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THE HIDDEN HOARD!

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



PEPPER v. BAGGY!

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THE HIDDEN HOARD!

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

By
**MARTIN
CLIFFORD.**

CHAPTER 1.

The Wrong Man.

"PEPPAH, bai Jove!"
Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was standing at the window of Study No. 6, looking out into the quadrangle, when he made that remark.

Jack Blake looked up from his sausages and chips.

It was tea-time in Study No. 6, and for once in a way plenty reigned in that celebrated apartment of the School House at St. Jim's.

"Pass it," said Blake.

"Eh?"

"Didn't you say pepper?"

"Yaas, dear boy."

"I thought we were out of it," remarked Blake. "But if you've got any, pass it."

"Weally, Blake—"

"Why can't you pass it, instead of burbling?" asked Herries. "I'd like some pepper."

"Weally, Herries—"

"What's the matter with the image?" Digby inquired of space.

"I wufuse to be alluded to as an image, Dig!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's three chums stared at him.

"If you've got any pepper," said Blake, "why can't you produce it? Are you hoarding pepper?"

"You uttah ass! I was not alludin' to peppah, but to Peppah."

Naturally, Blake & Co. could not be aware that Gussy's second "Pepper" commenced with a capital letter. They stared the harder. Herries tapped his forehead in a significant way.

"I always feared this," said Blake soberly. "Poor old Gussy! This is what comes of having a really artistic brain; it never works for long."

"Weally, you ass—"

"Poor old chap!" said Digby. "I believe they have rather short rations in asylums now. We must try to send you some parcels when you're taken away, Gussy."

"If you are insinuat' that there is anythin' w'ong with my b'wain, Dig, I hurl back the insinuation with fearful scorn!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus warmly. "It passes my comprehension that you fellows cannot understand a simple remark. I said I was not alludin' to peppah, but to Peppah, and I wepeat that I was alludin' to Peppah."

"Fairly off it!" said Blake, with a sigh. "I've seen this coming on. Now, let's have it straight. You were not alluding to pepper—"

"Certainly not."

"But to pepper?"

"Yaas."

"Don't let him get near the bread-knife," said Digby anxiously.

"Hold on," said Blake thoughtfully. "Perhaps it's a joke. Are you joking, Gussy?"

"Not at all."

"You're sure?"

"Of course I am suah, you uttah ass!"

shouted Arthur Augustus. "There is nothin' to joke about in Mr. Peppah comin' heah that I am suah of."

"Mr. Pepper!" ejaculated Blake.

"Yaas. I just spotted him c'wossin' the quadwangle."

"Oh! Then you're not potty, after all?"

"I wufuse to answah that question, Blake. I w'egard it as bein' beneath my dig to do so."

"The thumping ass is talking about old Pepper of Rylcombe, I suppose," remarked Blake. "What the dickens is the old Johnny coming here for?"

The juniors joined Arthur Augustus at the window. They were now able to see the "Pepper" to whom the swell of the School House had alluded.

Mr. Erasmus Zachariah Pepper, of Rylcombe, was crossing from the gates, and heading for the School House.

The shabby, dusty old gentleman was evidently visiting St. Jim's on business, though what his business there could be was a mystery.

"Old huns!" remarked Herries. "He's looking up here."

Mr. Pepper caught sight of the four faces at the window, and took off his battered old hat in salute with a grin.

The chums of Study No. 6 eyed him rather grimly. Erasmus Zachariah Pepper was not a persona grata at St. Jim's. The village miser was not, in fact, popular anywhere. The fellows had not forgotten how Mr. Pepper had hoarded gold in the storehouse under his barn, and had been found out by Grundy of the Shell, and forced to pay in his gold at the local bank, and take currency notes in exchange. St. Jim's was a patriotic school, and the fellows did not approve of hoarders, whether of gold or of food.

"What on earth does he want?" grunted Herries. "He's no bizney here."

"Pewwaps he is comin' about the went of the barn," remarked Arthur Augustus thoughtfully. "You wemembar the old boundah let it twice ovah, to Tom Mewwy and Gwunday, and pewwaps one of them has wufused to pay. He has also let the c'ellah to two otah fellows, and pewwaps they have wufused to pay, too."

"Enterprising chap, old Pepper," grinned Blake. "But he can't come here collectin' four rents for the same place. I think my squirt would reach him from this window, when he gets a little nearer the door."

"Bai Jove! Wouldn't that be wathah wude to a visitah, Blake?"

"He's not my visitor, ass! I don't owe him any rent."

"We are all w'espensible for the barn, Blake, as it is the meetin'-place of the St. Jim's Parliament, and we are m'embahs."

"Bow-wow!"

Jack Blake jumped for his squirt. It was a large squirt, and had seen service in many a row with the New House fellows. Blake hastily filled it with

water, adding a quantity of ink to give it a tone.

Then he ran back to the window.

Arthur Augustus shook his head doubtfully. He was not at all sure that politeness to a visitor allowed ink to be squirted over him.

But Blake and Herries and Digby had no doubts. Perhaps they did not think that Mr. Pepper was entitled to any politeness. Anyway, they were not so keen on politeness as their noble study-mate.

Mr. Pepper had nearly reached the house by this time.

"Hallo, Pepper!" called out Blake.

Mr. Pepper looked up again.

"Afternoon, young gents!" he called back.

"Step this way a minute, will you?"

Mr. Pepper looked rather surprised at that request, but he came towards the window. It was far above him, but as he stood, with upturned face, he offered a very fair target.

"Now, then, right on the wicket!" murmured Herries. "We'll teach him to come here rent-collecting."

"Go for his boko!" whispered Dig.

Jack Blake aimed at Mr. Pepper's somewhat prominent "boko."

It is possible that Mr. Pepper had some suspicion. Certainly, the moment the squirt appeared over the window-sill, Mr. Pepper jumped back with the alacrity of a kangaroo. But every bullet is said to have its billet, and Jack Blake's squirtful of inky water was not wasted, for Kildare of the Sixth came striding along the path under the windows at the moment. He appeared in view just as Blake discharged the squirt, and he came exactly under the shower at exactly the right moment.

"Haw, haw, haw!" roared Mr. Pepper.

And the old gentleman toddled on to the School House steps, apparently very much amused.

Kildare did not seem amused.

He jumped clear of the ground, in his amazement at getting that sudden shower from above, and then he stared upward, with a furious face that had a complexion like unto a zebra.

Blake was still leaning over the sill, frozen with horror. Herries and Dig, with more presence of mind, had dodged back out of sight. Arthur Augustus, who was not looking out just then, inquired gently:

"Did you catch him, dear boy?"

"Ow!" gasped Blake.

"You young rascal!" roared Kildare.

"Oh!"

"You—you—you've squirted me!" roared the captain of St. Jim's. "By Jove, I—I—I—I—oh!"

"Sorry!" stammered Blake. "I—I—I—"

"Come to my study, Blake!"

Kildare, mopping his face furiously with his handkerchief, strode into the House. Blake pitched away his squirt. He felt like jumping on it.

"Bai Jove! Have you missed him, Blake?" asked the surprised Gussy.

"I jolly well wish I had!"

"Weally, Blake, I am glad to see that you are sowwy for playin' this twick on a visitab!"

"You howling ass!" yelled Blake. "I got Kildare instead of Pepper."

"Gweat Scott!"

"Kildare's waxy, I suppose?" murmured Dig.

"Oh, no, he looked quite pleased," said Blake, with heavy sarcasm. "He's called me to go to his study—to thank me, of course."

"Bai Jove! Weally, Blake, pewpaws this will be a lesson to you about playin' twicks, so pewpaws it is all for the best!"

Possibly Arthur Augustus intended that observation to be consoling. Blake did not seem to find it consoling. He made a rush at the cheerful Gussy, and grasped him round the neck.

"Bai Jove!" yelled Arthur Augustus.

"Welease me, you utter wuffian—Ow!"

Bump!

Arthur Augustus sat down on the hearthrug with a concussion that made the dust rise from it. Blake left him there, and went to keep his appointment with Kildare of the Sixth.

CHAPTER 2.

Very Suspicious Circumstances.

"TOM MERRY!"

Grundy of the Shell looked into Tom Merry's study, where the Terrible Three were at tea.

"Hallo!" said Tom cheerily.

"Trot in, dear boy!" said Monty Lowther cordially. "I want you to tell us something about football."

"Do!" said Manners.

Grundy looked pleased, and surprised. "I'm glad you've found out that you've got something to learn from me about footer!" he exclaimed.

"Oh, not exactly that," explained Lowther. "I'm doing my comic column for the 'Weekly'—"

"What?"

"And if you'd tell me some of your views on footer, it would help me out."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I didn't come here to hear silly asses making silly jokes!" roared Grundy, no longer looking pleased. "You're wanted, Tom Merry. Old Pepper's in my study, and he wants to see you at the same time."

"Bother old Pepper!" answered the captain of the Shell. "Tell him I'm eating war bread and kippers, and he'd better go and eat coke."

"It's because you're a tenant of his barn," explained Grundy. "The old donkey has something to say to all his tenants. You'd better come. I'm calling for Racke and Cardew, too."

"What a merry lot of tenants for one barn!" grinned Monty Lowther. "I wonder he hasn't let it to all the members of the St. Jim's Parliament, one after another. I advise you to take the poker to him, and make him lower the rent, now you've got him in your study."

"That ain't a bad idea for you, Lowther," admitted Grundy. "I'll think about that. You'd better come along, Merry. If the old ass wants to terminate the tenancy, we shall have to talk to him pretty plain."

"Oh, all right!"

Grundy went along the passage to Racke's study. Racke of the Shell was also one of the enterprising Mr. Pepper's tenants.

There was an atmosphere of smoke in Racke's study when Grundy opened the door. Racke and Crooke were finishing their tea with cigarettes—a delightful little way they had.

Grundy gave a scornful snort.

"Rotters!" was his first remark. Grundy had strong views about the



Kildare is ink-autious!
(See Chapter 1.)

black sheep of St. Jim's, and he never hesitated to express them plainly.

"Hallo, what's bitin' you?" yawned Aubrey Racke.

"Put that fag away!" said Grundy, in his most dictatorial tone.

"Eh?"

"Put it away!"

"Mind your own business, confound you!" snapped Racke.

"This is my business," said Grundy loftily. "As a leading member of the Shell I don't approve of this kind of thing, and I don't allow it."

"You cheeky ass!"

Grundy came into the study with a warlike look. Racke looked at him furiously, but he threw his cigarette into the grate. Crooke followed his example. Certain it was that Grundy was a high-handed youth, and that he had no right whatever to interfere in Racke's study. But having assumed right, he meant to have his way; and neither of the black sheep felt inclined to stand up to Grundy's celebrated four-point-seven punch.

"That's better!" snorted Grundy. "You're a worm, Racke!"

"Oh, go an' eat coke!" snarled Racke.

"What sort of an example are you setting to the fags?" demanded Grundy.

"Blow the fags!"

"I'm disgusted with you!" said Grundy crushingly. Grundy evidently considered that his disgust was enough to crush anybody. Racke and Crooke looked as if they could bear it, however.

"What do you want here?" growled Crooke. "Nobody asked you into this study."

"Racke's wanted. Come along, Racke!"

"Raitlon, or the Head?" asked Racke in some alarm. There were certain drawbacks in being a merry blade at St. Jim's. It was always possible that the chopper would come down.

"Neither. Old Pepper's in my study, and he wants to see you about the barn."

"Oh, tell him to go and hang himself!"

"You're to come!"

"Well, I won't come!"

"I've told Pepper I'd bring you."

"Tell him you bit off more than you could chew, then."

"We'll see about that!" answered Grundy, making a grasp at Aubrey Racke, who jumped promptly out of the way.

"Oh, don't play the goat!" howled Racke. "I don't mind going."

"Get along, then!"

Racke, with a savage scowl, got along. Grundy was really a very difficult fellow to argue with.

George Alfred Grundy followed him into the passage, and went along to No. 9 in the Fourth, where he found Levison and Clive and Cardew. He found them discussing the coming cricket season. Cardew's chums were urging him to take up cricket in earnest this season; and the slacker of the Fourth was yawning portentously over the mere suggestion.

"You're wanted, Cardew," announced Grundy.

"Thank goodness!" said Cardew, jumping up at once. "I'll come, anywhere you like."

"Fathind!" grunted Clive.

"Ass!" said Levison.

"A wily kind of you to call for me, Grundy. If there's one thing worse than footer jaw it's cricket jaw. Where are we going to—call on your Uncle Grundy, or to see the soldiers—"

"You're coming to my study," answered Grundy.

"A merry little party—what?"

"Old Pepper."

"Oh, my hat! What does he want?"

"Come along and see."

Ralph Reckless Cardew hesitated. But there was more cricket jaw for him if he stayed in No. 9, so he decided to follow Grundy.

The Shell fellow and the Fourth.

Former entered Grundy's study together. Tom Merry and Racke were already there. Mr. Pepper was reposing in the armchair, and Wilkins and Gunn, Grundy's studymates, were finishing their tea, which the arrival of the visitor had interrupted—or, rather, had not interrupted.

"Well, here we all are," said Tom Merry. "Now, perhaps, you'll get to business, Mr. Pepper."

"Certainly, Master Merry. It's about the barn."

Mr. Pepper's tenants regarded him curiously.

The village miser had already done good business with that barn. Having let it to Tom Merry, as a meeting place for the St. Jim's Junior Parliament, he had to let it over again to Grundy for the same purpose. There was a storehouse under the barn, which was naturally supposed to go with the building; but, having received an offer from Racke, Mr. Pepper had let it to him; and, having received another offer from Cardew, Mr. Pepper had let it to him also. Whether all these numerous tenancies were quite legal was a question which did not appear to bother Erasmus Zachariah Pepper at all.

The juniors suspected that he had come to tell them that the barn was now let to somebody else as well, and in that case Mr. Pepper was nicely placed for a ragging, which his tenants were prepared to give him.

"Now, about that barn?" said Mr. Pepper, blinking at the juniors. "We've got to make some new arrangements."

"Rats!" said Grundy.

"The barn itself I don't want," pursued Mr. Pepper, unheeding. "So long as you two young gentlemen pay the rent promptly it's yours. But it's understood that the storehouse don't go with the barn."

"It ought to," said Tom Merry. "But we don't want it."

"If I wanted it," said Grundy, "I should insist on having it. But I don't want it. Keep it, and be blowed!"

