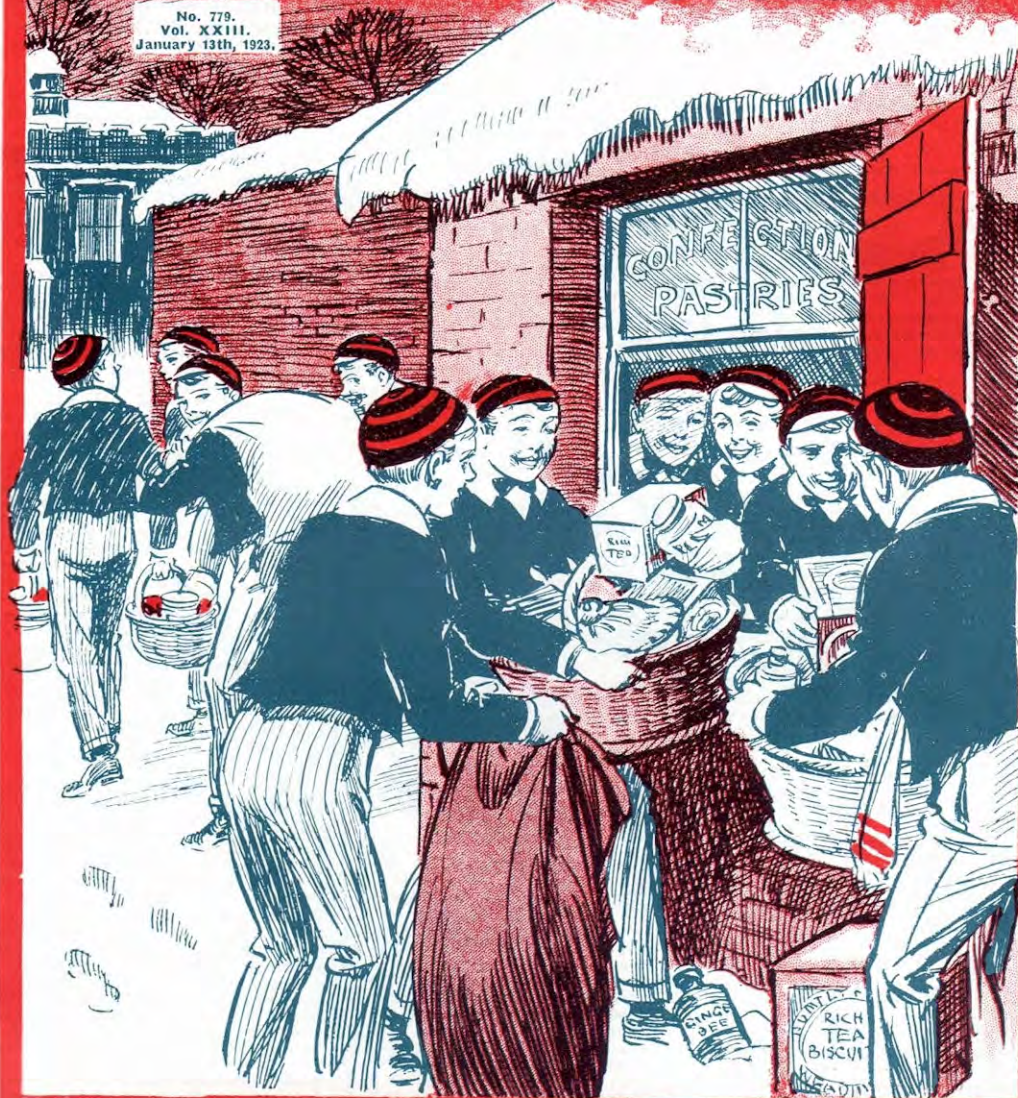


OUR GRAND BARRING-OUT STORIES ARE ALL THE RACE !

The GEM 2^D

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No. 779.
Vol. XXIII.
January 13th, 1923.



THE RAID ON THE TUCK SHOP !

(The Rebels of St. Jim's Replenish Their Larder by a Midnight Raid on the School Tuck Shop.)

Published by Howard Baker Press Ltd, 27a Arterberry Road, Wimbledon, London, S. W. 20.





My Readers' Own Corner:

LET'S HEAR THAT FUNNY JOKE OF YOURS!

**Tuck Hampers and Money Prizes Awarded for Interesting Paragraphs.
(If You Do Not Win a Prize This Week—You May Next.)**

All Efforts in this Competition should be Addressed to: The GEM, "My Readers' Own Corner," Gough House, Gough Square, London, E.C. 4.

LOOK HERE, BOYS!

Another delicious TUCK HAMPER awarded again this week. REMEMBER if you are not fortunate enough to win one of our HAMPERS you may win a money prize. Send along your attempt accompanied by one of the coupons, RIGHT NOW!

THE NEW BRAND!

As he polished his customer's boots the shoeblick puffed at the end of a cigar. Thinking to have a little fun at the youth's expense, the customer asked him if he always smoked cigars. "Oh, yes, pretty often," declared the youth. "What brand do you generally smoke?" was the next question. "Robinson Crusoe," came the reply. The customer pondered awhile. "I've never heard of that brand before," he said. "It's a name I've given 'em myself," said the youth. "You see, guv'nor, old Robinson Crusoe was a castaway!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to Roy Hudson, 123, Fitzgerald Street, Bradford.

JUST A MISTAKE!

