to be raised to forty-five, Mr. Selby ought really to have been overjoyed to hear that it was raised to fifty-one, including his estimable self in the list of conscripts. Anyone unacquainted with Mr. Selby might have supposed that Wally & Co. merely desired to afford their Form-master a little brief pleasure. But, as a matter of fact, they knew how that news would affect Mr. Selby—not in the way of giving him pleasure.

Military service for others and the same thing for himself were two entirely different propositions.

They knew their esteemed Form-master well enough to know that he would be simply knocked over by the bare possibility.

There was a rattle at the study door, and the voice of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was heard.

"Bai Jove! The door's locked!"

Wally unlocked the door.

"Hallo, Gus! So you've got back?" he said affably.

"What are you doing in my study, you young boundahs?" asked D'Arcy suspiciously. "What's goin' on heah?"

"We are!" said Wally. And he pushed his major playfully aside and went on.

The three fags scuttled down the passage.

"You young vascal!" shouted Arthur Augustus.

"Bow-wow!" replied Wally, from the end of the passage.

Arthur Augustus entered the study and looked round with a suspicious eye. He supposed that the fags had been there for a "rag." But there was nothing out of order. Even the canteens in the study cupboard were safe.

Wally & Co. scuttled downstairs. Tom Merry and his comrades had come in, but Mr. Selby had not returned from Wayland. His dutiful pupils were ready for him when he should come in.

Grundy of the Shell had returned with Wilkins and Gunn, in a decidedly morose humour.

Grundy was dissatisfied.

"Seen the news, Grundy?" asked Wally, as he met him in the passage. "Something rather interesting for you. (Change in the military age limit.)"

Grundy looked eager.

"Have they lowered it?" he asked breathlessly.

"Not yet; but it's extended, according to what's printed here," said Wally. "Ripping for Selby, anyway."

He handed the newspaper to Grundy.

Grundy looked eagerly at the stop-press column. If there had been an announcement of the lowering of the age to fifteen and a half Georgie Alfred Grundy would have danced with glee. As it was, he snorted.

"No good to me!" he growled. "Isn't it just like 'om—taking old jossers of fifty instead of athletic chaps of fifteen?"

"Isn't it?" agreed Wally sympathetically. "Still, that's good news for chaps like Mr. Selby—chaps who are awfully keen on it."

"Yes, it's a bit of luck for him," assented Grundy innocently.

"My hat!" said Wilkins, looking at the paper. "That will make Selby sit up."

"He'll be glad to see it, I should think," said Grundy. "I know I should be, in his place."

"You might be," grinned Gunn; "but Selby won't be."

**TUCK HAMPERS
FOR READERS OF
THE
BOYS' FRIEND
ONE PENNY.
OUT TO-DAY!**



The unfortunate Grundy was led in a grip of iron to the outer door, and there was a yell of greeting from the juniors outside. "Here he comes! Good old Grundy! Have they taken you, Grundy?" (See Chapter 9.)

"What rot!" said Grundy warmly. "I'm surprised at you, Gunn. Do you think that any man would be skunk enough to back up conscription if he wasn't willing to go himself?"

"Just a few, I think," chortled Gunn. "Not a lot, I hope, but just a few, and Selby's one of 'em."

"I don't believe it for a moment. I'll jolly well take this to Selby immediately he comes in," said Grundy. "He said something about reporting me to the Housemaster over that affair this afternoon. This will bring him round. He can't very well report me after I've brought him good news like this."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Hullo! What's the joke?" asked Tom Merry.

"Look at it! Selby's called up!"

Tom Merry jumped.

"Selby called up?"

"Yes; it's fifty-one now. Selby's only forty-nine and a bit."

"My hat!"

"Oh, what gorgeous news for him!" yelled Monty Lowther, in great delight. "Two to one he hides himself in the coal-locker."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, draw it mild!" said Wally indignantly. "Don't you

run down my Form-master. Of course, Selby will jump for joy."

"Well, he'll jump," said Lowther. "No doubt about that. He'll jump! I've got my doubts about the joy."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The news soon spread, and an excited crowd gathered in the hall to look at the newspaper and pass comments on the news. It was the most exciting event that had happened for a long time in the School House at St. Jim's.

CHAPTER 11.

A Chance for Mr. Selby.

"FIFTY-ONE!"

"Selby for one! Ha, ha!"

"Poor old Selby!"

"A dose of his own medicine! Ha, ha!"

"Selby in khaki, digging giddy trenches. Ha, ha, ha!"

"Grundy wanted to go into the Buffs," grinned Lowther.

"Selby will have to go into the Buffers!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Such were the unfeeling remarks on that startling news. Wally & Co. listened, with grinning faces. Not a single

suspicion occurred to anyone that the supposed news was "spoof." There it was in the stop-press column of the newspaper, and there was no room for doubt. Grundy, in his keenness to oblige and please Mr. Selby, had solved the difficulty of getting the news to Mr. Selby's knowledge. Grundy was only waiting for the Third Form master to come in, to show him the paper and watch the delight dawn in his face.

The news brought Blake & Co. down from their tea; in fact, nearly all the School House had gathered in the hall in great excitement. They ran over in their minds all who came under the new category of conscripts, eager to settle who would have to go.

"There's Linton!" exclaimed Manners. "Our Form-master's not fifty. Linton will have to go. We shall have a new master of the Shell."

"The Head's safe," grinned Blake. "The Head's over the limit. Fancy the Head in the trenches!"

The juniors could not quite fancy that. But they chuckled at the idea.

"What about our Form-master?" said Digby. "How old is Lathom?"

"Well over fifty," said Kerruish. "We sha'n't lose poor old Lathom."

"What about Ratty?"

"My hat! Ratty may have to go."

There was an excited debate at once as to whether Mr. Ratcliff, the Housemaster of the New House, was over fifty-one. Everybody hoped he wasn't. All St. Jim's would have been pleased to see Mr. Ratcliff go. But Figgins remembered that Mr. Ratcliff was fifty-three, to the general regret.

"It's rather hard on the old johnnies," Tom Merry remarked. "But they take them up to fifty in Germany, and up to fifty-five in Austria. This was bound to come sooner or later, unless the war stopped."

"Yaas, watahah! But I weally thought it would not come so soon," remarked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I thought about another year."

"Now, I put it to you," said Grundy argumentatively, "shouldn't I be more use than Selby or Linton? Why can't they give me a chance?"

"While there's life there's hope," grinned Blake. "They're taking schoolboys in Germany. It will come to that here in the long run."

"Yaas, watahah! It's bound to come, and I weally hope it will come soon. I watahah fancy myself killin' Huns."

"Next year there'll be a chance for everybody," said Lowther. "Selby is simply going early to avoid the crush."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What is all this excitement about?" asked Mr. Railton, coming out of his study. "Are you boys aware that you are making a great deal of noise?"

"It's the news, sir," said Tom Merry. "It's rather startling."

"Look at the paper, sir."

Mr. Railton took the paper eagerly. The Housemaster had "done his bit" gallantly at the Front, and had come home with an arm he could no longer use—alluded to by disrespectful fags as Railton's "gammy" arm. He was keenly interested in the great war-drama in which he was no longer able to play his part.

"What is the news?" he asked.

"It's in the stop-press column, sir."

Mr. Railton glanced at the paragraph, and started.

"Impossible!" he exclaimed. "Bless my soul! This is very surprising!"

"What is it, Mr. Railton?" asked the master of the Shell, coming on the scene.

All eyes were fixed on Mr. Linton. The juniors could not help wondering how he would take it. Mr. Railton silently passed him the paper.

In a dead silence, the master of the Shell read the paragraph. His face became very grave. Wally's heart smote him. He had intended his joke only for Mr. Selby, and had not anticipated this. But he dared not speak now.

"Dear me!" said Mr. Linton quietly. "That is very surprising news, and the notice given is very short. But if the country needs more men, there is only one thing to be done. I must prepare for this!"

"You are—"

Mr. Railton hesitated.

"I am under fifty-one," said Mr. Linton composedly. "I have certainly never turned my thoughts towards a military life, and I fear I shall be of little use; but where younger men have gone, I am fully prepared to go, if the authorities so decide."

And Mr. Linton handed the paper back to the Housemaster, and went to his study with perfect composure.

There was a cheer in the crowded hall. Mr. Linton did not appear to hear it. He went into the study and closed the door.

the door. Mr. Railton went back very thoughtfully to his own room.

"Linton's a brick!" said Tom Merry enthusiastically. "He's taken it splendidly, and it must be a shock to him at his age!"

"Yaas, watahah!"

"Selby will do the same," said Grundy.

"I don't think!" remarked Wilkins.

"He can't do anything else, after all he's said."

"You'll see!" grinned Lowther.

"Bai Jove! I trust Selby will play up like a bware maz for the honah of St. Jim's. As he's a vewy keen conscriptionist, he can't make any reasonable objection!"

"We shall see what we shall see!" chuckled Tom Merry.

"We will—rather!" said Wally.

The juniors waited eagerly for Mr. Selby to come in. They were very glad when the wheels of a taxi were heard in the quadrangle. There was a buzz of excitement at once.

"Here comes Selby!"

The master of the Third came up the steps. He was looking quite satisfied. He had made a telling speech at the town-hall in Wayland, calling upon the local Member of Parliament to take action for the passage of a Bill raising the military age to forty-five.

Mr. Selby had great hopes of success. His speech had bristled with such words as "slack", "shirker", and "coward." He felt that he had made an impression, and helped on the good work. So he had returned to St. Jim's in a very satisfied frame of mind.

He looked surprised at the sight of the crowd in the Hall, and the evident excitement in all faces. Grundy, newspaper in hand, advanced to meet him. The juniors looked on breathlessly.

"What does this mean?" exclaimed Mr. Selby.

"There's news, sir—"

"Ah, Grundy, I have to report your extraordinary conduct to the Housemaster!"