"All right, so far," said Mr. Pepper. "But it's understood that you hold your meetings in the barn, without going into the cellar."

"We don't want to go into the cellar," answered Tom Merry impatiently. "What on earth are you driving at, Mr. Pepper?"

"I reserve the right to go into the cellar if I want to, as tenant of the barn," declared Grundy. "Still, I don't want to, not that I know of."

"That's settled, then. Now, you young gents hired the cellar of me—I mean that splendid, well-furnished storehouse," said Mr. Pepper, blinking at Racke and Cardew.

"My dear man, I relinquish my tenancy on the spot!" said Cardew, with a laugh. "I only wanted your blessed cellar to kick up a row while the Parliament was meetin' in the barn. When they got into the cellar by movin' a plank in the floor that game was up," Mr. Pepper grinned.

"You'll give me back the key, then?" "Yaas, if I can find it," said Cardew carelessly.

"If you can't find it, Master Cardew, I shall charge you ten shillings for that key."

"Charge away, old scout! But if you won't be happy till you get it, you're booked for a miserable existence."

And with that Ralph Cardew strolled out of the study. He had had enough of Mr. Pepper.

Racke broke in angrily.

"Look here, what do you want with me, Pepper? I'm wasting time."

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"Sorry to take up your time, sir," said Mr. Pepper suavely. "I want the key of the storehouse that I let you, as the tenancy ends to-day."

Racke looked obstinate. He had hired that cellar as a secret meeting-place for his smoky and sporty friends, and he did not feel inclined to give it up.

"The tenancy doesn't end," he answered. "I'm ready to pay the rent."

"But I want the cellar, Master Racke."

"You can't have it."

"Must!"

"Rats!"

"Racke's within his rights," said Grundy. "You've no right to stop the tenancy in this way, Pepper. I shan't allow it."

"Hear, hear!" murmured Wilkins, with a wink at Gunn. Grundy's chums liked to see him on the high horse. They found him entertaining at such times.

"I must have the cellar, Master Racke," said Mr. Pepper calmly, without heeding Grundy, though he had one eye on that youth. "I want to use it for storing purposes."

"More likely hoarding!" sneered Racke.

"Shouldn't wonder," said Grundy. "You hoarded gold in that cellar, Pepper, you know you did, and you had to give it up. I had a hand in that; in fact, it was my work from start to finish. I regarded it as a patriotic duty to make you hand it over. I dare say you didn't know that."

Mr. Pepper gave him a very curious look.

"Yes; I knew that, Master Grundy," he said. "I've heard talk about that—I know all about it. You were very sharp in jumping into a matter that didn't concern you, Master Grundy!"

"It did concern me, as a patriot," said Grundy loftily. "I don't want to hurt your feelings, Mr. Pepper, or to say anything personal; but I must say that you are a toad, and I despise you."

"My feelings ain't easily hurt," answered Mr. Pepper cheerfully. "Never you mind my feelings, Master Grundy. Now, Master Racke, will you have the kindness to hand me the key of that cellar?"

"No, I won't!"

"No, don't!" said Grundy.

"Going into that cellar," said Mr. Pepper calmly, "I found it smelling of smoke. I found cigarettes and playing-cards there."

Racke started.

"I should be sorry to get any young gent into trouble by reporting his goings-on to his headmaster," pursued Mr. Pepper. "But I can't allow these goings-on in my barn. I dare say it comes under the Defence of the Realm Act, if you only knew. Will you give me that key, Master Racke?"

Amber Racke bit his lip hard, and drew a key from his pocket. He flung it on the floor before Mr. Pepper, and he stalked out of the study. The old fellow's threat had been quite enough for this festive Aubrey.

Mr. Pepper picked up the key smilingly, and disposed it somewhere in his frowsy garments. He rose to his feet.

"Well, is that all?" demanded Tom Merry.

"That's all, sir."

"Hold on, said Grundy, eyeing Mr. Pepper very suspiciously. "What do you want that cellar for so badly all of a sudden, Mr. Pepper?"

"Storing purposes, sir."

"What are you going to store?"

"Oh, things, and other things," said Mr. Pepper vaguely.

Mr. Pepper crossed to the door, taking up his ancient hat.

"Good evening to you, young gentlemen," he said suavely.

"If you're going to hoard food in that cellar—" began Grundy.

Mr. Pepper started.

"Oh, really, sir! What ever put such an idea into your head?" he exclaimed.

"It looks suspicious to me."

"Dear me! I assure you that you are mistaken," said Mr. Pepper anxiously.

"Don't think anything of the kind. It's wrong—quite wrong!"

"Well, what are you going to store, then?" demanded Grundy.

Mr. Pepper hesitated for a moment.

"Some—some goods," he stammered at last. "I—I'm going in for—for whole-sale drapery, and I'm going to store dry goods there."

And with that Mr. Pepper took a hurried departure. The juniors fairly blinked at him as he went. His explanation was so utterly incredible that it was hard to surmise that the other fellows shared Grundy's suspicions at once.

"Well, my hat!" ejaculated Tom Merry.

The captain of the Shell whistled as he left the study. If ever a man had shown himself up as a self-confessed hoarder, Mr. Pepper had. Grundy knitted his brows, and glanced at his chums.

"What do you think of that?" he asked.

"Pretty plain," said Wilkins.

"Food-hoarding, I suppose," said Gunn with a nod.

"Plain as anything," assented Grundy.

"Only"—Wilkins looked very thoughtful—"if the old rascal's going to hoard food in that cellar, it's rather odd that he should come here and tell us so."

"He hasn't told us so. I got on to it, that's all—owing to my unusual penetration," explained Grundy.

"Oh!" exclaimed Wilkins and Gunn together.

"Some fellows are keen and penetrating," said Grundy. "Some are not. It happens to be. That's all!"

"Oh!"

"And I'm jolly well going to look into this!" announced George Alfred.

"Taint our business," suggested Gunn.

"I'm making it my business!"

After that there was nothing to be said. George Alfred's tone was final. So Wilkins and Gunn said nothing, but went on with their tea.

CHAPTER 3.

The Only Way.

"I HAVE weccived a shock!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy confessed that to the Terrible Three a couple of days after Mr. Pepper's visit to St. Jim's.

Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther were adorning the School of House steps with their persons when D'Arcy of the Fourth joined them.

There was a very severe expression upon the noble brow of Arthur Augustus. Something or other had evidently failed to come up to his high standard, and he was shocked, though, like Hamlet's pater, he had a countenance more of sorrow than of anger.

"You have received a shock!" queried Monty Lowther.

"Yaas."

"Been touching one of Glyn's batteries?"

"I was not alludin' to that kind of shock, Lowthab. I have weccived a mowal shock."

"That's better than a physical shock," remarked Manners comfortingly.

"You get over it easier."

"But who's the offender?" inquired Tom Merry gravely.

"Give us his name,

"I am shocked at you, Mr. Peppah!" "Fancy that!" answered Mr. Pepper, unmoved.

"At a time when we are at death-grips with a faithful enemy, you are helpin' to weaken our defences," said the swell of St. Jim's, with thrilling indignation. "The result of the wah depends on food. You are awash of that, sir?"

"It depends on such a lot of things, sir," said Mr. Pepper blandly. "The number of things we've been told it depends on are amazin'. Fashions change, don't they?"

"If we are starved out, Mr. Pepper, we lose the war!"

"Bless my soul!" said Mr. Pepper. "A certain numbah of people wequah a certain amount of food," continued Arthur Augustus. "If they do not get it, they suffah from famine."

"That's what education does for a feller," said Mr. Pepper enthusiastically. "I suppose, sir, you've worked that out with the help of mathematics, and algebra, and such."

The Terrible Three grinned. But Arthur Augustus did not condescend to smile. He was in deadly earnest.

"Pway do not be frivolous, Mr. Peppah! It is only too clear that you are hoardin' food in that cellah. Who will be the use of it to you if we are beaten by the Huns? Don't you understand that in war-time we are all bound to stand or fall together?"

"Yes, I've seen that in the newspapers."

"It is true, although it has appeahed in the newspapers, Mr. Peppah. Your conduct is extremely wepwehensible, sir!"

Mr. Pepper fanned himself with his red handkerchief.

"I have no intention, sir, of callin' in at the police-station and denouncin' you," said Arthur Augustus sternly. "I wufuse to spy into your cellah, or to act the part of an informah. But I am bound to point out to you, Mr. Peppah, that you are actin' like a sneakin' pwo-German!"

"Awful!" murmured Mr. Pepper. "You are pleased to regard the match as a joke, sir?"

"Wasn't you jokin', Master D'Arcy?"

"Certainly not."

"My mistake," said Mr. Pepper.

"There is nothin' whatever to gwin at, you fellows! Mr. Peppah, I appeal to you—to your bettah nature as a Bwiton. Give us this sneakin' hoard of food, and take your chance with the west. Be a man, sir!"

"I was thinkin', Master D'Arcy—" "You were thinkin' of deim' as I advise?"

"Nunno! I was thinking that if you'd get out of the way I'd get along with this barrow. I've got to get it to the barn before dark."

"I twust, Mr. Peppah, that you will not persist in hoardin' food in that barn. I twust you will wheel this barrow to the Food Office in Wylcombe."

"Can't be done, sir."

"Then I must point out, Mr. Peppah, that your unpatriotic conduct is quite well known. You will be exposed and denounced."

"You ain't the feller to go and tell tales about a man, Master D'Arcy," said Mr. Pepper, shaking his head.

"Certainly not! But there are othahs."

"Master Grundy, perhaps?" asked Mr. Pepper, with a peculiar glimmer in his eyes.

"I will not mention any names, sir; but I assuah you that you are in dangah of bein' denounced, and I entweat you to do the straight thing while you have a chance. What waight have you to all

this stuff while people are waitin' in queues for their allowances?"

"It's mine," said Mr. Pepper. "I suppose the rights of property ain't abolished during the war, are they?"

"Food is national pwoaperty in wah-time, sir. It is against the law, and waightly so, for one man to have more than he needs, while othahs go short."

"I ain't giving any of this away," said Mr. Pepper obstinately.

"It will be taken away from you if Gwunday denounces you."

Mr. Pepper sniffed. "You tell Master Grundy to mind his own business," he said. "Master Grundy's meddled in my business once. That's enough."

"Then you wufuse to do the wight thing, Mr. Peppah?"

"Would you mind standing out of the way, sir?" asked Mr. Pepper politely.

"I wufuse— Oh, cwumbs!"

Mr. Pepper started the handcart suddenly.

As Arthur Augustus was standing directly in front of it, it smote him on the trousers as it lurched forward. The swell of St. Jim's sat down with startling suddenness. There was a puddle just behind him, as perhaps the wicked Mr. Pepper knew.

"Splash!"

"Bless my heart!" exclaimed Mr. Pepper. "You're wet, sir."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, cwumbs! Oh, cwikey!"

"Haw, haw, haw!"

Tom Merry & Co. rushed to drag Arthur Augustus out of the puddle. The state of Gussy's beautiful trousers was shocking.

"Oh, bai Jove!" gasped D'Arcy.

"Ho, the wottah! You did that on purpose, you bowwid wottah!"

"I asked you to get out of the way, sir," said Mr. Pepper. "A man couldn't do more than that."

"Gwoogh! Am I vewy mudday, Tom Mewwy?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tom. "Very."

"Bai Jove! If you were not old enough to be my gwandfathah, Mr. Peppah, I would give you a faithful thwashin'!" shouted Arthur Augustus.

"Am I to wheel this barrow over you?" asked Mr. Pepper.

"You wottah—"

"You're calling me some nice names, sir! I'm thinking that I shall have to complain to your headmaster."

"Wats! Dr. Holmes would not deign to bandy words with a food-hoardah. Oh, cwumbs! the watah is soakin' my twousahs!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There is nothin' to cackle at, you asses! Pway lend me a hand to turn that barrow ovah!"

Arthur Augustus had come there with quite pacific intentions; but he was wrahy now. Mr. Pepper's better nature had not shown the faintest signs of its existence, if it did exist; and he had wickedly set Arthur Augustus down in a muddy puddle. He deserved to suffer for his manifold sins, and Tom Merry & Co. agreed.

The four juniors seized the handcart, while Mr. Pepper yelled protests, and pitched it over on its side.

The packages sprawled right and left. Among them, half a dozen 12-pound biscuit-tins came into view, and a whole array of tinned tins and jam-jars.

The juniors fairly gasped as they saw them.

"Bai Jove! That proves it!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "I weally think it is our duty to go to the police."

"Leave a man's things alone!" howled Mr. Pepper. "You clear off, you young vagabonds. There ain't nothing in those tins."

"How can you tell such faithful whoppahs, you howwid man?"

"Mind your own business!" Mr. Pepper snatched up a stick from the barrow.

"Now then, hands off, or I'll lay this about you!"

"We're not going to touch your rubbish," said Tom Merry disdainfully. "You wouldn't stop us, if we wanted to, you old hunk! You ought to be jolly well ashamed of yourself!"

"You clear off!"

"Come away, deah boys—that howwid wottah makes me sick," said D'Arcy.

"I am also vewy wet. Come away."

The juniors turned away, leaving Mr. Pepper angrily gathering up his parcels. But as they went the scowl faded from Mr. Pepper's face, and he grinned. For a food-hoarder, caught in the very act, he showed a remarkable absence of nervousness.

Tom Merry & Co. walked back to the school. The appeal to Mr. Pepper's better nature had been a hopeless failure. Indeed, the juniors were half-inclined to give information at the police-station of what they had seen. But they naturally shrink from playing the part of informer, though the place of a man exposed to be punished, it was a man who hoarded food in time of scarcity.

"The rotter won't dare to keep it, now it's been seen," remarked Manners. "Now he knows it's known, he won't dare to go on hoarding it. Dash it all, anybody might have seen the stuff! He seems to be more fool than rogue."

"I don't quite understand him," confessed Tom Merry. "He's more rogue than fool, I know that—but he's acting like a fool now. Unless—"

"Unless what?"

"He says there's nothing in the tins," said Tom. "A fellow who denounced a chap for having empty tins would look a pretty fool."

"But it was a whoppah, deah boy. Why should Peppah keep empty tins, and store them in the cellah, and lose the wout of the place doing so?"

"Yes, of course," agreed Tom. "But—but I can't understand that sly old rogue being such a fool, all the same. Why couldn't he store the stuff in his cottage, if he's hoardin'?"