Murphy had gone hunting for a gas leak with a match. When he came to his senses some hours later in the hospital, he found several nurses and a doctor bending anxiously over his bed. "Good gracious, man," said the doctor. "I should have thought you'd have had more sense than to look for an escape of gas with a lighted match." "Faith," retorted the sufferer, "twas a safety match!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to A. W. Chase, 94, St. George's Road, Gt. Yarmouth.

IT PAID!

"Say, Jim," said the friend of a taxi-driver, gazing through the open door into the carriage, "there's a pause lying on the floor of your car." The driver looked carefully around him, and turning to his friend, whispered: "Sometimes when business is bad I put it there and leave the door open. The purse is empty, of course, but you've no idea how many people jump in for a short drive when they see it!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to S. Charlton, 16, Elmora Vale, Dabham.

THIS WINS OUR TUCK HAMPER MISUNDERSTOOD!

A darkie in the American army was doing "sentry go" for the first time in his life. Suddenly a dark form approached him. "Halt!" he cried in a threatening voice. "Who are you?" "The Officer of the Day!" came the reply. "Advance!" cried the



"Halt! Who goes there?"

sentry. The "O. D." advanced, but before he had gone many steps the dusky sentinel again cried: "Halt!" "This is the second time you have halted me," cried the officer. "What are you going to do next?" "Never mind what Ah's gonna do next. Mah orders is to call 'Halt!' three times, den shoot!"—A Tuck Hamper filled with delicious tuck has been awarded to F. E. Gardner, 73, Dewsbury Road, Aulfield, Liverpool.

PROOF POSITIVE!

Mrs. Overton had a deadly gleam in her eyes as she entered the butcher's shop and said in a withering voice: "Mr. Aitchboon, how do you account for the fact that there was a piece of rubber tyre in the sausage I bought here yesterday?" "Oh, my dear madam," responded the butcher, rising to the occasion, "that just serves as an illustration of how the motor-car is replacing the horse everywhere nowadays!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to Mrs. F. Edwards, 35, Field Road, Forest Gate, E.7.

TOO RISKY!

A butcher, who had the misfortune to be cross-eyed, was going to kill a bull. Calling the boy he employed, he told him to hold the beast by the rope fastened to its head while he dealt the blow. The boy, who was a son of the Emerald Isle, seemed rather fidgety about his task, and said: "If yer plaze, sir, would yer mould informin' me if ye are going to strike where ye are lookin'?" "Of course," said the butcher sharply. "Well, then," replied the boy, "ye can hold the bull yerself, fer shure Oi's not goin' ter fer yer be lookin' straight at me. Shure, if yer strikes where yer looks, the old bull must live till the noo boy comes!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to E. M. Hunter, 3, Kingsley Street, Pleck, Wallsall.

WITTY!

Tom: "This automatic weighing-machine has been here for twenty years." Dick: "Then it 'auto' be rheumatic, after 'weighting' all this time!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to H. Jewell, 63, Exeter Road, Adlecombe, Croydon.

SARCASM!

Old Gentleman (to beggar to whom he has just given a penny): "Now, my man, what will you do with that coin?" Beggar: "Well, I scarcely know, guv'nor, whether to purchase an annuity or invest it in stock. Which would you advise?"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to T. Heyden, Trefu House, Clinton Road, Redruth, Cornwall.

TUCK HAMPER COUPON

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No attempt will be considered unless accompanied by one of these



The Siege of the School House!

Dr Holmes' Tactics Are Unavailing to Bring About the Downfall of the Rebels of St Jim's. A Most Exciting School Story.

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

CHAPTER I.

The Hour and The Man!

"LEAVE it to me!"

"But—"

"That's enough!"

Grundy of the Shell spoke in a tone of finality.

Grundy, apparently, had had enough of argument. He said so. Having said so, he considered the matter finished. But it wasn't!

"You silly ass!" recommenced Tom Merry, in measured tones.

"You fabrious duffer!" said Monty Lowther.

"You cheeky chump!" said Manners.

The Terrible Three of the Shell all spoke together. But their combined opinions had no effect on Grundy.

He snorted contemptuously.

"Leave it to me!" he said. "You're all very well in your way. Tom Merry, but you're no good as leader. You're bound to admit that. Now, I'm a born leader!"

"A born idiot, you mean!" suggested Lowther.

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy warnily. "If you have any sense, Gwunday, you must see that this maffah had better be left in my hands."

"Fathead!"

"Weally, Gwunday!"

"Leave it to me," said George Alfred. "I'll see you through. Now, that's settled! No more jaw, for goodness sake! You fellows are all jaw, like a sheep's head. Leave it to me."

Tom Merry breathed hard.

Grundy was quite decided, and very firm. Grundy's view was that, in a time of crisis, the brainiest fellow ought to come to the top, and take the lead. Undoubtedly, it was a time of crisis, with a barring-out going on at St. Jim's. Equally, undoubtedly, in Grundy's opinion, he was the brainiest fellow there. Therefore, Grundy ought to come to the top, and take the lead. That was perfectly obvious to Grundy. Grundy was naturally exasperated when other fellows refused to see obvious facts—obvious to Grundy.

"Bump him!" suggested Jack Blake.

"Not a bad idea," remarked Herries. "Anyhow, we can't leave it to Grundy. He hasn't the brains of a bunny rabbit!"

Another snort from Grundy.

"Now, look here, Grundy!" said Tom Merry.

But Grundy did not look there! He had no time to waste. He interrupted the captain of the Shell.