"If you please, sir, there's news," said Grundy eagerly. Grundy was anxious to disarm Mr. Selby's wrath by that welcome news. "It concerns you, sir."

"Concerns me! What do you mean, Grundy?"

"They've done what you wanted, sir—raised the military age," said Grundy.

Mr. Selby started.

"Is it possible? Is it in the paper, Grundy?"

"Yes, sir; in the stop-press column."

"Very good!" said Mr. Selby, in great satisfaction. "Our efforts have not been in vain, then. Public opinion has been too strong for official inertia. So the age is raised to forty-five?"

He took the paper eagerly.

"Not forty-five, sir," said Grundy. "Fifty-one, sir!"

"What!"

"Fifty-one, sir. You'll be able to go."

"Grundy!"

"In fact, you'll have to go, sir," said Grundy, beaming. "Lucky you're so jolly keen on it, isn't it, sir? Yaroooooh!"

Smaack!

Grundy staggered back in bewildered astonishment. Mr. Selby had boxed his ears!

"How dare you, Grundy?" shouted Mr. Selby. "How dare you, I say, attempt to deceive me with such a childish joke!"

"Yow-ow! It isn't a joke!" roared Grundy indignantly.

"It's in the paper!"

"Nonsense!"

"It is in the paper, sir," said Tom Merry.

"Nonsense, I say!" exclaimed Mr. Selby, beginning to look agitated. "It is not possible! They could not be so stupid—so incredibly stupid as to propose such a thing, even! How dare you tell me such things?"

"It's in the paper, sir," chorused the juniors.

"It cannot be in the paper!" Mr. Selby's voice rose to a shrill shriek. In spite of himself, conviction was coming upon him, and his very heart turned cold. "It is a falsehood! I will report this insolent attempt at deception to the Head! I—I will—"

Mr. Selby's voice died away. His eyes fell on the stop-press column in the paper, and he read with starting eyes:

"IT HAS BEEN DECIDED THAT THE MILITARY AGE BE RAISED TO FIFTY-ONE. ALL SINGLE MEN COMING UNDER THIS CATEGORY ARE DIRECTED TO REPORT THEMSELVES AT THE NEAREST RECRUITING-OFFICE WITHIN TWO DAYS."

The newspaper fluttered from Mr. Selby's shaking hand. In dead silence the juniors gazed at him. His face was white as chalk.

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

He gazed at them almost wildly for a moment and then with unsteady steps staggered away to his study. As the door closed he was heard to mutter: "Infamous! Infamous! Tyranny! Worse than Prussia! Infamous!" Then the door closed, and Mr. Selby was shut off from view.

CHAPTER 12.

Blue Funk!

"WELL, of all the rotten funks!" said George Grundy, in utter disgust. "Bai Jove! Did you evah see anybody in such a blue funk, deah boys?" "What does he mean by saying it's infamous?" chuckled Blake. "Surely it's not more infamous in his case than anybody else's?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" "And that's the chap who's been a red-hot conscriptionist!" said Manners. "Why, he's just been to a conscription meeting!"

"Doctors don't like their own medicine," said Figgins sententiously.

"Wathah not! Selby certainly doesn't!" "Oh, my only Aunt Jane!" said Wally. "Isn't it gorgeous! I'll bet you two to one in doughnuts that Selby isn't here to-morrow!" He'll bolt!"

"Bols!" said Tom Merry. "A chap can't bolt! That's deserting. You might get shot for it!"

"Hard lines on him that he forgot to get married when he was young," said Monty Lowther. "These absent-minded chaps have to suffer for their absent-mindedness!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" "Well, it's hard on him if he doesn't want to go," said Blake. "But he ought to have shut up on conscription, in that case. A man ought to be willing to be as good as his word!"

"Yaas, wathah!" "But why doesn't he want to go?" exclaimed Grundy. "It's the chance of a lifetime! I'd give anything to be three years older!"

"So would Selby!" grinned Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!" "Hollo! Here he comes!"

Mr. Selby emerged from his study. His face was pale as death, and his eyes had a hunted look. He was trying to keep his composure, but the strain was too great and the attempt was far from a huge success.

"Give me that paper!" he called out, in a strange, husky voice.

Grundy handed him the paper.

"Congratulations, sir!" said Grundy.

Then he jumped back, just in time to escape a furious blow.

Mr. Selby evidently was no longer master of his nerves or his temper. Grundy dodged away promptly.

The Third Form-master glared at the juniors with the eyes of a basilisk. It was plain that he wanted someone upon whom to wreak the fury that consumed him.

"How dare you loiter about the hall?" he exclaimed. "Disperse at once! D'Arcy minor, go to the Form-room immediately, and take a hundred lines!"

"Thank you, sir!" smiled Wally.

Wally did not mind the lines now. The lines had been paid for in advance by that stop-press paragraph.

Mr. Selby tapped at Mr. Railton's door and entered, closing the door behind him. The Housemaster looked at him curiously, and at the paper in his hand. He could see that the Form-master had learned the startling news.

"Have you seen this?" gasped Mr. Selby.

The Housemaster nodded.

"Yes. It is very surprising," he said. "I thought—at least, hoped—that it would be a year at least before such a measure was necessary."

"You—you think it was inevitable in any case?" stuttered Mr. Selby.

"That is certainly my opinion. I may be mistaken."

Mr. Selby sank into a chair. His legs refused to support him.

"But—but it is infamous!" he gasped.

"Mr. Selby!"

"I repeat—infamous!"

"I fail to see anything infamous in it," said Mr. Railton, very dryly. "It has been agreed almost unanimously that we need conscription to win the war. What objection can there possibly be to raising the age of service? I understood that you yourself were in favour of such a measure."

"To forty-five—certainly."

"Then why not to fifty-one? Unless you pass the medical

examination you cannot go, so you need not fear that you will be wasting the time of the military authorities."

"I am not thinking of that."

"I do not see that there is anything else to think of. Every man's life belongs to his country, I suppose?"

Mr. Selby wiped his perspiring brow.

"Within certain limits, yes. I have always said so. Up to the age of forty-five, or even forty-seven or eight. But—

—but—

"Really, Mr. Selby, your words imply that you object to this measure simply because it affects yourself."

"And if I do," exclaimed Mr. Selby furiously, "do you think that I am fit to go?"

"That is for a medical man to decide."

"What use should I be in the trenches?"

"Probably you would not be sent there. I should imagine that you would be given garrison duty at home, at your age."

"Garrison duty!" shrieked Mr. Selby. "I—I shouldering a rifle and marching up and down outside a railway-station for a shilling a day! Am I to give up my comforts, my necessities, my salary, for that? How do I even know that my place will be open when I return? Am I to begin life again at fifty-five?"

"Those observations, sir, apply to every man who has gone to the war. Yet millions went cheerfully, without waiting for compulsion."

"I—I approve of compulsion. I have always said so. But—but not—"

"Surely you do not mean to say, Mr. Selby, that you approve of it in the case of others but not in your own case?" said the Housemaster sternly.

For very shame's sake the Form-master could not reply in the affirmative. But it was evident that that was in his mind.

"What am I to do?" he gasped feebly.

"There is no question about that. You must report at Wayland Recruiting Office to-morrow, or the next day, for service."

"I—I! Impossible!"

"My dear fellow, you are somewhat startled and agitated," said the Housemaster soothingly. "You see, there is no choice in the matter. The law has changed, and we must be prepared to change with it."

"I shall not go!"

Mr. Railton looked very grave.

Mr. Selby, I cannot listen to such observations. You know where your duty lies, and you know you must do it. If you should attempt to elude this obligation, I should have no hesitation whatever in handing you over to the authorities."

"You—you—would—" Mr. Selby's voice failed him. "Fool—fool that I was! Last year I might have left the country, if I had only known—"

"Please say no more, Mr. Selby. I am an old soldier, and I cannot listen to such words. You are upset. To-morrow it will seem quite different, and you will be glad that you have an opportunity of acting up to the principles you have always proclaimed aloud."

Mr. Selby gave him a furious look. He was not thinking of his principles now. He was only thinking of escaping the terrible obligation that had fallen upon him—partly as a result, as he could not help thinking, of the movement in which he had himself taken a part. Mr. Selby could have bitten out his tongue, now, for all the eloquent speeches he had uttered upon that subject. The mood he was in was not enviable. Rage and terror and dismay were mingled in his mind.

"I—I came here to ask your advice," he gasped at last. "There are ways and means of obtaining exemption—"

"I trust, for the honour of the school, that you will not apply for exemption, Mr. Selby. Indeed, after what you have frequently said concerning exempted men, I cannot see how you can reconcile it with your conscience to ask for it yourself."

"That is—different. Quite different."

"I fail to see any difference. And do not flatter yourself that you have any chance of getting exempted. I do not think so for one moment."

Mr. Selby groaned.

"I will see the Head. Surely the Head can do something! He must be able to do something! It is impossible that they will be allowed to tear me away from my home—impossible! I must see the Head!"

Mr. Selby staggered from the study. The Housemaster watched him go, with a smile of mingled compassion and contempt.

The man who had been through the trenches, who had faced death in a thousand forms on the stricken plains of Flanders, could not understand the wretched pusillanimity of the shirker.

Wally & Co. were in the passage, watching for Mr. Selby. THE GEM LIBRARY—No. 425.

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But the agitated master did not even observe them. He staggered away to the Head's study, leaving the fags grinning gleefully.

"Looks like a win for us—what?" chuckled Wally. "Did you ever see such a funk? Did you ever see such a giddy slacker? Yah!"

And the heroes of the Third felt that their many and manifold wrongs were fully avenged at last.

CHAPTER 13.

Grundy Chips In.

TRAMP! Tramp! Tramp!

Fellows who passed Mr. Selby's door that evening could hear his restless footsteps going to and fro, to and fro.

The wretched man could not keep still.