"Afraid of its being found, of course."

"But it wasn't so likely to be found there, with nothing said, as it is now, after he's fairly taken St. Jim's into his confidence about it."

"Yaas, he is wemarkably weakless for a food-hoarder. Oh, deah—my twousahs are stickin' to me!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I am wet thwough. Bai Jove, that uttah old wottah is laughin' at us," exclaimed Arthur Augustus, glancing back.

"Do you think, Tom Mewwy, that a fellow would be justified in hittin' a man old enough to be his gwandfathah?"

"No, I don't," said Tom, laughing.

"Come on!"

And Arthur Augustus nobly refrained from vengeance, and the juniors returned to St. Jim's considerably puzzled by Mr. Pepper and his curious conduct. And Mr. Pepper wheeled away his hoard to the barn without molestation.

CHAPTER 5.

Cardew Obliges.

"CARDEW, old fellow!" Thus Baggy Trimble of the Fourth.

Cardew and Clive and Levison were all in No. 9, and Levison minor was there, too, getting some help from his major before prep. Baggy Trimble's fat face was thrust in at the doorway with quite a beseeching expression on it.

The thought of Mr. Pepper's hoard of food haunted Trimble of the Fourth. And the knowledge that Grundy was on the track of the food-hoarder alarmed him. Baggy would have been glad to confound that food hoard; but the local Food Office would not have benefited by the confiscation.

Racke of the Shell had given up his key to the cellar, the sporting club in that quarter being at an end. But Cardew still had a key, and Baggy Trimble was after the key. It was about the tenth time he had been after it, without success, so far.

Cardew elevated his eyebrows as Baggy addressed him. "Old fellow" from Baggy was not gratifying to the heir of Lord Reckness.

"Did you address me?" he asked, staring at the fat Fourth-Former.

"Yes, old chap."

"Would you mind leavin' out the 'old chaps' and the 'old fellows'?" asked Cardew, politely. "They offend my nerves."

Levison and Clive grinned, and Frank Levison burst into a chuckle. But Baggy Trimble was not rebuffed. Baggy was about as thin-skinned as a rhinoceros or a Prussian.

"Look here, you know, old scout," he said, as affectionately as ever, "considering that I voted for you the other day—"

"I stood you five bob for that, I think, and it was dear at the price," said Cardew.

"If you've got that key about you—"

"Anybody here got a cricket-stump?" asked Cardew.

"Look here, I want that key," said Trimble wrathfully. "I'm going to make sure that old Pepper's got a hoard, and then I'm going to give him up to—justice. I must make sure first, you know. Of course, I—I don't intend to touch any of the food myself. I—I wouldn't."

"I think one of you chaps might throw a book at him," said Cardew in a plaintive voice. "I don't want to get out of this armchair."

"If you don't give up that key, Cardew, it may be my duty to go to Mr. Ralston about it," said Trimble desperately. "I suspect you of being an accomplice in a food-hoarder, Cardew!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Get out, you fat toad!" growled Clive, without looking up from his work.

"I say, it looks true about old Pepper food-hoarding," remarked Frank Levison. "Wally and Reggie Manners saw him carting a barrow-load of stuff to the barn yesterday. Reggie says he saw treacle-tins among it, and boxes of biscuits."

"It's jolly queer," remarked Levison major. "I saw him at the same game of stuff about whenever a St. Jim's chap happens by. Either he's the biggest fool in Sussex, or he's pulling our leg."

"I'm going to show him up, if I can get a peep into the storehouse, and make sure first," said Trimble eagerly. "It's justifiable, under the circumstances."

"Don't be a rotten spy!" granted Clive.

"But food-hoarders have to be bowled out, you ass!"

"You're not a policeman."

"I look on it as a patriotic duty," said Trimble loftily. "And if Cardew don't give me the key I shall consider him an accomplice, and denounce him!"

"Fathead!"

"You mean that, Trimble?" asked Cardew, with an extremely serious expression on his face.

"Every word," declared Baggy, de-

lighted at having made an impression upon the usually careless dandy of the Fourth. "In fact, I'll have no mercy on you!"

"Bless my Sunday boots!" ejaculated Cardew. "You're a regular Hun, Trimble! I never knew you were such a terrible fellow."

"I'm a dangerous chap when I'm roused," said the fatuous Baggy, with a frown. "Don't you get me down on you, that's all!"

"You'll let me off if I give you the key," faltered Cardew.

"Yes, Heustler Injun."

Cardew's study-mates stared at him blankly. He was feeling in his pockets. "You're not going to give him the key!" exclaimed Levison.

"You've heard what he's threatened me with. How can I refuse him, after that?" said Cardew gravely.

"Blessed if I can make you out!" said Levison, puzzled.

"Besides, Trimble assures us that he's not going to touch the food himself," added Cardew.

"He jolly well will, if he gets the key."

"I'm sure he won't."

"Oh, rats!"

"Hand it over!" exclaimed Trimble eagerly, as Cardew produced a rusty iron key from his pocket.

"It's understood that you don't scoff the hoard yourself, Trimble?" asked Cardew hesitatingly.

"Oh, of course!"

"Do you think the fat toad will keep that promise?" howled Clive.

"Oh, yes, I think I can trust him in this case."

"Then you're a silly duffer!" said the South African junior bluntly.

"Thanks!" said Cardew, unmoved. "Here's the key, Trimble—on the understanding that you don't scoff the grub."

"Good!" ejaculated Baggy, hardly believing in his good luck as his fat fingers grasped the key.

He bolted out of the study with it before Cardew could have time to change his mind.

"If that fat duffer goes out now he may get into trouble," remarked Cardew, with a shake of the head.

"Gates are locked."

"Bet you he'll chance it, now he's got the key," said Clive. "You were an ass to give it to him! Pepper's hoard ought to be taken away, if it's there; but it's rot to let a food-hoag scuff it!"

"But Baggy won't scuff it," expostulated Cardew.

"Oh, don't be an ass! You know he will. That's all he wants."

"I know that's all he wants; but there's many a slip between the grub and the jawbones," answered Cardew.

"Pepper may have tons of grub in the cellar, but there's a padlock on the door, and I don't see how Trimble's going to get through that."

"Haven't you just given him the key?" bawled Clive.

"Eh? What key?"

"The key of Pepper's cellar, you chump!"

"Not at all."

"What?"

"Do you think Trimble supposed I was giving him the key of Pepper's cellar?" asked Cardew blandly.

"Of course he did."

"What an unfortunate mistake!" sighed Cardew. "I wasn't, you know. Trimble has been bothering me for a couple of days for a key, so I thought it would be only kind to give him one."

"My hat!" ejaculated Clive.

"That's the key of the top box-room," yawned Cardew. "I put it in my pocket in case Trimble should come and

ask me for a key again. I hate to disappoint a chap."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And he's gone out after call-over with a key that doesn't fit the lock of the barn!" howled Levison minor.

"Apparently," agreed Cardew. "You see, I was quite right in thinking that Trimble wouldn't touch Pepper's hoard. I'm sure he won't—unless he can undo a padlock with his teeth, and I don't think he can. Hallo! Who's this?"

"This" was Grundy of the Shell, who threw open the door and stalked in as if the study belonged to him.

"I've come for the key," he announced.

"Great Scott! There seems to be a run on keys to-day!" ejaculated Cardew.

"What sort of a key do you want, Grundy—same as Trimble?"

"Has that fat rotter been after the key of Pepper's storehouse?" exclaimed Grundy eagerly.

"Oh, yaas!"

"You haven't given it to him?"

"Might I request you not to shout?" inquired Cardew. "I find it somewhat irritatin' to the nerves."

"Look here," roared Grundy, "I've taken this matter in hand. I'm going to hand over Pepper's hoard to the authorities. That's my duty."

"They've appointed you Food Controller?" asked Cardew, with owl-like gravity.

"Eh? Of course not. Don't be an ass!"

"Certainly not, my dear fellow! That's your department."

"I didn't come here to listen to silly gas!" roared Grundy.

"Better not talk, then; or I don't see how you're to avoid it," remarked Cardew affably.

George Alfred Grundy seemed on the verge of an explosion. But, with an effort, he restrained his righteous wrath.

"Will you give me the key?" he snorted.

"The one I gave Trimble, do you mean?"

"You've been ass enough to give Trimble the key?" exclaimed Grundy.

"Well, he asked me. He will scoff the grub before it can be handed over to the authorities!" howled Grundy.

"He said he wouldn't."

"Did you believe him, you silly ass?"

"Yes; under the circumstances, I thought he could be relied upon," said Cardew calmly.

"Then you're a blithering idiot!" snorted Grundy. "Has he gone out?"

"I fancy he's heading for Pepper's barn at this very minute."

"Oh, my hat!"

George Alfred Grundy rushed out of the study without waiting for more. Frank Levison, grinning, shut the door after him.

"Grundy seems to think that I gave Trimble the key of the cellar," yawned Cardew. "Odd how a chap makes these mistakes. Heigh-ho! I suppose I'd better get on with my prep! I wonder what villain invented prep? Yaw-aw!"

And Cardew dragged himself to the table and sat down to work.

CHAPTER 6.

Nothing for Baggy!

BUMP! "Hallo!"

Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther were taking a little trot round the dusky quad before going in to prep. It was dark under the trees by the wall, and as they came trotting down the path there was a sudden collision.

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The Terrible Three halted.
"What the dickens is that?" exclaimed Manners.

"Yaroooh!"
"Sounds like the dulcet tones of Baggy!" grinned Monty Lowther.

"Yow-ow-ow! You've knocked me over, you silly idiots!" wailed Trimble from the ground. "Help me up! Yow-ow!"

"Certainly, old scout!"

Monty Lowther stooped, and grasped at Baggy and helped him up. It was Baggy's nose he got hold of, and there was a muffled roar as the fat junior was jerked to his feet.

"Grrrrrooooooh!"

"By gad! He's talking German!" ejaculated Lowther. "That are you talking in Hun language for, Trimble?"

"Gerrroah! Led go by dose!" spluttered Trimble. "I'll kick your shins! Yow-woop!"

"Is that your nose?" asked Lowther.

"Yow-ow! Yes! Led go!"

"Sure it's your nose?"

"Groogh!"

"Well, there it is," said Lowther, letting go at last. "It's still sticking on, I believe. Not that it's worth keeping."

"Groogh!"

"What are you doing here, Trimble?" asked Tom Merry, laughing.

"Yow-ow-ow!"

"Anything else?" asked Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yah! Rotters! I say, Tom Merry, give me a bunk up, you!"

"Breaking bounds, you young rascal!" demanded the captain of the Shell.

"I've got to go out! It's awfully important!" gasped Trimble. "Give me a bunk over the wall, old chap!"

"Leave it to me," said Lowther.

"Come on, Baggy! Now, shove yourself against the wall—so! Now I'll grip you—"

"Groooh!"

"What's the matter now?"

"You silly jabberwock, you can't bunk me up by taking hold of my ears, can you?" yelled Baggy.

"Well, I can try."

"Let go, you beast! You give me a hand, Merry!"

"Here you are!"

"You silly chump, what are you pulling my nose for?"

"You asked me to give you a hand."

"Gerraway!" gasped Baggy. "I don't want your help! Go and eat coke! Yah!"

He snorted furiously, and scrambled up by the slanting oak to the top of the wall. The Terrible Three, chuckling, resumed their trot.

Baggy Trimble rolled over the wall, and dropped into the road outside. There he felt in his pocket, to make sure that the key was safe.

Then he trotted away down the starlit road.

The glutton of the Fourth was in high feather now. Mr. Pepper's board was at his mercy, or so he fondly believed. And, however large that board was, it was certain that none would be left for the miser after Trimble of the Fourth had finished with it.

"I'll have a bit of a snack," murmured Trimble as he trotted down the lane—"just a bit of a snack. I haven't had enough to eat for weeks. Then I'll cart the rest away, and hide it under the hollow tree. I'll give him food-hoarding, the rotter! I'd like to see his face when he finds it gone! He, he, he!"

Much cheered by the thought of Mr. Pepper's face when he found his board gone, Baggy Trimble turned into the fields, and headed for the barn.

Dark and lonely the building looked as the fat junior approached. Sometimes—on a half-holiday—it was the

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scene of lively proceedings, when the St. Jim's Parliament met for debates. Behind the barn was the storehouse, built to fill the space left where the ground sloped away under the building. Baggy was gasping when he reached the door, and felt over the rusty padlock with his fat fingers.

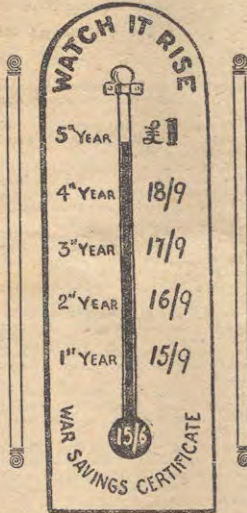
He drew the key from his pocket, and it clinked against the padlock. Baggy's fingers were trembling with eagerness.

Only a minute or two now, and the food-board would be in his greedy grasp. The glutton of St. Jim's would be transported to the seventh heaven. Already, in his mind's eye, he was enjoying unlimited tuck—biscuits, and ham, and syrup, and jam, and honey, and other delightful things.

But as he fumbled with the lock there was a heavy footstep in the gloom.

Trimble started.

It occurred to him at once that perhaps Mr. Pepper was watching him.



heard. He made a desperate effort to unfasten the padlock. Once in the storehouse, he could fasten the door, and he would be safe. But somehow the key wouldn't go in it. Clink, clink, clink!

"I see you, you young rascal!" shouted a husky voice in the gloom.

"Robbing my storehouse—hey?"

"Oh, dear!" gasped Trimble.

He grasped the padlock, and jammed the key at it. But still the key wouldn't go in. It dawned upon Trimble's fat brain at last that the key was about three sizes too large.

"I'm after you!" howled Mr. Pepper's voice from the gloom. "I see you, Master Grundy!"

Mr. Pepper loomed up from the night.

Whack!

"Yaroooh!" roared Trimble, as the old gentleman's stick came across his shoulders with terrific vim.

He jumped away from the door.

"I'll teach you to rob a poor old man!" roared Mr. Pepper, still laying on with the stick.

Trimble dodged desperately.

"Yow-ow-ow! Leave off! Yooop!

Yah! Oh! I!"

