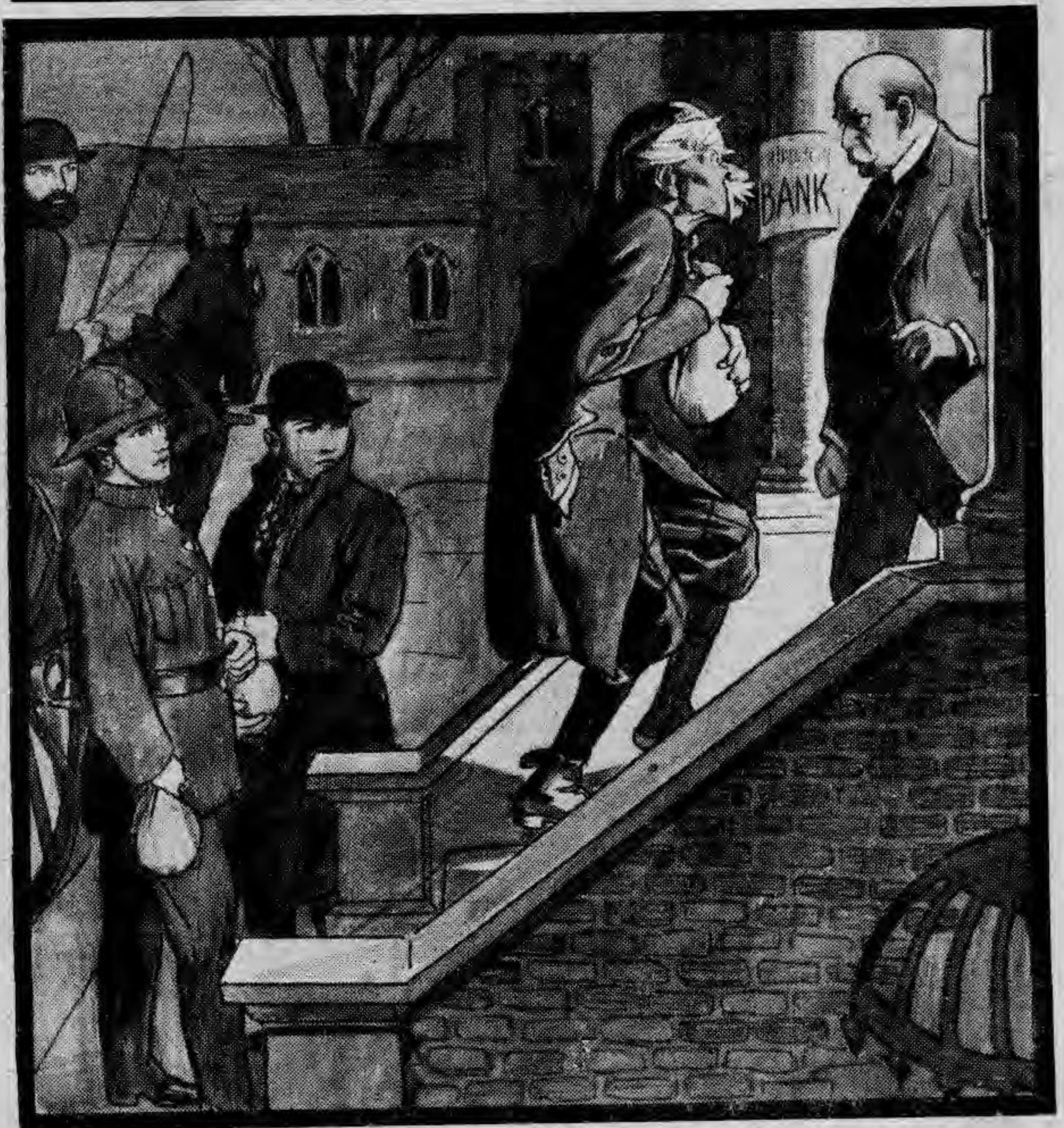


# PEPPER'S GOLD!

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



## AFTER BANKING HOURS!

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# PEPPER'S GOLD!

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

By  
**MARTIN CLIFFORD.**

## CHAPTER 1.

### The Luck of the Draw!

**L**EVISON MAJOR is drawn against—Levison minor!" announced Talbot, smiling.

"Hooray!" cried Wally D'Arcy, chief of the fag tribe at St. Jim's. "I only hope I've the luck to be drawn against my old ass of a major, that's all! He won't stand an earthly, will you, Gus, old scout?"

But little Frank Levison looked quite dismayed.

"I say, Talbot, I—I—look here, you know, I want to withdraw! I can't stand against Ernie!"

"Rats!" shouted Manners minor. "You ain't jolly well going to be allowed to let us down like that, young Levison!"

Reggie Manners, like Wally D'Arcy, would have had no objection in the world to standing against his elder brother, though they were on far better terms now than they had been.

Ernest Levison, of the Fourth Form, crossed over to Frank and shook him, but very gently.

"Young ass!" he said. "Look here, Franky, there ain't a fellow in the school I'd sooner have lick me than you, if I've got to be licked!"

Frank flushed with pleasure. He had not thought of that way of looking at the matter.

"That's all right, then," said Wally. "Because, you see, Levison, he's going to lick you! You fatheaded Fourth Formers and Shellfish have wangled it so that we can't have many members, anyway. But we're voting solid for every fellow in the Third and Second who does stand—we don't care who's against him! So we're pretty much bound to get our little lot home."

The draw that was being made in the Common-room was that for the candidates in the St. Jim's parliamentary election.

The constituency was the whole of the school below the Fifth Form, everyone having one vote in each election. That was easily enough settled. But there had been more than a little difficulty in deciding who should be the candidates, for nearly everyone wanted to stand. After much deliberation, it had been settled that every member of the Shell and Fourth who chose could enter the lists, but that the representation of the fag Forms could not possibly be on so liberal a scale. It would never do to have the St. Jim's House of Commons crowded with noisy fags.

Thus practically half the Shell and the Fourth would find seats, with a limited number of the Third and Second.

No one but the fag tribe knew how the matter of candidates from the fag Forms had been decided. But there were rumours that wild shrieks, sounds as of free fighting, the tramp of many feet, and the biff of falling bodies had been heard in the Form-rooms what time the matter was being talked over. What was certain was that from the amicable discussions thus carried on, Wally D'Arcy and his little band had come out

right ends up. They were all standing, and the name of one of them had been in the first pair drawn from the hat by Talbot.

Talbot had already been elected Speaker of the House. He was just the man for the job, the rest thought. It was too much to expect that all his rulings would be obeyed; but they would have a better chance than anyone else's—better even than Tom Merry's.

So the drawing of the lots naturally fell to Talbot, as his name was not upon any of the slips.

There were others present whose names were not included.

A disgruntled Third Former stood with a little group of the Fourth and the Shell. Piggott's right eye lent colour to the stories of how the fags had settled matters among themselves. And it looked as though someone among his fellow-fags had lent colour to Piggott's right eye. Piggott's name was not among those to be called.

Neither was that of Racke, in whose tail of blades and blackguards Piggott figured. Crooke had said he wouldn't stand, but had changed his mind later, when it had occurred to him that he might be drawn against, say, Mellish or Trimble, and would thus have a chance.

Mellish was standing. So were Scrope and Clampe, who belonged to the sportive crowd.

And Racke wished now that he had also come in.

Fellows would say that he had funked it. His chance of getting in would have been small indeed; and even if he had been elected some of those who were down upon him because of the paternal war-proflittering would have made the House unpleasant for him. But that would have been better than to have them saying he had funked it—especially as the charge was a true one!

"Figgins against Lennox!" announced Talbot, having drawn two more slips.

"This," remarked Lennox, "is where I don't come in!"

For the popularity of George Figgins was great, even in the School House, and Figgy was already marked out for leadership of the Opposition. Lennox had no chance against him.

"Trimble against—"

Talbot paused dramatically. Everyone was interested. Quite a ripple of excitement ran through the crowd. Baggy Trimble, the sneak and the glutton, who listened at doors and collared other fellows' letters, was of no account; but that was just why it was interesting!

Baggy's eyes fairly goggled as he waited, hanging, as it were, upon Talbot's breath.

"Merry?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The great shout of laughter was almost like an explosion.

It was very funny. Baggy Trimble v. Tom Merry. The least against the greatest, one might say. But Baggy did not think it funny.

"Tain't fair!" he howled. "The papers have been wangled! It's been done to make certain of Tom Merry

getting in, and I'm not going to stand it!"

"Wrong, Baggy, wrong!" said Monty Lowther soothingly. "You may stand; but you will not sit—that is all."

"I—I'd rather have Mellish!" bleated Baggy.

"You wouldn't have any better chance, you fat fool!" snapped Percy Mellish of the Fourth.

"Cardew against Redfern!"

"Reddy, old chap, I retire!" said Ralph Reckness Cardew. "I know when I'm up against a better man than myself, by gad! You can't be left out."

"Can't retire—it ain't allowed," answered Dick Redfern of the New House. "And it's no cert for me—not by jolly long odds!"

"Hobbs versus Finn!" said Talbot. "Manners major v. Bates! Wynn versus Tompkins!"

"Here, hold on!" cried Blake. "You mustn't rattle them off like that, old scout! It don't give us time to taste them, you know."

"Can't take all day and all night over it," replied Talbot. "D'Arcy major versus Manners minor! Clive versus Owen!"

"Up the spout with your major, Wally!" shouted Reggie Manners.

"Don't you be so jolly cocksure, or I may give our chaps orders to vote against you!" growled Wally, much to Reggie's surprise.

"Well, I like that, blessed if I don't! If you can lick him, so can I. And you needn't jolly well think we're going to take orders from you to that extent, my pippin!"

Arthur Augustus did not like his luck at all. It was bad enough to be drawn against a fag. It hurt what the swell of the Fourth called his "dig." But it was worse to know that, by sheer weight of the votes of the fag tribe, the Third Former might lick him!

"Kerr against Gore! Jameson versus Mulvaney minor!" went on Talbot, drawing fast from the well-shaken-up slips. "Blake versus Clampe!"

"Rotten luck!" grinned Jack Blake. "There goes my chance!"

"Swarkin' bounder!" muttered Leslie Clampe, who knew Blake did not mean it.

"Pratt against Lawrence!"

"One good man out," remarked Figgins. "But that's about the first stroke of bad luck we've had yet, Kerr, old son!"

Both Pratt and Lawrence were New House.

"Lowther against Wilkins!"

"Wilky, I congratulate you heartily," said the humorist of the Shell.

"Whaffer?" growled Wilkins.

"You won't have the fag of attending the House, that's what for."

"Don't you make any silly mistake, Lowther!" said the great George Alfred Grundy, in his most dogmatic manner. "I'm seeing Wilky through, and Gunn, too. I don't know that they deserve it, but I'm going to do it."

"Gunn against Scrope!"

"I'll help you to see Gunn through

that," said Lowther generously. "It ought not to take much doing."

"Digby versus Thompson!"

"Thought my turn was never coming," said Digby. "But I'm satisfied now."

Dig should have been satisfied, anyway. Thompson from over the way had little chance against Robert Arthur Digby.

"When are we going to get a show?" asked Dick Julian. There were four juniors in Study No. 5 on the Fourth-Form passage, but not one of them had heard his name called yet.

"And there's us, too—don't forget us, Talbot!" said Clifton Dane. No. 11 of the Shell studies, with three occupants, also remained out in the cold at present.

But Julian and Dane were joking. It was in deadly seriousness that Grundy said:

"Look here, you know, Talbot. It's about time I heard my name! If it don't soon come I shall begin to think the biz-ney has been wangled!"

"Think what you like—and if you can," replied Talbot. He grinned as he spoke. Grundy could not see why. The speech did not seem to him to make sense. But Lowther was grinning, too. Grundy noticed that.

"He means you haven't anything to think with, old scout," said Gunn obligingly.

"What? I'll give you a thack—"

"It wasn't me! It was Talbot, you ass! I never said I thought you hadn't any brains," Gunn interrupted him in haste. Then, to Wilkins, standing by his side, Gunn said, in a lower tone:

"We don't need to think that—we jolly well know it—eh, Wilky?"

"Contarini against Crooke!" announced Talbot.

"Oh, by gad! I'm not taking any of that!" said Crooke. "Contarini, by gad! He's an alien!"

"No—he's an ally," corrected Tom Merry.

"Same thing, dash it all!"

"Shows what you're made of, Crooke!"

"If we'd had a Hun here it would have suited Crooke better," remarked Monty Lowther.

"Why, dear boy?" asked Arthur Augustus. "It is hardly fair to talk of a Hun in the same breath with Contarini, you know!"

"Some of the fellows might have voted for Crooke rather than for a Hun," Lowther explained. "Not many, of course, but some."

"I shouldn't!" said Blake decidedly. "That is, not unless he was a very Hunny Hun indeed. We ain't obliged to vote, you know."

"Herries versus Julian!" said Talbot.

"That means one good man out," Tom Merry said.

"Weally, it is wathah a pitay that we could not have awwanged it to avoid contretemps of that description," remarked Arthur Augustus.

"Avoid whichers?"

"Is it any use at all your pwetendin' that you studay Fwench, Dig?"

"Not that I know of. I have to, that's all."

## CHAPTER 2.

### Racke Comes In.

"GIBBONS versus Macdonald!" That was Fourth against Shell, but not very interesting otherwise. It passed without comment.

So did the pairing for contest of Walkley, Lorne, and Lucas with New House fellows of no special note.

But the next dip into the hat brought out something better.

"D'Arcy minor v. Reilly!"

"Wally, me son, ye're done an' done

for!" said Reilly, in his best Hibernian brogue.

"Rats! Bet you I lick you by twenty votes at least!" retorted the leader of the Third.

"Weally, Wally, I cannot countenance—"

"No need, Gus! Take your counting-house away! It beats me where you could have dug up such a thing! Disgrace to our family, it is!"

"Noble v. Smith minor!"

That was an easy one for Kangaroo.

"Hammond v. Kerruish!"

Rough luck! 'Arry 'Ammond—of Hammond's Hats and Study No. 5 of the Fourth—and Eric Kerruish, from the Isle of Man and the same study, were the best of chums. But these things could not be helped in a straight draw.

"Dane against Gibson!"

"Who's Gibson?" asked Clifford Dane. "Did I ever hear of the chap before? New kid, eh?"

"Oh, I say, Dane!" protested Curly Gibson of the Third.

"You'll hear of him again, though!" sang out Wally. "He's the man who's going to lick you—Curly Gibson, 80 votes; Dane, 15—or something like that!"

"Curly Gibson is it?" said Dane. "I think I remember now—the kid that don't wash his neck quite nicely; but, of course, that's no distinguishing mark in the Third. All serene, Curly; don't get your little rag out! Save that for polling-day, my infant!"

"Lumley-Lumley v. Jones minor! Frere v. Boulton!" went on Talbot.

Then, with impressiveness:

"Skimpole against Mellish!"

"My hat! It can't be did!" gasped Blake. "Why, that means Skimmy will get in!"

"Oh, does it?" snarled Mellish.

"What is there against Skimmy's getting in?" asked Talbot.

"Everything! He'll gas all the time! He could bore the hind leg off a donkey!"

"Pity if you're crippled, Blake," said Lowther blandly.

"Can't be allowed. Bad for the footer team!" said Tom.