Some of the fellows laughed, some shrugged their shoulders. All felt contempt and scorn for the man whose very sense of personal dignity seemed to have fled under the blow that had fallen upon him.

Mr. Selby did not know, and he did not care. There was no degree of meanness he would not have resorted to in order to escape his fate.

His interview with the Head had been extremely unsatisfactory. Dr. Holmes could not agree with him on any point.

The Head was, indeed, surprised by the view Mr. Selby took of the matter. He did not expect the Form-master to be delighted to go soldiering in middle life. But he expected him to take it quietly and calmly, and with courage. He pointed out to him that it was no worse at forty-nine than at forty-one. That if Mr. Selby gave up his freedom and comfort, it was no more than he had urged others to do, no more than millions of brave men had done without waiting for compulsion. On the point of exemption the Head was adamant. Mr. Selby was not indispensable. Dr. Holmes pointed out that his Form could be taken by a prefect until an older master could be secured. It would be inconvenient, but inconveniences were to be expected in war-time. He could not undertake to represent to the tribunal that the Form-master was indispensable.

There was no help in that quarter. Indeed, the Head's manner had been very dry and unsympathetic. For a rigid conscriptionist to be seeking to dodge conscription struck him as conduct of the most questionable kind, and he saw no valid reason whatever why Mr. Selby should not go.

Mr. Selby saw lots of reasons, but not reasons that would have any weight with an exemption tribunal. His chief reason was that he didn't want to go. He didn't want to exchange a handsome salary for a shilling a day. He didn't want to leave a comfortable home for the rough life of a camp. Above all, he didn't want to face German bullets, if it came to that. He was willing to throw all his rigid principles overboard to escape. He would willingly have agreed to peace at any price with the Huns, if only it would come in time to save him from serving. The fiery words he had poured out at the town-hall that afternoon were forgotten. If Mr. Selby had spoken at the town-hall at this hour, his speech would have been of a very different tenor.

What was to be done?

The miserable man was in a cold sweat as he thought of what was coming. All his thoughts were bent upon one end—to escape service.

Tramp! Tramp! Tramp! To and fro in his study he went, a prey to gnawing thoughts and horrible dread.

There was a tap at the door, but Mr. Selby did not hear it. The door opened, and Grundy of the Shell looked in. The Third Form-master swung round and glared at him.

"What do you want? Go away!"

"Mr. Linton wishes to speak to you, sir."

"Oh, very well."

Grundy looked grimly at the Form-master. Grundy was disgusted. Even the simple-minded George Alfred could not fail to see any longer that Mr. Selby wasn't glad to go. And Grundy was envying him his chance with his whole heart.

Mr. Selby brushed past him and went to the Shell master's study. It occurred to him now that Mr. Linton also was called up, and a faint hope dawned in his heart that the master of the Shell had thought of some method to dodge.

Mr. Linton greeted him with a very grave face.

"You have seen the paper?" he asked.

"Seen it!" said Mr. Selby huskily. "I have thought of nothing else since I have seen it! I—I am quite overcome!"

"It is serious news for men of our age," said the master of the Shell quietly. "Our leaving so suddenly will be awkward for the Head. It cannot be helped. We have our duty to do. You, I suppose, feel more keen about it than I do, as I have never been a compulsionist. But, of course, I do not think of shrinking."

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"Wha-a-ah!"

"I propose that we should go together in the morning," said Mr. Linton. "The sooner the matter is settled, the sooner we shall know what we must do."

"You—you have no plan—"

"Plan?"

"Yes. I—I thought you might have hit upon some method of escaping this—iniquitous—"

"Really, Mr. Selby, I cannot hear you use such expressions. If we are wanted, we must go. Compulsion makes no difference to that, I suppose. We have our duty to do. Men of our age are fighting on the German side. It was certain to come in this country in the long run, and I have long been prepared for it."

"I shall not submit!" gasped Mr. Selby.

"My dear sir, you have no choice in the matter!"

"Concealment may be possible!"

Mr. Linton's brow darkened.

"Kindly say no more, Mr. Selby. I am not sure that it is not my duty to report your words to the authorities. I trust, however, that you are not serious."

Mr. Selby gave a snort, and quitted the room. There was no help, evidently, from the master of the Shell. He had to depend upon himself alone, and his mind was almost made up by this time. The calm courage with which Mr. Linton was prepared to do his duty made no impression upon the wretched man, excepting to exasperate him. Come what might, he would not go! To that desperate resolution the unhappy shirker had come!

Headless of the curious eyes that watched him, the Third Form-master went upstairs to his bedroom. He was heard moving about there, and Trimble of the Fourth, who was very great at listening at doors, brought down the news that Mr. Selby was sorting out his clothes and packing a bag.

"Getting ready to go in the morning," commented Blake.

"Getting ready to bolt, you mean!" grinned Monty Lowther.

"Bai Jove! Bolt!"

"Two to one in plum-duff!" said Lowther.

"Bolt!" exclaimed Grundy. "Well, he looked in the bluest of blue funks. But he's jolly well not going to bolt. Think of the disgrace to the school!"

"I fancy he's thinking of his own skin. What does it matter? A blue funk won't be much good in the fighting-line!"

"He's not going to bolt," repeated Grundy. "It's a disgrace to St. Jim's for any chap here to try to dodge. I'm going to speak to him!"

"Ass!"

"I jolly well wish I could go instead," said Grundy. "But he shan't bolt. He's not going to disgrace us. Think how the Grammar School chaps would chip us! What the dickens does Selby's skin matter, so long as we beat the Germans? I'm going to speak to him."

"Come back, you ass!" roared Wilkins.

"Rats!"

Grundy strode away determinedly, leaving the juniors in the common-room gasping. Grundy's nerve was equal to the occasion. He knocked at the door of Mr. Selby's room, and opened it.

The master of the Third was kneeling beside a half-packed bag, cramming things into it. He looked round at Grundy. It could hardly be doubted that the wretched man was making preparations to "bolt."

"Go away at once, Grundy!" he snarled.

"I've come here to speak to you, sir," said Grundy firmly. "You're called up, and you're going to join the Colours. You can't get out of it."

"What!"

"You can't leave, sir," said Grundy. "You'll be found afterwards, you know, and sent to chocky for deserting. Think of the disgrace to the school, sir. It simply can't be done."

Mr. Selby turned purple.

"Grundy," he shrieked, "how dare you!"

"I think it's my duty to say this," said Grundy loftily. "You're not a master any longer—you're a soldier of the King. It's every chap's duty to see that you don't disgrace the school."

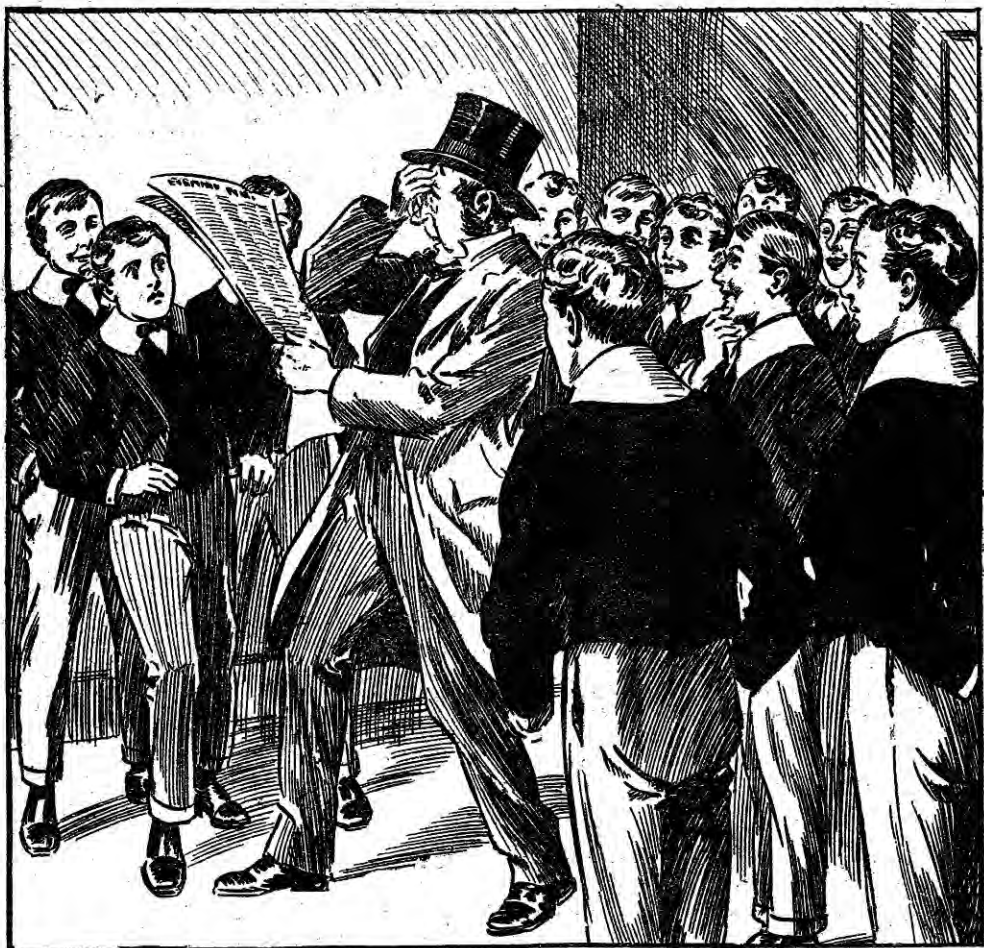
Mr. Selby gasped for a moment. Then he clutched up an umbrella and rushed at Grundy.

Whack! Whack! Whack! Whack!

"Yaroooh!" roared Grundy. "Wharrer you at? Yah! I'm only warning you for your own good. Yaroooh! Oh, my hat!"

Whack! Whack! Whack!

Grundy fled along the passage with the infuriated Mr. Selby after him, still lashing away with the umbrella. Grundy's roars rang through the School House, and a yell of laughter from below answered them.