"Take that—and that——"

"Yooooooop!"

"And that—and that—and that!" gasped Mr. Pepper.

Trimble took them. He couldn't help it. Then he dodged round Mr. Pepper and ran for his life. He stumbled and rolled away over the dark field. Mr. Pepper brandishing his stick and shouting after him.

"Ow, ow, ow, ow!" gasped Trimble. "That beast Cardew! Wrong key! Ow, ow, ow! The beast was pulling my leg! Ow, ow! I'll lick him! Groogh! Oh, dear, that old villain is after me!"

The fat junior bolted again. If only he could have got into the cellar, he could have bidden defiance to Mr. Pepper outside, but he realised too late that the humorous Cardew had given him the wrong key. He plunged through a ditch and a hedge, and came out into the road, muddied and gasping.

There, breathing in great gulps, he listened for Mr. Pepper, and as he listened a strong grasp was laid on his collar, and he was shaken like a rat in the jaws of a terrier.

"Groogh!"

"Yaroom! Help!" yelled Trimble. "Yow-ow-woop! Help! Fire! Zepelins! Murder!"

"Shut up your row, you fat ass!"

"Oh!" gasped Trimble. "It's you, Grundy! Oh, dear! I thought it was that old villain Pepper!"

George Alfred Grundy shook him again. Wilkins and Gunn loomed up in the gloom. Grundy's faithful followers were there—very unwillingly—but there was no saying this great George Alfred nay.

"Don't make such a thumping row!" exclaimed Wilkins. "Suppose old Crump is going his rounds."

"We don't want to be caught out of bounds, Grundy, you ass!" muttered Gunn uneasily.

"Yow-ow-ow! Leggo!"

"Give me the key, you fat rascal!" said Grundy sternly. "The one Cardew gave you. Sharp, now!"

Baggy Trimble grinned in the darkness. He had no objection to giving George Alfred that key, none at all.

"Sharp now, before I squash you!" commanded Grundy.

"Yow-ow! Leggo—"

"You'll give me the key before I let you go," said Grundy, shaking him.

"Yow-ow! Here it is."

Grundy took the key. Trimble shook himself loose, and dodged away. He scuttled off, leaving George Alfred Grundy the key—and the somewhat difficult task of negotiating Mr. Pepper's padlock with the key of the box-room in the School House of St. Jim's.

CHAPTER 7.

No Luck!

"COME ON!" snapped Grundy. Wilkins and Gunn were showing signs of hesitation.

Grundy's methods always resembled those of a bull charging a gate. This was what Grundy called efficiency.

"I say, old Pepper's there," said Wilkins.

"What about that?"

"He won't like us burgling his barn," murmured Gunn.

"I don't expect him to like it."

"Them!"

"Peacocks, the barn's ours," added Grundy. "We pay rent for it, don't we? If you fellows are afraid of old Pepper—"

"Oh, we'll come."

"Well, come on, and give your lower jaw a rest, old chap!"

Grundy led the way across the dark field, followed reluctantly by Wilkins and Gunn.

A lantern glimmered behind the barn, showing that Mr. Pepper was there. The three Shell fellows came up into the radius of light, and Mr. Pepper gave them a glare.

"Oh, so you're here!" he snapped.

"What do you want?"

"I'm going into that storehouse," said Grundy calmly. "I've got reason to believe that you're hoarding food there."

"I ain't."

"I'm sorry to say I can't take your word, Mr. Pepper. I look on you as being little better than a Prussian. Stand aside, please."

Erasmus Zachariah Pepper had taken up a strategic position in front of the door, with his lantern in one hand and his cudgel in the other. He seemed determined to oppose the investigation of his hoard.

Grundy beckoned him to stand aside, sharply. He was not there to waste time.

"Get a move on," he snapped.

"You ain't going into that cellar," replied Mr. Pepper. "The cellar's mine. I've let you the barn. You can play at games in that barn as much as you like, with your Parliament and all that rubbish. You ain't allowed to trespass in the cellar."

"Will you stand back?"

"No, I won't, Master Grundy! An Englishman's house is his castle, likewise his cellar. You clear off."

"I shall be sorry to hit you, Mr. Pepper," said Grundy, with really noble self-restraint. "But if you don't move I shall shift you."

"Look here, Grundy!" murmured Wilkins.

"Shut up, Wilkins!"

"You can't assault a man and burgle his storehouse," said Wilkins. "It's against the law."

"I dare say it's justifiable under the Defence of the Realm Act," answered Grundy. "Pretty nearly everything is. Besides, a food-hoarder is an ally of Germany, and outside the law."

"But he says he isn't a food-hoarder," said Wilkins feebly.

"He would," answered Grundy scornfully.

"You mind your own business," interposed Mr. Pepper. "You're too fond of sticking your nose in where it hasn't any concern, Master Grundy. I desay you feed on the fat of the land at the big school, too."

"We don't!" roared Grundy indignantly. "We have just the same as everybody else, and you know it."

"Sorry I can't take your word, Master Grundy."

"Wi-a-at!"

Grundy fairly stuttered with rage. It was the same remark that he had made to Mr. Pepper, certainly. But that remark to Mr. Pepper and that remark from Mr. Pepper were quite different things. There was a great difference between the dative and the ablative, so to speak, in this case.

Grundy rushed forward, and grasped the village miser by the shoulders.

"Grundy!" gasped his chums in dismay.

Grundy did not heed.

He swung Mr. Pepper away from the door. The old gentleman lashed out with the stick, and caught Grundy across the shoulders. Grundy yelled, and sent Mr. Pepper spinning.

"You old villain!" he roared. "You hunched that stick again and I'll hit you in the eye, even if you're a hundred years old."

"Ow!" gasped Mr. Pepper, as he sat down.

"You stick there!" said Grundy, glowering at him. "You get up, and I'll knock you down again fast enough!"

"I protest agin you going into my storehouse!" shouted Mr. Pepper. "I



Mr. Pepper is Wanted.
(See Chapter 10.)

call you other young gents to witness that I protest!"

"Oh, dry up!"

Grundy jammed the key at the padlock.

If that key had fitted, Grundy would certainly have gone in and investigated the mystery of the storehouse on the spot. But unfortunately it did not fit. After jabbing at the padlock savagely for some moments, George Alfred realised that the key was no use. He breathed hard.

"This dashed key doesn't fit," he growled.

Wilkins and Gunn looked greatly relieved to hear it. Grundy was a great man, but they doubted whether he could safely walk over the law in this high-handed way.

"That fat villain gave me the wrong key!" exclaimed Grundy indignantly. "I'll scalp him! I'll spiculate him! I'll—"

"Haw, haw, haw!" came from Mr. Pepper.

"Well, if you can't get in we'd better get back," suggested Gunn practically.

"Haw, haw haw!"

"Oh, dry up, you cackling old fool!" howled Grundy.

"I suppose we'd better get back now, you fellows. I'm not giving in though."

"You'll let my storehouse alone, or I'll have the law on you!" said Mr. Pepper, who had scrambled up now, but was keeping at a safe distance from Grundy. "I forbid you to set foot in it."

"I'll show you to-morrow!" snorted Grundy.

"Mind, none of your tricks," continued Mr. Pepper. "None of your getting a plank up in the barn with a screw-driver, and getting in that way. I don't permit it."

"I sha'n't wait for your permission. I assure you," said Grundy disdainfully. "Come on, you fellows. What are you waiting for?"

"We're waiting for you," said Gunn.

"Oh, don't jaw! Come on!"

Grundy marched off with his followers. Mr. Pepper shook his stick after them; but as they vanished into the darkness Mr. Pepper grinned. The suspected food-hoarder ought to have felt extremely uneasy, but apparently he did not. He seemed to be entertained, somehow, by Grundy's investigations.

George Alfred was frowning darkly as he tramped back to St. Jim's with his comrades. He had been defeated, or, rather, checked; Grundy never admitted defeat. Gunn, who was a rather more thoughtful fellow than Grundy, was knitting his brows, looking puzzled.

"Look here, Grundy," he said, at last. "I think you'd better drop it."

"Fathead!"

"I've been thinking—" "You can't think, Gummy! 'Don't try."

"I've been thinking," persisted Gunn. "Old Pepper actually made the suggestion himself about getting down through the barn by getting up a plank. It was just as if he wanted you to go into his cellar, and wanted to make sure you would, though you hadn't a key."

"You silly ass! He wants to keep me out."

"Then the way he let you shove him away from the door," continued Gunn. "He never really tried to stop you. He thought you had a key, then, and he was simply letting you go in if you chose."

"Are you off your rocker, Gunn?"

"Look here! Pepper's a downy old bird, and he's playing some crooked game," said Gunn. "First he comes to St. Jim's and fairly tells us he's food-hoarding. Then he pretends to want to keep you out of the storehouse, and really seems to want you to go in. He's got some tricky game on, I believe."

"Don't you start thinking, Gunn," advised Grundy. "You're talking rot, old chap. Dry up, there's a good fellow."

William Cuthbert Gunn dried up; but he was still uneasy. Wilkins was rather inclined to agree with him—Mr. Pepper was well known to be a "downy bird." But it was no use arguing with Grundy, so Wilkins held his peace.

The three juniors climbed in over the wall, and dropped into the quad; and it was just Grundy's luck to run into Kildare of the Sixth as they hurried towards the School House. The prefect stopped them at once.

"You've been out of bounds, Grundy."

"Well, you see—"

"I see that you've been out of bounds! Fifty lines each!" said Kildare.

"I can't very well explain, Kildare, but I've been engaged on work of national importance."

"What?"

"Work of national importance."

Kildare looked at him.

"I did not know you set up as a humorist, Grundy," he remarked. "Take a hundred lines."

"Look here—"

"Cut!" snapped Kildare.

Wilkins and Gunn dragged their chums away. Grundy was no respecter of persons; but it was not judicious for a junior to tell the captain of the school what he thought of him.

"That's the kind of encouragement a fellow gets when he's being patriotic!" remarked Grundy bitterly.

"A really patriotic and efficient chap who does things always finds some silly fool butting in."

"I suppose Linton will be ratty in the morning, as I haven't done my prep. It's really enough to make a chap give up being patriotic. Efficiency isn't popular in this school."

And Grundy shook his head seriously. It really did seem that efficiency—of Grundy's brand—met with little encouragement at St. Jim's.

CHAPTER 8.

Grundy Means Business.

"Y AROOH!"

Tom Merry & Co. came out of the School House after dinner on the following day, and holding that afternoon, and the Terrible Three were heading for the playing-fields; but they paused as they spotted Baggy Trimble wriggling in the grasp of George Alfred Grundy.

"Leggo!" roared Trimble. "Draggimoff, Tom Merry! Yah!"

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

"Oh, don't ask questions!" said Grundy. "I'm not asking for your assistance."

"Trimble is, though," smiled Tom, and he took the great George Alfred by the collar. "Let go!"

"Mustn't bully fags, dear boy!" remarked Lowther.

"Let go my collar!" bawled Grundy. "When you've let go Trimble," answered Tom cheerily.

"The fat villain gave me the wrong key yesterday!" howled Grundy. "I had my journey for nothing!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I was the key Cardew gave me!" wailed Trimble. "Cardew gave me the wrong key. He was pulling my leg."

"Oh, that alters the case," said Grundy, releasing the fat Fourth-Former. "Why couldn't you say that before?"

"You didn't ask me, you idiot!" hooted Trimble. "You just grabbed me like a wild Hun, you burbling chump!"

Tom Merry released Grundy's collar, laughing. Grundy gave him a dark look. "I haven't time to lick you now, Merry."

"The Gem Library,—No. 542.

"What a stroke of luck for you!" remarked the captain of the Shell.

"Yes, don't be an ass. Look here, if you like, you can come along this afternoon and back me up," said Grundy. "I'm going to rout out old Pepper's hoard."

"Both old Pepper!" answered Tom. "I don't believe he has a hoard at all."

"Yes, he as good as said so!"

"Yes. That's why I don't believe it."

"Oh, you're an ass!" said Grundy disdainfully. "Why, lots of the fellows have seen him carting tins and things into the cellar under the barn."

Tom Merry nodded.

"I've seen him myself," he said. "But, coming to think of it, I fancy it's not quite what it seems. He's too deep for me."

"Perhaps you don't think food-hoarders ought to be punished?" sneered Grundy.

"I think they ought to be hanged," said Tom. "But a chap would look a silly idiot for denouncing a man who was stuffing away empty tins in a cellar."

"Why should a man stack away empty tins, you dunder?"

"Oh, I give that up!"

"You're not a very intelligent chap, Merry," said Grundy patronisingly.

"You can't even judge a fellow's form at footer. I'm certain that old Hun has got a ton of food stowed away, and I'm going to have it out. I'm willing to let you help, if you've got sense enough."

"Sorry, I haven't," said Tom, laughing; and the Terrible Three went their way.

Grundy sniffed, and strode into the School House.

"Seen Cardew?" he asked, as he met Blako of the Fourth.

"In his study, I believe."

Grundy tramped up to the Fourth Form passage. He was after the key of the storehouse, and he meant to have it. That afternoon Mr. Pepper's secret hoard was to be brought to light, or Grundy would know the reason why.

Levison & Co. were in No. 9, discussing what was to be done with the afternoon.

They smiled as Grundy presented himself in the open doorway.

"Trot in, dear boy!" said Cardew. "So glad to see you! Your face is an antidote to war-worry, by gad!"

"I want that key!" announced Grundy, thumping the table to lend emphasis to his words.

"Didn't you get it from Trimble?" asked Cardew innocently.

"That was the wrong key."

"You don't say so?"

"Now I want the right key."

"That's a very interesting piece of information. Gentlemen, Grundy wants the right key. I hope you are interested. It's so kind of Grundy to come here and tell us these things."

"I don't want any rot!" roared Grundy. "I never stand any rot! Are you going to give me that key, Cardew?"

"Suppose we try the cinema?" suggested Cardew thoughtfully. "There's some new war-films at the Wayland Cinema."

"Will you answer me, Cardew?"

"And we haven't been to the cinema for some time," continued Cardew, addressing his grinning chums, and apparently forgetful of the presence of the great Grundy. "We can take the train, and that will save the trouble of walking."

"Yes or no?" roared Grundy.

"Anybody got a time-table?" continued Cardew.

"I've come here for that key!" belated Grundy. "Mind, if you don't hand it over, I'm going to take it!"