"Enough talk!" he said. "Let's get to it! I think I'd better speak out plain, Tom Merry. We're barring out the Head, because he's sacked you from the school, and we won't let you go. I'm backing you up as heartily as anybody!"

"But for that," said Tom cheerily, "I should have punched your nose before this, Grundy!"

"Cheese it! We all believe in you, and think the Head is making a bloomer, and we're going to see you through," said Grundy. "But seeing you through means making a success of the barring-out. There's only one way to succeed—put the best man at the top and obey his orders. That's what you fellows don't seem to understand. A time of stress always produces a great man fit to take the lead—the hour and the man, you know."

"Oh, my hat!" said Tom.

"Look at Cromwell!" said Grundy.

"Kuk-kuk-Cromwell!"

"Yes, Cromwell—Oliver Cromwell. When they wanted to

give King Charles the kybosh they wanted a leader, and Cromwell put in. The hour and the man, you know. Suppose all the silly old leaders had kept their jobs, what would have become of them? That's how it is. Can't you learn anything from history?" demanded Grundy scornfully. "What the thump do you study it for in the history class if you can't learn anything from it?"

"Bai Jove!"

"Of course, this rebellion is on a smaller scale," said Grundy, "but the position's the same. A Cromwell's wanted! Well, here I am!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors roared.

"I don't see anything to cackle at," said Grundy darkly. "I'm prepared to fight any fellow that doesn't agree with me. I can't say fairer than that."

"Grundy—Lord Protector of St. Jim's!" almost sobbed Monty Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Cut it out!" said Grundy. "Now, I hope I've convinced you, Tom Merry!"

"Not quite!" said Tom, laughing.

"Well, you must be an obstinate ass," said Grundy, in disgust. "What's the good of my talking to you if you can't understand when I'm finished?"

"Are you ever finished?" asked Cardew of the Fourth.

"He, ha, ha!"

"Enough jaw!" snapped Grundy. "Now, the matter stands like this. We're barred in here. The Head's let us rip ever since Christmas Day—leaving us to stew in our own juice, by gad. The grub's running out. Of course, the Head is counting on that. He thinks we shall surrender when we're hungry."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"It's a serious matter!"

"Jolly serious," said Fatty Wynn feelingly. The Falstaff of the Fourth was in complete agreement with Grundy on that point. "Of course, we're standing by Tom Merry to the last shot in the locker. But a fellow gets awfully hungry in this weather."

"Don't interrupt me, Wynn. We've got to get provisions in. It won't be easy!"

"If it were easy we'd let you handle the job," said Digby.

"But it's hard. So what good would you be?"

"Yaas, that is wathah a posah, Gwunday!"

"Don't jaw! We've got to get an expedition down to the village, and get in grub, and get it safe into the house," said Grundy. "Only a chap with great strategical abilities can take charge of an expedition like that. I'm the chap!"

"But—" said Tom.

Grundy pushed back his cuffs.

"You argue too much, Tom Merry," he said. "Now, I'm prepared to give you the licking of your life, if that's the only thing that will make you see sense. I'll take command of the expedition after I've thrashed you. Come on!"

Tom Merry smiled, and put his hands into his pockets.

"I'm not going to hammer you, Grundy. You've asked for it, but I can't hammer a fellow who's standing by me in a scrap like this. You can't help being a born idiot, I suppose. If you're keen on taking charge you can try your luck—and when you've mucked it up we'll send another expedition to get in the grub."

"Yaas, that's not a bad idea!"

Snort from Grundy.

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"Leave it to me," he said. "You'll see that it will be a tremendous success. I shall want some fellows to come with me to carry the grub. Hands up, volunteers!"

Grundy looked round, apparently in expectation of seeing a forest of hands rise in the air. But not a hand rose. Grundy looked puzzled.

"I've asked for volunteers!" he said.
"Ha, ha, ha!"

Apparently the rebels of St. Jim's were not keen on following the lead of the great Grundy. The hour had produced the man—but his greatness was not recognised by the common herd, as so often happens with great men.

"Well, of all the rotten funks!" said Grundy.

"Weally, Gwunday."

"Plenty of volunteers, on one condition," said Manners.

"What's that?"

"That you stay behind."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

YOU CAN PIN YOUR FAITH TO TOM MERRY

Grundy gave a contemptuous snort.

"I'd stay behind if there was any chance of the stunt succeeding without my leadership," he said. "As there isn't, I'm bound to go. You can come with me, Wilkins—and you, Gunn. I expect my pals to stand by me. No need to jaw; come and get ready."

Wilkins and Gunn exchanged a hopeless look. They knew of old how useless it was to argue with the great Grundy.

"Now, about the cash!" said Grundy. "We'd better get all the stuff we can, and have a whip-round. It's a case of all-in. We can raise ten quids."

"Yass, wathah!"

"That's the idea," assented Tom Merry. "But we're jolly well not putting it in your hands, Grundy. If you're caught, it goes."

"I sha'n't be caught."

"Bow-wow!"

Grundy sniffed.

"Well, I don't care. I've got plenty of tin of my own. I'll pay for the stuff, and you fellows can square your whack when I get it here."

"That's all right!" said Tom cheerily.

And Grundy and his two faithful—but rather unhappy—followers, prepared for the desperate venture. Ralph Reckless Cardev of the Fourth was heard to offer three to one in sovs. that they would be bagged by the Head; but there were no takers.

CHAPTER 2.

Grundy Tries It On!

TOM MERRY stood at a window, and looked out into the quad, where there was a glimmer of snow in the winter sunshine.