Mr. Selby's voice died away, as his eyes fell on the stop-press column in the paper. The newspaper fluttered from his shaking hand when he had finished reading the print. (See Chapter 11.)

Whack! Whack! Whack!

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Gwunday's gettin' it, bai Jove! Poor old Gwunday!"

"Run for it, Grundy!"

"Yaroooooh!"

Grundy came pelting down the stairs, roaring, with the lashing umbrella close behind. Mr. Railton came hastily out of his study.

"Good heavens! What is the matter?" he exclaimed.

"Yarooooh! Help!"

The Housemaster ran up the stairs, and Grundy dodged round him. Mr. Selby, panting, lowered the umbrella, which was already broken on Grundy's unfortunate shoulders.

"Mr. Selby! Calm yourself! What is the meaning of this extraordinary scene?" exclaimed the Housemaster sternly.

"This is not the way to chastise a junior."

"The insolent young scoundrel!"

"Yarooooh! I'm hurt!" roared Grundy. "I don't care! He's not going to disgrace St. Jim's! He's jolly well not going to bolt! Yow-ow-wooop!"

Mr. Railton's brow set grimly.

"Grundy, do you dare to insinuate—"

"All the house knows it!" hooted Grundy. "He's packing his bag to bolt! It's a disgrace to the school! Yarooooh!"

"Silence, Grundy! Take five hundred lines for impertinence!" said Mr. Railton sternly. "Another word, and you shall be flogged. Mr. Selby, calm yourself!"

The Housemaster, looking very grim, accompanied the panting Form-master to his room. His eye took in at a glance Mr. Selby's hurried preparations for departure.

"Mr. Selby, I take it for granted that that reckless boy's suspicions were without foundation," he said.

Mr. Selby gritted his teeth.

"That is my own business," he said.

"Not entirely!" said the Housemaster sternly. "If you have any intention of holding yourself up to general contempt by an attempt to evade your duty, I must speak plainly. I am Housemaster here, and I am also an old soldier. I shall allow nothing of the kind."

"You—you will not allow!" gasped Mr. Selby.

"Certainly not!"

"You will dare to detain me here!"

"If you leave this building, Mr. Selby, until the time comes to report yourself for service, I shall telephone instantly to the police, and put them on your track as a deserter."

With that the Housemaster strode from the room.

Mr. Selby sank helplessly on his bed. He did not finish packing his bag. It was not wanted now. "Bolting" was out of the question. There was little sleep for the master of the Third that night.

In the Third Form dormitory there were many chuckles. Mr. Selby's intended flight, nipped in the bud by the great Grundy, was the talk of the House. The fags rejoiced in the

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NEXT
WEDNESDAY:

"D'ARCY'S DEBT!"

A Magnificent New, Long, Complete School Tale of
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news. It had leaked out in the Third that that precious "stop-press" news was spoof, and that Mr. Selby's wild alarm was entirely without foundation. The Third Form simply hugged themselves with joy over that tremendous "jape." Never had Wally of the Third been such a great chief in the eyes of his followers. He had fully avenged all the wrongs of the Third.

CHAPTER 14.

Only a False Alarm!

TOM MERRY & CO. looked for Mr. Selby in the morning, but they did not see him. He did not appear at breakfast. It was learned that he was taking breakfast in his room. Mr. Linton, however, the other "conscrip" of St. Jim's, was at the head of the Shell table, his manner grave but perfectly composed. The Shell fellows felt decidedly proud of their Form-master. The call that had come to Mr. Linton was no light matter, but he was taking it like a man and a Briton.

The morning papers did not arrive early at St. Jim's. So far, there was no information to go upon save that "stop-press" paragraph of the night before. Before morning lessons, however, the papers arrived, and Mr. Linton opened his "Times" very eagerly, to learn further particulars. To his amazement, the matter was not mentioned in the "Times." He sought through the paper from end to end, but he sought in vain. Greatly puzzled he went to Mr. Railton's study, to consult the Housemaster's "Daily Mail." He found Mr. Railton in a state of surprise also. The "Daily Mail" made no mention of the great news.

"This is extraordinary!" said Mr. Linton.

"Extraordinary indeed!" avowed the Housemaster. "Is it possible that some error crept into the evening paper—that some rumour was taken as a fact, and published as one? Such things have occurred, though that particular paper is, as a rule, very accurate."

Mr. Selby came hurrying into the study. He had a "Daily News" in his hand.

"What does this mean?" he exclaimed. "There is no mention here of the news we received last night. It must have been a mistake. Surely it must?"

Mr. Selby looked at the two masters with a haggard hopefulness.

"I cannot understand it," said Mr. Railton. "It is easy, however, to ascertain. They will know at the recruiting-office. I will ring them up."

"Pray do so. Make haste—make haste!" said Mr. Selby.

Mr. Railton went to the telephone. The master of the Shell stood very quietly while he waited. Mr. Selby trembled with eagerness, between hope and fear. If only it was a false rumour! Mr. Selby would have given ten years' salary for that to prove to be the case.

"Wayland 99," said Mr. Railton into the receiver. "Is that the recruiting-office? Mr. Ketch speaking? Thank you. I am Mr. Railton. Pray excuse my troubling you. Can you tell me whether the news, published in an evening paper last night, is correct—that the military age is now raised to fifty-one?"

"Nothing of the kind, sir."

"Then the news is unfounded?"

"Quite."

"Thank you. It was printed in the stop-press column of the 'Evening News.'"

"Surely there is some mistake, sir. I had the 'Evening News' last night—every edition of it—and it did not appear there."

"But—but I saw it myself—"

"You saw it?"

"Undoubtedly."

"That is very remarkable. It certainly did not appear in my papers. There must surely be some mistake."

"I may take it that there is no foundation for the story?"

"None whatever."

"Thank you very much."

Mr. Railton rang off.

"The news is totally unfounded," he said. "It is extraordinary. No one else seems to have seen it in the paper."

He picked up the copy of the "Evening News," which the agitated Mr. Selby had left in his study the previous night, and looked very scrutinisingly at the "stop press" paragraph. A slight smile came over his face. In the light of the new information on the subject, he was able to form a better opinion of that "stop press" paragraph.

"I fear that this is a trick!" he said. "I did not think of it before, but this 'stop press' paragraph does not seem quite in order. The type is quite different from that used in the other 'stop press' news. I am afraid that this paragraph has been inserted in the blank space of the 'stop press' column. Indeed, there is no other explanation, for this

paper is quite reliable in its news. This paragraph has been printed in the space left blank, by some person with a very curious sense of humour."

"A—a joke!" shrieked Mr. Selby.

"So it appears—a somewhat unfeeling joke," said Mr. Railton. "A very serious matter, too, for the person concerned, for it is distinctly against the law to make such an announcement unauthorised."

"Some—some boy here has played this joke on me!"

"On you?" said Mr. Railton, raising his eyebrows. "Why upon you especially, Mr. Selby? Mr. Linton is also concerned. No boy here could possibly have foreseen that the news would be unwelcome to you, considering your attitude upon the question of compulsory service."

Mr. Selby almost gasped with rage.

"Certainly, considering his attitude on the matter, the printer of that precious 'news' ought to have supposed that the news would be welcome to him. But Mr. Selby did not believe anything of the sort. He was only convinced that the unknown joker knew his character well enough to know that the news would be most unwelcome."

"I repeat that it was directed towards me!" he exclaimed passionately. "And I can point out the culprit! It was Grundy, of the Shell who handed me the paper; that boy has been insolent on this subject before. You have said yourself that the law has been broken. I demand his punishment."

"I will send for him," said Mr. Railton quietly; and he rang the bell and sent Toby for the great George Alfred.

Grundy came to the study cheerfully.

"Grundy," said Mr. Railton, "it appears that this paragraph is without foundation, and was inserted in the paper by some practical joker."

"Oh, my hat!" said Grundy, in astonishment.

"Were you the person concerned, Grundy?"

"I, sir! Certainly not, sir! I thought it was all right!"

"It was you who handed the paper to Mr. Selby."

"Yes, sir; I thought he'd be glad to see it," explained Grundy. "My idea was that he would simply jump for joy. I told all the fellows so, and I didn't believe what they said about it. I hadn't any idea that Mr. Selby was a funk, and wanted to dodge out of it, sir."

"Grundy!" thundered Mr. Selby, while Mr. Linton turned away to hide a smile.

"Yes, sir. I'm only answering Mr. Railton's questions, sir," said Grundy. "I suppose I'm bound to answer my Housemaster."

"You did not perpetrate this foolish joke, Grundy?" asked Mr. Railton.

"No, sir. I didn't know it was spoof. I can't see where the joke comes in, either, unless the chap who did it knew that Mr. Selby was a funk—"

"That will do, Grundy. You may go."

"Thank you, sir."

"Is not that boy to be punished?" gasped Mr. Selby, as George Alfred quitted the Housemaster's study.

"Certainly not, as he denies all knowledge of the matter. He is evidently speaking the truth."

"Someone is guilty. Some boy must possess a printing press—the boy who has such a machine must be the guilty party."

"It is possible. I understand that there is such a machine in Study No. 6, in the Fourth Form."

Mr. Selby's eyes gleamed.

"They are the boys I should suspect—they are impertinent, insolent—"

"I will question them."

Toby was despatched once more for Blake & Co. Blake, and Herries, and Digby and D'Arcy came into the study, wondering. They had a ready heard the news from Grundy, and realised what a "jape" had been played on the master of the Third; and they congratulated themselves upon the fact that their consciences were clear. It was a jape after their own hearts; but very fortunately they had not been concerned in it.

"Blake, I understand that you have a hand-press in your study—I heard of it some time ago. You still have it?"

"Yes, sir," said Blake.

"Did you print this paragraph in the blank column of this paper? It turns out to be an insertion made by some unknown person."

"No, sir. Never thought of such a thing."