"By gad! Are you still there, Grundy?" asked Cardew, glancing at

him. "What a persistent fellow you are! You asked me for something, didn't you?"

"Will you give me the key?" shrieked Grundy.

"Oh, the key! No." Cardew shook his head. "For your own sake, dear boy, I won't give you the key. You'd better keep clear of old Pepper. He's too downy for a simple youth like you to have any dealin's with. Shut the door after you!"

Grundy strode towards him.

"I want that key!" he said grimly.

"Yass, you've stated that before. You're fallin' into a bad habit of repeatin' yourself, Grundy!"

"I'm going to take it, then!"

"Another remark that you've heard before! Really, Grundy, you should put on a new record."

Grundy laid a powerful grasp upon Ralph Reckness Cardew. He felt that he was wasting time. At the same moment Levison and Clive laid a powerful grasp upon George Alfred Grundy, and Cardew followed suit.

Grundy was a mighty man with his hands. But three to one were rather too many for Grundy. He went out of the study doorway like a stone from a catapult, and landed on his back in the passage.

Levison & Co. smiled at him as he lay there gasping.

"Come in again, dear boy!" said Cardew invitingly.

Grundy leaped up and came in again, charging like a bull. But the three Fourth-Formers met that frontal attack cheerfully, and grasped Grundy again and hurled him forth.

Bump!

"By gad! This is quite an amusing game!" yawned Cardew. "Come in again, old scout! We'll keep this up as long as you do."

"Yow-ow-ow!"

Grundy scrambled up, but he did not come in again. He stood and panted, and glanced ferociously at the grinning three.

"I—You—Ow!"

"By the way," said Cardew politely, "if you're done, would you mind shuttin' the door?"

Grundy did not shut the door, but apparently he was done, for he stamped away down the passage, breathing wrath. He found Wilkins and Gunn in his own study, and bestowed a glare upon them.

"You couldn't come and lend a fellow a hand!" he snorted.

"Anything up?" yawned Wilkins.

"Br-r-r-r. Who's my screwdriver?"

"What about the key?"

"Both the key!"

"But Cardew's got a key—"

"Blow Cardew!"

Grundy found his screwdriver, and slipped it into his pocket.

"Now come on, if you don't want to jaw all the afternoon!" he said sarcastically.

"What about footer?"

"Are you coming?" roared Grundy.

"Oh, all right!" said Wilkins resignedly. And they started.

CHAPTER 9.

Grundy's Great Discovery.

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY was lounging elegantly in the gateway as Grundy & Co. came out. He turned his eyelids upon

Grundy.

"Grunday, dear boy—"

"Well?" snapped Grundy.

"Bai Jove! Don't yap at a fellow like that, Grundy! It wathth throws me into a fluttah!" remonstrated the swell of St. Jim's. "I have heard that you are goin' to nose into old Peppah's

storehouse, Gwunday. I do not regard that as a justifiable proceedin'!"

"Oh, rats!"

"Mr. Peppah is an extremely objectionable old gentleman," continued D'Arcy. "He has no respect for a fellow's twonahs. But, weally, it is wathah too thick to nose into his place without permish. Suppose you were w'ong in your supsiah?"

"I'm not going to suppose anything of the kind!"

"Weally, Gwunday——"

"Boah!"

With that emphatic reply Grundy marched on, leaving Arthur Augustus shaking his noble head very seriously.

Grundy & Co. reached the barn, and Wilkins and Gunn were relieved to see that Mr. Pepper was not in sight. They entered the barn, which was deserted now. St. Jim's Parliament not being in session just then.

"How we shan't be long!" remarked Grundy.

There was a plank in the floor of the barn that had been raised before. It had been screwed down again; but Grundy set to work energetically upon the screws.

It was not easy work, for the screws were long, and well driven in. But Grundy, engaged upon work of national importance, was tireless. One after another the screws came out.

Wilkins and Gunn watched him in uneasy silence.

They were quite as heartily down on food-hoarding as Grundy was, but they had more respect than George Alford for law and order. As Mr. Pepper persisted that the tellar had not been let with the barn, it was something like trespass to force a way into it against his prohibition. True, if a hoard of food was discovered there, Grundy's action might be considered as justified. Food-hoarders generally get short shrift. But if Grundy's suspicions was not well-founded, there might be serious trouble.

Such considerations did not worry Grundy. He laboured on with the screw-driver, and the plank was loose at last.

He dragged it up, and threw it aside. The way into the storehouse was open now.

"Hold the light for me!" commanded Grundy.

Wilkins held the electric torch Grundy handed to him, and flashed the light down through the opening. Grundy dropped through into the cellar, and Wilkins handed down the lamp.

Grundy flashed the light round him, and looked about for the hoard.

"My hat!" he ejaculated.

"Anything there?" called out Gunn.

"I should jolly well say so!" Grundy called back jubilantly.

"Good!"

"Tons of it!"

"Phew!"

"Come and see for yourselves!"

Wilkins and Gunn hesitated no longer. They dropped through into the storehouse. The lamp, held aloft by Grundy, gleamed upon Mr. Pepper's hoard.

And it was a hoard!

Piled up at one side of the cellar were more than twenty twelve-pound biscuits. A wooden box, open at the top, was stacked with tronde-tins, more than two dozen in number. Near by stood a wooden case stencilled "Cube sugar," and it was nailed up with great care. Grundy pushed it, and it did not move—it weighed at least a hundredweight.

And that was not all.

There were wooden boxes and cases, all nailed or screwed up, with such labels as "Lentils," "Haricots," "Oatmeal," "Rolled Oats," "Cheese," "Butter," "Margarine," "Corned Beef," and "Pickled Pork."

The three Shell fellows simply gasped.

They had suspected a hoard. But this store was enough to provide for a regular garrison through a long siege. Evidently Mr. Pepper didn't intend to run any risk of famine if the war dragged on for ten years to come.

"Oh, crumbs!" stuttered Wilkins. "The awful villain! Why, there's three whole firkins of butter!"

And three cases of margarine!" murmured Gunn.

"Half a hundredweight of cheese, at least," said Grundy, "and a good hundredweight of sugar!"

"And here's tea! My hat! It's marked 'I cwt.' on the outside!"

"And beans and things—no end of them!"

"The awful old fraud!"

"And other people are waiting in queues for ounces of margarine!" said Grundy. "What do you think now?"

"You ought to be hanged!"

"Drawn and quartered!" said Gunn.

"Boiled in oil!" added Wilkins.

"Hallo!" It was a crusty voice in the barn above. "You young rascals, a-spying and trespassing in my storehouse! Out you come!"

"Old Pepper!" ejaculated Wilkins.

Mr. Pepper was glaring down through the orifice in the floor. Grundy grinned up at him. "You're found out, you old rascal!" he said.

"Come out of my storehouse!" shouted Mr. Pepper.

"Oh, we'll come fast enough, now that we've bowled you out, you old fraud!" said Grundy contemptuously.

The three juniors scrambled up.

"I'm going to screw down this here plank," said Mr. Pepper, "and then I'm going to complain to your headmaster."

"You ain't arrested before then!" grinned Grundy.

"There ain't any food in my storehouse!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Grundy.

Mr. Pepper's statement was really too thick, considering what the investigators had just seen with their own eyes.

"I tell you——"

"Oh, cheese it!" said Grundy. "We've just seen your hoard, Mr. Pepper. You'll have to answer for this. Come on, you cheaters!"

"I—I say, you ain't going to the police!" exclaimed Mr. Pepper.

"You can bet your Sunday hat I am!" answered Grundy emphatically.

"But, look here——"

"Rats!"

Grundy & Co. marched out, and crossed the field to the road. Grundy was jubilant, which was not surprising under the circumstances. This was a triumph for George Alford; his name would resound for miles and miles as that of the fellow who had exposed the biggest food-hoard in the county. Gunn did not seem quite satisfied, however.

"This is a jolly queer bizny!" he remarked.

"Jolly shady, you mean?" said Grundy.

"Yes; but it's queer, too! I believe old Pepper was watching from a distance, and only came up after we were in the cellar. It's just as if he wanted to let us go in."

"Oh, don't be funny, Gunn! The old rascal is fairly flabbergasted!" chuckled Grundy. "Rylcombe will be too hot to hold him after this!"

"Any luck, deah boys?"

Study No. 6 met Grundy & Co. as they emerged into the lane, and Arthur Augustus called out the question.

"Yes, rather!" chorused Grundy. "There's a terrific hoard—simply terrific—bigger than the one that was found in a Member of Parliament's house the other day!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Sure!" asked Jack Blake doubtfully.

"We've seen it!"

"Bai Jove! Undah the cires, Gwunday, if you have actually seen it, I wergad you as bein' justified in informin' the authorities!"

"I'm jolly well going to!"

Grundy strode on to the village. Gunn lingered behind with Blake & Co., and Wilkins, on second thoughts, lingered with him. Grundy did not mind. He was quite willing to take all the lime-light himself at the police-station. The juniors watched the barn from the road, and saw Mr. Pepper come out of it, and seat himself upon the bench and light his pipe.

"He doesn't seem very much alarmed," remarked D'Arcy.

"He's got a nerve!" said Wilkins, with a nod.

"The awful rotter!" exclaimed Herries indignantly. "Fancy a man hoarding up food, while my dog Towser hasn't tasted meat for weeks!"

And Herries shook his fist at the distant Mr. Pepper.

Grundy strode quite jauntily into the village, and presented himself at the little police-station. He found P.-C. Crump there, looking as sleepy as usual. Mr. Crump gave him a sleepy look of inquiry. But his eyes opened wide when Grundy announced his discovery.

"My heye!" said Mr. Crump.

"Better come along at once," said Grundy. "He may be taking the stuff away, and hiding it somewhere else."

"You've actually seen it, Master Grundy?"

"I've seen it with my own eyes—tea and sugar and butter and margarine and tinned meats. A good bit over a ton together, I think!"

"Well, I'm bound to look into this 'ere," said Mr. Crump. "Course, the place can't be searched without a warrant."

"There's no time to waste!" exclaimed Grundy anxiously. "The old rascal may get it all shifted somewhere else."

"I'm coming along," said Mr. Crump. "If Mr. Pepper refuses to let me see in the cellar, I shall know what to think, and then I shall take proper steps."

And Mr. Crump puffed out into the street after Grundy, and they started for the barn. Two or three village urchins followed them, to see what was on.

"A ton at least!" Grundy was saying to Mr. Crump. "A hundredweight of sugar at the very least. I couldn't move the case. And oatmeal and tinned foods!"

Mr. Crump listened in stolid silence as he plodded on, and Grundy ran on with his thrilling description. But Grundy's loud words were heard by the urchins following, and the news spread like wildfire that a huge food-hoard had been discovered. Children of all ages gathered to follow the procession. A queue outside Mr. Sands', the grocer's, broke up to join in. By the time Mr. Crump and Grundy were well out of the village they were the head of a procession numbering fifty at least.

"Bai Jove! Heah's all Wylcombe comin'!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, as the crowd came in sight.

"My hat!" murmured Blake. "If Grundy's put his foot in it there will be a row about it!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

St. Jim's fellows were joining the crowd, and some fellows from the Grammar School. Tom Merry & Co. happened along in time to join, and a dozen more, and men came out of the fields, and apparently out of space, so rapidly did the crowd increase in

numbers. It was quite an army that marched down on Mr. Pepper's barn, with a threatening buzz of voices. And, in spite of the majestic presence of Mr. Crump, it was pretty certain that, if the food-hoard was really there, the rascally hoarder would not escape without severe handling.

CHAPTER 10.

Poor Old Grundy!

MR. CRUMP halted in front of Mr. Pepper, who was smoking his pipe on the bench outside the barn. Mr. Pepper glanced at him carefully.

There was a murmur from the crowd. "Old hunk!"

"Yah! Hoarder!"

"He ought to be hanged!"

"Yah!"

"What's all this here?" asked Mr. Pepper innocently.

P. C. Crump grunted.

"This here young gent has given information about a food-hoard on your premises—these here," Mr. Pepper, he said. "I've come 'ere to look into it."

"Cammon!" said Mr. Pepper.

"Which you deny that there is any 'oard?"

"I do," said Mr. Pepper.

"I've seen it!" roared Grundy indignantly. "A hundredweight of sugar—"

"Tons of grub!" said Wilkins.

"Have you any objection to me looking in the cellar, Mr. Pepper?" asked Mr. Crump sternly.

"Course I have," answered Mr. Pepper.

"There ain't any food in my cellar. I'm not a hoarder."

"Mind, if you object, I go to the Food Office at once for a written paper," said Mr. Crump. "The cellar will be searched."

Mr. Pepper rose to his feet.

"Let the policemen in!" roared fifty voices.

"Let's smash in the door!"

"Have the food out!"

The crowd pressed closer.

"Gentlemen and neighbours—"

began Mr. Pepper.

"Yah! Hoarder!"

"I protest!" shouted Mr. Pepper wrathfully. "Neighbours, I haven't so much food as would make a lunch for a country bird, and what I have is in my cottage. Master Grundy doesn't know what he's talking about."

"I've seen it!" shouted Grundy.

"I take you all to witness that Master Grundy accuses me of food-hoarding," said Mr. Pepper, looking round. "I'm going to have the law of him. Master Merry, and D'Arcy, and you, Mr. Crump, I take you all to witness."

"You're welcome!" shouted Grundy.

"Har you going to open that cellar door, or har you not, Mr. Pepper?" demanded the fat guardian of the law majestically.

"Under protest, I will do so," said Mr. Pepper. "Any friend and neighbour is welcome to look into my storehouse."

Mr. Pepper led the way round the barn, and the crowd followed him, eyeing him angrily. Arrived at the door of the cellar, Mr. Pepper fumbled in his pockets.

"Blessed if I haven't lost the key!" he announced.

There was a yell at once.

"That's a lie!"

"Come off!"

"Bust in the door!"

Mr. Pepper's statement really seemed like a palpable pretence, and the crowd began to look very threatening.

"Horder! Horder!" said Mr. Crump sternly. "Stand back, there! This 'ere

proceeding is in the 'ands of the lor. Horder! Now, Mr. Pepper!"

"Ah! An' so 'e is—a reg'lar 'oarder!" came a voice from the crowd.

"I can't find the key," said Mr. Pepper only.

"Bust in the door!"

"Ave you any objection to that there padlock being forced, Mr. Pepper?" inquired Mr. Crump.