"Better Skimmy than that worm Mellish, anyway!" was Dig's opinion.

"Don't talk rot! Mellish had no chance against anyone, so he might just as well have been knocked out by a good man, and let Skimmy get the knock from another."

"I fear, Blake, that I do not quite apprehend your standpoint," mildly observed the learned and bespectacled Skimpole. "I have always regarded you with friendly feelings, and I regret that those feelings should have failed of reciprocation. I can only say—"

"That's why!" groaned Blake. "Just listen to the weird old jaw-worker!"

"Glyn versus Wallis! Walkley versus Barden!" said Talbot.

Wallis and Barden were both of the New House. And now there followed in succession several New House names, two paired together in each case. It could not be helped; but Figgins wore rather a long face. He wanted to lead a strong Opposition, and this business reduced his chances.

Everyone belonging to the Shell, in both Houses, had now been accounted for except Talbot, who was not standing; Racke, who had refused to come in; and George Alfred Grundy.

All the School House Fourth had also been drawn, with the single exception of Wyatt, whose name now cropped up with that of a fag in the Second.

There followed pairs, in which Second Form and New House chiefly figured; and Figgins looked happier. He had not

yet realised the voting-power of lagdom, and he fancied his men safe.

And still the slip which bore the name of Grundy had not come out of the hat.

"I say, Talbot!"

"Well, Grundy?"

"Are you sure my name's there?"

"I'm not!"

"Eh?"

"I say I'm not sure. How can I be? I didn't do the slips."

"But—"

"Better ask Merry and Manners. They did the work."

"It's there all serene," said Manners. "I wrote the Shell names and the Second. Tommy did the Fourth and the Third."

"I saw Manners write yours, Grundy," Tom said soothingly. "I remember because he wrote it in full—George Alfred Grundy, with A.S.S. after it!"

"Eh? What's A.S.S. mean?" inquired Grundy.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You're the only chap here who doesn't know, Grundy!" said Monty Lowther, wiping tears of laughter from his eyes. "But never mind—where ignorance is bliss, 'tis folly to be wise!"

"You'll never be foolish through being wise, anyhow, Lowther!"

"There are three more slips," said Talbot. And he took out two.

But one bore a New House name and the other that of a School House fag.

"Then yours must be on the last slip, Grundy," said Talbot, opening it.

"But there's something wrong," said Tom, looking puzzled. "We made it an even number, didn't we, Manners?"

"I thought so, Tommy. Hold hard though. What about Racke? I fancy we must have counted him in, though I didn't write a slip for him."

"I'm dashed if I'm going to stand it!" howled Grundy. "There's a rotten conspiracy to keep me under!"

"Why, you silly ass, this is where you score!" retorted Dig. "You go in with out a contest!"

"Hanged if I'll do anything of the sort! A pretty nice sort of thing that would be for me—me, you know!"

It was not wholly surprising that Grundy should take it that way. He dearly loved the limelight, and was not likely to be satisfied with crawling in because there was no one to oppose him.

Half a dozen of the leading spirits took counsel together.

"There's only one thing to be done," pronounced Grundy, while they conferred.

"Eh? What's that?" asked Talbot.

"Put the slips back, and have the draw all over again," replied Grundy.

"My hat! Of all the nerve!" gasped Lawrence.

"My dear chap, it's just the sort of thing Grundy would expect, don'tcher know," said Cardew. "Grundy's got to be satisfied, though the heavens fall, by gad!"

"Of course I've got to be satisfied, you silly chump!" hooted Grundy. "Haven't I as good a right as anyone else—and better, come to that?"

"Well, I agree, for one," Cardew said, winking at Levison. "I'm not a bit satisfied."

"Why not?" asked Levison.

"Don't like bein' drawn against Reddy. Reddy will whack me, by gad!"

"Well, what would you like?"

"Me? Oh, I should like to be /up against Grundy, y'know."

"You silly fathead! You burbling idiot!" roared Grundy. "What chance would a tailor's dummy like you have against me?"

"I ain't slovenly, certainly," replied Cardew, with a disdainful glance at Grundy's attire. Grundy was not a precisian in dress, by any means. "But I

didn't know St. Jim's was so keen on slovenly chaps. Never mind, we live and learn. Reddy, will you allow yourself to be returned unopposed, an' let me be crushed by Grundy—just to make a Roman holiday, y'know, or some giddy old game of that sort?"

Meanwhile, the confab went on.

"Let another fag in," suggested Blake. "It won't hurt us to have one more little scrub, and it will keep Grundy out. There ain't a fagling among them who will vote for Grundy, and he's safe to be licked that way."

"Isn't it wathah like playin' it wathah low down on Gwunday?" asked Arthur Augustus.

"Not a bit of it! The silly old chump don't know when he's well off. That's his own fault, not ours."

"It ain't a bad notion, Blake," said Tom.

"Well, speak it out, then!"

"Wally," said the junior skipper, raising his voice, "does your lot care to put up another man for election?"

"What do you think? Rather! A giddy score, if you like! Not but what we've got all that really matters now!"

Wally meant himself, Levison minor, Manners minor, Frayne, Hobbs, Jameson, and Gibson—Wally & Co., in short!

"I'll stand!" said Piggott eagerly.

"Bet you you don't!" snapped Wally. "What do you think Hobby gave you that black eye for, if you are to be allowed to crawl in afterwards? 'Tain't likely we'll have you!"

"D'Arcy minor means to make it clear that this is to be a really respectable Parliament—without any reflection upon other and rival institutions, such as the little affair at Westminster," Lowther put in.

"D'Arcy minor can jolly well say what I mean without your help, Lowther!" said Wally. "And he jolly well knows that Piggott cottons to what I mean!"

Wally's pronouns might be mixed; but his meaning was quite clear—he had no notion of letting Piggott in.

Grundy, who had been standing for quite a minute and a half with his mouth wide open, now emitted a thunderous roar.

"Do you chaps think that I'm going to have a beastly fag fobbed off on me—a wretched little infant from the Third Form—me?"

"Not so much of that, Grundy!" snapped D'Arcy minor.

"You wait till the Third jolly well catch you alone, that's all! We'll see who're beastly infants then!" said Manners minor darkly.

"That's it! You take warning, Grundy!" chimed in Jameson.

Grundy scowled at them darkly, but did not condescend to answer them. It was almost a lowering of his dignity to be aware of the very existence of the fag tribe—except, of course, when it became urgently necessary to cuff some member of it.

"Oh, great Scott, what does the chap want?" asked Blake impatiently. "Will nothing satisfy him?"

"I want the draw made again, of course!" replied Grundy. "That's fair. Ain't that fair, Wilky? Speak up, you dummy! Can't you speak, Gunn? You silly asses talk fast enough when it ain't wanted!"

But Wilkins and Gunn did not appear to think it was quite reasonable to have the whole thing done over again to please Grundy.

Then, to the surprise of everyone, Racke spoke up. He had been thinking the matter over, and, on the whole, he liked less than ever the prospect of standing outside the election.

All of his precious set were in it—unless

one counted Piggott, who, though a most promising young blackguard, was a mere fag, after all. They would gibe at him, he knew.

Not one of them had a chance of election. Crooke would go down before Giacomo Contarini, though he did call the plucky little Italian an alien. Clampe had not a dog's chance against Blake. Gunn would lick Scrope, whether Grundy saw Gunn through it or not. And, though Skimmy's ways were queer, everyone who counted preferred Skimmy to Percy Mellish.

But Grundy! Racke, overestimating Grundy's unpopularity, saw his opportunity here.

"I say, you know, I'm not keen on this bizney," spoke up Racke; "but if it's not too late for me to change my mind, I don't object to standing against Grundy."

"Is it in any way to oblige us?" asked Tom Merry.

"No, it's not, confound you! You know that!"

"Then I don't mind. But there isn't one of us who would care to be under an obligation to you, Racke. As it is—well, let Grundy decide, as far as I'm concerned!"

"That's better," said Grundy. Racke was at least of the Shell, and there would be no loss of prestige in standing against him.

No one raised any objection. If Racke chose to face a licking, they didn't mind.

But the fags, though they did not jib at the rearrangement, stood out—on principle, they said—for the additional member Tom Merry had offered them, and another contest was fixed up, Harvey of the Third v. Green of the Second—a fag beanfeast, as Monty Lowther said.

### CHAPTER 3.

#### Grundy's Plans.

"O H, you'll beat Racke all serene," said Wilkins, over tea in Study No. 3 on the Shell passage.

"There ain't any doubt about that," agreed Gunn. "Everybody may not take the trouble to vote for old Grundy, but they're not going to vote against him—not to get a cad like Racke in."

"But they will vote for me! I expect it of them!" said Grundy emphatically. "Every chap who has a spark of decency or patriotism in him will vote for me after what I've done—I mean, of course, what I'm going to do! They won't be able to help themselves; they will feel that it's up to them, and they'll do it!"

And Grundy absent-mindedly cut himself a very much larger slice of cake than truly patriotic—and large profit making—teashops are accustomed to apportion to their customers in these days of leanness.

"You may think so, but I'm blessed if I can see Tom Merry, or any of that lot, doing it!" remarked Wilkins, who had little hope of his own election.

He spoke gloomily. But he helped himself to cake in a manner which suggested that there were still things in life which he found interesting.

"They're just the fellows who will," replied Grundy confidently. "I can't say that I have always been satisfied with the way they have behaved to me."

"'Tain't likely you would be," agreed Wilkins. "No chap likes being bumped about a dozen times every giddy week."

Grundy frowned upon Wilkins.

"You talk like a silly ass, George Wilkins!" he said.

"Oh, I must have caught that from you, old scout!" replied Wilkins.

"If you want a thick ear—"

"I don't. But I could do with another bit of cake—just a little bit—half-a-pound or so, you know. What is it

you've done that they are all going to admire so, Grundy?"

Gunn kicked Wilkins under the table. Gunn had some notion of what was in Grundy's mind, and would very much have preferred to let the subject drop.

"Yoop! Yow! Keep your silly feet to yourself, Gunn, will you?" howled Wilkins.

"I haven't done it yet. But I've laid all my plans. And you chaps know me," said Grundy. "You know that when I've settled to do a thing, the thing's as good as done. I've proved it—oh, heaps of times! Of course, with your inferior minds—"

"I don't get at what it is yet," cut in Wilkins. "I s'pose that must be my inferior mind. Does your inferior mind hurt you, Gunn? If so, how? Is it at all like toothache?"

"If you weren't the howlingest ass in all creation, George Wilkins, you would have understood before this!" roared Grundy. "Gunny knows. Don't you, Gunn?"

"Well, yes, I suppose I know what you mean, old fellow," admitted Gunn. "But if I were you I wouldn't do it. It ain't safe. And as for helping you in the giddy election, I can't see how it will do that. The chaps will only say it's another of your mad tricks."

"My what?" hooted Grundy.

"Oh, I know now!" said Wilkins. "It's that maniac scheme about old Pepper's gold. You can't do it, Grundy. And what blessed good would it be if you could?"

"Are you a patriot, George Wilkins?" rapped out Grundy sternly.

"Fair to middling, I think. I'd do any little thing I could for the country. But it ain't a thing a chap goes making a song and dance about, I reckon."

"You mean that you want to be thought patriotic without doing anything to deserve it—that's what you mean!" thundered Grundy.

"Well, what can I do? I ain't old enough to join up yet. I sha'n't be a conscienceless objector—not even a shirker, which ain't quite so bad—when I am."

"What can you do? You can help me in collaring from that beastly miser the gold that he has no right to hoard, and in sending it to aid the Government in its need! That's what you can do. Of course, you haven't brains enough to think out a plan of action for yourself; but, under my guidance, you may be useful."

"Thank you for nothing, old scout! It's too much like giddy burglary for my taste."

"It does seem a bit like that, you know Grundy," said Gunn.

"That shows what minds you fellows have! Burglary? Pah! Is that the name to give to a patriotic—"

"It's the name Pepper would give it," said Gunn. "I don't know whether the giddy lawyers would, because I believe it has to be breaking into an inhabited house to make it burglary. But that ain't much odds. They'd be down on you like a thousand of bricks. You'd come out of gaol feeling like a martyr, and all that, I dare say; but Wilky and I don't cotton a fat lot to the idea of being martyrs. See?"

Grundy looked at them reproachfully. It seemed to him impossible that they should not see this thing in the way he did.

He was utterly honest, and they knew it. He would not have taken a single coin from Pepper's hoard for himself, not though he had been starving.

But Mr. Erasmus Zachariah Pepper, who had notions as to the letting of barns that seemed to Grundy sheer dishonesty—as they were—was a miser; and he was

keeping back a big hoard of gold of which the Government had urgent need. Grundy had found that out, and to him his duty seemed clear. That gold must be taken to where it could be made available to help in the prosecution of the war; and, as it was extremely unlikely that any persuasion would induce Mr. Pepper to take it himself, George Alfred Grundy meant to take it for him!

And, once the thing was done, Grundy would make no secret of it.

All St. Jim's would be allowed to know, and expected to applaud. Grundy had no possible doubt as to the admiration his drastic methods of dealing with the unpatriotic miser would evoke.

But Gunn and Wilkins had a good deal of doubt.

Grundy evidently meant to make the affair a feature of his election campaign. He was going to appeal to the electorate on the patriotic platform. That ought to give him an enormous majority over a fellow like Racke, who swanked around on war-profits, and could not be considered even up to the average in patriotism.

But Wilkins and Gunn did not doubt Grundy's beating Racke, anyway.

"You can't do it in time," said Wilkins.

"That's all you know!" replied Grundy, with lofty superiority. "As a matter of fact, I should be prepared to do it at once if it was necessary to rush it. But it ain't. I've got forty-eight hours at least—perhaps double that time—but that will be enough."

"But the elections?"

"The elections aren't all to be held on the same day, Gunn. They couldn't be. That stands to reason. But you chaps haven't got any reason!"

"How do you know?" inquired Wilkins.

"Who should know if I don't? I'm a member of the arranging committee, I suppose?"

"Eh? I thought they'd clucked you out—on your neck!"

"You silly ass! I should like to see—that is to say, there was some slight difference of opinion at the first meeting I attended; but I've consented to overlook that. It doesn't do to stand too much upon trifles at a time like this; and, of course, you know what a loss to the committee I should be."

"Awful!" said Gunn. "Pass the biscuits, Wilky!"

"They'd never get over it," said Wilkins, absent-mindedly helping himself to the remainder of the cake.

"As for the other matter, this is how I should work it. I—"

"But you don't know that the gold is still there even."

"Oh, don't I, Gunny? What do you fellows suppose I was doing in the barn yesterday afternoon, when that young ass of a D'Arcy locked me in? I've made a way through the floor to the place underneath, and I can see that the chest has not been dug up again."

"My hat!" gasped Wilkins.

He had been hoping that Grundy would be choked off by the impossibility of getting at the buried hoard without the key, which Pepper had, to the store-place under the barn.

But as Grundy had found another way, it was not at all likely that he would be choked off.