"And you others—"

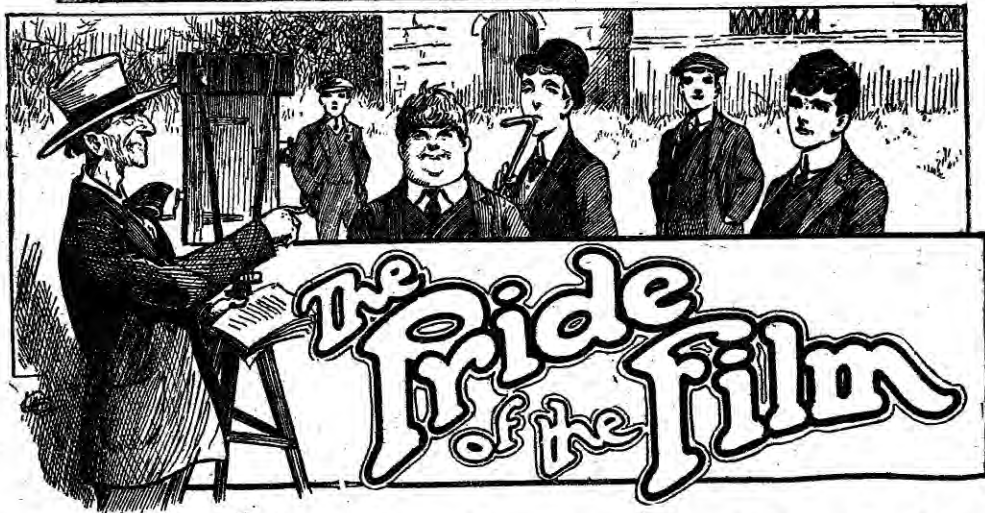
"No, sir," said Herries and Digby.

"Wathah not, sir," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I regard it as a very good joke, but I should have considered it disrespectful myself. It was very unfeeling to show up Mr. Selby in his true colours in this way."

(Continued on page 111, of the cover, col. 2.)

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

START OUR GRAND NEW SERIAL STORY TO-DAY!



The Opening Chapters of a Magnificent New Adventure Story. By VICTOR CROMWELL.

The First Instalments.

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 TURNEY, 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 near an old house, and Silas Shock, the operator, climbs on to the roof of a shed to take the picture.

The roof collapses, and Mrs. Horace Dell—Mr. Dell's sister-in-law—who is acting in the piece, picks from the ruins a pocket-book, which is found to be full of banknotes.

(Now read on.)

A Strange Claimant.

As soon as Mrs. Dell saw the banknotes that had been found in the broken roof of the old tool-shed she became active and eloquent.

"What a glorious find!" she cried. "I wonder whom they belong to? I had better go around to see the house-agent at once."

But Tony Dell had other views.

"I don't fancy we'll be quite so eager to publish the news," he said. "I dare say I could find fifty claimants for these notes inside of an hour if I started mentioning the discovery all round the parish."

"Nonsense, Tony! The house-agent is a highly respectable man!"

"Very likely, Agnes; and his chief clerk may be first cousin to a bishop, and his cashier second cousin to a convict. We'll take no chances. Who has seen the discovery here?"

He looked around at the actors of his company.

"Now, he said to these, 'there'll be a stupendous row of secrecy. You all understand—eh? We don't want the whole parish rushing here claiming the plunder. I'm going to investigate this find first.'"

Mrs. Dell argued no more.

Her brother-in-law meant what he said about the vow of secrecy, for each one who had seen the discovery of the notes was made to promise that not a word of the circumstance would pass his lips.

"And now we'll get on with the picture," declared Mr. Dell, when this business was concluded. "Agnes, you've got

nothing much to do, so please keep an eye on the treasure till we've done our work."

So for a good hour—some folk called Tony Dell a time-waster, as he was very painstaking in all that he undertook—he directed his little group, planned, rehearsed, and explained. But to-day he felt cribbed and cabined, for every now and again would come out an exclamation of disgust.

"Confound this poky little place! I could fix up the whole picture better in the studio!"

Yet though he protested, he was determined, since Mrs. Dell had hired the house, and wanted it used, to act as much of her story as he could in the house that she had hired for the purpose, and to which she had taken such a fancy as a suitable background for the picture.

When the long, laborious work was finished, and most of the actors had taken their departure, a remarkable incident occurred.

Mrs. Dell was out in the garden—or it should rather be called yard, since it was covered with flagstones. She was holding the case of notes under her arm and explaining to Silas Shock a few ideas of her own about taking moving pictures, and Mr. Dell and his niece were in a room overlooking them.

Silas, in lofty scorn, was listening without hearing, and, with his back to a window of the house, was using a few feet of film on the doorway in the high surrounding wall, that gave entrance from the street.

Suddenly a cry was heard from the yard in a strange voice:

"That's mine!"

Mr. Dell turned to the window commanding the yard. As he did so, something hit him with terrible force, crashed him to the ground, and rolled on the top of him.

It seemed incredible. But this something was Silas Shock himself, who had come backward through the window, carrying broken glass and rotten frames with him.

For a wonder neither he nor his employer was cut, and while they picked themselves up out of the dire confusion, Mrs. Horace Dell came rushing in.

"He's got it," she cried, "and he has locked the door outside! Oh, you idiot, Tony, to leave the key in the lock!"

"So he has got it!" said Tony, removing a large jagged piece of glass from his pocket. "What has he got, Agnes?"

"The case of notes! A man came rushing in and grabbed them! Mr. Shock acted like a hero, but he only got thrown through the window—like a football!"

"That man has some wits!" said Shock, slowly dusting

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NEXT
WEDNESDAY!

"D'ARCY'S DEBT!"

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

his sleeve. "I really hope I didn't hurt you, Mr. Dell. I didn't mean to come in on you, but I was too much hurried to choose a proper landing-place. Goodness! He has a wrist!"

Reconstructed the story of the invasion seemed to be, that while Silas was photographing the door, that contrivance suddenly opened, to admit a stranger. This worthy, seeing the case of notes in Mrs. Dell's hand, made a spring at her, shouting "That's mine!"

Silas Shock rushed to the rescue, and the man, seeing his new assailant, simply went for him in a style that proved him fully qualified for a rough-and-tumble wrestling match. As far as could be gathered, he grasped the luckless camera-man by the front of his collar and the lower part of his waistcoat, and lifting him over his head, flung him.

"What a wrist he had!" commented Silas again, as he told this part of the story. "Then the man sprang at Mrs. Dell and snatched the packet of notes, the peril of which she had forgotten in her amazement at my plight. Having gained the package, the man had fled through the door and locked it in Mrs. Dell's face."

"What are you going to do about it, Tony?" asked Mrs. Dell when this anti-climax of the story was reached.

"Why should we do anything?" replied Dell. "The stranger who took the package said 'That's mine!' Why not let us take it for granted that he spoke the truth, and let the matter rest? I don't know if you know it, Agnes, but I have cares enough of my own without including those of the whole parish."

And here Mrs. Dell came out right eloquently. There were times when she could be overwhelming, and this turned out to be one of these occasions. Her brother-in-law listened patiently, lighting a cigar the while. At last he shrugged his shoulders and capitulated.

"Well, if that's your idea, and I have to take up the job, we had better start right away. Now then, what sort of a man was he?"

Silas Shock was invited to give his description. The only tangible facts to grip that he could offer, were that he had something like a wrist, that he was very broad in the shoulders, and rather like a pegtop.

"A sort of prize-fighter-looking man?" said Dell. "More like a wrestler," declared Shock. "Leastwise, I've seen wrestlers much his build. Ah! But he had some wrist!"

"How was he dressed?" Shock interrupted.

"I never thought of it before, sir, but I believe I've got him in my camera. I was doing that door when he came in, and he'll be on the film as sure as chestnuts!"

"Can you find out?"

"When I get back," said Shock.

"Now about getting out," said Mr. Dell.

This was easily managed. The key, though on the outside of the door, was still in the lock, and it was quite an easy walk to scale. Reggie climbed the broken outhouse, and was over it in a moment.

"Half a moment!" said Dell, as they were leaving. "We may as well take that oily revolver with us."

There was no room in the motor-car for Reggie, so he started out to get to the tram on foot, having seen the car start away.

Silas Shock was quite right about the film, as he found that he had managed to get quite a good picture of the man who

had so suddenly broken into the yard of the house at Wandsworth.

The few feet of film that he developed showed the man peering in through the door, which was held slightly at first, and then abruptly entering. It did not display his attack on Mrs. Dell for two reasons, first she was out of the picture, and second that Silas had put the apparatus out of action the moment she had been attacked, and had sprung to the rescue.

The picture of the man was not very clear, owing to the fact that while he was motionless his face was mostly hidden, and when he moved, he moved with a spring. Yet Mrs. Dell was delighted with the result.

"I suppose that now you will take up the case?" she said. "What case—and why should I take it up?" retorted Dell, who was mentally back in the ever present problem of making good "movies"—which is work enough for any one brain—and had almost forgotten his promise to interest himself in the incidents that were agitating his sister-in-law.

"Besides, Agnes," he went on, when he brought his mind back to the subject, "who can recognise the man from that picture? I'll tell you what we'll do, we'll inform the police and the house-agent as to what has occurred, and let them deal with the matter. Why, for all I know, those very bank-notes might be false, and not worth eighteen-pence the bundle."

"In which case we have a public duty, Tony," persisted Mrs. Horace Dell. "We may be on the track of banknote forgers."

Reggie didn't hear the rest of the conversation between the two, but as far as he could make out, it was decided that Mr. Dell's latest decision was to be acted upon. The police were to be informed of the circumstances, and given a good, clean copy of the film negative.

The Man in the Film.

That afternoon Samson Skewes met Reggie outside the studio. The author was most remarkably cordial, and displayed abounding good spirits.