His face was thoughtful.

Matters had gone, so far, victoriously for the rebels of St. Jim's. In the barred School House they had held their own.

They had defeated the attack made upon them by Sixth and Fifth, at the orders of the Head; and the senior Forms were now away for the Christmas holidays. Day after day had passed since then, and the rebels had been left in triumphant possession of the School House.

Sometimes they saw the Head, or Mr. Railton, or Mr. Ratcliff emerge from the New House across the quad, and look towards their stronghold.

But that was all they saw of the enemy.

Dr. Holmes seemed to have resolved to leave them to themselves; to "stew in their own juice," as Grundy had so eloquently expressed it.

The Head's position was, undoubtedly, a very difficult one. A couple of hundred juniors stood by Tom Merry, and the School House, bolted and barred, was a very strong fortress, certainly not easy to take so long as the garrison stood to their guns.

Perhaps the Head counted upon weakening in the ranks of the rebels—perhaps on the running short of provisions. The School House had been fairly well stocked; but the garrison was numerous, and after a few days they had been put on rations. But the rations were running short.

The question of renewing the supply of provisions was a pressing one. By pooling their resources, the rebels had

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plenty of cash; but the school shop was, of course, closed, and it was a difficult and dangerous enterprise to venture as far as Rylcombe.

Already several fellows who had gone out of House bounds had failed to return. Taggles, the porter, and the Head's gardener, and the stableman, were keeping an eye open, and any incautious junior who went out was "nailed" at once. He was marched into the New House, caned, and taken to the station and sent home for the remainder of the vacation.

It was very probable that Mr. Railton, if not the Head, would be on the watch for an attempt to renew the food supply; and it was an enterprise that required great prudence and caution.

Tom Merry had very little expectation that Grundy of the Shell would be successful, though he hoped for the best. But there was really very little choice about giving Grundy his head.

It was either that, or a fight with Grundy; and Tom felt a natural disinclination to hammer a fellow who had supported him through thick and thin, exasperating duffer as he was.

Tom, as he looked out into the glimmering quad, was wondering how the barring-out at St. Jim's would end. He was determined never to submit to the Head's sentence of expulsion; and so far there had been no sign of his followers weakening.

But it was certain that something must happen before the time came for the new term to commence at St. Jim's.

The term could scarcely begin with the School House, in which were the masters' rooms, and all the Form-rooms, in the hands of rebels who had turned the building into a fortress.

Would the Head recognise his mistake, and give in? Tom could scarcely hope for that.

But otherwise there seemed no end to the affair. Unless the unknown thief was found, the Head would continue to believe that it was Tom Merry who had robbed Mr. Ratcliff's study.

And the thief, as Tom was assured, was some utterly unknown footpad from outside the school—probably far enough away by this time.

Tom's rather gloomy meditations were interrupted by a clap on the shoulder, and he turned to see the cheery face of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Not feelin' down, old chap?" asked Gussy.

Tom smiled.

"Oh, no! Just thinking."

"It's all wight, you know," said Arthur Augustus confidently. "We're holdin' out a treat. Of course, Gwunday's no good; but we shall get the gwub in soonah or lath."

"What-ho!" agreed Tom.

"The Head will have to see weason, you know," said Arthur Augustus. "He can't be enjoyin' this state of affairs. He hasn't been able to go away for Christmas with Mrs. Holmes. He can't like bein' stuck ovah there in the New House with howvid old Watty to bore him."

Tom Merry laughed.

"We're goin' to see you wighted, old fellow," said Arthur Augustus cheerily. "I've no doubt that the Head will see weason in the long run, and will apologise gwacefully for his wotten mistake."

"I hope so," said Tom, laughing.

"Bai Jove! There's goes Gwunday!"

HE'S A BORN LEADER!

To what extent he will persist in this great rebellion you must

WAIT AND SEE!

Tom Merry turned quickly to the window again. George Alfred Grundy was making his venture.

Three figures were stealing away from the School House, and from the way they crouched and doubled, it looked as if they were seeking to keep in cover.

Grundy led the way, and he was followed by Wilkins and Gunn, his study-mates and unhappy followers.

Grundy was full of confidence; but even at that distance it could be discerned that Wilkins and Gunn did not look happy.

"Bai Jove! They'll weach the wall all wight!" said Arthur Augustus. "Gwunday is a vewy exaspewatin' ass, but I wish him luck!"

"Yes, rather!"

There was no sign of an enemy. Tom Merry watched the



Suddenly a light from an electric torch shone full upon the face of Grimes, and a sharp voice called out: "Halt!" Grimes pulled in his horse as a man loomed up behind the light. "Hallo! What's the game?" he asked. "Not highway robbery, I hope!" (See page 9.)

three stealing figures as they dodged into the cover of the trees near the wall. He drew a deep breath.

"Bai Jove! They're goin' to get cleah!" murmured Arthur Augustus, in great excitement. "The jolly old enemy is not on the watch!"

"Looks like it!" agreed Tom.

"Of course, if they're capchahed, we'll wush out to the wescue," said Arthur Augustus.

"Yes, rather!"

But Grundy & Co. were not captured, in the precincts of the school at all events. Through the leafless trees, the juniors at the windows of the School House saw them clamber over the wall, and drop outside. They disappeared from view.

"Gone, bai Jove!"

"Hurrah!" shouted Jack Blake. "They're clear! The giddy enemy has been caught napping!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"They're not back yet," drawled Ralph Reckness Cardew.