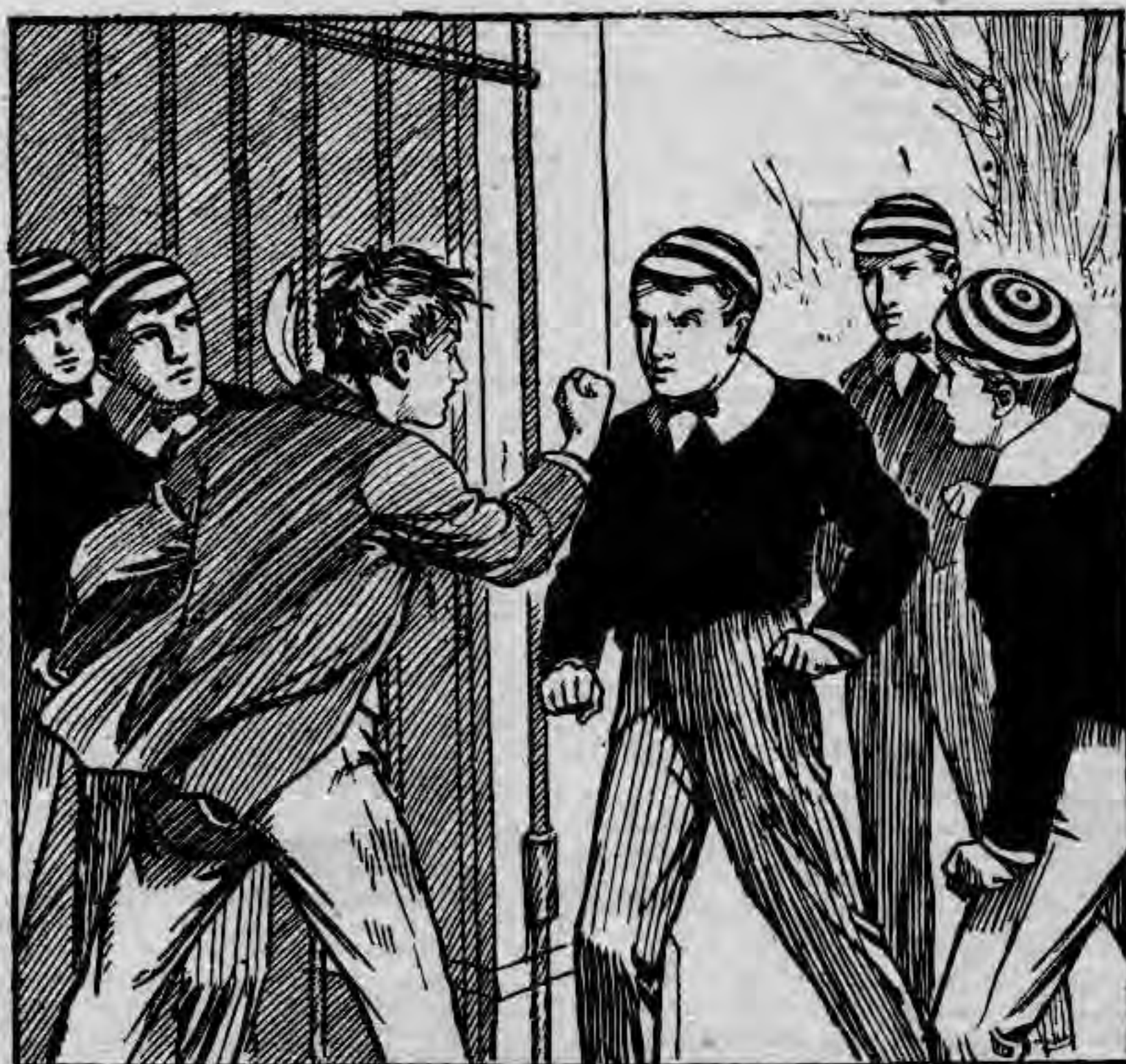
Grundy took the exclamation as expressive of Wilkins' great admiration of his resourcefulness, and smiled upon Wilkins.

"We shall take along some bags," he said.

"It would be a bit shivery without them," remarked Wilkins.

"Ass! I mean canvas bags to carry the gold in."

"Oh, I see! But you'll let Gunny and



Grundy Stands Up to Cults.  
(See Chapter 5.)

me wear our other bags, even if you don't want yours, I suppose?"

"We shall transfer the gold to these bags. Outside, a trap will be in waiting. We shall get in, and drive to Wayland. There we shall deliver the gold to a bank-manager, and get notes in exchange."

"Can't be done!" said Gunn. "No bank will be open at night; and there are always some of the fellows about at the barn in the day-time."

"I shall write to the manager beforehand, telling him we are coming," said Grundy.

"He won't take any notice. He'll think it's spoo!" objected Wilkins.

"Not in the least! Why should he?"

"Well, I should, if I were a bank-manager."

"That's because you're an idiot!"

"Then Pepper's to have notes instead of his gold?" said Gunn.

"Yes. I have come to the conclusion that my authority does not extend to confiscation on behalf of the Government, though the rotter deserves it," answered the monumental George Alfred calmly.

"His authority!" gasped Wilkins.

"I shall deposit the notes in the chest, and bury it again," went on Grundy—"in the presence of witnesses, of course—you two!"

"You seem to have made up your mind that we're to be in it!" growled Wilkins.

"That, surely, goes without saying!"

"Shall you ask the bank-manager to come along?" inquired Gunn.

"No. I don't see that that is necessary."

"Look here! Bank-managers ain't generally silly asses, you know," said Wilkins. "He'll ask no end of questions about your having all that gold—a schoolboy like you. And the end of it will be that he'll call in the police."

"But we sha'n't do schoolboys—not so far as he can tell, anyway," replied Grundy. "We shall go in disguise."

"Where are you going to get the disguises from?" inquired Gunn.

It was no use protesting further against Grundy's taking it for granted that Gunn and Wilkins would obey; Grundy always did that.

"I shall provide them," said Grundy.

"And the horse and trap, too?"

"Of course!"

"Well, you've got it all mapped out, I must say!" said Wilkins.

"That need not surprise you. Such is my habit," said Grundy loftily. "But I'm going to do more than that for you fellows."

"For us? Oh, crumbs! He talks as if he were doing this for us?"

"What did you say, Gunn?"

"I—I only remarked that it was jolly good of you, old chap, and wondered whether Wilky would feel as grateful as he ought to. He ain't a very grateful chap, old Wilky ain't."

"He will be grateful for what I am going to do, I think. Now it is absolutely certain that I shall lick Racke—the only question is the majority, and I intend to make that a record for these elections. You ought fairly to wipe the floor with Scrope; but there's no telling. But Wilkins won't have a chance against Lowther if I don't stand by him. Personally, I can't think what chaps see in Lowther—a cheap kind of tom-fool, as I have told him to his face. But—what are you doing, William Gunn?"

The last words came in an angry roar. For Grundy had detected Gunn in a pantomimic representation of winding a crank behind him. If one could have believed it possible that Gunn could consider Grundy long-winded and wearisome, one might have thought he was expressing that idea to Wilkins in dumb show. But his answer made it clear that he was not so ungrateful as that.

"Nothing, old chap, it's—it's—oh, only

a little exercise for the biceps I do now and then," he said.

"But what are you going to do for me?" said Wilkins.

"I am going to give a free tea to the constituency!" announced Grundy.

#### CHAPTER 4.

##### The Elections Begin.

THE elections began next day, the polls taking place in the barn, where Talbot, Tom Merry, Blake, Kerr, and Wally D'Arcy—Wally represented the fag tribe—sat as a returning committee.

Vote was by ballot, and the possibility of anyone's attempting trickery was guarded against as far as possible. In the case of each election, just as many papers as there were fellows in the Lower School had been prepared, with "Figgins v. Lennox", or whatever the particular candidates might be, marked at the top. Thus, no voting-paper could be used except in the contest to which it properly belonged—which was a very necessary precaution indeed.

In spite of the fact that the ten contests fixed for the first day included few into which much excitement entered, there was a big crowd at the barn.

Wally sat with the pile of voting-papers before him, and he had also a register of voters' names. It was Wally's business to tick off each name of a fellow taking a paper for that particular contest in the column provided for the purpose. Behind the Third Form leader, with his hands in his pockets, but his eyes wide open, stood Kerr. Kerr didn't appear to be doing anything in especial, but, in fact, he was there to see that no one did Wally down. Now, that in itself was no easy thing to do, and the presence of the keen Scottish junior made it next door to impossible.

The first poll was that with which Kangaroo and Smith minor were concerned, and everyone felt sure who would come out on top.

Nevertheless, Second, Third, Fourth, and Shell mustered almost at full strength. Racke was not present, and there may have been a few other absentees; but they did not include anyone who mattered.

"None of that, Bates!" snapped Wally. "You've got two papers there, you know. It ain't your place to take 'em. You just wait till I give you one!"

"Well, I didn't know I'd got two," replied Bates. "Don't let me have any of your cheek, D'Arcy minor!"

"It ain't cheek. I'm an official—and a jolly important one, too! I'm here to see that this is done on the square, and it's blessed well going to be!"

Kerr said no word.

Bates, who had merely made a mistake through over-eagerness, handed one paper back, and Wally shifted the pile out of reach of the voters.

"Here, I say, I don't want this, you know," protested Baggy Trimble, after a glance at the paper handed to him.

"What do you want?" snapped Wally. "Hands down there, young Kent! I'll give you your paper if you wait half a jiff—I'm attending to Trimble, now."

"I want one for my own show, of course," replied Baggy. "What do I care about the rest? They're nothing to do with me!"

"It's Noble v. Smith minor, now. Merry v. Trimble is fourth on my list. Come in your proper turn and you can have what you want. Are you going to take one of these?"

"He, he, he! No! Why should I? I don't care whether Kangaroo gets in or not!"

And Trimble rolled away.

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"Old Wally's keeping them in order jolly well," said Frank Levison admiringly.

"He's swanking jolly well, if you ask me," growled Reggie Manners. "Told me to keep my paws off—as if I were a kid!"

"Well, so you are!" said Frank. "You're the biggest kid I know in some ways, Reggie!"

"Wally's all right," Curly Gibson said. "I love to see the old bounder keeping up his end like that! Shows the other Forms that there's really something in the Third!"

"Yes, but Wally ain't all there is—he's not the only onion in the soup," returned Reggie, always a bit more disposed to kick against Wally's leadership than any of the rest.

"That's about all, I think, Merry," said Wally. "Am I right, Kerr?"

"You are, my son," replied the Scot gravely. "Anyone who isn't here yet either don't want a vote or deserves to lose it."

"Poll closed in Noble v. Smith minor," announced Blake. "Poll opens in—er—Blake v. Clampe."

Some of the fellows had already dealt with their papers for the first contest, and now a stream began to flow towards Talbot, who was receiving them. Another stream commenced to flow towards Wally.

The poll in the second election was declared closed, and Blake announced the third—Manners major v. Bates.

"I say, Wally, you might as well let me have two papers," suggested Reggie, when he went up.

Reggie spoke in a low tone.

Wally answered in a much louder one.

"Rats! You can't have two papers, Manners minor!"

"Well, you needn't yell it out like that, so that everyone can hear!" retorted Reggie furiously. "I know it won't make any difference, or I shouldn't have asked. My major will lick Bates out of sight, hands down. But I thought he might as well have one more vote, and I wanted to see whether you'd do a pal a good turn—that's all!"

"I haven't any pals while I sit here," Wally replied severely.

"You won't have any when you come away if you go on like this!" snapped Manners minor.

He was badly put out. He really hadn't meant any harm. If Wally had given him two papers he would have been surprised; but it is to be feared that he would have recorded votes for his major on both. Wally's public reprimand surprised him more, and hurt him, too.

"You shouldn't have done that, Reggie," said Harry Manners gravely.

"Now you're beginning. Do you s'pose I ain't straight, you idiot?"

"No, I don't. But you gave other chaps the chance of saying you weren't, you know!"

"That was D'Arcy minor's fault, the rotter!"

"It wasn't! Wally was right! If this thing ain't on the square it's worse than nothing. I don't blame Wally a bit!"

"Well, then, I do, and I'm jolly well going to punch his head as soon as this foolery is over!"

"You'd better punch mine now!" said Frank Levison. "I say that Wally was right, and that you were letting the Form down!"

"So do I, so you'd better punch mine, too, Reggie!" chimed in Joe Frayne.

"We'll have no punching of heads here," said Manners major. "Go outside if you want to do that sort of thing."

"I'll wait for Wally!" said Reggie doggedly.

"Hallo! What's the merry game

here?" asked a voice from the door of the barn. And Gerald Cutts of the Fifth appeared, with his chums, St. Leger and Gilmore, behind him.

"Elections," said Tom Merry briefly. "You ain't wanted, Cutts. In fact, Fifth Formers ain't admitted. The notices said that this was purely and simply a Lower School affair."

"So cut, Cutts!" said a voice which sounded like Monty Lowther's.

"I like your dashed cheek!" returned Cutts. "Think you're going to start a giddy Parliament, and keep us out, do you?"

"We don't think—we know," said Tom quietly. "If you'd been asked to come in you'd have turned up your classic conk and said it was kids' rot. As you ain't asked, you butt in, which is just your style. But if you don't clear out you'll be put out! Savvy?"

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus. "I must say, Cutts, that your habit of buttin' in where you are not wanted is one of which I do not at all approve."

Cutts did not appear to yearn for the majestic approval of the swell of the Fourth. The big Fifth Former, who prided himself on being a nut and a sportsman, was always up against Tom Merry & Co. He had come along now to make himself unpleasant, and he did not mean to go without doing it. But St. Leger and Gilmore, looking at the crowd of Shell and Fourth fellows, did not feel quite easy. They lacked their leader's hardihood.

"What's the dashed contest now on foot?" asked Cutts.

"It's no affair of yours," said Blake. "But I don't mind telling you that it's Merry v. Trimble."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Cutts. "Merry has picked himself out something nice and soft, eh, you chaps? Give me a giddy paper and I'll vote for Baggy! He's a Hun of the Hunniest kind, but I'll vote for him!"

Tom Merry flushed angrily. Wally snatched up the papers and handed them to Kerr. A dozen or more of the bigger fellows began to thrust themselves in between the Fifth Form trio and the rough bench behind which Wally and Kerr were.

"Come along, you two!" cried Cutts.

"We'll all vote for Baggy! Three cheers for Baggy! Here, I say, St. Leger—Gilmore—where are you off to?"

"Oh, come away, Cutts!" said Gilmore. "What's the use of barging in? We don't want anything to do with this silly kids' rot!"

"I'd recommend your takin' Gilmore's advice, Cutts," drawled Cardew of the Fourth.

Cutts had a queer sort of feeling for Cardew. It was not exactly friendly; but it had some respect in it. Cutts might have liked to forget that Cardew, in his early days at St. Jim's, had saved him from expulsion; but it was not easy for him to forget it.

Cutts turned on Cardew now.

"Oh, so you're here!" he said. "Is this kind of child's play in your line?"

"Quite," replied Cardew. "I'm only a kid in the Fourth, you know, Cutts. Don't go forgettin' that again, please!"

Cutts went red. Perhaps for a moment he wavered. But he did not like the notion of turning tail.

"Well, there are enough kids in the Fourth an' Shell here to swamp me—if they dare!" he replied. "Hand over one of those papers, young D'Arcy!"

"Don't do anythin' of the sort, Wally!" shouted Arthur Augustus.

"Think I'm such an ass, Gus?"

If Cutts had been allowed to take a paper and register a vote for Baggy Trimble—whom, by the way, he held in

utter contempt—he would have gone in peace. And the vote would not have mattered.