"I'll jolly well force it!" exclaimed Grundy.

"You can do that on your own responsibility, Master Grundy," said Mr. Pepper.

"I wash my hands of it."

"Go it, Grundy!" sang out a dozen St. Jim's fellows.

Grundy took out his screwdriver. He jammed it into the padlock, and with two or three powerful wrenches burst it open. He flung back the door.

"Horder!" shouted Mr. Crump, as the crowd surged forward.

But the voice of the law was disregarded. Perhaps the general idea of the crowd was that the constable was telling Mr. Pepper what he thought of him.

The crowd swarmed into the storehouse under the barn, and there were yells of wrath and indignation as the hoard was seen. Mr. Crump's eyes almost started out of his fat face at the sight of the stacks of boxes and tins.

"My hey!" he stuttered.

"Lynch him!" yelled a voice.

Mr. Pepper, hustled by the crowd, clung on to the stout constable.

"Now, then, what's that like for a hoard?" chorused Grundy.

"Hands off!" shrieked Mr. Pepper.

"I tell you there isn't any food here."

"What?"

"Yah!"

"Horder!"

"If anybody finds any food here, I'll give it to him as a present, free, gratis, and for nothing!" yelled Mr. Pepper.

"What do you call that, then?" roared Grundy, pointing to the sugar-case.

"On that a sugar-box, Master Grundy."

"Well, what's in it, you fraud?"

"Cobblestones!"

"Wha-a-at?"

"Cobblestones!" yelled Tom Merry.

"Bai Jove!"

There was a gasp of amazement from the crowd. Mr. Pepper was grinning.

"There ain't any law about hoarding cobblestones that I ever heard of," he said. "Neither is there any law again keeping stones in a sugar-case. If there is, it's a new law, and I haven't heard tell of it."

"Cobblestones!" murmured Wilkins, with a glance at Gunn.

Gunn drew him quietly out of the crowd.

"I suspected something all along," he whispered. "I warned Grundy; you heard me."

"You did, old chap."

"Let's cut!"

"You bet!"

And they cut. Grundy having found that egregious nest, was entitled to all the credit of it, in the opinion of Wilkins and Gunn.

"Cobblestones!" stuttered Grundy.

"It's a whopper—it's a lie! What would he be hoarding cobblestones for?" he said.

"I ain't hoarding anything," said Mr. Pepper, with virtuous indignation. "I'm going to lay down a new path across this field, and I've been getting in materials. I'm keeping them in this storehouse. Why shouldn't I?"

"Bai Jove! Why not, Gwunday?"

"Oh, my hat! I said Blake. 'Grundy's done it this time.'"

Grundy, with a howl of rage, rushed at Mr. Pepper. He seized a billet of wood, and fairly smashed the lid off.

There was "Cube sugar" stencilled out-

side the case—as there generally is on a sugar-case. But inside nothing was packed but stones—material for Mr. Pepper's new path.

"Oh, my hey!" murmured Mr. Crump, as some of the stones rattled out.

Grundy, in a state of great exasperation, smashed open box after box. Only cobblestones came to light. Whatever label the boxes bore outside, the interior contained nothing but—cobblestones! Mr. Pepper watched him with a lurking grin, raising no objection to the damage done to his property. Finally, Grundy pitched out the great array of treacle tins. Some of them burst open, and sand streamed out. He tore open three or four of the big biscuit tins. Sand! Nothing but sand and cobblestones! And it was safe to say that to whatever length famine went in the land, Mr. Pepper was not intending to make a repast of sand and cobblestones. Whatever he was, he was not a food-hoarder.

Grundy desisted at last, in great dismay.

The crowd were grinning now, and clearing off. Some of them begged Mr. Pepper's pardon before they went. It was only too plain that their fellow-townsmen had been the victim of a cruel and unjust suspicion. Grundy's terrific accusation had fallen to the ground!

"Well, Master Grundy," said Mr. Crump grimly, "what have you got to say now?"

Grundy stuttered.

"You come to me with an accusation against an honest man!" said Mr. Crump. "You bring me away from my duties. You took about a food-hoard! Do you think Mr. Pepper was going to eat these 'ere stones?"

"Nunno!" gasped Grundy. "Oh, dear!"

"Bai Jove! You weally have wathup put your foot into it, Grundy," remarked another Augustus D'Arcy, apparently by way of comfort.

"But—but what has the old villain got all the boxes marked as food for?" howled Grundy. "What's he keeping sand in treacle-tins and honey-jars for? People don't keep sand in treacle-tins."

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Monty Lowther.

"Perhaps he was doing it to pull the leg of a silly ass who couldn't mind his own bizney!"

Mr. Pepper grinned.

The policeman stumped out of the cellar, after a severe frown at Grundy. No doubt Grundy had meant well; but he had raised a disturbance and wasted Mr. Crump's time, and all for nothing.

Grundy was about to follow, when Mr. Pepper tapped him on the shoulder.

"You'll hear from my solicitor, Master Grundy," he said significantly.

Grundy started.

"What you say that?"

"Did you think you was going to get off scot-free, after damaging my property and accusing me of food-hoarding?" demanded Mr. Pepper indignantly.

"Don't you think it, young man! I'm going to sue you for damages—for defamation of character."

"Oh!" stuttered Grundy.

"Oh, my hat!" murmured Tom Merry.

The St. Jim's juniors exchanged glances. At last they comprehended the whole cunning scheme of the extremely crafty Mr. Pepper.

He was not a hoarder. He had no food to hoard. But he had deliberately given Grundy the impression that he was hoarding food, feeling that he could rely upon the egregious George Alfred to put his foot in it. Just as Grundy had interfered before, he was sure to interfere again; and Mr. Pepper had given him rope, so to speak, to hang himself.

For Grundy's benefit Mr. Pepper had arranged that pretended board in his cellar. Empty biscuit-tins and treacle-tins and sugar-cases did not cost him much. Doubtless he had quite enjoyed the labour of stacking them with his materials for a new path, considering that he was leading Grundy, on to make a fool of himself. No wonder the cases had been carefully nailed up. That was not to prevent Grundy seeing the food they contained. It was to prevent him seeing the cobblestones they contained.

The astute Mr. Pepper had set Grundy on the track by his visit to St. Jim's. He had carefully arranged to let St. Jim's fellows see him wheeling his board to the storehouse.

He had cleared Baggy Trimble away fast enough—Trimble was not his game. But he had carefully allowed Grundy to go ahead—as Gunn had suspected, though he had not guessed Mr. Pepper's reason.

And when Grundy had discovered the board—he had been given time to discover it—Mr. Pepper had then come on the scene before Grundy could see the contents of the cases if he felt so disposed.

It was all clear now—even to Grundy!

As to Mr. Pepper's motive, that was clear enough too, from his mention of the damages! Mr. Pepper was after Grundy's!

He intended to punish Grundy for having interfered in his affairs on a former occasion, and he intended to make him pay. He was well aware that Grundy's people were rich, or he would not have taken the trouble. And Mr. Pepper undoubtedly had a good case! Grundy had accused him of food-hoarding before half Rylecombe—he had brought a crowd round the place, and smashed open Mr. Pepper's cases—he had held up the virtuous Mr. Pepper to public scorn—and now he hadn't a leg to stand on!

Even Grundy's mighty brain grasped it all at last, and he realised that he had been the astute Mr. Pepper's helpless victim from beginning to end. While

he had been pursuing his investigations in his well-known efficient way, he had in truth been underestimating the fly who walked into the spider's parlour.

Grundy was so astonished and dismayed that he stood blinking at Mr. Pepper, his mouth open, a good deal like a fish out of water.

"Defamation of character!" continued Mr. Pepper, with relish. "That's the word! Defamation of character and false witness! There's a law in this country, young man, and it doesn't allow an honest man to be accused of crimes and such without giving him justice! You'll hear from my solicitor. And don't think you'll get me to settle the case out of court—don't you think! I'm going to be set right with my neighbours. I am. I'm going to have you up at the county court, Master Grundy!"

And with that Mr. Pepper walked out, and tramped away smiling to his cottage. He was done with Grundy.

Grundy stood rooted to the ground. "Oh, dear!" he said at last.

He looked at Tom Merry & Co. They were laughing. They could not help it, though they felt that matters were serious for poor Grundy.

What the Head would say when an action was commenced against a St. Jim's fellow for defamation of character did not bear thinking of.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus at last. "I'm awfully sorry, Grundy—excuse my smiling—ha, ha! I can see it's very serious."

"Serious enough," grinned Blake. "You've fairly put your foot in it, Grundy."

"I warned you he was a downy bird, Grundy," grinned Manners.

"You can't say we didn't warn you," added Monty Lowther.

Grundy groaned. "Oh, dear! The old villain was spoiling me all along! I can see now. He really meant me to find this hoard, you know."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"D-d-d you think the beast really means to sue me?" stuttered Grundy.

"Yaas, wath'at!"

"That's what he's done it for," said Tom Merry. "He knew you could be depended on to be a meddling idiot—excuse me—and he planted this on you on purpose. You'd better write to your people at once, and get them to deal with him."

"Oh, dear!" groaned Grundy.

Grundy spoke no word during the walk back to St. Jim's. For once in his history George Alfred Grundy had nothing to say for himself.

St. Jim's fairly howled over the story of Mr. Pepper's hoard, and Grundy's great discovery therefor. It was, but the whole school seemed to see only the comic side, and they yelled. The unfortunate hero wrote at once to his kind Uncle Grundy a very pathetic letter, and it was fortunate for him that his Uncle Grundy was a very indulgent relative. The next day Uncle Grundy came down and interviewed Mr. Pepper at his cottage.

Mr. Pepper was very obstinate at first, declaring that he wanted a hundred pounds damages, and that he meant to have them. But, in fact, Mr. Pepper was not keen to go to law against Grundy's people—if he could grind his axe by an easier method. After long negotiation his claim was whittled down to twenty pounds, and that sum Uncle Grundy paid over to settle the matter. And the news that it was settled was great news to the unhappy George Alfred. It had been a very profitable transaction for Mr. Pepper, but Grundy felt as satisfied as Mr. Pepper at having got safely out of the affair. And for a week, at least, Grundy was a very subdued Grundy—though he recovered in time.

THE END.

(Don't miss next Wednesday's Great Story of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's—**"THE WHEEZIE THAT WENT WRONG!"** by Martin Clifford.)



CADET NOTES.



ORGANISERS of Cadet Corps in this country, and the large number of Cadets who have joined the Army in recent years, have been disappointed to discover that they can get no recognition for their years of Cadet service from our own War Office. It is interesting to know, however, that French boys who happen to have served in English Cadet Corps, and who offer no other recognition for such work on joining the French Army. To each such boy is issued, to be forwarded to the officer commanding his Cadet Corps, a certificate officially setting forth the marks awarded to him for various forms of training and education. Such courtesy and wisdom is characteristic of the spirit of our Allies, and is, unfortunately, too often lacking in the public management of the affairs in this country.

The Duke of Connaught, accompanied by Major-General Lord Chelmsford—the Chairman of the Middlesex Territorial Force Association—and others, inspected four battalions of Cadets of the Middlesex Territorial Regiment in St. James' Park on a recent Saturday afternoon. There were about 2,000 of the Cadets on parade, and an enormous crowd of the general public and their parents, etc., to witness the review. The Middlesex Cadets, like those of other counties, are recruited from all classes of the community, but a large number of those at the inspection came from the secondary schools in the northern suburbs of London. They presented a very smart appearance, and were well-called forth praise from the Duke of Connaught and Colonel Simpson, the commandant, in their addresses after the inspection.

It is very satisfactory to learn that after

only six months of preliminary training the Cadet company known as the 12th Herts Cadets, which was formed last October in connection with the 3rd Hertfordshire Volunteer Battalion, has arrived at such a state of efficiency as to justify the officer commanding the company in making an offer of their services to the public in any necessary and useful work. There are many things which can be well performed by trained and organised lads, and no doubt the citizens of St. Albans will be glad to avail themselves of the offer thus made. There are many other places which do well to follow their example.

A drumhead service for the Wolverhampton Volunteer Cadets was held in West Park recently. Major Cator, commanding the 4th Volunteer Battalion of the Staffordshire Regiment, was present, and the Cadets turned up in large numbers. Throughout the county of Staffordshire rapid progress is being made with the organisation of the Cadet Movement. Up to the present about 2,500 Cadets have been enrolled, the largest individual corps being that at Wolverhampton, which now numbers 350 members, while the North Staffordshire Corps, with its headquarters at Hanley, has over 300. This is magnificent progress to have been made in a short time, and shows what can be done by active and united effort in this direction.

The success of the recent movement for forming Cadet Corps throughout the county of Northumberland has, we are glad to see, now inspired the adjoining county of Durham to take up the same task. Colonel the Hon. Cyril A. Liddell has been appointed the colonel-commandant of the County Cadet

Movement, and is actively engaged in forming corps and raising funds for their equipment, etc. A very handsome response has been received to the first appeal for subscriptions, and we have no doubt that in a very short time Durham will be as well provided with Cadet Units as its neighbour Northumberland.

Besides the counties that have already been mentioned in these notes, the work of organising County Cadet Corps is now being taken up actively in several others. In Berkshire Major Vaughan Williams is the county commandant of the Berkshire Cadets, and it is hoped to raise a strong force in the county. There are already a number of companies in existence, and it is intended to have a full battalion in Reading. In Hereford Colonel C. Healey, C.M.G., has been asked to take up the work of organising the Cadets of the county, and is now engaged in promoting the movement. Readers in these counties or elsewhere who would like to join Cadet Corps, and desire further information, should apply to the Central Association of Volunteer Regiments, Judges' Quadrangle, Royal Courts of Justice, Strand, London, W.C., who will be pleased to send them full particulars of their nearest corps, etc.

Are You Reading
"THE BROWN TORRENT"
in this Week's "Magnet"?

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 543.

FURTHER IMPRESSIONS OF

By SHAKESPEARE II,
From Mudanslush.

LONDON. The Earlier Impressions
Appeared in the "Magnet."

LIKE everything else nowadays, Impressions are pretty difficult to get hold of. A pretty nearly all picture galleries and museums and places of the kind are labelled "Ministry of Tuck," "Boot-and-Shoelace Control Committee," "T.S.W., as the Huns say. And the public are barred.