"Anybody feel inclined to take a sportin' offer? Four to one we don't see Grundy's jolly old phiz again till next term!"

"Weally, Cardew—"

"They're not been spotted!" said Levison of the Fourth. Cardew grinned.

"Railton knows that if he collared them in the quad, we'd buzz out and rescue them, same as we did Gussy once," he said. "I fancy they'll drop on old Railton out of our sight."

"Well, Grundy asked for it," said Clive. "He will have to take his chance."

"Yaas, wathah!"

From a good many windows in the School House the rebels of St. Jim's watched for the return of Grundy & Co.

But as the wintry hours wore away there was no sign of George Alfred. And the general opinion was that George Alfred Grundy had made a "muck" of it—which, as Monty Lowther remarked, was only to be expected, considering the mental apparatus that unkind Nature had endowed George Alfred with.

CHAPTER 3.

Grundy's Luck!

"A LL serene—what?" George Alfred Grundy asked that question. He stood outside the stone wall, and grinned with satisfaction.

Gunn nodded. Wilkins took no heed, being busy in extracting snow from the back of his neck. Grundy had

kicked a small avalanche of snow over his chums in descending the school wall, and Wilkins had caught a good deal of it inside his collar. It did not seem to please him, somehow, and his look was not nearly so happy and satisfied as Grundy's.

"We've cleared out as easily as falling off a form," continued Grundy. "Mind, I don't say it actually was easy. With any other fellow leading you, you'd have bumped into the enemy right enough."

"Didn't see any enemy!" remarked Gunn.

"That's because you were well led," explained Grundy. "With Tom Merry or Blake or Figgins leading, you'd have bumped right into them."

"Oh!" said Gunn.

"Rely on that," said Grundy. "Now, I've led you out safely. I'm going to lead you back with the tommy. Just keep your eye on me, do exactly as I tell you, and never make the mistake of stopping to think before you obey orders, and you'll be all right."

"Oh!" said Gunn again.

"Come on!" said Grundy. "What are you hanging about for, Wilkins?"

"I've got my beastly neck full of beastly snow from your beastly hoof," said Wilkins in a voice that had a sulphurous sound.

"If you're going to make a silly fuss about silly trifles, George Wilkins—"

"It's squeezing down my back!" groaned Wilkins.

"Blow your back! Is this a time to think of your back?" said Grundy, with scornful contempt. "I'm ashamed of you, Wilkins. Look at me!"

"Gr-r-r-r-r-r!" said Wilkins.

"Catch me complaining over trifles!" said Grundy. "For goodness' sake, Wilkins, buck up, and be a man! Can't you take example by me? What's the good of a fellow setting other fellows a manly example if they never profit by it? It's discouraging. Just follow your leader, and leave off grouching!"

Grundy led the way.

Unfortunately, Grundy's foot slipped on a patch of ice by the roadside, and he skidded so suddenly that he had no chance to save himself. Before Grundy knew what was happening he had plunged over headlong, diving his head into the deep drift of snow under the school wall.

Gunn grinned, and Wilkins chuckled. Wilkins' neck was still clammy with snow melting down his back, but he seemed to derive great comfort from the view of Grundy, with his

head and shoulders buried in snow, and his long legs kicking wildly.

"Moooooooooooooh!" came in muffled accents from the drift.

"Ha, ha, ha!" chortled Wilkins.

"Mmmmmmmoooooooooh!"

"Like a blessed farmer's cow," said Gunn. "What is Grundy mooting for?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Mmmmmmmmmmmmmmm!"

Grundy backed out of the snow-drift, gurgling and spluttering, with a face of crimson. He sat up and gasped. There was snow all over Grundy—in his hair, in his ears, in his mouth, in his collar, and melting down his back. He was in a much more parlous plight than Wilkins, and the expression of happy satisfaction had left his face.

"Groogh! Mmmmm! Ooooooh! What are you blithering cuckoos cackling at?" gasped Grundy.

Wilkins and Gunn became grave—as grave as they could. Grundy struggled to his feet, and fielded his cap from the snow.

"Come on!" said Wilkins cheerily.

"Shut up! I've got a lot of dashed snow in my neck——"

"Never mind——"

"What?"

"You're not going to make a silly fuss over a silly trifle, I suppose!" asked Wilkins.

They were Grundy's own words, but they did not seem to please Grundy. He left off scooping at the back of his neck, and started towards Wilkins with clenched fists and a glitter in his eyes.

"Grundy! Wilkins! Gunn!"

"Oh, my hat!"

It was the voice of Mr. Railton, the Housemaster of the School House. The three juniors spun round, Grundy quite forgetting his belligerent intentions. The enemy, apparently, had not been so completely dodged as George Alfred had fondly supposed.

Mr. Railton had come from the direction of the school gates. There was a grim expression on his face.

"Oh! You, sir!" gasped Wilkins.

"You three boys will follow me at once," said Mr. Railton.

"Yes, sir!" murmured Gunn.

"Hold on!" said Grundy. "We're not taking orders from you at present, Mr. Railton. There's a barring-out on."

"I am aware that the school is in a state of rebellion, Grundy," said Mr. Railton. "The Head's orders are that every boy who leaves the School House is to be sent home for the vacation."

"I'm not going, sir."

"Indeed!"

"You see, I'm backing up Tom Merry," explained Grundy. "I'm the life and soul of the barring-out, really. Without me it's pretty certain to peter out. I couldn't possibly desert the fellows. Let us pass, will you?"