But Cutts would have gone victorious. Which did not at all suit the views of the juniors.

"I give you five seconds, Cutts!" said Tom. "You go now—on your feet—or you go when the time's up—on your neck!"

"I'm not going till I've voted!" roared Cutts.

"One!"

"Hand me over one of those papers, young Kerr!"

"Two!"

"Do you hear me?"

"Three!"

"I—I—oh, dash your—"

"Four!"

"If you force me to deal with you, Merry—"

"Five! Out with him!"

Like a tidal wave, Shell, Fourth, Third, and Second bore down upon Cutts. The few who might have hesitated to handle a Fifth Former were carried along with the rest. Even Baggy Trimble, for whom Cutts would have voted, was in the charge, though it is only fair to Baggy to say that he was not in it from choice.

Cutts was hustled and hustled out of the door. Not a hand was raised against him, though he was hitting out furiously. No attempt was made to bear him to ground. That would have been too dangerous. But those nearest used their shoulders, and those behind them lent their weight; and Cutts, burly though he was, had no more power to help himself than the strong swimmer engulfed by a whirlpool.

They rushed him out, and did not pull up till he was twenty yards from the door.

"That's enough!" cried Levison. "Let him try it again, and we'll jolly well frogs-march him!"

But before they could return to the barn and the interrupted polling, Cutts, mad with rage, was in among them again, and lashing out savagely.

"Frogs-march!" shouted Noble. And he was the first to seize Cutts.

Levison and Lowther, Clive and Digby, Manners and Dane, a dozen others, grabbed at the Fifth Former.

They took no risks this time. They gave him the frogs-march right out of the gate and on to the road. And there they dropped him, just as Grundy, Gunn, and Wilkins dismounted from their bikes at the gates.

## CHAPTER 5.

Grundy as Pugilist—and as Prophet!

"WHAT'S this all about?" asked Grundy.

"Yooop! Yareoogh! I'll slay some of you young rotters!" howled Cutts.

"If you must really know, Grundy, this silly ass has been butting in where he wasn't wanted and making himself objectionable, so naturally we put him out," said Kangaroo.

"I quite approve," answered George Alfred, in his most lordly manner. "You ought to be ashamed of yourself, Cutts! It's a good thing for you I wasn't there, or you'd have got it worse!"

Cutts scrambled to his feet, a dusty and dishevelled figure, and shook his fist in Grundy's face.

"You—you—oh, you swanking, silly idiot!" he roared, more enraged than ever at being thus talked to by Grundy.

"You'd better take that fist down, Cutts," said Grundy. "I don't stand threats, you know."

Cutts dashed the fist in his face.

Grundy staggered. He had not ex-

pected the blow. But in an instant he recovered himself, and returned it, with all the force and weight of his burly body behind the punch.

It was the turn of Cutts to stagger now. His madness abated. He realised that a fight on a public road with a fellow in the Shell would do him no good. He did not doubt his ability to thrash Grundy, but—it would not do!

"Come away, Cutts, old man!" said St. Leger, catching him by the arm.

"Here, I've something to say about that," put in Grundy, who was taking off his jacket.

"You can't fight here, old fellow," protested Kangaroo, with a hand on Grundy's shoulder. The Shell and Fourth had never liked old Grundy better than in that moment. It was really not his affair, and he had butted in as badly as Cutts had done, but in a very different way!

He was not the only fellow among them who would have stood up to Cutts single-handed. But he was the one who had done it, and he wanted to go on with it, too!

"We can't fight here," said Cutts sulkily. "An' I'm not goin' to scrap with any chap in the Shell. You're not up to my weight, any of you."

"That's our bizney, not yours," said Grundy. "Mind you, Cutts, I'm ready to meet you when and where you like, with gloves or without. And I dare say I shall lick you. I don't say it's an absolute certainty, of course, but I'm game to try."

"Bravo, Grundy!" cried Ernest Levison.

"Good old Grundy!" roared the crowd.

Grundy was the hero of the moment. He liked it.

And for once in a way he bore himself modestly. When Cutts turned away with St. Leger and Gilmore he quietly put on his jacket again.

"That will keep," he said.

But once in the barn he was the old Grundy again.

"Here, I say, young D'Arcy! I want papers for myself and Wilkins and Gunn for any contests that you've been working off," he said authoritatively.

Tom Merry and Blake, Talbot, Kerr, and Wally had not deserted the polling-place. There had been plenty to handle Cutts without their help. They had been rather surprised when Grundy had made his appearance in the centre of an enthusiastic crowd. They did not know what Grundy had done that anyone should applaud him. But it would have made no difference in their reply to Grundy's demand if they had known.

"Then you can't have 'em, old Grundy!" answered Wally. "You're too late. You shouldn't get kept in, you know!"

"None of your cheek, you little sweep!" roared Grundy. "What polls have been put through?"

"There's the list," said Wally, pointing to one that had been posted during the last few minutes.

"Noble v. Smith minor, Blake v. Clampe, Manners major v. Bates, and Merry v. Trimble," read Grundy. "Well, I don't know that it matters very much to me what happens in any of those cases."

"That's just as well, because you can't make any difference to what happens," replied Kerr.

"That's final!" said Wally.

"It don't matter to me," said Grundy doggedly. "But I stand on my rights all the same—and on Gunn's rights—and on Wilkins' rights!"

"That's the worst of having such big feet," said Wally cheerily. "I suppose

your own rights wouldn't be big enough for your tootsies!"

"Oh, leave us out, old scout!" said Wilkins. "We don't mind whether we vote or not. There are plenty more elections."

"And there ain't much doubt about those four, anyway!" added Gunn.

Grundy glared at them.

"It's a matter of principle with me," he said impressively.

"Well, it's a matter of no interest to us," chuckled Wilkins.

"Are you going to hand over those papers, D'Arcy minor?" hooted Grundy.

"I—am—not!" replied Wally, very clearly and distinctly.

"Then I shall come and—"

"Oh, clear out, Grundy! You're blocking the gangway!" said Kerr.

"You can have voting papers in Digby v. Thompson," Wally told the angry Shell fellow.

"Don't want them! I want the other four!"

"You wouldn't have wanted them if you could have had 'em without chucking your giddy weight about," Wally said shrewdly. "You don't really want them at all. You only want to make out you're important. And you ain't, you know! You're only old Grundy—the biggest silly ass at St. Jim's!"

"Cheese that, Wally! It may be true, but it ain't exactly official language," said Kerr. "And you're in an official position just now."

"But there ain't any red tape about me," replied Wally.

"Come off it, Grundy," said Kangaroo. "It's only fair. The lists can't be kept open like that. It would make an awful muddle of things."

"I was going to vote for you," said Grundy slowly.

"Much obliged, old chap! I'll take my chance without your vote!"

"And for Merry," went on Grundy.

"Trimble's a worm!"

"He, he, he! I'm glad they wouldn't let you have a paper, Grundy!" chuckled Baggy.

"And for Blake, Clampe's a rotten snob and a waster. And for Manners major, because I don't really think much of Bates. But now I'm not sure what I shall do."

"We are, though, Grundy," said Tom Merry cheerily. "You won't vote at all in those four elections."

"What? Do you mean that I'm not going to have the voting-papers?"

"Observe the quickness of Grundy's intelligence," remarked Monty Lowther. "It is dawning upon him that—"

"Oh, you shut up! Look here, clear out of my barn, the whole crowd of you!"

They might have expected that. Grundy had let the question as to whether he or Tom Merry & Co. had the better right to the barn stand aside for the time being. But he was sure to raise it again in such a crisis as this.

"We'll put you out of your barn inside half a jiffy!" snapped Tom.

"Oh, you admit it is mine, then?" roared Grundy.

"I don't admit anything. Just dry up, and let us go on!"

"Didn't you have enough of the barn yesterday, Grundy?" inquired Ernest Levison.

Grundy's brief spell of popularity had ended. The manner in which he had stood up to Cutts had made all who saw applaud. But he was rubbing that off the slate, so to speak.

He looked round him uncertainly. It was not often Grundy had any doubt whatever as to his correct course. But he saw that Gunn and Wilkins were not to be counted upon for support. Neither

of them had any relish for being handled by an irate crowd, after the manner in which Cutts had been handled; and that was what they had to expect if they backed up Grundy.

"Well, I'm going," said Grundy at length.

"Hooray!" cried Wally. "Now we can get on with the washing!"

"And you can stand on your rights—and Gunn's—and Wilkins'—just as well somewhere else as here, you know, old scout!" said Kerr soothingly.

"I'm going to!" replied Grundy darkly. "There's a surprise coming for some of you chaps—more than one surprise, in fact! I'm fed up. I'm going to insist on taking the place that is my due—that's what I'm going to do! And I venture to prophesy that some of you will be sorry for the way you've treated me before I've finished! It's enough to choke a chap off being a patriot. But I'm not to be choked off, and within forty-eight hours you will see what you will see, and hear what you will hear!"

"Is George Alfred also among the prophets?" chortled Lowther.

"Not on that showin'. I could have prophesied that much myself with one hand tied behind my back," said Cardew.

"Let us know when the signs and wonders are going to begin, Grundy, there's a decent chap!" pleaded Ernest Levison.

Grundy gave each of them a look of lofty superiority before he went. Lowther, Cardew, and Levison were among the fellows whom Grundy liked least.

Cutts and Grundy between them had prevented the working off of some of the ten contests fixed for the time between classes and dinner, and there was a House footer match that afternoon, so that they would have to be postponed to the morrow. In fact, only the five mentioned had been dealt with. Talbot took charge of the voting papers, which would be counted in the evening.

Before dinner Wally, D'Arcy and Reggie Manners found time and opportunity to continue, but not to conclude, their argument. Wally went into Hall with a cut and bruised mouth, and Reggie with a discoloured left eye. Such slight tokens were common enough in the Third. But this particular falling out of friends had a result which bore upon several of the elections.

It split the solid voting-block of the fag tribe, which might have carried to victory almost anyone for whom it was cast.

Reggie vowed that he would not vote for Wally, and he carried with him the malcontents of his own Form, with a considerable number of the Second, who held that Wally had got too big for his boots.

Wally said that he might have voted for his major against Reggie anyway, but now he was jolly sure he meant to, and any chap who called himself a pal of his would do the same, of course.

Which was quite a good thing for Arthur Augustus, who had been in danger of getting swamped by the fag vote, but by no means a good thing for Manners minor!

## CHAPTER 6.

### Grundy's Election Address.

TOM MERRY approached the notice-board with a slip of paper in his hand. The votes had been counted and re-counted, and that paper gave the results of the five elections put through.

As it was generally known that the counting was proceeding, and that the polls would be declared as soon as possible, Tom was not surprised to find a crowd in front of the board.

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But the demeanour of the crowd puzzled him. It was a hilarious crowd—a spluttering, wheezing, grinning crowd. It evidently found something funny on the notice-board.

There had been nothing funny there when Tom had glanced at it last. The notices had all been of the most ordinary description.

"Grundy in excelsis!" drawled Cardew, and that gave Tom a clue.

"It's the top-note in election addresses!" said Levison.

"It's beastly bribery and corruption!" said Herries.

"That is, all things considered, more my concern than yours, old chap, seeing that I have to take the lists against one of the Grundyites!" replied Lowther. "But I don't mind. This is so very Grundyish!"

"Hallo, Tommy! You haven't seen this! It's the latest Grundy atrocity!" said Manners, making room for his chum. Tom grinned as he read.

### "TO THE ELEKTERS OF ST. JIM'S!"

"We, the undersigned, hearby rekwest your sufferages. I apele to you in the naim of the services I have wrendered in the past, and by those witch I meen to render in the future. I apele to you as

*Eat less  
Bread*

a PATRIOT TO PATRIOTS to return me, the undersigned, alsoe George Wilkins and William Cuthbert Gunn, by simply imense magorities!

"My own opponent is a person who is held in well-deserved content by evryone whose oppinion has the slitest value. Little better can be said for the oponent of my coleege Gunn. As regards the oponent of George Wilkins, I will not say that his morel caracter is of a like black nature, but as a footling ass who makes what he calls goaks in quiet unecesary profusion, he is not worthy of a seet in the St. Jim's Parlelament. I think you will all agre, and if you don't you are rong, witch I cannot help.

"I may add that within the next too days, St. Jim's, witch has concisistently underated the undersigned, will have a surprise, and will be in a better posishun to appreciate his meritts as an individual of desision and recorse. But moor of this latter.

"I shall adress the elekters in Study No. 3 Shell passage, to-morrow at 5 p.m., and there will be tea provided for all who atend.

"(Sined),

"GEORGE ALFRED GRUNDY."

"My hat! Surely Gunn and Wilky hadn't any hand in that?" said Tom.

"Must have had, I think, by gad!" replied Cardew. "There's several words in it spelt right—'services,' 'simply,' 'deserved,' 'nature,' 'profusion,' 'worthy'—old Grundy might have gone wrong on

any of them. There are other ways they could be spelt."

"But Wilky and Gunn wouldn't have been wrong in so many," said Digby.

"George Alfred says what is so, and where are Wilky and Gunn?" asked Dane.

"When father says 'turn,' we all turn!" chuckled Levison.

"Oh, give them the benefit of the doubt!" said Clive. "They weren't idiots enough to sign it, anyway."

"Tea in No. 3—which means a spread—is bribery and corruption," said Tom.

"Not for the votes," answered Lowther. "It's merely a bribe to get chaps to listen to Grundy's 'adress'—with one 'd'!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Then he'd better give 'em the adress before they're allowed to start in on the grub," remarked Cardew. "They won't wait afterwards, y'know."

"Racke's giving a tea to-morrow, too," said Kangaroo.

"Are you invited?" inquired Levison.

"Everybody's invited," said Gibbons. "I shall go to 'em both, if I can work it. Teas ain't to be sneezed at in these times, and I don't mind being bribed, because I sha'n't vote for either of them."

"Same here," said Trimble. "They can't bribe me—I'm above that, you know. But I'm always open for a good tea. He, he, he!"

"Hallo, Tommy, what's that you've got in your hand?" asked Manners.

"Something that concerns you," said Tom, smiling, "and me, and Baggy—not to mention others. Baggy, my hero, I congratulate you!"

"What, am I in?" smirked Baggy. "Rough on you, Tom Merry!"

"Well, I won't go so far as to say you are in; but you've got a vote," answered Tom.

"A vote? Of course I've got— Oh, you silly ass! I voted for myself, of course!"

"That explains the mystery," said Tom, pinning up the sheet.

It read thus:

### "ST. JIM'S PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS!"

"Declaration of poll in contests held up to date.

"The following candidates are hereby declared returned:

"HARRY NOBLE, JOHN BLAKE, THOMAS MERRY, HENRY MANNERS, and ROBERT ARTHUR DIGBY.

"The votes polled in each case are shown hereunder.

"Noble, 105; Smith minor, 56.

"Blake, 138; Clampe, 5.

"Merry, 143; Trimble, 1.

"Manners major, 87; Bates, 72.

"Digby, 92; Thompson, 81.

"A scrutiny may be made by anyone not satisfied as to the correctness of these figures, but will make no difference to the result, as the election committee are quite satisfied.

"Signed, for the said Committee,  
"REGINALD TALBOT."

"It ain't right! I'm going to have a scrutinty!" howled Baggy.