"I don't know how to thank you," he said to Reggie, "as I am convinced that if it hadn't been for you I should not have got my money again for a good long while. I have been with Mr. Startfield all day. He insists on being called Startfield still, though, of course, that isn't his real name."

"I hope you get on well with him," inquired Reggie. "I gave you the hint not to take him fighting."

"Quite right," replied Samson, "and I tried to act on it, although I was feeling rather angry at the trick he played me just after I was married. It is wicked to let a fellow grow up and think he has enough money to live on, and then tell him that he is penniless the day he has taken a wife."

Reggie agreed that it was a heartless act.

"I can't make that out why he did it," he said. "Did Mr. Startfield explain?"

Skewes looked very thoughtful, as if he had heard a good deal more about the real truth of his father's legacy than he had ever known before.

"Reggie," he said, "I don't really know what's the right and the wrong of the affair. It seems pretty clear to me that originally all the money really did belong to Mr. Rankin—or, as I must now call him—Mr. Startfield. He made it himself, and he put it into the business he was in with my father, and then, somehow, as the business didn't need very much capital, my father gradually got it all out of the concern, and into his own name. Mr. Startfield trusted my

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father in everything, and signed any paper that was given him to sign."

"Mr. Startlefield told me a story something like that," said Reggie.

"He did more to me," replied Skewes, "he proved the assertion. I have seen the old books of the firm. And when do you think Mr. Startlefield found out what had happened?"

"When?"

"The day after he was married. He drew a cheque for three hundred pounds for furniture, as he and his wife were going to spend their honeymoon furnishing. Then he asked his partner to sign it, and his partner—my father, I am sorry to say—refused."

"So that was why he played you the same trick."

"Exactly. Mr. Startlefield told me that when, a few years later, he heard that he was the sole executor and my guardian in my father's old will, which had never been altered, he planned to do this thing to me, to get even with my father. And he carried it out, too."

Reggie expressed some opinion about the action which was not completed, because Samson Skewes went on:

"I ought to tell you one fact, though, that puts a much better light on affairs. Half of the money that was supposed to be mine, has been lying at the Bank of England, under trustees, to be payable to me five years from the date of my marriage, with accumulated interest."

"That looks as if he didn't mean to cheat you in the end." "It does," said Skewes. "And now he has made up the other half. Look here!"

He took a cheque-book from his pocket.

"I can fill up these for sums that seem fabulous to me," he said. "But I am in a difficulty about drawing a penny. You see the money isn't rightly mine at all, though Mr. Startlefield says it is, as he made it legally mine by proving my father's will, and letting me grow up thinking it was mine."

The conversation was taking place in the public road, and a man was approaching them. As he passed, Reggie uttered an exclamation, for he recognised him as the man whose face he had just seen on Silas Shock's film, the man who had appeared in the doorway of the Wandsworth House, and who had run off with the package of notes.

Reggie watched the man walk along the road. He was well dressed, and muscular looking, and certainly he had been well described by the words "of a pegtop build," for Reggie had never before seen such enormous breadth of shoulders go with such thin, stumpy little legs. In fact, his appearance was so odd in this respect that he gave one a confused impression that the lower part of his body hadn't grown at all after childhood, and that double nourishment had, somehow or other got into his shoulders and upper part of his frame.

"I'd like to walk this way," said Reggie, pointing up the road, without explaining why.

But at the end of a few dozen steps he had a surprise, for the man turned into the garden drive of Mr. Startlefield's house.

Just as he did so, Reggie heard his own name called. He turned around, and there was Mrs. Horace Dell and Dolly, who were just leaving the picture studio together.

"Well, Reggie," said Mrs. Dell, "are you going to make a big success of my story picture?"

Reggie promised that he would try.

"Let me see," she went on, "isn't this Mr. Skewes?"

Samson Skewes was introduced.

"I have heard about your clever stories," she said. "My brother-in-law, Mr. Anthony Dell, is rather full of them. But I warn you, you will have to look to your laurels. I am your bitter opponent now, for I have started making picture-plots and my situations are simply immense. It is a shame, of course, for us people who don't need to do this kind of thing for money, to come in and crowd you out. But genius will find expression."

Skewes couldn't have told her about his own altered circumstances, but didn't do so.

"I ought to add," went on Mrs. Dell impetuously, "that you mustn't let Mr. Dell have it all his own way about plots. He is a fairly clever man, with a bad knack of going all wrong about important things. It may seem incredible to you that he really didn't want to use my picture story at all. Yet that is so, and, frankly, if I hadn't almost made it a cause of quarrel between us, I don't believe he would be doing so now."

As she was thus expatiating on the eccentric methods of her estimable brother-in-law, she walked slowly on by Samson Skewes' side, letting Dolly follow with Reggie.

They came to the entrance to Mr. Startlefield's garden, into which the mysterious man of the film had turned a moment or two before, and as they did so the sound of voices reached them from within. Reggie and Samson Skewes recognised one of the voices as that of Mr. Startlefield.

"Clear right off, out of my grounds," he was saying indignantly, "and if I ever catch you here again, I will have you arrested as a suspicious character."

The other voice replied, scornfully and mockingly:

"Do you know what that is, Mister Sir? It's the pot being rude to the kettle. That's what that is, Mister Sir. You take time and think it over, Mister Sir, and don't let your angry passions rise, and kindly pay up what is owing, Mister Sir."

The next moment the man of the film emerged from the garden. Mrs. Horace Dell knew him at first sight, and with an impetuosity that was almost foolish, rushed eagerly forward.

"You thief!" she cried. "Where are my banknotes? Where is all that money you stole from me?"

Startlefield was close behind the man, and heard these words. They appeared to afford him astonishment and delight.

"Why, it is Mrs. Dell," he said, coming forward, all traces of indignation leaving his face. "Are you also a victim of this scoundrelly blackmailer? Or has Mr. Stancombe here only acted the part of burglar to you? He is quite gifted in either or both of the parts."

The man spoken of as Stancombe turned on Startlefield ferociously.

"Not so free with my name, Mister Sir!" he said. "And don't you be so handy with your remarks about burglars and blackmailers, as I don't know what you mean by the words, excepting that some people had better be careful who they rile up."

"As for you, ma'am," he went on, now giving Mrs. Dell the benefit of his energy, "I never set eyes on you before, ma'am, and—with all due respect to the stylish cut of your dress—I hope I may never set eyes on you again."

Mrs. Horace Dell was not one to be put down in this simple and sweeping manner. Impetuous and not over tactful, she retorted to the rudeness by repeating her question.

"What have you done with those banknotes you stole from me?"

This time the man spoken of as Stancombe appeared to understand this reference, for he took a more careful survey of her.

"Good gracious, I know what you mean now, ma'am!" he said. "You're the woman who was fondling my savings so lovingly this morning, in that garden over at Wandsworth. Bless me, ma'am, I was in such a hurry then that I didn't notice particularly, and so I suppose should never have known you again if you hadn't spoken. My memory seemed to be of a far uglier old woman than you, ma'am!"

Mrs. Dell only laughed at this rudeness. One saving quality that she possessed was a perfect indifference to remarks about her personal appearance. Without pretending to extreme youth or great beauty, Mrs. Dell was a fine-looking woman with a very attractive presence, so that the words "old" and "ugly" were very far wide of the truth in her case.

She was not by any means convinced that Stancombe spoke the truth about the banknotes, and, with her usual directness, she said so.

"I don't believe the bank-notes are any more yours than mine," she declared. "As for being your savings, the idea is ridiculous. People don't snatch their savings and run away. I can understand the snatching, but running off shows a guilty conscience. Anyway, you had better come back to see Mr. Anthony Dell, my brother-in-law, who has put the affair into the hands of the police."

Stancombe started at the word "police." It was a word that appeared to have an unpleasant sound in his ears. However, he met the suggestion with lofty sarcasm.

"I don't want to see any of your brothers-in-law, or uncles or aunts or second cousins by marriage, ma'am!" he said. "And as far as I'm concerned, this Mr. Dell, or Dell, or whatever his name may be, can go to the military as well as the police. It ain't any affair of mine. I wish you a very good day, ma'am!"

And off he went, striding along the road towards London with the easy, assured gait of one who wished to leave the impression that he was master of the situation.

Mrs. Dell half hesitated, as if she were somewhat inclined to follow him, but whatever her inclinations in this respect, she thought better of it, and, instead, turned to Mr. Startlefield.

"What do you know about that man?" she inquired eagerly. "You heard what he said. Do you really believe that the banknotes are his?"

Mr. Startlefield, who now appeared to have recovered from his irritation and anger, replied to the impetuous lady with irritating slowness.

"Really, Mrs. Dell," he said, "I don't know what banknotes you refer to, but, from what I know of the man, I should judge that, if he snatched them from you, they are

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now his, inasmuch as he isn't likely to let them go again. But as to whether they belong to him or not, my knowledge of him would prompt me to say that they don't."

"You mean that the man is a bad lot?"

"You put it mildly, ma'am. He ought to be in Prince Town Prison. He is a professional blackmailer. In fact, his visit to me was paid as a part of his blackmailing work, for he is annoyed with me for not keeping up my instalments in regard to a little secret of mine that he holds."

"What secret?"

Mrs. Dell asked this surprising question quite as if she were inquiring about some quite very ordinary matter of interest. Even Startlefield seemed astonished at her directness of method.

"Well, really," he said, "if I told you, it might cease to be a secret, though I must claim that it was not a very disgraceful affair, as I was merely cheating a person I knew. Stancombe became aware of the facts, and has since regarded me as a virgin gold-mine. I can give you his address at Wandsworth if you wish to pursue your inquiries further."

Although Startlefield was speaking jocularly, the word "Wandsworth" seemed to strike on Mrs. Dell's ears, and she treated his remark as sincerely meant. In consequence, he was not a little surprised when she accepted the offer.

"That man stole some money that was in my possession," she declared, "and I feel it my duty to get that money back; unless he can prove his right to it."