Mr. Railton eyed him.

"No, Grundy," he answered, "I will not let you pass. You are now in my custody."

"D-d-did you see us getting out, sir?" murmured Wilkins.

"Yes, Wilkins. I allowed you to get outside the school walls before taking you in charge in order to prevent a riotous attempt at rescue on the part of your confederates in this rebellion."

"Oh!" gasped Grundy.

Wilkins and Gunn grinned—they couldn't help it. Grundy's masterly strategy evidently had not been so masterly as he had supposed. The Housemaster's eye had been very wide open all the time.

Mr. Railton glanced at his watch.

"There is excellent time for catching a train," he said.

"Taggles!"

"Yessir!" Taggles came shuffling up through the snow.

"You will take these three boys to the station, take their tickets, and see them in the train."

"Yessir!"

"I'm not going!" roared Grundy.

"Grundy!"

"Back me up, you fellows! Who's Railton, anyhow?" exclaimed Grundy truculently. "Rush him over!"

Grundy led the rush. Whether the three Shell fellows could have tackled the Housemaster successfully was a problem. It remained a problem, for Wilkins and Gunn did not even dream of putting it to the test. They would as soon have rushed a Bengal tiger in his native jungle as Mr. Victor Railton, Housemaster of St. Jim's.

Grundy did all the rushing. Wilkins and Gunn looked on as interested spectators. Perhaps they were not wholly sorry to see the overpowering Grundy butting against so tough a proposition. Mr. Railton grasped Grundy by the collar with his left hand, and swung him round quite easily, burly as Grundy was. Into his right hand a cane dropped from under his arm. The cane came into rapid action.

Whack, whack, whack!

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"Yaroooooooh!" roared Grundy.

Whack, whack, whack, whack!

"Oh, my hat! Help! Rescue, you rotters! Back up!" yelled Grundy.

"Nothing doing, old chap!" said Wilkins agreeably. "Can't back up against a Housemaster, you know. What did you lead us into a giddy trap like this for?"

"Not Cromwell's style, really!" remarked Gunn.

Whack, whack, whack, whack!

Grundy roared and struggled desperately. The hefty whacks of the Housemaster's cane seemed to be faying Grundy.

"Will you obey orders now, Grundy?" asked Mr. Railton calmly.

"Ow! wow! yow! No!" roared Grundy.

Whack, whack, whack, whack!

"Ow! I—I mean yes! Yes, certainly! Oh, yes, sir! Pleased!"

"Very good," said Mr. Railton. "Taggles, take these three boys to the station. I may as well warn you that a watch is being kept, and that there will shortly be a force here to deal with the rebellious juniors in the school. Any attempt to return will be followed by a flogging. You may go!"

Grundy & Co. went.

They tramped down the snowy lane to the village with Taggles, whose crusty face wore a wide grin. Taggles saw them into their train. Then Taggles' manner changed a little. Taggles had a firm conviction that all boys ought to be drowned at birth. But he had a great respect for the institution of Christmas tins.

"Good-bye, young gentlemen!" said Taggles, quite affably. "I hope, sirs, you'll have a comfortable journey. Anything more I can do for you?"

"You can take your face away!" suggested Wilkins.

"And boil it!" added Gunn.

Taggles frowned. Apparently there were to be no parting gratuities on this occasion.

"You young raskils!" he said.

"Cut off!" snapped Grundy. "You forget your place, my man!"

"You cheeky young rip—ooooow!" roared Taggles, as Grundy reached out of the carriage window and knocked off his ancient high hat.

Taggles scrambled after his hat, and the train rolled out of the station. Wilkins and Gunn settled down comfortably. As a matter of fact, they were not displeased to be out of the rebellion, and booked for home. But Grundy looked truculent and wrathful.

The three juniors had to change for Wayland Junction. Grundy made no motion to follow his comrades to the express.

"Come on, Grundy!" said Wilkins. "No time to lose!"

"You come on!" was Grundy's reply.

"Eh! Where are you going?"

"Back to St. Jim's, of course!"

"Oh, my hat! You heard what Railton said?"

"I'm not deaf!" answered Grundy.

"Well, then, you ass——"

"Are you coming?" demanded Grundy.

"We're not looking for another row with Railton, and a flogging from the Head into the bargain. We could never get in without being nailed!"

"Under my orders!" said Grundy.

"You're such a jolly ripping leader," said Wilkins admiringly. "You lead fellows into a trap, and then offer to lead 'em into another! Not good enough, dear boy! Come on, Grundy!"

"You bet!" said Gunn.

"Follow me!" roared Grundy.

"Bow-wow!"

Wilkins and Gunn ran for the express. Grundy glared after them, and made a stride in pursuit. But he paused. He was quite determined to return to St. Jim's. But even Grundy realised that he couldn't return, running the gauntlet of Mr. Railton and Taggles, with Wilkins and Gunn under his arms, as it were. Grundy was still thinking it out when the express rolled away, and Wilkins and Gunn waved their hands to him—a salutation to which Grundy replied by brandishing his fist. Then he walked out into the streets of Wayland.

CHAPTER 4.

Mr Railton's Last Word!

"AFTER dark!" said Tom Merry.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Who's going?" asked Talbot of the Shell.

Arthur Augustus coughed.