"A whicher? It sounds rather like a pig eating charcoal," said Monty Lowther.

"What it says on the paper—a scrutinty. Can't you read, Lowther? I know I must have had more than one vote. It stands to reason, for I voted for myself, and that was one."

"But where did you expect the rest to come from, Baggy?" asked Levison.

"Well, why shouldn't a chap vote for me?"

"Better ask him!"

"Ask who?"

"Whom, Baggy—whom! Do not let excitement play the merry dickens with your grammar! The chap, of course!"

"But I didn't mean any particular chap."

"For once, Baggy, I find myself agree-in' with you. The chap who voted for you wouldn't be particular—very much to the contrary, indeed."

"He, he, he! I don't take any notice of your silly sare, Cardew! Nobody does, come to that. But I'm going to have a serenity," said Baggy.

The results were very much as expected. Clampe's votes were almost as easy to account for as was the one solitary vote Baggy had polled. Clampe himself, Crooke, Scrope, Mellish, and Piggott—those were the five.

Kangaroo's easy victory was no surprise. Bates had run Manners more closely than anyone had thought likely; and Thompson, with the New House voting practically solid, had given Dig a tussle.

The Lower School of St. Jim's awaited with keenness the polling of the morrow.

## CHAPTER 7.

### Gunn and Wilkins are Mysterious.

"IT'S got to be stopped somehow!" said Wilkins desperately.

"All very well to say that. But how are you going to stop it?" returned Gunn hopelessly.

"I didn't say I could. But it's got to be stopped, and if we can't do it, someone else must!"

"We can't sneak about the silly ass, Wilky."

"I dunno but what I'd rather do that than go to quod with him," said Wilkins morosely. "I like old Grundy all right; you know that, Gunny. The other fellows may say what they like about him, but for all his silly assiness he's a good chum, and we've stood by him a good many times. But I'm jolly well hanged if I'm going to prison to please him!"

"He's written to the bank manager at Wayland," said Gunn. "If I could get hold of the letter I'd jolly well burn it! But that wouldn't put the kybosh on the bizney. He's hired the horse and trap. He's got the disguises. It's all cut and dried, and I must say the old fathead is doing the thing thoroughly! He generally forgets the most important details, and then wonders why his giddy schemes come a bloomer. But he don't seem to have forgotten anything this time."

"Except to make arrangements to have all the bobbies and the special constables locked up safely for the night," replied Wilkins. "I wouldn't mind it so much if he'd got that done. Tell you the truth, Gunny, I ain't worrying a scrap about the moral what-d'ye-call-it of the bizney. I can't see that old Pepper will be any worse off for having notes instead of his rotten old gold, and, anyway, he deserves all he gets. But it will be dead off if we're caught. When a chap has to go to prison it takes him a giddy long time to live it down, you know."

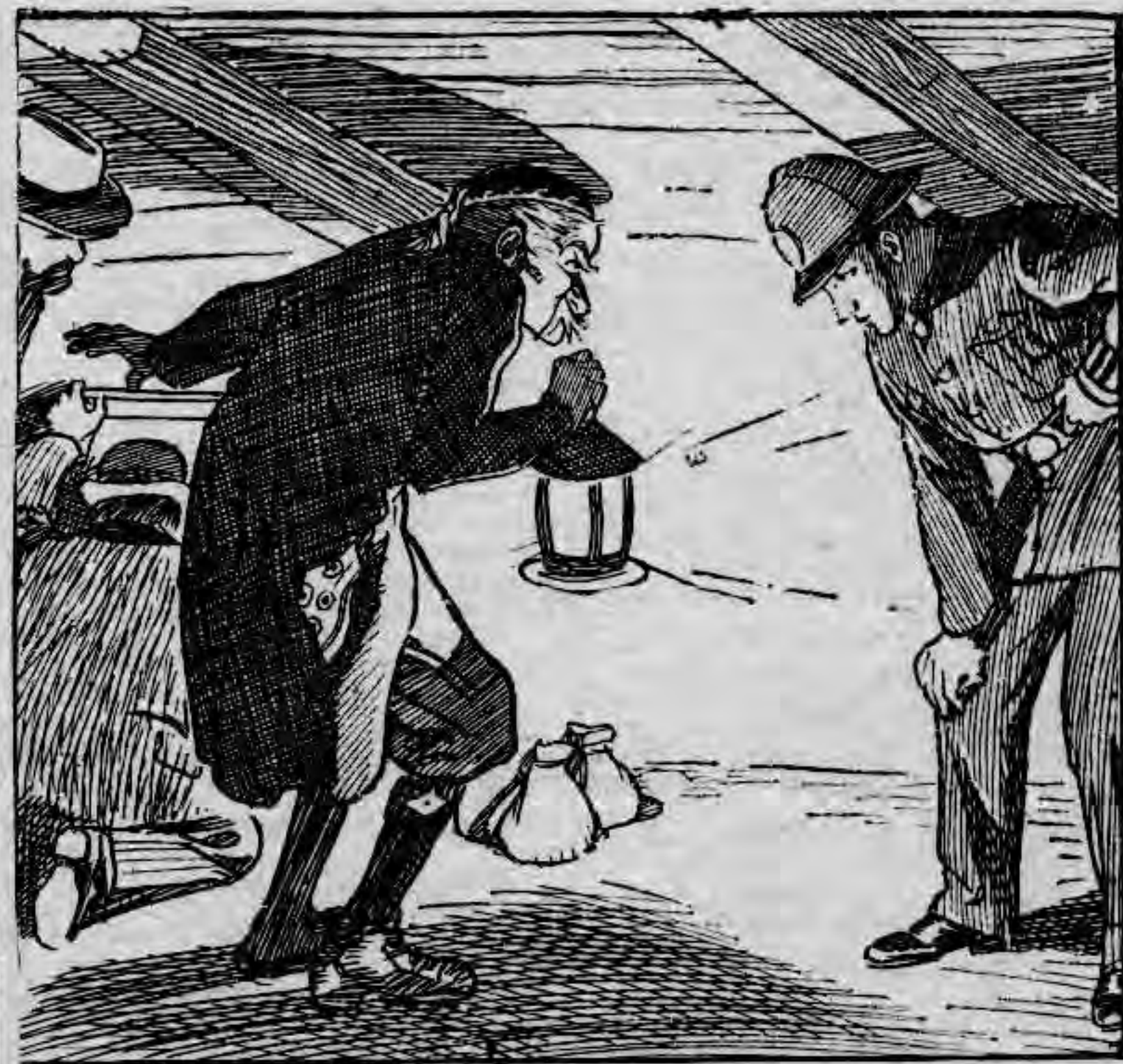
"If I have to go, I shall write a book about it. I've often thought lately, since I went in for a heap of reading, that it would be a good wheeze to write a book."

"Rats! They won't even take your tripe for the 'Weekly,'" said Wilkins rudely.

Gunn and Wilkins were in a funk, and to one another they did not mind admitting it.

The situation really was an awkward one for them.

When Grundy was crossed, Grundy was, as the Scots say, "gey ill to live wi'." And Gunn and Wilkins had to live with Grundy. Moreover, they



Mr. Pepper and P.-c. Lowther.  
(See Chapter 10.)

wanted to go on doing so. Since they had shared a study with the great George Alfred they had learned to appreciate the value of a flowing horn of plenty. In every tip from Uncle Grundy Gunn and Wilkins had their share.

And they had no wish to go back on their chum. They had often followed him against their own better judgment. But now they balked. This was too, too much!

They paced side by side under the elms in silence for a minute or two after Wilkins' decidedly rude remark. But when Gunn spoke it did not appear that he had been thinking of that at all—not that Wilkins would have minded had such been the case.

"What's to be done, Wilky?" he said. "That's the giddy question—what's to be done? It ain't a scrap of good gassing about the things that might happen. Our game is to see that they don't!"

"You seemed to think that it would be sneaking to let on to anyone," replied Wilkins.

"Depends upon who it is. It would be to tell Railton—or the Head—or Kildare even. But we might give Tom Merry a hint."

"I say, though, Tom Merry's got the key!"

"He hasn't! At least, he has—but old Grundy's got another. Didn't you know?"

"No. Wasn't I kept in this morning, ass? It's you that knows all about the bizney. How did he get it?"

"Took along a score or more that he'd hired in Wayland, and tried them while the chaps were at footer yesterday afternoon. One of them fitted. It's quite a simple lock."

"He's getting artful," said Wilkins. "He's been keen enough on things before; but I never knew him to think them out as he has this."

"Well, the old chump really is no end patriotic. I'll say that for him,"

answered Gunn. "So am I—in reason. And so are you, Wilky. But I can't see the sort of patriotism that's going to land you in chokey for stealing gold—and that's what they'll call it—sure to."

"Let's give Tom Merry a hint, Gunny."

"Is a hint going to be any use?"

"Well, we can't tell him everything, can we?"

"Num-no, I suppose not," said Gunn.

On the whole, Gunn might have preferred to cast the burden upon Tom's shoulders. They were broader than his; and Tom Merry, with half the Shell to back him, could stop Grundy—which Gunn knew himself and Wilkins powerless to do.

But, though Grundy never harboured malice, it was not likely that he would ever forgive Gunn and Wilkins if they gave away his great secret.

"Come along to No. 10," said Wilkins. "Grundy's gone out. I saw him go. Best get it over while he's away. But be careful not to say too much, you know."

"You'd better do the chin-wagging," growled Gunn.

"No. We'll both do it. A chap can't stand there like a dummy."

The door of Study No. 10 bore a card, on which was written in big red letters:

"NO ADMITTANCE!  
"HEADQUARTERS OF THE ST. JIM'S ELECTION COMMITTEE."

But Wilkins and Gunn were past taking account of little things like that.

"You—can't—come—in—unless you're really—someone of importance!" roared Blake.

"Well, we are," said Gunn, and pushed open the door.

Tom Merry, Talbot, Jack Blake, Kerr, and Wally D'Arcy were seated around the table. Lowther, Manners, and

Arthur Augustus occupied the hearth-rug. Those three were not members of the committee; but two of them were inmates of the study, and Gussy had insisted upon being present.

"Here, clear out!" said Blake.

"Don't be a silly ass! We've got something important to talk about—but not to you, Blake," said Gunn.

"Well, you can go and talk about it somewhere else," said Wally. "We've got three silly asses who are not on the committee in the room, and I reckon that's more than enough!"

But Tom Merry saw that Gunn and Wilkins were really in earnest, and he had his own notions that Grundy was up to something more than usually mad.

"It's all serene," he said. "We've finished this little lot, and it's no good you fellows thinking you're going to stay to tea, because there ain't enough to go round."

"We'll stay and hear Gunn and Wilky tell their tale of woe," chuckled Blake.

"You jolly well ain't going to do anything of the sort!" said Wilkins. "This is a Shell affair. We don't mind Talbot staying, as well as these three chaps; but not the rest of you."

"Who's in?" asked Gunn eagerly. The work upon which the committee had been engaged was the counting of votes in the dozen or more polls taken that day.

"You hear Wilky, Blake?" said Lowther blandly. "It is not 'Whoa' for you and the noble Gussy and our ingenious young friend here. It is rather 'Gee-up.' I trust I make myself clear?"

Wally, who was taking his duties as representative of the fags upon the committee very seriously, began to chant the list of the successful candidates, reading from the paper which Talbot had just signed.

"Kerr—Koumi Roa—Owen. That's three New Housers all in a row," he said.

"I say, though, it's a bit of a surprise, Owen licking Clive!" said Gunn.

"Organisation, dear boy, organisation," said Kerr. "The New House has a genius for that sort of thing."

"It was only by two votes, though," said Wally. "We had to count the blessed papers three times to make sure. Then Contarini's licked Crooke all ends up! Good old Jackeymo! Macdonald—Lorne—Harvey—Glyn—Jameson—"

"New House again!" said Kerr.

"Don't you go counting, Jimmy! He belongs to my party, and he got in on our votes," returned Wally, in haste.

"Weally, Wally, to talk about your partay—"

"You're an old ass, Gus! Just you shut up! You chaps will jolly well find out about our party when the giddy old Parliament gets steam up! We'll make you old fogies tremble in your shoes!"

"Get on with the washing, my son," said Talbot.

"All serene. That's nine, ain't it? There are five more. We did work 'em off to-day, with no silly asses barging round like yesterday! Herries. Only by five votes over Julian. I gave him mine, but I ain't sure now. Oh, never mind that! Redfern—"

"New House!" came from Kerr.

"My hat!" said Gunn. "Cardew licked! He won't like that!"

"He says he don't mind," said Blake.

"Study No. 9 won't have a look-in," said Wally confidently. "It's ten to one easy on Frank Levison against his major. The other three are Barden—"

"New House!" chuckled Kerr.

"And a smubby nose—and pimples!" added Wally. "I wouldn't have voted for a dial like that! Hobbs. He's

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another of my crowd. Oh, and Lumley-Lumley. That's the day's return, my lads."

"Will you post it up on the board for me, Wally?" asked Tom.

"May I? Oh, rather!"

And Wally cut. Wilkins had not heeded him, having no great interest in the list. He had given up his case as hopeless.

"Now, if Blake and D'Arcy will do a bunk, we can talk to you fellows," he growled.

"Oh, come along, Blake, deah boy! We are weally not in the least cuvious, Wilkins, an' we simplay decline to stay aifah that."

"Just as well, for we ain't going to tell you if you do," said Wilkins sourly.

Blake and D'Arcy departed. Gunn and Wilkins stood looking rather helpless. Each was waiting for the other to begin.

"Pile in!" said Tom encouragingly.

"It's about Grundy," said Wilkins.

"You've got to keep an eye on the old ass," added Gunn.

"A painful duty—if a duty!" murmured Lowther.

"Haven't time," replied Tom.

"You've got two eyes each. Won't they serve?"

"It's no good," said Gunn, shaking his head sadly.

"Not a scrap of good!" chimed in Wilkins.

"But what do you want us to do?" inquired Talbot.

"Oh, stop him, you know."

"But stop him from what, Wilky?"

"That's just what we can't tell you. It wouldn't be the straight thing to old Grundy," answered Wilkins.

"Besides," said Gunn, "we're in it, too!"

The four stared at them. This was very mysterious.

"Then you want to be stopped, too?" said Manners, grinning.

"Well, yes, if you come to that," replied Wilkins.

"Only we sha'n't take much stopping. Grundy will. You know Grundy!" added Gunn.

"Mad—quite mad!" murmured Lowther.

"We knew Grundy was more or less potty, but we thought you chaps had a glimmering of sense," Tom said.

"So we have. Really we have. Merry! But—well, we can't give old Grundy dead away," said Gunn.

"But if you were to keep an eye on him," Wilkins added hopefully.

"One each, or one among us?" asked Lowther.

"In connection with what—when—and where?" asked Talbot.

"Well, then—the barn," said Gunn slowly.

"To-morrow night," added Wilkins.

"And that's all we can tell you!" said Gunn, with immense decision.

"If it's the barn, I'll see to it that Grundy don't go playing any of his tricks there," Tom said.

Wilkins nudged Gunn, because he saw that, for all his air of having quite definitely finished, Gunn was in danger of letting slip the fact that Grundy had a key. To Wilkins, though he did not know why, that seemed telling altogether too much.