Nevertheless, I offered to write some first-rate Impressions of places I have never seen and knew nothing at all about. The editor said I could if I liked, but he really did not think they would get published. He is a very mild man, and always talks like that.

So I thought and pondered and meditated and lubricated until I grew so middle-headed that I wondered whether anything on earth could make me sillier. (I really don't think anything could.—Editorial Note.) Anyway, I resolved to put the Hampton Court Maze in the test, and with that intention I buried myself in a Tube.

To me these Tubes are more bewildering than any mere maze. I am just beginning to see that if you travel by the Piccadilly Tube and want to get to station on the Bakerloo Tube, you change from the Piccadilly Tube to the Bakerloo Tube. But as to how, when, where, why, and what or which, ask me no more.

My method is to flash through a number of stations, get out at any one I fancy, wander through a labyrinth of subterranean passages, get in another train going somewhere else, and by dint of looking at sign-boards and keeping a wary eye upon every station we enter, I generally manage to hit upon the one I want during the course of the first week of my journey.

I reached Westminster Bridge in this manner, and boarded a steamer bound for Hampton Court. I chose that particular vessel because the skipper appeared to be a steady and reliable old chap, and not the irresponsible lunatic he proved himself to be.

He was the kind of person who need a great deal of scope in which to prove their prowess. The Thames, though a pretty wide sort of stream, wasn't by any means wide enough for him. The way he hopped, skipped, and jumped, left the wheel until the boat was on the point of billing against the Embankment, to leap back and give the wheel a sudden jerk, which sent us journeying on the tee-too-um principle of navigation, was most unnerving to one unaccustomed to life on the ocean waves.

That great fortune, escaped collision with those grubby old barges which float aimlessly about the river, with no one in charge of them, is a mystery to me. He did it, somehow, and I felt considerably relieved when we reached the clearer parts of the river beyond Chelsea.

The sun hid himself behind a pile of clouds when he saw us coming, and the rain began to fall. It came down in pretty heavy drops. I told you, and we hastened to take shelter below.

Half of us managed to get inside, when a lady of incredible proportions got jammed in the doorway. The under cover were vastly amused at this, but those in the rain showed signs of bad-temperence.

One sarcastic gentleman at the back advised her to "try it sideways." Though she had no intention of following his counsel, a rather complicated feat of steering on the part of the skipper removed all option. She shot inside, with our damp fellow-passengers following her by the foot.

We tried hard, nobly, and gallantly—we who had been under cover—to restrain our merriment, but it burst out at last in a united guffaw, led off by a jovial-looking youth in a very high collar.

"Ho, ho, ho!"

The stout lady glared round, and gripped her umbrella more tightly.

This made us rather nervous, and the

jovial youth lost some of his joviality. But "Ho, ho, ho!" he burst out again. "See! Ain't it funny? We've barely got inside when it's stopped raining! Ho, ho, ho!"

"Ho, ho, ho!" we all, casting grateful glances at him. "Ain't it, just?"

And we trooped out on deck again, the stout lady modestly bringing up the rear.

I had been seated some minutes, dreamily gazing down at the waters sparkling in the brilliant sun, when I felt a feeling—a cold and wet feeling, a most unpleasant feeling. For when open seats are in a shower of rain, if only for a few minutes, they are apt to get a trifle wet. "It's with no intention of showing off my superior knowledge that I say this, O fellow-dwellers in this temple of wisdom (I'm addressing the Editorial Staff now, not my readers) 'tis but the stating of a plain fact.

The jovial youth stirred uneasily, and seemed on the point of rising, but, catching my eye, he put on a languid expression.

"How beautiful everything seems," he murmured, "after the rain!"

"It does, indeed," I averred. "And the air is so refreshing after the rain!"

At that moment an elderly gentleman—about forty years, by appearances, clear of the new Man-Power Bill—shifted uncomfortably, and we gazed at him inquiringly. Finding our eyes upon him, he started a little, and said:

"Ah! What is more pleasant," he observed, "after the rain than to glide peacefully through placid waters, listening to the twittering of birds in the heavenly-sprinkled air!"

We professed entire concurrence with these sentiments. Though as we were passing under the London and South-Western Railway, and the time and the nearest approach to the twittering of birds was the creaking and cranking of an electric-train on its way to Kew Station. I fear the old gentleman's poetical imagination had led him astray.

He had been, by the way, the tenderer of the sarcastic advice to the stout lady. I recognised the voice. It was a wheezy affair—something between a croak and a sneeze.

Our friend of the jovial disposition indulged in an elaborate yawn.

"Yaw-yaw! Er—my legs feel rather cramped. I think I'll stretch them a bit."

He rose to his feet, and was soon wrapt in contemplation of the sunny landscape. And I myself, being of opinion that a much more extensive view could be obtained standing, also rose. And by a most remarkable coincidence the elderly gentleman rose, too!

In a very few minutes all the passengers had risen to their feet, with the solitary exception of the stout lady, she was engaged in some publication dealing with the mysterious subject of dross.

At length she looked up quite suddenly, and, with the majesty of Jove, rose slowly and ponderously to her feet. But she had not been conquered by the damp. We had got there—that was all.

The skipper made several erratic jobs at the landing-stage, throwing us poor passengers to all manner of "attitudes queer and quaint."

I remember that in the pleasure fairs at Mudanslush a source of great enjoyment was a contrivance known as "Shaw's Wiggle-Waggle." It consisted of a kind of movable platform upon which were fastened a number of forms. You paid your money, sat upon one of these forms, and the thing got going in a hurried, rectangular motion—wiggles, sideways, backwards, sideways, forwards—in the course of which joint-dislocating experience you bestowed innumerable beaming grins upon the spent-up pleasure-seekers, who gazed up at you enviously, and looked as if you were enjoying it no end.

Now, whether the skipper had boned his mode of navigation from Shaw's Wiggle-Waggle, or whether Shaw's Wiggle-Waggle had boned the idea from the skipper, is beyond my power to state. But, so far as opinions go, I strongly suspect the latter to be the true case. For the skipper did not merely proceed sideways and backwards and forwards; he went about a hundred and seventy-four other ways.

In fact, I will make bold to issue a challenge. I defy Shaw's Wiggle-Waggle to prove that it hasn't boned the idea from the skipper. Let the case stand in legal history as *Mudanslush v. Shaw's Wiggle-Waggle*.

But will Shaw's Wiggle-Waggle accept the challenge? No! Will Shaw's Wiggle-Waggle appear at the bar to defend itself? No! Bah! Talk to me not of Shaw's Wiggle-Waggle!

The vessel became stationary at last, and it was with a feeling of great relief that I stepped on dry—but not very dry—land—on landing-stage—of Hampton Court, manfully resisting a temptation, on route, to sling the skipper overboard. His size—and mine—helped me to resist.

And it was then we saw that it was he, the old Hun, who was the cause of the wiggles! There he lounged, using some two-score sheets of tarpaulin, which ought to have covered the seats, as a kind of divan!

I visited the palace first, saw as much as I wanted to see of the twenty-four-hour clock and the antediluvian bedsteads, and proceeded to the Maze.

It turned out to be such a very small affair that I was wondering whether to enter or tramp home in disgust, when I caught sight of two persons sitting at a small booth near by.

They were father and son evidently, and each was sipping at a glass of wine. The father was a compound of the gloomiest qualities of an undertaker's mute and a teetotal fanatic. And the son, even more gloomy and thoughtful-looking, if possible, was more other than our friend of the jovial disposition.

I never saw such a change in a chap in all my life. The purpose of the high collar made it appear as if he were wearing funeral black gloves, and a massive volume on some abstruse, theological subject.

As in a dream I sauntered past.

"Tis so, my parent—'tis so, indeed!" he rumbled, in tones an octave lower than usual. "When the iniquities of man are extirpated—when his selfish aims and ambitions are ground under foot—then, and not until, will red and lurid warfare, grim and ghastly bloodshed, cease at last."

I staggered faintly through the entrance, let fall the price of admission, rounded a curve in the first path, and collapsed against the hedge, perspiring copiously. The Exalted Personage at the next lap, could not have felt more than I did.

But "Be a man!" I bade myself encouragingly. "You came here to be amazed, so be amazed, and bear it like a man!"

Partly because of this encouragement, and partly because the hedge was so prickly, I stood erect and tried to smooth down my hair, which had done likewise.

A gentle breeze began to blow, and waited to my ears came phrases from which "Day of Judgement," and "Crack of doom" are but mild selections.

I scurried desperately along, found the centre of the maze, and lost it again; and when I emerged, very cautiously, the pair had vanished.

Ah, my dear Mudanslushians—and any other folk—the quality of a humbug in this world is difficult to estimate! But I will not moralise. I shed a simple tear for the depravity of mankind in general, and gave after a darning vessel and a gaze at the passengers of which are two of gloomy

leaving wearing very high collars and funeral black gloves.

I feel tempted to remark here that the passengers had rich, one and all, with their hands clasped behind them. But even a would-be humorist must draw a line somewhere; and I believe the sun had dried the seats.

Missing the boat caused me no very great sorrow. I returned home smoothly and serenely—comparatively speaking—by bus.

My weird North-country accent seems to nuzzle the Londoners a bit. And, as most of them have but a hazy notion of places situated outside the pale of the metropolis, their remarks sometimes rather exasperate me. Thus, when I launch forth to do a bit of shopping, things often proceed something like this:

"A tin of sardines, please, and a jar of marmalade."

The shopman bobs about a bit, hands over the goods, and smiles.

"You hail from Warwickshire, I believe?"

"No, I don't hail from Warwickshire."

"Ah! Then you come from the Hebrides?"

"For the Hebrides?" I grunt. "I come from Mudanshush."

The shopman smiles a superior smile.

"I knew it," he says triumphantly. "I once you came from somewhere that way."

I didn't compliment him on his knowledge of either topography or phonetics, but amble off for more purchases. It is an old lady behind the counter this time—one about ninety.

"Half a pound of treacle, mum, and a quarter of bloater-paste."

She sets to work on the order, and, to my dismay, the old, old smile begins to beam forth.

"Er—you must find it rather cold here," she begins; "that is, in comparison with the West Indies?"

"I don't come from the West Indies," I growl. "And I'd rather you didn't put the bloater-paste in the same jar as the treacle, mum!"

I stamp off to the next shop.

"Couple of blowers," I demand irritably, "and a pound of bilberries!"

I scowl ferociously as the obnoxious smile becomes in evidence.

"Bounce," murmurs the shopman—"very strange!"

"What's strange?" I breathe sulphurously.

"Why, this," he explains. "By a wonderful coincidence, I happen to have some relations at the Cape of Good Hope who have just set up an emporium and flee-forgetting percherne, to pay for them!"

You can easily see that such wild guesses at a chap's place of nativity are enough to make a stout turn blasphemous. And I fear that they have a baneful effect upon my appetite, for I am sometimes unable to consume all the delicacies I—er—well, we must call it buying.

I had the surprise of my life the other day. I went into a shop kept by a gaunt man of gloomy and scornful aspect, and asked for a couple of bobs' worth of eggs.

I always thought there was something uneasy about that man. I have often passed his shop; and the way he stands, with folded arms, staring gloomily before him, is most impressive, while the black straw hat he wears is surrounded by an atmosphere of mystery that is difficult to describe.

The number of ominous "Ugh's" that he uttered as he plocked the eggs into the bag told me that something out of the ordinary was cooking. I felt to conjecture. Would it be Hull, Hudson Bay, Cumberland, or Greenland; Guernsey, Jersey, Alderney, or—

"You come from Mudanshush?"

I rose slowly from my posture in the middle of the floor, into which his unexpected words had thrown me, and gazed at him with wide-open eyes.

"I was—what did you say?" I gasped.

"I was," he repeated, slapping the bag of eggs on to the counter—he had already taken the money for them—"do you come from Mudanshush?"

"How—how did you guess that? Do you come from there?"

"No, I don't," he said emphatically, bringing his hand heavily down upon the bag of eggs.

"But—but why Mudanshush?" I protested. "There are lots of places within wading distance of here. Sleighton-under-Syrie, for instance, and Smokey-cum-Grit, and—and lots of others. Why Mudanshush, precisely?"

"Ugh! I can tell that accent. I should hope!" he granted. "You didn't pay for these eggs, did you? Oh, you did! Good-day!"

Thus it was a very dazed Mudanshushian

that staggered out of the establishment with his bag of eggs.

I paused a few yards past the shop, retraced my steps, and peered cautiously through the dirty window at that phenomenon. There he stood, arms folded, gazing gloomily and scornfully from under his black straw hat upon a row of quaking bonyons, an opaque shelf.

He must be a vizard, or something. He never has any customers, or even a wash, if appearances go for anything. Scarcely a day passes but that I wander in the direction of his shop to have a look at him.

But when I took a trip to the British Museum—unaware that it was in the hands of the Ministry of Marbles, or some such important matter—I made a grim and gruesome vow that there should be no more wide guesses at my nativity.

A policeman, with a face like a half-opened tomato-tin, was on duty at the gates, and he cast an evil eye upon me.

"Well, and what do you want?"

"Wotcher, your foot?" I responded briskly. "Swelp me, I've nooted it here on the look-out for Impressions, blimey! Strike me pink if I won't!"

And, with an affable nod to the bobby, whose eyebrows vanished into his helmet, I passed inside.

A heavy odor fell upon my shoulder.

"Here! What's that? You Belgians think you can go in and out anywhere you like! What's it if you said you came for? Food ratings, was it?"

"Impressions!" I replied indignantly. "Just thought I'd pop into the Musey for some Impressions—of—of mummies and things—"

"And the locks, I suppose?" said the bobby suspiciously. "If ever a chap's face was enough to get him a gratis apartment in Dartmoor—Any way, call again after the war. I'll be shut up now."

Like practically all other places of interest, And in circles like these how on earth do Cabinet Ministers, the Lord Mayor, and Bishop of London expect a fellow to get any decent Impressions of their settlement?

P.S.—Merely to observe that the Wizard appeared to-day in a pair of brand-new, green-bayed trousers, a pair of brand-new straw hat, and gloomy aspect, exactly as per usual.—Shakespeare II.

THE TWINS OF TASMANIA.

FOR NEW READERS.