"I should be sorry to butt in, like Gwunday!" he remarked. "But I think you fellows will admit that this



As Grundy climbed out of the ditch, a light flashed full in his face and he blinked. "Here he is, sir," cried Sergeant Stuckey, as Mr. Railton appeared upon the scene. "I'll 'ave 'im, sir; I'll 'ave 'im! Here, Pilkins, this way! Arter 'im!" (See page 10.)

bizney wequahs a fellow of tact and judgment to handle it."

"Bow-wow!" remarked Blake. "Now, you'd better not go, Tommy."

"I was thinking that I had better go," said Tom Merry mildly.

Blake shook his head decidedly.

"Not good enough," he said. "Of course, we sha'n't run into the enemy's arms like Grundy. But Railton is a wary old bird, and he may catch us. If he catches anybody but you, it won't matter much. But if you're caught, why, you're sacked! We can be sent home for the vacation; but you'd be booted off for good. See?"

"I see," said Tom, rather slowly.

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus. "We must not let Tom Mewwy fall into the enemy's hands, or the whole thing breaks up."

"That's true enough," said Talbot.

"Right as rain!" said Manners. "We're not letting you outside the House, Tom. You're the giddy palladium, you know!"

The captain of the Shell nodded.

"Right-ho!" he said. "But, if you fellows go, for goodness sake be careful. I think Gussy had better stay with me."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy——"

"There might be an attack, you know," said Tom Merry solemnly, "and then where should we be, if you were off the scene, Gussy?"

"Yaas, that is vewy true," said Arthur Augustus unsuspiciously. "At the same time, these fellows are vewy likely to make a muck of it, you know, if I am not there to direct operations. Howevah, I will weinain if you wequiah me."

"Good!" said Tom. "Now, we don't want a crowd to

go; only enough fellows to carry off the stuff. Talbot had better take the lead——"

"I'm afraid that wouldn't be much good," said Blake shaking his head.

"Why not?" demanded Talbot.

"This ought to be in Fourth Form hands," explained Blake. "You know what you Shell fellows are!"

"Yaas, wathah; there is somethin' in that!" said Arthur Augustus, nodding his head sagely.

"Leave it to Study No. 6," said Blake. "I'll take the lead, and Herries and Dig will help me."

"But——" said Tom.

Talbot of the Shell laughed.

"I don't mind," he said. "Let Blake try his luck. But you'll want some fellows to carry the grub, Blake!"

"A crowd would never get through," said Blake. "My idea is to bag the grub in Rylcombe, and get it brought near the school and hidden. Then we can send out a few fellows at a time at night to sneak it in, in sections. We couldn't get the whole lot in at once unseen."

"That's not a bad idea," agreed Tom.

"Now for the giddy collection, then!" said Blake.

"Every fellow contributes according to his means," said Tom Merry. "Shell out, you chaps!"

The collection was quickly taken. Some of the St. Jim's juniors had plenty of that useful article, cash; some had little. But every fellow put something into the hat. Arthur Augustus threw in a couple of pound notes; Ralph Reckness Cardew tossed in a whole fiver. The contributions were mostly, however, in silver or ten-shilling notes. But among so large a crowd even small contributions mounted up. Jack Blake was soon in possession of the sum of twenty-five pounds to be expended in provisions.

"That's all right," said Blake. "This will tide us over for a bit if we get the cargo landed."

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"Don't forget jam tarts!" said Fatty Wynn anxiously.
 "Jam tarts!" said Blake, scornfully. "Who wants jam tarts?"
 "I do!" said Fatty Wynn warmly. "And dough-nuts!"
 "Soldiers don't stand siege on jam tarts and dough-nuts!" retorted Blake. "What we want is grub—just grub. Plain and solid."

"Yaas, wathah!"
 "Look here—" began Fatty Wynn.
 "Shut up, Fatty!" said Figgins, laughing. "Blake's right!"

"But, I say—" "Dry up, old man!" said Kerr.
 Fatty Wynn, thus suppressed by his own chums, was silent; but there was a mournful look on his plump face. Certainly, he liked plain, solid fare—plenty of it. But he liked the trimmings to follow. Fatty Wynn began to wonder whether barrings-out were rather a rotten idea, after all.

THE SITUATION IS SERIOUS at St. Jim's—

The early winter darkness had set in, and Blake and Herries and Digby slid down a rope from a back window and disappeared into the gloom. They had been gone about five minutes when a knock came at the door of the School House. There was a rush to the door. The front of the House was brilliantly lighted, all the lights being on. The rebels burned electricity with the generosity of fellows who had the comfortable knowledge that they hadn't to foot the bill.

"Who's there?" shouted Tom Merry, without making a movement to unbar or unchain the great oaken door.

"It is I—Mr. Railton."

"Good-evenin', sir!" said Arthur Augustus. "I trust you are well, sir?"

Mr. Railton did not reply to that. He did not seem to have come over to exchange polite greetings with the rebels of St. Jim's.

"My boys," he called out, "for almost a week now this riot has gone on! The Head has hoped that you would come to your senses and return to your duty. As you have not done so, force will now be used!"

"We've heard something like that before," said Monty Lowther.

"What?" "Sing it over again to us!" suggested Cardew.

"Ha, ha, ha!" "Have the Sixth and Fifth come back to help?" inquired Wildrake. "I guess we've licked them once, sir, and we can lick them again!"

"Yaas, wathah!" "Glad of the chance, sir!" sang out Kangaroo of the Shell.

"Trot out your jolly old prospects!" "Listen to me, my boys!"