They were allowed to go without having further pressure put upon them. The Terrible Three and Talbot all understood how a dread of being disloyal to Grundy and some other mysterious dread were warring in their rather muddled minds; and, though Lowther was not inclined to take the matter seriously, Tom and Talbot were, and Manners said he thought there might be something in it.

## CHAPTER 8.

### Baggy Again!

"HE, he, he! You fellows would give something to know what I could tell you!"

It was Baggy Trimble who made that remark, looking in at the door of Study No. 10.

Only the Terrible Three were there. They had been chuckling over the events of the evening before, when free teas for electors had been going both in Study No. 3 and Study No. 7.

A good many fellows had attended both teas. Herries and Digby and Levison and Clive and Cardew had gone together. As they told both Grundy and Racke, they were above all suspicion of bribery, because they had no intention of voting for either candidate. But all electors had been invited; and, like the great George Alfred, they stood on their rights!

The fags had turned up in force. The Shell and Fourth generally had attended, though among the absentees were the Terrible Three, Talbot, D'Arcy, Blake, Study No. 11 of the Shell, Lumley-Lumley, and the ingenious Skimpole, who was too busy over his latest invention to spare the time.

But, though there had been big attendances, there had been no address delivered in either study. Till the grub was cleared up, both Grundy and Racke had been shouted down every time they tried to speak; and when once the grub had vanished the electors followed suit.

Altogether it had been a most disappointing experience for Racke and Grundy, though it had pleased nearly everyone else. Especially had it pleased Baggy Trimble, who had wrought mighty deeds in both studies. So well had he done himself that he had been ill in the dormitory later. But he had got over that; and, anyway, little things of that kind were small indeed to Baggy compared with the unusual pleasure of a real gorge.

"Give something to know what you could tell us, would we?" said Tom Merry. "We'll give you exactly two seconds to clear out, and if you haven't cleared in that time we'll give you—"

"It's about Grundy, and it's jolly important!" broke in Baggy.

"Better hear him, old chap!" said Manners. "That giddy mystery wants clearing up."

"Come inside, Baggy, and shut the door," Tom said. "You're a low sneak and a crawling worm—"

"But we've got to use you," Lowther put in. "We'll wash our hands of you afterwards instead of beforehand—that's all!"

"I've a jolly good mind not to tell you!" whined Baggy. "You ain't civil!"

"You never had even a moderately good mind!" snapped Tom. "But you're going to tell!"

And Baggy told. He had heard Grundy telling Wilkins and Gunn the plans for the night, and he poured out the whole business excitedly. It was a confused sort of yarn, as told by Baggy; but the Terrible Three got the hang of it pretty correctly, for it worked in with things that they knew, and with the mysterious communications of Gunn and Wilkins.

"My hat! It's giddy thick, even for old Grundy!" gasped Manners.

"And yet, in a mad sort of way, there's decency in it," said Lowther. "It can't be allowed to go on; but the old maniac means well."

"Look here! I've got a plan!" said Trimble eagerly. "Pepper ought to have all that chink taken away from him; he's a miser, and he ain't patriotic! But why should we let Grundy go fooling it away by taking it to a bank? Why shouldn't we nip in and collar it for ourselves—"

eh? I'd help—I mean, I'd lead. And if you chaps will help me the thing will be as easy as eating peas! He, he, he!"

"My hat! My one and only chapeau! The patriotic Grundy ain't in it with the piratical Trimble!" said Lowther, in amazement.

But Baggy saw nothing out-of-the-way in his suggestion.

"It would be easy enough," he said. "We've only got to let those three get clear of the barn, and then frighten them. They'll bolt, and we can collar the—"

"The swag," said Tom. "Only, you see, Trimble, we don't happen to be criminals! You worm!"

"Oh, really, Merry—"

"Shut up! We'll attend to this bizney. I'm not saying you were wrong to come to us, all things considered, though your intentions were jolly well off the rails. But now you've just one thing to remember, and that is to keep this dark. Not so much as a giddy word to anyone, mind!"

"He can't do it!" said Monty Lowther, shaking his head. "He would burst. The only safe way is to gag him and shut him up."

"I—I— Oh, look here, you rotters! I know your little game! You mean to collar the gold yourselves and keep me out of it!"

"Rats, you fat idiot! Setting aside the fact that we're not thieves, can't you see that the thing could never be brought off? If Grundy tries it he'll land himself into big trouble for a dead cert! That's why we must stop the old ass."

"Well, then, all I've got to say is that I'm sorry I told you at all!" said Trimble sulkily. "I don't mind Grundy getting into trouble; I'd like him to. He's a silly ass, and a beastly bully, too!"

"That ain't all you've got to say—don't you make any mistake! You've got to promise that you won't breathe a word of this to anyone else," said Manners.

"What's the good? Baggy don't know what a promise means," said Lowther.

"Oh, yes, I do, as well as you do, Lowther! Now, then!"

"Well, promise, this, on your honour—no, that's no use, you haven't any!" said Tom. "Take your oath that you will tell no one!"

Baggy took his oath. Perhaps he meant to keep it, and perhaps he did not; anyway, as Tom might have known, you cannot bind by an oath one who has no honour to be bound, for the very essence of an oath is the honour of him who takes it—unless, indeed, it is fear, and Baggy soon got over any fear he felt.

Within an hour he had told Cutts all about it. He knew that Cutts was not feeling at all well-disposed towards the mighty Grundy, and that Cutts was a vengeful fellow.

Cutts listened, and told Baggy he was quite right to come. He did more than that—he gave Baggy five shillings. It is true, he kicked Baggy out after the tip had passed. But, with the five bob clutched tightly in his podgy palm, Baggy could bear a kick or two with philosophy.

St. Leger and Gilmore were called into consultation.

"You can't do it as revenge on Grundy, old man," said St. Leger. "That's dead off. But I certainly think this chap Pepper ought to be warned. Don't you, Gil?"

"Yes; unless we could carry out Baggy's scheme," said Gilmore, slowly and thoughtfully.

For to Cutts also had Baggy suggested the enterprise which Lowther had styled piratical, but which might more correctly have been classed as highway robbery.

"Can't be did!" said Cutts at once.

"I'm not on for a risk like that; besides, there's my conscience!"

"Put it on the risk, old chap!" replied Gilmore, grinning. "We know all about your conscience."

"I don't!" said St. Leger. "First I ever heard of Cutts having one. But it's no odds. The scheme's too wild—and if it wasn't there would be the danger of Baggy talking. Warn Pepper if you like, old man—that ought to be done; and it will be a pretty big spoke in Grundy's wheel. But leave it at that!"

"That's what I'll do," said Cutts. "There's no need for any of us to show up personally in the matter, though. An anonymous note to Pepper will bring him on the scene fast enough if he really has any oof hidden under the barn. And if it's all a giddy flam, or if he's shifted it, our dear friend Grundy will have his trouble for his pains. So that's all serene!"

"It will all fit in with our visit to the Green Man to-night," said St. Leger.

So it was agreed. But the Terrible Three, calling in only Talbot to their aid, were concerting a plan of quite a different kind to deal with Grundy.

## CHAPTER 9.

### In the Night.

"WAKE up, Wilky!" growled Grundy.

"Lemme be! Oh, I say, Grundy, old pal, chuck it, do! No good can come of it!"

## TO THE BOYS AT THE FRONT.

*If you are unable to obtain this publication regularly, please tell any news-vendor to get it from*

Messageries HACHETTE et Cie.,  
111, Rue Reaumur,  
PARIS.

"Are you in a funk, George Wilkins?" demanded Grundy in fierce, low tones.

Lowther suppressed a chuckle with difficulty. The Terrible Three and Talbot were all awake—waiting. And now the hour had come!

It occurred to them that the best thing Wilkins could have done would be to say "Yes," and let the thing slide. But Wilkins knew that Grundy would not let it slide, and, moreover, though a fellow may admit once in a way that he is funk, it is a very different thing to admit himself a funk. Wilkins could not do that.

He got out of bed. Grundy proceeded to rouse Gunn.

Gunn was meeker—or possibly Gunn had more faith in the intervention of the Terrible Three. Anyway, Gunn began to dress without protesting.

"I can't get this clobber on in the dark!" growled Wilkins.

"Yes, you can!" replied Grundy. "They're men's bags, but you get into 'em the same way you do into your little kid's trousers!"

"I don't mean the bags, you silly idiot! What about the beard and wig?"

"See to them in the study. Don't make unnecessary difficulties, Wilkins! Gunn ain't doing it!"

"Too fed up," said the dismal voice of Gunn.

Directly the three were out of the dormitory there was a scramble of four out of their beds. Tom Merry chuckled over a parcel to Lowther.

"You'd better do the lobby act, Monty," he said. "The rest of us will be special constables. Jelly lucky we had that blue uniform by us!"

They dressed in haste. Talbot, Tom, and Manners donned long overcoats, and put on hats. Lowther had a complete policeman's uniform, helmet and all.

"I shall have to do a little making-up," he said.

"Not likely!" answered Tom. "There isn't time!"

"Talk about spoiling the ship for a ha'porth of tar! Are you going to let a gorgeous wheeze like this fail for want of a dab or two of grease-paint?"

"It won't. There won't be light enough for anyone to notice things like that," said Manners. "You're like the chap who blacked himself all over to play the part of Othello, Monty."

"He was a true artist, with far more soul than you fellows," grumbled Lowther, who hated missing an opportunity to exercise his talent in make-up.

"It's not mere japing, you know," said Talbot. "You may take it that way, Lowther, and I won't deny there's a funny side to it all right. But there's a serious one, too, and that's what we're thinking about."

"Think about it all you like! It's spoiling Grundy I'm after. You fellows are out to rescue him from the consequences of his own obstinate silly-assiness. That ain't my game."

But they knew that Lowther was as keen as they were to guard the obstinate Grundy from danger.

"We mustn't be too soon," said Tom. "It would be all very well if we could be certain to get ahead of them and wait at the barn. But we can't afford to run into them on the road."

"I'll creep down and see if they've gone," volunteered Manners.

He came back in a few minutes.

"Coast clear!" he announced.

Tom Merry & Co., though not much given to breaking bounds after lights out, knew the way out as well as anyone, and within a few minutes the four were safely clear of the school premises and on their way to the barn.

"Grundy's got some digging to do," remarked Talbot. "Wonder whether it occurred to him that a spade was necessary."

"And I've got the key of the barn in my pocket," said Tom. "I should think that's a bit necessary, too, unless he's found another way in."

"Fact of the matter is, we might have left him to come a bloomer over the job on his own," Manners said. "He'd be safe to."

But, though they knew Grundy pretty well, they did not know all about him yet!

Grundy had forgotten neither the key nor the digging. He was fully armed. To him there seemed no possible flaw in the arrangements he had made. Gunn and Wilkins were not so sure. They thought of P.O. Crump and of zealous special constables, and they shivered.

"Binks will give tongue," said Tom. D'Arcy's dog was still domiciled in the barn.

"Not likely! Old Grundy's no end friendly with Binks," answered Manners.

It was a dark night, and not until they were close to the field did they see that a horse and trap stood outside. A man sat in the driver's seat, nodding. They slipped past him without his seeing them. The barn loomed up against the gloom of the sky. No light showed.

"We ought to be able to see something round at the back, though," Talbot said.

Round to the back they went, and found the door which gave entrance to the store-room below the barn. They found, also, the very chink through which Grundy had seen Mr. Pepper counting

his gold, and one by one they peered through.

They saw a burly figure which might have been recognised as Grundy's and a bearded face which could hardly have been. The burly figure bent over a hole in the ground in a most cramped and uncomfortable position. But, in spite of the discomfort, the bearded face was flushed with joy.

For the chest was there! Already the corner of it could be seen.

The light of the candle by Grundy's side did not show too clearly the other disguised faces, but enough of them could be seen to make it plain that the feelings of Wilkins and Gunn were not as the feelings of George Alfred Grundy.

It would have suited Wilkins and Gunn much better if the chest had gone!

But those two still had a gleam of hope. There might be no gold there. The presence of the chest suggested the presence of the gold, but did not absolutely prove it.

Grundy, with a tremendous grunt, dragged up the chest.

"Lend a hand, you two, can't you?" he said sharply. "Don't stand there like dummies! You help me to lift this thing out, Wilky! Get the bags ready, Gunn!"

"Oh, I say, Grundy, chuck it!" pleaded Wilkins. "Don't be a silly ass! Chuck it!"

"Wha-a-a-at?" roared Grundy, hardly able to believe his ears.

"For a fellow engaged on a job of this kind Grundy really is a trifle noisy," remarked Talbot to Tom.

"We'd better chuck it, old chap!" said Gunn weakly. "Put the thing back! Don't open it! 'Tain't ours, and we've no right to meddle with it!"

"Are you a lunatic, William Gunn? Or do you think I am?"

"The answer is in the affirmative in both cases," observed Lowther outside. "Moreover, we all heartily agree with Gunn, for once."

"Do you suppose I'm the chap to carry a thing through to this point, and then drop it because you poor, weak-kneed specimens are afraid?" went on Grundy. "Do what you are told, you backboneless funks!"

"Pleasant way Grundy has with him," said Manners. "Who wouldn't be Wilky or Gunn, and serve a boss so civil and kindly?"

"Well, they'd annoy me if I were Grundy," confessed Tom. "They are in it, and they ain't in it! They're quivering with funk, and looking out for us to come to the rescue. Why didn't they refuse? That might have choked the fat-head off it."

"It wouldn't have done, Tom," replied Talbot. "And they are only in it because they wouldn't desert a pal. They might show up a bit better, but I don't think so badly of them as you do."

"Well, neither do I, if you come to that," Tom said. It sounded rather Irish, but Talbot knew what he meant.

"My only Aunt Matilda!"

Tom was at the chink now. Grundy and Wilkins had lifted the chest out of the hole, and Grundy had pulled away the sacking that covered the gold.

Until that moment Tom felt he had never more than half believed the yarn. He had acted as if it were true; he had not cast doubt upon it. But when the rolls of sovereigns were displayed in the candlelight it was as though he were looking upon something he had never really expected to see.

"Let's have a squint, Tommy!" said Lowther.

One by one they looked through, and the sight they saw made them all feel more serious. They realised that it

would be no matter for jest if Mr. Erasmus Zachariah Pepper came upon Grundy and his reluctant accomplices at this job. The miser would not be likely to show them any mercy.

And now Binks began to bark angrily, inside the barn.

"Someone about!" said Tom.

And they shifted away from the door—not a moment too soon!

## CHAPTER 10.

### A Great Success.

**A** LANTERN came round the corner of the barn, and behind the lantern was a man, and the man was Mr. Pepper!

Before the four could make up their minds what to do—or whether to do anything—the sound of a grating key was heard. Then came a howl of rage.

But the great George Alfred proved equal to the occasion.

So sure was he that what he did was right and patriotic, that the appearance of Mr. Pepper, which reduced Gunn and Wilkins to a state of babbling imbecility, left Grundy master of himself.

"I didn't expect to see you, Mr. Pepper," he said coolly.

"I should think you didn't, you thieving hound!" roared Pepper. "Pretty cool that, I must say! Who are you, and what does this mean?"

He did not know Grundy, that was evident.

Gunn and Wilkins felt just a little less like men going to immediate execution; and, outside, Tom whispered to Lowther:

"If Grundy bluffs we've got to back him up, Monty! And you're first over the top, old scout!"