Then, when the address had been given to her, she turned to Reggie.

"You come with me," she said. "You are the only being with any brains in this region. I am going to get that money back and give it to the person it belongs to."

The Window.

The stolen banknotes had become almost an obsession to Mrs. Horace Dell. Reggie could not quite understand her logic, but he gathered that she felt her tenancy of the house at Wandsworth, while the theft took place, made her responsible about the money.

That she was eccentric in many of her ways no one would deny. But underneath Mrs. Dell's eccentricity there was a strong love of duty, and it arose from this chivalrous sentiment that she was a kind of modern-day knight-errant, anxious to right the wrong.

In the present good work she was undertaking, as Reggie and Dolly and she were starting off, there was a brief delay at first, because Mrs. Dell wanted the key of the old house at Wandsworth where the notes had been stolen, and Mr. Dell was unwilling to assist what he called her "hare-brained schemes" by giving it to her.

"You'll only make a fool of yourself, Agnes," he said. "I have written the police."

"Written!"

"Yes. What's wrong with that?"

"You should have wired, of course. However, it may be all the better, as we shan't be interfered with."

However, he reluctantly gave her the key, and a little later Reggie and Dolly and Mrs. Dell were back at the quaint old house at Wandsworth, where the incidents of the morning had occurred. Once inside the yard, they began to make a more careful and detailed examination of the outhouse with the broken roof.

As they did so, Dolly suddenly drew Reggie aside.

"Be careful how you look," she said, "and don't raise your eyes too sharply. There is someone watching us. He is peering out of a window in the house opposite, just over the garden doorway, and I am almost sure it is Mr. Stancombe."

She was quite right. At an attic window in a building across the road, the unpleasant face of the man who had snatched the package of banknotes was looking down on them.

The man seemed to be following their movements with the greatest of interest, though, as Mrs. Dell was in the outhouse sorting over the rubbish which had fallen with the roof, he could not see her as well as he could see Dolly and Reggie.

As Reggie turned away, there was a sudden exclamation from Mrs. Dell.

"A pocket-book!" she cried.

"Not so loud, Mrs. Dell," said Reggie in an undertone. "We are being watched."

"Watched! Where?"

Mrs. Dell would have come out and stared around her, thus giving information to the man at the window, had not Reggie barred her way.

Quickly he explained things to her.

"I don't care," she said firmly. "The man can see us if he likes."

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But, all the same, she gave the pocket-book to Reggie. "Stuff it in your pocket," she said, "or there may be another piece of snatching, and I don't want that terrible man's hands on me again."

By the time Mrs. Dell looked, the face was gone from the window.

They entered the house, and examined the pocket-book. It contained only one paper, which was very brief and very simple:

"This is the last will and testament of me, Marmaduke Henty. I give and bequeath all my property to my favourite niece, Sarah Alice Rankin, born Sarah Alice Henty."

The will was signed "Robert Henty," and there were two witnesses. In addition was a footnote in pencil: "The above property consisted of banknotes at date of death of Robert Henty, numbered as follows."

Then followed the numbers and descriptions of the banknotes, totalling, Reggie roughly guessed, to a thousand or more pounds. The pencil note was not in Mr. Henty's writing, and there was no signature.

"Why, it is a will!" said Mrs. Dell. "We must find out who this Mrs. Henty is!"

It was when Mrs. Dell said this that Reggie suddenly remembered his long, confidential talk with Mr. Startlefield, whose real name was Rankin. It came back to him that Mr. Startlefield had told him about the Hentys, one of whom he had married. Surely this niece referred to must be Startlefield's wife.

At the Police-Station.

But before he could say a word about this discovery, Mrs. Dell seized the paper and pocket-book from his hand, and stuffed them into her muff.

"Look out of the window," she said.

Reggie looked. He saw now why Stancombe had left the attic opposite, for that human copy of a pegasus was now in the yard with his back turned to them, and his head and shoulders in the outhouse, stooping down examining the rubbish that had fallen with the roof.

"What impertinence!" cried Mrs. Dell. "One would think he was the tenant! I'll teach him!"

She darted from the room before Reggie could point out the possible danger of taking such a course, and marched boldly up to the intruder, who had turned to meet her the moment he heard her footstep.

"Are you aware that you are trespassing on private ground?" asked Mrs. Dell.

"Quite aware, madam," replied Stancombe; "and I wish it was the wickedest thing I ever did. You must be aware, ma'am, that there is no such thing as the law of trespass. You have to prove damage, ma'am, and any damage I ever did in this ramshackle old place would be a fool to what your photographer did when he fell through the roof, ma'am!"

Mrs. Dell resented the man's sneering manner, and replied with stern coldness.

"You will be able to explain that to the police," she said. "They will be wanting to know the truth of the affair when they come for the banknotes you stole!"

Here the man made a most startling statement, quite different from what he had said before, and quite unexpected:

"I have sent those banknotes over to the police already, ma'am. I thought it the best course to adopt!"

Mrs. Dell stared at him in surprise.

"I don't believe it," she said.

"Very well," replied Stancombe. "If that is your line, you had better come over with me and ask the police!"

Mrs. Dell was always abrupt and impulsive. Turning to Reggie and Dolly, she said:

"Come on to the police-station. Reggie, you lock the door!"

They had not very far to go. At the police-station they were treated with great civility, and shown into an inspector's office.

"I want you to convince this lady, sir," began Stancombe, "that I sent you over some banknotes and an oily leather case just now. She doesn't believe me, and has been calling me a rather rude names!"

The inspector opened a safe, and produced the very case that Stancombe had snatched from Mrs. Dell.

"It is quite right," he said. "We received this by hand a little while ago, with a verbal message that the sender would call."

Mrs. Dell was still sceptical.

"What is in it?" she asked.

"Banknotes, ma'am," retorted Stancombe.

"Banknotes, madam," echoed the inspector.

"Let me see them. And what are the numbers?" persisted Mrs. Dell.



Silas Shock rushed to the rescue, and the man, seizing him by the collar and waistcoat, flung him down and rushed away with the notes. (See page 20.)

"Don't tell her," put in Stancombe. "She'll copy the numbers, and get a friend to claim them."

The inspector shook his head very politely. He had had long experience of such cases, and he recognised the importance and sound common-sense of Mr. Stancombe's warning.

"Now, if you have any numbers of any notes that are missing," he said, "and if you like to tell me what those numbers are, I will have great pleasure in going through the notes and informing you!"

"It isn't very likely that that will be much good to the lady," sneered Stancombe. "What do you think, Mr. Sir?"

But, sneer as he might, Mrs. Dell's next words caused him to change from sarcasm to bewilderment, for that lady at once accepted the challenge, and offered to supply the numbers she wished traced.

Arranging her muff on a table, so that Stancombe could not see what she was copying, she commenced to make a clear copy of all the notes, with not only numbers, but values set out in full. As many of the notes were for £20, £50, and £100, it seemed important that these sums should be stated.

All the while she was writing Stancombe was watching her with very great interest, which clearly increased into anxiety as she passed over her list to the inspector.

The police official opened the case, and laid both notes and list before him, keeping his own bulky form well between his visitors and his table. The onlookers saw his pen taken from behind his ear on two occasions, and, apparently, some "ticks" were marked on Mrs. Dell's paper.

At last he turned to his callers, and addressed himself to Mrs. Dell.

"Your list includes all mine," he said.

"You mean that the notes on my list are in the packet?" she asked.

"No, madam. I don't mean anything of the sort," replied the inspector. "You've got fifty-pound and one-hundred-pound notes on your list. All mine are five-pound notes, and there are eight of them. You have all the numbers on your list, but your list covers notes worth twenty two hundred pounds, while I have notes for forty pounds. Could you suggest what that means?"

Mrs. Dell looked puzzled a moment, and then she replied in her usual frank manner.

"I can easily tell you what that means," she said, pointing at Mr. Stancombe. "That man snatched the notes out of my hand, and brought them to his own house. Learning that I was on his track, and meant to bring him to justice, he removed the most valuable notes from the case, and, leaving the small ones in it, brought it to you with a show of honesty."

"It's a lie!" said Stancombe nervously.

"It is a very serious charge," admitted the inspector. "I shall want to know a little more fully where I am. Do the notes belong to you, madam?"

"No," said Mrs. Dell. "They belong to"—here she looked at the wall behind her muff—"a Mrs. Rankin!"

"Then if they belong to her, they belong to her husband; and if to him, they belong to me," put in Stancombe. "He owes me quite a lot of money!"

(Another long instalment of this splendid new serial story next Wednesday. Order your copy early.)

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NEXT
WEDNESDAY:

"D'ARCY'S DEBT!"



THIS WEEK'S CHAT

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For Next Wednesday:

"D'ARCY'S DEBT!"

By Martia Clifford.

In this fine, long, complete story Mr. Clifford tells, in his own humorous way, of the trap into which Arthur Augustus D'Arcy falls, not so much through his lack of business aptitude as because he vainly believes himself quite a good "business man." Visitors of importance are expected in Study No. 6, and it is urgently necessary that the wrecked furniture shall be replaced. In a moment of weakness Blake, Herries, and Digby allow Gussy to take on the buying job. He goes to Wayland with £10s. 6d. in his pocket, and purchases goods to the alleged value of over £40 on the hire system. Of the complications which arose, and of the desperate struggles which D'Arcy made to keep the whole affair from the knowledge of his chums; of the trick by which they succeeded in wringing a confession from him at length; and of the unexpected manner in which the trouble was cleared up at the finish—you will read next week. Those readers who have been clamouring for a story in which Dick Julian plays a prominent part, those whose liking is for the impersonation of some stranger by a junior with dramatic tastes, and everybody else who can appreciate a tiptop yarn will simply revel in

"D'ARCY'S DEBT!"

A GROWN-UP READER'S ENTHUSIASM.