The twins are Philip Derwent, of Highcliffe, and his sister Philippa, of Cliff House. They have a cockatoo, named Cocky, which has been until recently with Flip (Philip) at Highcliffe, but is now at Cliff House. Flip has made an enemy of Gadsby, who is plotting against him with Vavassor. His best chums, Merton and Tunstall, are away from the school for a time, owing to a riotous and riotous life of the nuts, and without any real taste for it at the outset, takes to gambling. He goes with the nuts to a gambling den at Courtfield, quarrels with Pon, and is knocked senseless just as the warning "Police!" is heard. Flip comes to himself in a cellar, bound hand and foot. He is let out, however. He makes up his mind that the only thing for him to do is to run away, as returning to Highcliffe means certain expulsion. Then he meets Peter Hazeldene, who has run away from his friends, Gogs of England, to London, and are subito by rough. They meet all other friends of Flip's. Hazel runs off and Flip follows. Johnny Gogs meets the pretty post-girl, and a general argument ensues between Chikker, Gogs, the nuts, the Caterpillar, and Miss Gittins. Tunstall returns.

Tunstall Returns (continued).

"**H**ELLO, Tunstall! Churned to see you back?" said Pon. And he held out his hand. "You're lookin' very fit, by gad!"

Tunstall ignored the proffered hand.

"Can't say I'm exactly charmed to see you again, Ponsonby," he replied coolly. "Matter of fact, I'd rather you had cleared out before we came back—not that it is of any special importance to us. If you've once made up your mind that you can't do with a chap at any price, it's quite a simple thing to do the other thing, y'know, an' not speak as you pass by."

"Oh! Then this isn't a friendly visit, by gad?" snarled Pon.

"Most certainly is not. Did you expect one from me?"

"Might I ask what you do want?" inquired Pon, with deadly politeness.

"I want Gadsby an' Vavassor!" snapped Tunstall.

"Oh! Feelin' friendly in their case, then?"

"I am not!" answered Tunstall deliberately.

"I mean to give both the rotters a good hiding!"

"I wonder you didn't include me!" sneered Pon, still herring the way into the room.

"Rather warmer, too!" retorted Tunstall, his hands clenching.

"Brought that image along to help you, by

gad?" asked Pon, with a look that was not at all loving at Gogs.

"Excuse me, but I have a very distinct objection to being spoken of in that manner," put in Gogs.

"An' I dare say you have!" drawled Pon. "As I've an objection to bouncers with faces like Gogs' eggs, I don't study, by gad?"

"Then we will go inside, I think," Tunstall.

"Gogs said, 'I should be sorry to annoy Ponsonby.'"

Tunstall stared. Gogs looked too innocent to have misunderstood Pon purposely.

"You won't come inside?" snapped Pon.

"Then I fear you will get hurt," said Gogs sweetly.

"Go an' eat coke, you toad-faced cadd!"

"That," said Gogs calmly, "is very rude indeed."

His hand reached out and gripped Ponsonby. Pon punched wildly, then gave a howl of rage and pain, and after that lay down. He did not want to lie down, of course. Tunstall wondered why he did so. Tun knew nothing about Gogs' talent for jui-tai.

"The way is now clear," Gogs said gravely.

Tunstall stepped over the prostrate body of the furious Pon, and walked into the study.

Attending to Vav and Gaddy!

"**F**UNKIN' me, Gadsby!" he snapped.

"It was fair inference, Gaddy and Vav were there, in an atmosphere of cigarette-smoke, and with cards upon the table. But neither had spoken a word during the brief interchange of courtesies among the three outside."

"Funkin' you be dashed for a tale!" answered Gadsby hotly. "When was I ever afraid of you?"

"Conscience doth make cowards of us all," quoted Gogs.

"It doesn't do me, by gad!" snorted Gadsby.

"No, I can believe that," replied Gogs mildly. "Your conduct is of a rudimentary order, if existent at all, which I doubt; and to make a coward of you would be a work of supererogation."

"By gad, I can't be sling 'em about!" said Tunstall, half admiringly.

"Brought up on dictionaries," sneered Gadsby.

"Seems to have learned a thing or two besides, though. Now, are you goin' to take a thrashin', or are you goin' to show fight, Gadsby, you howlin' cad?"

"Take a thrashin' from you, by gad?"

"From me, of course. I'm in 'propose' to catch Langley or the Head to do my work for me."

"I can't see that it is your work," Gadsby

grewled. "I don't know what you're makin' all this dashed fuss about, come to that."

"Then I'll enlighten you. It's about a letter."

Vavasour looked very uncomfortable indeed. But Gadsby was new locally at Vavasour.

"What letter? I've got nothin' to do with your dashed letters, have I?"

"You oughtn't to have, certainly," replied Tunstall. "But you had the Dickens of a lot to do with this one—you an' that wot'n Vav!"

"Oh, leave me out of it, do, Tun!" pleaded the wot'n.

"Can be done, Vav! You're goin' through it."

Ponsonby had arisen from the floor by this time, and stood sulkily in the doorway of the study, within a yard of Goggs.

Gadsby glanced almost impudently at his leader. If Pon would not show fight! They were three to two—or, say, two and a half to two, having regard to the slight use Vav ever was when the crisis came. As for Goggs as long odds as the nuts liked to have on their side, but Gadsby thought it might serve, since the alternative seemed worse.

Pon did not appear to think so. And from Vav's point of view, really, it was not worth while. He was not concerned in the business which had aroused the wrath of Tunstall.

Moreover, he did not fancy provoking Goggs. As long as the eye of Goggs was upon him, he was likely to keep the peace, lest worse might befall him.

"I don't know what letter you're talkin' about," Gadsby said, very sulkily.

"This one," replied Tunstall. "Recognise it, don't you? The one Vav got from the postgirl he was tryin' to mash, an' handed over to you? Aft' follow with a spark of decency in him would."

"Oh, go an' eat coke, you bounder!"

"That wasn't what I came here for. Do you take a lickin' without a fight or with one? That's the question you've to answer!" Goggs turned his heated aside for a moment. A gleam darted into Pon's eyes, and he gave Gadsby a slight but significant nod. Pon was seething with rage at the treatment he had suffered, and he thought he saw his chance.

Vavasour had bucked up, the attack which followed might have been successful. As it was, it felt with momentary success.

For Pon gave Goggs a sudden push which sent him sprawling against the table, and Gadsby struck hard at Tunstall's face as he turned his head in surprise.

Then Pon collared Tunstall by the back of the neck, and Gadsby, stimulated to heroism, lit again.

"Sit on that pratin' ass, Vav!" roared Pon.

Vavasour hesitated. Hesitation was fatal in dealing with Johnny Goggs, who was himself very little in the way of losing time. He was rising when Vav tried to take a seat upon him; and somehow it was upon the floor that Vav took a seat, with a bump that shook every bone in his body.

Goggs was not far enough to bear any like-

ness to a well-cushioned armchair; but Vav would have preferred Goggs to the floor. His impression was less that of having taken a seat than that of having been a victim of a miracle, the rising up of the floor to smother him. He knew that Goggs must have done it; but how it was done he did not know in the very least.

Then, for the second time within five minutes, Pon felt the grip of Goggs. Its effect upon him was to make him let go at once of Tunstall's neck, and to vent a wild howl of anguish. Then he sat down hard by the side of Vav, and said things better left unrecorded.

"Easy does it, Pon!" spoke the Caterpillar from the door. "You'll be shockin' Goggs, dear boy, an' there's no tellin' what Goggs may do then. Or, you brute!" gasped Gadsby, very well punished indeed, sir, by Gadsby!

Tunstall had gone for Gadsby like a whirlwind. Gadsby took it fighting; but he was outclassed from the outset. No one could have dreamed that easy-going Tunstall had so much force in him. But his nose was streaming red from Gadsby's foul blow, and his neck had suffered at Pon's hands; and he was taking it all out of Gadsby.

"Here, stop it, you brute!" gasped Gadsby, fairly taken aback. "I—I give in! I—I apologise if you like, though I'm dashed if I see what I've got to apologise for! Here, I say, you can go on who you like!"

"Oh, can't it?" howled Tunstall. "I'll show you!"

It seemed that he could. Gadsby kept at his hands up, and did what he might to defend himself; which was a sad mistake if he expected Tunstall to stop. As long as he did that he was a combatant, even though he had ceased to hit. Had he dropped his fists his face at least would have been safe.

Tramp, tramp, tramp! The floor of the study echoed under their feet. Gadsby was bleeding at the nose now. Both his eyes would be in mourning in a few hours. His face was taking on a decidedly battered and swollen look. It was safe to say that Gadsby was not enjoying himself.

Others were, however. Goggs, standing over Pon and Vav, smiled benevolently upon Tunstall. The Caterpillar leaned against the wall and regarded the scene with critical approval. Smithson—hailed by Goggs as "Nebby"—hid come up, with Yates and Benson. Now Frank Courtenay and Monon arrived upon the scene at the same moment, though not in company.

Monson gave one glance at what was happening, and then mizzled. He was not at all anxious at all this might be about, and his conscience gave him no warning hint. But he thought he saw that this was no pleasant or proper place for a member of the nut brigade at the moment.

"I say, you know, you fellows are really making a most awful row!" protested Courtenay. "What's it all about, Rupert?"

"Ask Goggs, dear boy!" Goggs was here before me, and I'm much more eloquent."

Courtenay turned with a smile to Goggs. The new fellow made him smile still, though

he had begun to have a pretty clear notion that the amiable Johnny was anything but the ass he looked.

"I should describe it, Courtenay, as a species of trunk shock, and to my mind, quite justified," said Goggs mildly.

"Good old Goggles! That's about the size to see you take a thrashing, nevertheless."

"Hasn't he had enough, Tunstall?" asked Courtenay.

And at that moment Gadsby dropped his hands. Tunstall dropped his also, though unwillingly.

He looked at Gadsby. Both were dripping with blood; but Tunstall was hardly marked apart from that, while Gadsby carried marks that were not likely to disappear quickly.

"I would suggest that you might now get up and take your turn," said Goggs to Vavasour.

"I say, though—dash it all, you don't expect me to fight that mad brute!" gasped Vav.

"I do not," replied Goggs. "But I expect to see you take a thrashing nevertheless."

"Oh, by gad! Here, keep off, Tunstall, you brute! Don't be a dashed fool!"

"I'm not going to be. But I should be if I let you off, by Jupiter!" answered Tunstall grimly.

"Stop him, somebody! Pon, are you going to stand there?"

"The dear Pon is not exactly standin', Vav. But perhaps Goggs will allow him to assume a perpendicular position if he asks quite politely," said the Caterpillar urbanely.

Judging by his scowl, Pon had no intention of making any polite request. But he rose to his feet, and Goggs did not interfere.

A fleet gleam of light came into the face of Adolphus Theodore Vavasour. He might have known Pon better.

"Keep off! Pon—"

"It's not my bizney!" snarled the leader of the nuts.

"Courtenay, stop him! You're skipper of the Form!"

"Thought you didn't recognise me as such, Vavasour," said Frank Courtenay coolly.

"Oh, that's rot! Of course I do, by gad! I mean—oh, I do, absolutely!"

"I should be pleased to hear it—if it mattered," answered Courtenay, not stirring.

"You! You! You! You! You! You! You! Tunstall! I say, you fellows—Yates, Benson, Smithson—aren't you going to stop him? You—"

"We are not!" said Smithson, with immense decision.

"Good, Nebby—good!" remarked Goggs approvingly.

"Look here, face, not so much of your Nebby!" snapped Smithson.

"My dear Nebuchadnezzar—"

"Oh, chuck that! You know jolly well it's not my name, ass!"

"But," Courtenay said that it was, and I should be loth to suspect you of—"

"Drop it, clump!" snapped Smithson.

"Don't quarrel, children," said De Courcy.

"Let dogs delight! Excuse me, Vav, but I really cannot have you gettin' behind me! I regard the wall as more reliable. Somethin' I must have to support my feeble frame, but—"

"Yoopy! Oh, stop it, Tunstall, you brute!" Vav howled, as Tunstall, who thus far had only threatened, dragged him up, and began to lay a riding-whip about him.

"Yarroo! Stop! That's Pon's whip!" yelled the victim.

"Well, Pon can have a taste of it when I've done with you! He's only got to say the word, by Jupiter!" retorted Tunstall, laying on hard.

"What a fortunate thing it is that the nuts always use clothes-brushes!" drawled the Caterpillar. "Now, if this were you, Smithson—"

"Red!" I brush my clothes when they want it. Don't be a silly ass, Caterpillar!"

"Can't help it, dear boy!"

"What does this disgraceful scene mean? Courtenay—De Courcy—Smithson—Goggs—"

Someone had appeared in the corridor. It was Mr. Mobbs, and he seemed badly taken aback.

He broke off, fairly panting for breath. To the snobbish mind of Mr. Mobbs such treatment of a highly-connected youth like Vavasour by Tunstall, who had no lords or dukes among his relatives, as far as Mr. Mobbs was concerned, was a very bad boy.

"Fry Tunstall, sir," suggested the Caterpillar. "Or Vavasour. I should fancy, I know, that they might know—"

"Gadsby!" gasped Mr. Mobbs. "Who has treated you in this barbarous manner?"

(To be continued.)

The Editor's Chat.

For Next Wednesday:

"THE WHEEZE THAT WENT WRONG!"

By Martin Clifford.

In this story we get back to the Shell v. Fourth, content, though it is not a sports yarn, as perhaps the title will suggest to you. Racket and crooke are concerned in the wheeze, and the way in which they came to be concerned in it makes one of the most interesting parts of the story. Clampe also gets mixed up in it, and so does Arthur Adams D'Arny—very much mixed up! Tom Merry & Co., Jack Blake & Co., Grundy, the Head, and Taggles, all come in. But I must not tell you more, or I shall be giving away too much.

LIST OF TOM MERRY STORIES IN THE "GEM"—(continued).

- 276.—"The St. Jim's Adventurers."
- 277.—"The Strife of St. Jim's."
- 278.—"The Schmeer."
- 279.—"Tom Merry's Special Number."
- 280.—"The Scamp of the School."
- 281.—"The Coward or Hero?"
- 282.—"The Rascal of St. Jim's."
- 283.—"Taggles' Benefit."

- 284.—"Schoolboy and Gentleman Boxer."
- 285.—"The Coward of St. Jim's."
- 286.—"The Gimp for Dick."
- 287.—"The Great Wallaby Match."
- 288.—"Figgins' Foe."
- 289.—"Wally on the War-path."
- 290.—"The Message of Mystery."
- 291.—"The Black Sheep."

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