"I'm on!" replied Lowther.

"I am who I am," said Grundy, in deep tones. "It will avail you nothing to protest, Pepper! You are a grossly unpatriotic man, or you wouldn't have all this whack of gold here when the Government has called for it. Don't think you are being robbed! You will receive notes in exchange. The whole business has been arranged, and the best thing you can do is to trot off home now, and come along here to-morrow. You'll find the notes in the chest all serene then."

"Well, if ever I heard such a thing in all my born days! Likely, ain't it? You're thieves, that's what you are, and I'm going to hand you over to the police!"

"I don't quite see how," answered Grundy coolly. "Wilk—er—Wilkephant and—er—Gunter, bind and gag him!"

Grundy had realised in time that he must not use the names of his followers. "Gunter" was not so bad; but even on the spur of the moment Grundy might have managed something better than "Wilkephant"!

The two did not obey, of course.

"This is the crisis! Buck up and butt in, Monty!" said Tom Merry.

Stooping his head, Lowther passed boldly in through the open door. The light was not enough to show the boyish face above his uniform, and he spoke in a gruff voice.

"In the name of the Bing, Erasmus Zachariah Pepper, I confiscate these moneys for the purposes of the War, and I advise that you offer no resistance, by deed or word, lest the same be held against you!"

"Wha—a—at?" demanded Mr. Pepper, badly taken aback.

There can be no doubt that from the outset he took Lowther for a policeman. Monty had to stoop, and that helped to prevent the miser from seeing his face clearly. "Bing," as the humorist of the Shell said later, was hardly distinguishable from "King" by a flustered man, and the speech was made with lots of official gravity.

Moreover, Mr. Pepper's conscience was not clear. That was what really helped them all most in the bluff that saved Grundy.

"You have been discovered hoarding gold—an offence against the law of the Realm. You are also obstructing other more patriotic citizens in the execution of their duty. It is my duty to take you in charge, and to warn you that anything you say may be used in evidence against you!"

Not the remotest suspicion that he had to do with St. Jim's boys had entered the brain of Mr. Pepper. He never doubted that Lowther was a constable; and he saw in Grundy, Gunn, and Wilkins, three bearded men, apparently of middle age.

Tom Merry, Talbot, and Manners hung back.

For any one of them to show himself might have been fatal. And there was no need for their aid at this stage.

Lowther was doing all that could be asked of him.

Gunn sidled out, and found the three.

"Oh, I am jolly glad you've come, you chaps!" he whispered. "But what's to be done? How are we going to get out of this beastly mess? Old Pepper hasn't twigged yet, but he's dead sure to!"

"Leave that to Monty," said Tom, grinning in the gloom.

"The Government ain't got rights of confiscation," said Mr. Pepper weakly. He was not quite sure of the legal position.

"There may be no confiscation, in the exact sense," Lowther replied at once. "It is possible that a mild view may be taken of your crime, and that you will merely be compelled to exchange the gold for notes. But quite certainly you will not be allowed to keep it."

"Who are these chaps?" demanded Pepper, looking hard at Grundy, who was kneeling with the metal chest and the bags brought to carry away the gold in before him.

"That is not a question I consider it necessary to answer," said Lowther. "Suffice it to say that they have the same warrant that I have. Strange things must be done under the Defence of the Realm Act, as you must be aware. Will you come quietly, or must I handcuff you?"

And Lowther whipped out of his pocket a pair of bracelets.

It was his trump-card, and he had played it at exactly the right moment.

Mr. Pepper was so completely staggered that any suspicions he may have entertained, fled at once. The handcuffs convinced him.

"C-c-c-come?" he stammered. "Where to?"

"To the police-station at Wayland, of course! Do you not understand that this—"

"Look here, you know, that's too much—altogether too much, that is! The Government might give a man time. I've had that gold put away for—reasons of my own—excellent reasons, I may say. But I came along to fetch it to-night so that I might take it to Wayland to-morrow, early, and pay it into the bank there. Ain't that good enough?"

Lowther shook his head.

"You are too late, and your story is too thin. I fear that an appearance before the magistrates, on an exceedingly grave charge is inevitable."

"But I can't pay the money in to-night! It's too late, and the bank-manager would be in bed before we got to Wayland."

"That difficulty can be overcome," said Grundy, speaking very gruffly. "I have arranged with the manager of the bank at Wayland to receive this money to-night. He will be expecting me. It is not at all necessary that the—er—the

accused should accompany us; but he is at liberty to do so if he wishes."

"It is not in the least as he wishes, Mr. Looney!" said Lowther impatiently. "He must go to Wayland with me to-night, whether he likes it or not!"

Pepper looked from one to the other, puzzled.

"Look here, you're a constable," he said. "But who's this Mr. Looney, and who are the men with him? I don't see where they come in."

"It is unnecessary that you should understand," said Lowther. "No doubt all will be made plain to you when you appear before the magistrates. Continue the packing of the gold, Mr. Looney, please! It is well it should be done under the eyes of this person."

Grundy maintained afterwards that he recognised Lowther from the first. However that may have been, he had certainly tumbled by this time, and he played up very well indeed. But he grumbled later at having been presented with such a name as "Mr. Looney." Lowther said that he did not see what else he could have been called.

"I—I don't mind going to Wayland with you now," said Mr. Pepper, in evident fear. "And I'll pay the gold into my account at the bank. Won't that settle it? What's the good of dragging me into court, and blackening a good name for nothing—or next door to nothing?"

"Mr. Looney, in this matter your authority is higher than mine. You have but to say the word, and my arrest becomes merely nominal."

"He'd better go before the magistrates!" growled Grundy. "It will give him a lesson. I've got no sympathy with unpatriotic pigs!"

But Pepper continued to plead, all unsuspecting that what he desired to do, for fear of worse befalling him, was just what they would have had him do, for fear lest worse might befall them.

And at last the adamant heart of Mr. Looney seemed softened. He gave a grudging assent to the plan, and Mr. Pepper looked rather like a condemned man who has been reprieved. He would grieve long and bitterly for the hoarded gold, doubtless; but he evidently dreaded the notion of having the hoarding made public.

Outside, Tom and Talbot and Manners waited impatiently. Gunn had gone back. It was cold and dark, but it was not dull for them. They could hear every word spoken, and it was exciting to listen for Grundy's next speech, which might give the whole game away at any time, they felt. All had confidence in Lowther, but none had much in Grundy.

But Grundy played up finely, and now a procession of five came out of the barn. First marched Mr. Pepper, with Lowther's hand gripping his arm from behind. But there was no need for the grip. The gold held Pepper!

After Lowther followed Grundy, Gunn, and Wilkins, and each of the three carried a bag of gold.

The procession passed on towards the gate, and Tom and Talbot and Manners followed it. But they took good care that no sound of their coming should reach the ears of Mr. Pepper.

Lowther insisted on leaving the lantern behind. The trap which waited had but a very dim light.

"You can go!" growled Grundy to the driver. "I'll drive. Be here again in about an hour, that's all. The trap will be sent back to you."

"Right you are, sir!" said the sleepy man, and the gloom swallowed him up.

"We can't all go," whispered Tom to Talbot. "Anyone mind if I do? Because I mean to, anyway! Will you see—er—Wilkephant and Gunter safely home and tuck them up in their little beds?"

"Right-ho!" said Talbot.

Manners might have said more, but he did not get the chance. Lowther and Mr. Pepper were already in the rear seat of the dogcart. Tom clambered to the place by Grundy's side. And not until Wayland was reached did Grundy discover that the fellow by his side was Tom Merry—neither Gunn nor Wilkins!

"I hope old Grundy won't spill the lot—gold and all!" said Manners, as they bowled away through the gloom, leaving him behind with Talbot and Grundy's aides. "But it ain't anything better than evens against it. Tommy must be mad not to take the reins himself!"

But Tom admitted later that he never even gave a thought to that peril. And, miracle or no, Grundy took them into Wayland without a mishap.

In the main street of the sleeping town a ring at the private bell of a certain building brought to the door a decidedly grumpy bank manager. He was not less grumpy when he recognised Mr. Pepper, whom he knew as a client of the bank.

The three behind grinned as he made remarks which veiled but thinly his evident conviction that Mr. Pepper, known to him as being eccentric at best, must now have gone stark, staring mad. There was mention of the folly and impropriety of sending a mysterious anonymous letter, and of appointing such a time. But Pepper took it all meekly. He felt that he was getting off easily.

The bags were lifted out of the cart, and handed to Mr. Pepper, who, in turn, handed them to the manager. But Tom

and Lowther took more than good care that neither man saw their faces.

"I won't be more than ten minutes. May as well ride back to Rylcombe, as you're sending the trap back!" growled Mr. Pepper.

But no sooner was the door closed behind him and the manager than Tom seized the reins from Grundy's hands, and turned the horse's head.

"This is where we mizzle!" said Tom.

The bank manager never knew how Pepper's gold came to be handed over to the care of the bank thus. He may have thought he knew—but he didn't!

But Mr. Pepper found out. One of those bags had "G. A. G." inked on it, and there was a good deal of the ferret about Mr. Pepper, apart from looks.

What did he do? Well, what could he do? Grundy had the whip hand. Not for much would Mr. Pepper have had that story become public property; and perhaps he did not realise that Grundy and his helpers would have objected just as strongly to its disclosure. The net result was that Mr. Pepper agreed, with many grumbles, to consider the tenancy of the barn as running on for nine weeks, in consideration of the money already paid him, and to accept ten shillings a week for it after that period had expired.

Grundy got in all right. He would have beaten Racke in any case. But some garbled version of the story of Pepper's gold had gained currency in St. Jim's, and Grundy attributed his thumping majority to the Lower School's appreciation of his patriotism. Which pleased Grundy and hurt no one. Moreover, Grundy went so far as to express a strictly qualified approval of the manner in which the Terrible Three and Talbot had backed him up. He never came quite to understand their point of view, though.

Levison major went under to his young brother, owing to the fag vote; and Study No. 9 was left completely out in the cold—whereof came later happenings.

But Arthur Augustus triumphed over Manners minor, for Reggie said he didn't want any pal of Wally's to vote for him, and Wally and his pals took him at his word!

For the rest, there was no great surprise in the case of any of the polls, and within a week or so the House was duly elected, and the first sitting took place.

THE END.

(Don't miss next Wednesday's Great Story of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's—"THE ST. JIM'S PACIFIST!" by Martin Clifford.)

## The Editor's Chat.

For Next Wednesday:

**THE ST. JIM'S PACIFIST!**

By Martin Clifford.

Next week's story is a very good one indeed. Skimpole gets an idea that the war has lasted too long, and adopts "Pacifist" principles. He starts a League of Youthful Conscientious Objectors, but only enlists one recruit—Baggy Trimble! His movement is severely discouraged all round, but that is not what chokes Skimpole off. What does—that it is that sends him off to the Recruiting Office at Wayland to offer himself for enlistment—you will read next week.

Some of my readers don't like Skimpole. It is an error of taste. Skimpole is a good fellow, for all his eccentricities. He means well every time, and the right feeling is in him. Of course, he is a bit of an ass; but so are most of us, about some things, and many of us about most things! At least, Skimpole uses his brains, though the result is not always good.

THE WEEK AFTER NEXT!

I know well that you are all looking forward eagerly to our great Special Christmas Number. It will appear the week after next, price 2d. We have had some fine Christmas Numbers in the past, but never one better than this.

In the long, complete story, which is its big feature, you will meet again Valentine Outram, the boy who was for a brief time at St. Jim's, who suffered through Levison's persecution, but who left with the good wishes of all who knew his secret. You will remember the two stories which dealt with him—

"UNDER D'ARCY'S PROTECTION," and "A STRANGE SECRET!"—

which were very popular when they appeared. Many readers have asked to hear of Outram again, and Mr. Clifford is gratifying their desire in his story for the Christmas Number.

Look out, too, for the budget of information about St. Jim's, for a long instalment of the serial, and for other attractions!

FIRST-RATE STUFF!

Do you fellows read "Answers"? Some of you, no doubt. But there must be lots who don't.

Well, you can't afford to miss it just now. You have heard of Ian Hay, no doubt? He writes the best war stuff of all who write it, and his "Carrying On With the First Hundred Thousand," now appearing in "Answers," is really top-notch!

Then there is the new serial—"Inside the Lines"—the novel of the play that is drawing crowded houses. A spy yarn this, with war and mystery and love all woven into it.

*Your Editor*

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 503.



# THE TWINS FROM TASMANIA



## Our Great New Serial Story.

### THE CHIEF CHARACTERS OF THE STORY.

|                        |       |                                                                                      |
|------------------------|-------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| PHILIP DERWENT         | .. .. | The twins from Tasmania—Philip (Flip) at Highcliffe, Philippe (Flap) at Cliff House. |
| PHILIPPA DERWENT       | .. .. |                                                                                      |
| PONSONBY               | .. .. | The leader of the Highcliffe nuts.                                                   |
| GADSBY                 | .. .. | One of the nuts, and Flip's enemy.                                                   |
| VAVASOUR               | .. .. | Another of them—an empty-headed swell—hand in glove with Gadsby.                     |
| MONSON MINOR           | .. .. | Yet another—sulky—disposed to the Gadsby faction.                                    |
| MERTON                 | .. .. | Two more of the nuts—chums of Flip's—they share No. 6 Study with him.                |
| TUNSTALL               | .. .. |                                                                                      |
| FRANK COURTENAY        | .. .. | Captain of the Fourth at Highcliffe—a fine fellow.                                   |
| RUPERT DE COURCY       | .. .. | His chum, known as the Caterpillar.                                                  |
| THE GREYFRIARS FELLOWS | .. .. | For further information see the "Magnet."                                            |
| MARJORIE HAZELDENE     | .. .. |                                                                                      |
| CLARA TREVLYN          | .. .. | Cliff House girls and friends of Flap                                                |
| PHYLLIS HOWELL         | .. .. |                                                                                      |
| MOLLY GRAY             | .. .. | A little red-headed Cliff House junior—knows Merton at home.                         |

The last instalment told how Gadsby and Vavasour, with the aid of Hazeldene of Greyfriars, stole Flip Derwent's cockatoo, Cocky, from his study, and how the bird was taken in its cage to Cliff House. Flip and his chums, knowing nothing of the loss, go over there and find the girls in the hockey-field.

(Now read on.)

#### More Hockey Practice.

"TWO or three times a day, indeed!" said Clara Trevlyn, with her pretty little nose in the air. "No, thank you! Twice a week is quite enough!"

"What! When they're so jolly kind about coaching you?" said Flip.

"Coaching us? The very idea! Do they dare to say they have been coaching us?"

"Oh, come now, Miss Clara! Didn't I show you the best way to pass in from the left?" pleaded Tunstall.

"An' we were only jokin', anyway," added Merton, quite humbly.

"It's a very poor joke indeed," said Miss Clara, in her most severe manner. "Marjorie, my dear, aren't you absolutely certain that we could lick the best team the Highcliffe Fourth could put into the field against us into a cocked hat?"

"I don't think Miss Primrose would let us, Clara."

"Is she so fond of Highcliffe?" asked Flip, with pretended simplicity.

Flap felt proud of her brother. He wore the Highcliffe First Eleven blazer—which may have been a trifle swanky, but was excusable. Langley had given him leave to wear it, and there was no limitation as to times and seasons.