A reader of the "Gem" and "Magnet," who is certainly not exactly a young man, writes me a letter from which I cannot refrain quoting an extract: "Not since the palmy days of the 'Boy's Own Paper,' when 'My Friend Smith,' 'The Fifth Form at St. Dominic's,' Jules Verne's romantic prophecies, and other stories delighted our schoolboy minds, have I read or even thought of a boy's paper," he says. "But hearing that my neighbour's boy had developed a passion for reading—the symptoms of appreciation being deep immersion, punctuated by chuckles of laughter—I investigated the cause. At first approaching the booklet with something like contempt, I soon found myself under the spell. Now, I am a devoted 'Gemite' and 'Magnetite,' looking forward to each new number with real zest. My wife particularly enjoys Gussy, and we both think the whole tone good, interesting, and amusing."

As this gentleman read the stories, he mentions fully thirty years ago, it does not need a Herlock Sholmes to deduce the fact that he is no longer quite young. To those of my readers who find their parents objecting to the Companion Papers and refusing to sample them on their own account, I recommend that they should show this paragraph to the said parents. If they will only read, they also may fall under the spell!

THAT YANKEE LETTER.

"Irishman" (Dublin) takes up the cudgels on behalf of the American nation. He says Cyrus P. Crake is no Yankee. No real American would write such piffle. The real American is a man of brains, and apparently this young idiot has none. "Irishman" thinks far too much has been made of the "too proud to fight" speech. We don't know the ins and outs of the case, he says. But that is hardly the point. We really don't require to know all the ins and outs of it to be sure that the Hun will not hesitate to take advantage of any nation which announces itself as too proud to fight. President Wilson was simply asking for a slap on the face. It is not

worth while to say any more about the matter just now, because present indications point to the likelihood of a break between the U.S. and Germany, and I suppose that when, if ever, we do find the Americans ranged on the side of right and justice, we shall have to forget that they were a long time finding their place.

NOTICES.

Signaller W. T. Powell, 23539, "A" Co., 12th Batt., South Wales Borderers, Marne Barracks, Blackdown Camp, via Farnborough, Hants, would be glad to have letters from "Gem" readers.

F. Manly, 389, and T. Gregory, 381, H.M.S. Infexible, care of G.E.O., London, would be very pleased to receive back numbers of the Companion Papers.

Driver W. Langley, 76317, 31st Brigade A.C. B.E.F., Salonica, asks if any reader can spare him and his comrades a cricket set.

Private C. L. Owen, 6351 Details, 2nd Rifle Brigade, 15 Camp, 8th Infantry Base Depot, B.E.F., Le Havre, France, would like to correspond with a girl reader—age 19-20—and would also be glad to have back numbers.

A. V. Cutler, 8, Holmwood Villas, Gander Green Lane, Sutton, Surrey, wants to buy back numbers of the "Gem" earlier than 300.

R. Millidge, 3, Edinburgh Road, Plaistow, E., would like to join a "Gem" or "Magnet" Club, if there is one in his neighbourhood.

Football: The "Magnet" F. C. Wanted members to join this club. Apply to Fred Hodgson, 97, Hyde Park Road, Leeds.

J. A. Needs, 32, Soming Street, Roman Road, Barnsbury, N., invites readers of the "Gem" and "Magnet" in that neighbourhood to co-operate with him in the formation of a League.

"Daphne," c/o E. Nichols, 34, Elsie Road, East Dulwich, S.E., wants a chum for a six weeks' walking or cycling—walking preferred—tour which he intends to make in Scotland, starting on April 4th. Will any boy reader between the ages of 13 and 16 who would care to entertain the idea write to him at above address at once?

W. S. Watkin and C. A. Pool, 26, Waterfall Road, Lower Tooting, S.W., are starting a Boy Scout patrol, and would be glad to hear from any readers in their district who care to join.

Private S. Gardiner, 34564, C Company, 13th Battalion, Welsh Regiment, 114th Brigade, 38th Division, B.E.F., France, would be glad to receive reading matter—preferably from a girl reader.

REPLIES IN BRIEF.

"Gem Likes" (Sea Point, South Africa).—Some people spell quite as badly as Grundy and Coker—even grown-up people who have had some education.

"The Watcher" (Peckham).—I really don't know a very great deal about the cinema business. The paper named would be more likely than the London agents to supply photographs, I should say.

"Aixington" (Penge).—Your "free library" for back numbers of the Companion Papers is quite a great idea, and you seem to have done fine work in roping in new readers. Talbot and Tom Merry would be a pretty even match.

(Continued on page iii. of the cover.)

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THE CONSCRIPTS OF ST. JIM'S.

(Continued from page 18.)

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"Yaas, wathah!"

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"Very likely, sir. We were out all yesterday afternoon."

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"I haven't the faintest idea, sir."

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Study No. 6 departed.

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THE END.

(Next week's grand, long, complete story of the chums of St. Jim's is entitled "D'Arcy's Debt" by Martin Clifford.)

A Cash Prize for Every Contributor to this Page.



LOOK OUT FOR YOUR WINNING STORYETTE.

HIGHLAND HOSPITALITY.

A tourist was caught in a heavy rainstorm up in the Highlands. Eventually he came upon a solitary cottage, where he was given shelter and asked by the husband to stay the night. As the weather continued bad, he accepted the man's invitation.

After dinner, when wearing a suit of the guidman's clothes while his own were drying, he was met on the stairs by the mistress of the house, who had a broom in her hand.

Mistaking the tourist for her husband, she gave him a thump on the head with the broom, and at the same time remarked:

"That's for asking the man to stay a' night!"—Sent in by George Farrell, Anderston, Glasgow.

DISCORD.

Mrs. Gubbins was discussing the war with her neighbours. "Well, if the worst comes to the worst," she said confidently, "I'll be able to keep the wolf from the door by my singing."

"Yes," assented Mrs. Sharp. And then she added: "That is, if the wolf has any ear for music!"—Sent in by Henry Smith, Bootle.

WISE MAN.

Recruiting-sergeant: "One gran'father living. Is he on your father's or your mother's side?"

The Recruit: "Oh, he varies, sir. He sticks up for both of 'em at different times—a sort of neutral."—Sent in by D. Sanderson, Galashiels, N.B.

HE "SOUNDED" THEM.

It was a little parish in Wales, where very little English is spoken. A general meeting was held to consider the desirability of putting a chandelier into the local school-room. Everyone seemed in favour of the idea.

"Do you think we ought to have one, Mr. Davis?" said the schoolmaster to a venerable old parishioner.

"I agree to it," was the reply; "but there is just one thing I would like to know. If we have a—"

"Chandelier," put in the schoolmaster.

"If we have a chandelier," the old man continued, "who's going to play it?"—Sent in by T. Clifford, Leeds.

NOT QUITE READY.

Two inmates of a certain asylum formed a plan to make their escape.

They reached the outer wall, and one said to the other:

"Bend down and let me get on your back. When I get on top of the wall I'll haul you up."

As soon as he reached the top, however, he slid down the other side, and called:

"I think you'd better stay in a little longer, mate. You're not quite sane, yet."—Sent in by R. Brimble, Bath.

DIER RESULTS.

Customer: "Another half a pound of your beetle-powder, please!"

Chemist: "Glad you like the powder, sir. Works wonders, doesn't it?"

Customer: "Yes. I gave a black-beetle the first half-pound, and he's very ill. If I give him another half-pound perhaps he'll die. Hurry up!"

—Sent in by R. D. P., Llanidloes, North Wales.

SO DO WE.

A number of children from one of the poorer parts of London, who had been taken into the country for a day, visited a farm.

The farmer, who had just finished milking, gave them all a drink of milk.

"How do you like that?" he asked.

"Oh, it's fine!" murmured one little chap. "I do wish our milkman had a cow."—Sent in by Miss Eva Smith, Moston, Manchester.

A BARGAIN.

Boy (excitedly): "I say, dad, I've just made nineteen shillings and threepence."

Father: "Good, my son! How did you manage it?"

Boy: "I've bought a guinea-pig for one-and-ninepence."—Sent in by R. S. Walton, Hampstead.

HOPE DEFERRED.

They each sat at an extreme end of the old sofa. Although they had been courting now for something like two years, the wide gap between them had always been respectfully preserved.

"A penny for your thoughts, Sandy," murmured Maggie, after a silence of just under an hour.

"Weel," replied Sandy, with surprising boldness, "tae tell ye the truth, lass, I was jest thinking how fine it would be if ye gave me a wee bit kissie."

"I've no objection," simpered Maggie. And she slipped over and kissed him on the tip of the left ear.

Sandy again relapsed into a brown study, and a quarter of an hour was thus ticked away.

"An' what be ye thinking about noo? Another—eh?"

"Nae, nae, ma lassie; it's mair serious the noo."

"Is it, laddie?" asked Maggie softly, her heart going pit-a-pat with expectation. "An' what might it be?"

"I was jest thinking," said Sandy, "that it is jest about time ye were paying me that penny."—Sent in by R. Down, Tavistock.

AN ENCOURAGING SENTENCE.

The subaltern was getting on very nicely sentencing delinquents as he thought fit, and no fault could be found with the sentences till a case of overstaying leave appeared.

The subaltern, after hearing the evidence, drummed on the table thoughtfully, as though at a loss for a suitable punishment, and then rapped out:

"Fourteen days C.B.!"

But the sergeant who was entering up the sentences, called out:

"No, no, sir! You cannot give him that!"

"Oh—er—sorry!" replied the sub. Then, turning to the offender, he said:

"Seven days C.B., then!"

But again the sergeant intervened, saying the sentence was too heavy.

"Give him—er—two days' pay, sir," he advised. Meaning, of course, that two days' pay should be kept from the man's allowance.

Then the officer extracted two shillings from his pocket, and, handing it over to the offender, said:

"Don't let it occur again!"

—Sent in by H. Ingham, York.

As the "GEM" Storyette Competition has proved so popular, it has been decided to run this novel feature in conjunction with our new Companion Paper,

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