With his square shoulders and tanned face, he looked to the eyes of his sister—and, she fancied, to those of the rest also—far more manly than either Merton or Tunstall, though they were well-built and not so unfit as they had been. And somehow he talked rather differently. Flap liked both Merton and Tunstall—they were her brother's chums, which went for much. But they had rather a flirtatious manner of talking to the girls, which found small favour with Flap and her chums. Miss Clara might not mind it, for it gave her chances to snub them; but both Phyllis and Marjorie preferred Flip's franker, more boyish style.

"I don't believe he's very wicked," whispered little Molly Gray, in Flap's ear. "He may have my thicket if they want to play. We're only waiting time now."

"I don't think Miss Primrose is at all fond of Highcliffe," said Phyllis frankly. "There will be a row when she finds out about these practices. We can stand that, I dare say, and there's no harm in it, of course. But if we asked her to let us play you, the cat would be rather out of the bag, wouldn't it?"

"Flap! Are we going to play thith morning any more at all?" asked Molly Gray desperately. The small girl might offer her stick for Flip's use; but she knew that she would soon get another. Cliff House had just a few slackers, though not so many as Highcliffe.

"Oh, come on! You can come on my side, Flip, and Marjorie can have the other two."

"Compliment for us, Algy!" said Tunstall. He had never seen Flip Derwent play hockey, and fancied he might be quite as good as his chum at that game.

"We're not condemned to goalkeeping to-day, then, Miss Clara?" said Merton.

"No; but I think you had better play back together. Flap and her brother will want some stopping."

"Clara, are we allowed to arrange our own side, or is it really necessary that you should do it for us?" asked Phyllis.

For Clara was on the same side as Flap, while Phyllis figured on Marjorie's. Before Flap's coming Phyllis and Marjorie had usually been on opposite sides. But now, if the game was to be at all even, they had to play together. Where they had been Nos. 1 and 2, with little to choose between them, they were now Nos. 2 and 3. And they did not mind. For there was no swank about Flap.

Clara noticed that her hint had been taken. Tunstall and Merton were sent to play back. Flap gave up her place at centre-forward to her brother, and moved over to outside-right, with Miss Clara inside.

Flip bullied off with Phyllis. The ball went from his stick straight to his sister; it was almost as if there was magic in it. Phyllis thought. For she was very quick, and he could only have been down the fraction of a second before her, yet the pass was as clean and powerful as though there was nothing to hamper or flurry him.

Then Flap got away down the outer line. She ran like a deer. Her brother kept pace with her in the centre easily. Past two of Marjorie's side she flashed, then middled beautifully just as Flip reached the circle. He took the ball on his stick, and juggled it past Tunstall as easily as could be. Merton rushed in and swiped; but he hit only empty air. The ball had been twisted between his feet, and Flip whipped round him, and shot a goal at once.

"My hat!" gasped Merton.

"He's a giddy marvel!" said Tunstall.

"Algy, I vote we accept Miss Trevlyn's challenge, even if we can only raise six men! The girls couldn't begin to stop this chap!"

"Oh, couldn't we?" snapped Miss Clara. "It does not follow that because you can't we are equally helpless, you know."

"You haven't forgotten the way to send her across, Flap," said Flip.

"And you haven't forgotten your hockey, either, Flap. Oh, I wish you would come and play every day!"

"So do I!" said Phyllis Howell heartily.

"We should improve a bit then, I'm sure."

"They never said such things to us, Tun!" groaned Merton.

"They ain't grateful—that's what's the matter with them," replied Tunstall. "But we won't let the boulder through so easily next time, Algy, dear boy!"

The two played up for all they were worth, and won applause at times. But it was easy to see that they were not in the same class as their chum. Flip was one of those born athletes who seem to pick up all games without trouble.

"We've never had a better game," said Marjorie, when the time came to stop.

"Won't you please come again?"

"Oh, Marjorie! What about Miss Primrose?" gibed Clara.

"Well, I forgot her entirely. Anyway, it won't make it any worse for us if—if Flap's brother—"

"All his friends call him Flip," put in Flap.

"Mine call me Algy," said Merton meditatively.

"Flip, then," said Marjorie, with a rosy flush. "Perhaps she wouldn't mind quite so much. Tunstall and Merton aren't—well, they aren't anybody's brothers, you see."

"Poor us, Tun!" sighed Merton.

"I'll come again all serene—I'd like to," answered Flap. "But I can't cut footer often, you know."

"Talking about brothers, Marjorie, there's that brother of yours looking over the hedge," said Clara. "And that odious, fat Bunter with him, I declare!"

Hazel and Bunter had finished their task. It was Bunter who had lowered the cage over the Cliff House garden-wall, bunched up by Hazel. And Hazel thought it was Bunter's fault that in the lowering the catch came unfastened, and that Cocky walked out directly it reached the ground.

"You clumsy idiot!" he snarled, when Bunter told him.

"Well, it don't really matter," replied the Owl. "Tain't our bird. What's the odds if it does get lost?"

Now, Master Gittins had been sent back to Courtfield, and Bunter had insisted on stopping to look at the hockey practice.

Hazel felt uneasy. He would rather have cleared out without letting any of the girls know he had been near. The sight of Flip did not tend to reassure him. But he dared not go and leave Bunter there, for the Owl's tongue was an unruly member.

"Wonder what Bob Cherry and Wharton would say to this?" grinned Bunter.

"What's it to do with them?" snapped Hazel.

"Oh, really, Hazel, everyone knows they're both gone on your sister!"

"Rats! Marjorie ain't that sort. They are her friends, that's all. Come on, Bunter, or we'll be late for dinner!"

And across the field he shouted:

"Can't stop now, Marjorie! See you some day soon!"

### Where's Cocky?

"**H**ALLO! Where's old Cocky?" asked Merton, coming with Tunstall into Study No. 6 after dinner.

"Oh, I don't know, by gad! Perhaps Flip's taken the old boy for an airing," replied Tunstall lazily. "Tell you what, Algy. I'd a dashed sight sooner go over to Cliff House and get some more hockey this afternoon than trot down to the sands for this rotten silly fight bizney."

"So would I, dear boy," Merton returned. "Mustn't tell Pon so, though, by Jupiter! He'd say we were finkin'. Nor Flippy. We may pretend all we like, but we all know that we're bankin' on Flippy's bein' better than their best man to save us from a disgraceful hidin'."

"True, O King! Monson's nowt, as they say up North. Pon might be a fightin' man if it wasn't for the yellow streak in him. You an' I ain't much. But Flippy's all there."

"What's that about me?" asked Flip, coming in. "There go the fellows who are playing St. Jude's! Wish I was with them—and you two as well! It would be more sense than this scrapping dodge. I haven't any real quarrel with any of the Greyfriars outfit, though if Cherry wants his revenge he's welcome to it. And it's rather rot, this mixed scrapping bizney, when one comes to think it over."

"It was something like that we were sayin'," answered Tunstall. He leaned on Flip's shoulder, and the two watched Frank Courtenay and his men getting into the brake that was to take them over to St. Jude's.

"Where's old Cocky?" came Merton's lazy voice from the depths of a soft armchair.

Flip whipped round.

"By Jupiter, he's gone!"

"Looks like it," said Tunstall. "Unless some ass has hidden him for a lark."

But Cocky was certainly not in the room.

"Look here, you know, he's got to be found!" said Flip.

He took most things coolly, but he was not taking this coolly. And his chums, who admired his usual coolness, did not feel that he was wrong. There was a suspicion in the minds of both that neither cared to speak out.

They knew better than Flip how low Gadsby and Vavasour could descend. And they had more idea than he had how much Gadsby and Vavasour hated him. Merton and Tunstall thought they saw the hands of those two in this.

"Let's go an' look for him," suggested Tunstall. "I fancy he must be in one of the studies."

But, of course, he was not. Most of the studies were untenanted. The two conspirators had naturally taken good care to keep out of the way.

Box-rooms and dormitories were searched. Merton even put his head into Mr. Mobbs' study, but withdrew it hastily, with some lame excuse, when he saw that the master was in.

If his chums had taken the disappearance lightly Flip would have fallen out with them. But they did not. Yet he had as yet no notion why they looked so serious. They were fond of Cocky, of course, but not as he was.

What worried Tunstall and Merton was the suspicion that there might be worse behind. When Cocky was found, it might be with his poor old neck wrung and his free flow of speech stilled for ever.

They would regret Cocky, but they would regret still more the trouble that would follow such a discovery. When it came to a pinch Pon would not throw over Gadsby and Vavasour, and Merton and Tunstall were not sure that they had the resolution to throw over Pon. And there must be a break between Pon and Flip Derwent if Pon clung to those two cads.

There would be a place for Flip among the other section of the Form. Courtenay and the Caterpillar would welcome him. But it was not so certain that they would welcome his chums; and the two were not sure that they wanted to go over. It would seem like desertion.

"He's nowhere here," said Flip. "The only thing to do seems to find out who's meddled with him."

"Isn't that rather wastin' time at the present stage of affairs?" asked Tunstall. "Seems to me that the old chap himself matters more than the mystery."

"I've been thinkin', by Jupiter!" said Merton.

"Did it hurt?" inquired Tunstall sympathetically.

But Merton had been thinking to some purpose.

He remembered Hazel's visit, and the cat-party in No. 6, and the tiff between Hazel and Flip. And he remembered that Hazel had shown up at Cliff House between morning classes and dinner.

It seemed to him possible that Hazel had had a hand in this. Gadsby and Vavasour were funks, and Gadsby at least had more than his share of cunning. It would be like them to use Hazel as a tool; rather unlike them to risk as much as they must risk by making away with the bird once for all. Their object in sending Cocky to Cliff House was not very evident to Merton; but, for that matter, the whole notion was hazy in his mind.

Worth looking into, though, he thought. For they were at a standstill as things were.

"I've a sort of a kind of idea that Cliff House wouldn't be a bad place to look for him," he said.

"Do you know anything, Algy?" rapped out Flip.

"No. 'Pon my soul, old man, I don't! I'd tell you straight out if I did, by Jupiter! Tun an' I are with you in this, whatever happens. Cocky's our friend, too, you know."

Tunstall had never heard Merton speak with so much feeling before. He was just a trifle surprised to find that the feeling found an echo in him.

"Algy's right," he said. "An' we can't afford to throw away the result of the first thinkin' Algy's been known to do in all his little puff. Come along, old scout!"

Monson minor met them as they went downstairs.

"What about the giddy light, you fellows?" he said. "We shall have to be startin' soon, you know. Pon was askin' where you were."

"Fight he hanged!" said Flip; and he pushed past him.

Tunstall and Merton followed, leaving Monson agape.

He went to Pon at once, of course. But by the time he had found the leader of the nuts the three had got out their bikes and ridden away.

Merton was glad that Flip asked no questions on the way. He did not want to tell about his suspicions.

They dismounted near Cliff House.

"It don't seem very likely," said Flip doubtfully. "Who'd bring old Cocky here?"

Neither of his chums answered that.

"There's no one in the hockey-field," said Tunstall. "The girls have a halfer to-day, of course. I suppose they've been trotted out for a giddy promenade, two by two, like the animals goin' into the Ark, by gad!"

"Or perhaps they're kept in for playin' hockey with low Highlife chaps," suggested Merton, with a faint grin.

"Give me a bunk up the wall, will you?" said Flip.

The spot he chose was almost exactly where Bunter had been bunked up by Hazel-dene.

"My word!" he said, seated astride on the top of the wall. "I say, you fellows—I say! The cage is here, but old Cocky ain't!"

"Bunk me up, Tun!" said Merton, in haste.

"No; you bunk me!"

"Don't be such a dashed idiot! Why, he's gone!"

Flip had dropped inside.

"Goin' after him?" asked Tunstall.

"Not likely! Yes, I will, by Jupiter!"

Merton was very much in earnest, that

was plain. So was Tunstall, for that matter, but he was less excited.

"You're a hero, Algy!" he said. "Personally, I'm not goin' to risk Miss Primrose—too much like puttin' one's napper into the dashed lion's jaws for me. But go on if you feel like it."

"Won't be much good, I'm afraid. Oh, by Jupiter, Flippy's copped!"

It was even so. The voice of Miss Penelope Primrose, headmistress of Cliff House, was heard:

"Boy, what are you doing there? What does this impertinent intrusion mean?"

Flip had no chance to bolt. But he had really no desire to bolt. The clearing up of the mystery and the recovery of Cocky were the things which seemed to him to matter.

He came forward with the cage in one hand. He could not raise his cap, for, in his haste, he had forgotten it.

"I'm very sorry, ma'am," he said. "I suppose I ought to have come round by the gate."

"You ought not to have come in at all!" replied Miss Primrose severely. "Boys are not allowed here, unless by special invitation."

She was looking at him hard. Flip met her eyes frankly.

Miss Primrose was puzzled. The Highlife cap might have given her a clue had Flip been wearing it.

"I think I ought to know you," said the lady.

"I don't think you do, ma'am," replied Flip. "But people say I'm like my sister. Perhaps that's it."

"Why, of course!" said Miss Primrose. "Your name is Derwent. Is that not so?"

From the very manner in which she spoke the name it was easy for Flip to guess that Flap had found a place in Miss Primrose's heart.

He was not at all surprised. It would have been a stony-hearted person who had failed to like Flap.

"And what are you doing here with that cage, Derwent?"

"It was in the garden. It's our cockatoo's cage—Flap's—my sister's. I mean—and mine. Perhaps Flap has told you all about Cocky? Some rot—somebody has taken him out of my study and the cage has been put over your wall. But Cocky's gone!"

"Do not cry, my dear boy!" said Miss Primrose kindly; and Flip heard Merton snigger.

"I wasn't going to, ma'am," he said.

"Perhaps the bird is still in the garden," suggested Miss Primrose.

"I don't fancy so," replied Flip, looking round. "But I'll call him, if you don't mind. He's sure to answer if he's near. Catching him may be another pair of boo—I mean, quite a different thing."

"Call him, by all means," said Miss Primrose graciously.

"Cocky! Cocky, old boy!" called Flip.

But there was no answer.

"I shall have to look for him somewhere else," said Flip. "I think it's jolly—no end—oh, I mean very kind of you to overlook my getting in over the wall, Miss Primrose!"

"We will say no more about that, Derwent. But next time you pay a visit, do not forget that there is a gate. You must come and see your sister before long, and you may bring one or two of your friends with you—nice, quiet boys, I hope and trust. Good-bye, and I hope most sincerely that you will find your bird!"

Merton and Tunstall greeted Flip with broad grins.

"Tamed the dragon, by Jupiter!" said Merton. "Flippy, old son, you're a wonder!"

"I'm not. But I think I can claim to be a dashed nice, quiet boy," said Tunstall.

"She's no more a dragon than you are," answered Flip. "I reckon she's bonza, though she may look a bit of an old wowzer. But you and Merton will have to behave like n.q.b.'s when I take you along—if I ever go, that is."

"If you ever go! If—oh, dash it, Flippy!" said Merton.

"Well, I ain't so keen on girls' company as you chaps are," Flip said. "My sister's all right, and one or two of the others seem real dinkum; but I bar a crowd. Come along and look for Cocky; that's what matters!"

They went, and it was not till an hour later that any one of the three gave as much as a thought to the fight on the sands.

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