"Certainly, Mr. Wailton! Pway dwy up, you fellows, and don't intewwupt Mr. Wailton. Wemembah the wespett due to a Housemastah, even when he is playin' the gidday ox!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" "Listen to me! The Head has requested me to obtain the necessary force for dealing with this rebellion," said Mr. Railton.

"I have therefore sent word to a number of my old companions-in-arms in Flanders."

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Clive.

"Old soldiers—what?" exclaimed Levison.

"It's beginning to look like business!" remarked Figgins coolly.

"Well, let 'em all come! They licked the Germans, but they won't lick us!"

"Hear, hear!"

"A sufficient force will be obtained to deal with you," continued Mr. Railton, his deep voice coming clearly through the big door. "Before affairs reach this serious state, however, I beg you to consider the position and return to your duty."

"We're doing our duty, sir," said Manners.

"What?"

"Yaas, wathah! It's our duty to stand by Tom Mewwy, and not allow the Head to turn him out, sir. May I suggest, sir, that your time would be better occupied in reasonin' with the Head and twyn' to make him undahstand that he is playin' the goat?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I have warned you, my boys!" said Mr. Railton. "If

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you resist the force that is brought against you, there will be some rough handling. You should bear this in mind."

"We're ready for it, sir," said Talbot.

"Is Tom Merry there?"

"I am here, sir!" answered Tom.

"I would make an appeal to you, Merry, to lead your schoolfellows no farther into mischief," said Mr. Railton. "The end can only be submission and severe punishment for all. It can do you no good; the Head's sentence will be carried out."

"The fellows are standing by me of their own accord, sir," answered Tom Merry steadily. "Any fellow who chooses is free to go, and leave me to take my chance. They're backing me up like real bricks, because they know I am innocent."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Bravo, Tom Merry!" roared Wally of the Third. The Housemaster's steps were heard retreating. He had said his say, and probably he had hoped little from the effect of his words. Tom Merry looked round at the crowd of excited faces.

"You fellows know what to expect now," he said. "I've said before, and I say it again—I don't want to drag any fellow unwillingly into my scrape. Any fellow that would rather go while the going's good has only got to say so."

"Rats!"

"Bosh!"

"Piffle!"

The replies of the juniors were emphatic. Matters were evidently becoming more serious; but the rebels of St. Jim's did not falter. Even Fatty Wynn was prepared to face short commons rather than fail in backing up Tom Merry. As for a "scrap" with Mr. Railton's former military comrades, it is much to be feared that the rebels looked forward to it, rather than otherwise. As Cardew remarked, a little scrapping would break the monotony; and the rebels agreed that it would.

CHAPTER 5. Passing the Military!

"THAT'S the lot!" said Blake.

It was quite a large lot.

Blake and Herries and Digby had reached Rylcombe in safety. Darkness had favoured them, as well as the fact that Mr. Railton was engaged in parleying with the rebels at the time their venture was made. Once in the village, the emissaries of the rebels had lost no time.

Their purchases had been on an extensive scale. Every sixpence of the substantial sum of twenty-five pounds had been laid out to advantage. Blake & Co. visited Mr. Sands, the grocer, first. Mr. Sands, who had heard rumours of the peculiar state of affairs obtaining at St. Jim's, eyed the juniors very curiously, and his youthful assistant, Grimes, grinned from ear to ear. But Blake proceeded to give his orders with perfect nonchalance, and Mr. Sands, who was a business-man, took them with genial civility, not bothering his head about matters that did not concern him. Grimes was told off to help the shoppers carry off the goods, and Blake remembered that Grimes' father was the owner of a horse and cart which were let out on hire. Grimes agreed at once to fetch round that means of transport, at the usual remuneration, and the groceries were stacked in the cart.

Then the juniors proceeded to the baker's for a cargo of loaves and cakes of the cheaper variety. Then they dropped in at Mrs. Murphy's, the village tuckshop, for further

—AND NO SIGNS YET OF SURRENDER!

Will Tom Merry be the Victor?

supplies. One or two further calls were made, till the cash was all expended, and the cart was fairly loaded.

Grimes drove the cart when it left the village. Grimes, fortunately, was on the best of terms with the St. Jim's fellows, and he entered heartily into the spirit of the thing. Grimes was told all about it, and he deeply sympathised.

The snow had ceased to fall, but there was plenty of it on the ground, and it was necessary to proceed at a walk in the dark lane when the village was left behind. Blake and Herries and Digby walked beside the cart.

"We've done it!" remarked Blake, with great satisfaction.

"And my opinion is that it's lucky the fellows left it to our study."

"You bet!" agreed Herries.

"I wonder where Grundy is now?" grinned Digby.

Blake chuckled.

"Safe at home by this time, most likely," he said. "Well, if grub's going to be short, we sha'n't miss the biggest mouth in the School House."

Grimes peered down from his seat in the cart.

"We're close on the school now," he said. "You don't want me to drive up to the gates, Master Blake?"

"No fear! Stop at the next field gate," said Blake. "We want to get the stuff as near as possible before we unload."

"Right-ho, sir!"

Grimes drove on. In the winter gloom ahead a light gleamed out suddenly from an electric lamp, and a sharp voice called out:

"Halt!"

"My 'at!" ejaculated Grimes, in astonishment.

Blake and Herries and Digby faded into the frosty hedges in a second. If it was Mr. Railton, they were not anxious for a meeting. The cargo had to be trusted to Grimes' discretion.

Grimes pulled in his horse in wonder. Grimes could remember the war-time, when military men would loom up on dusky roads and call on passengers to halt. But there was no war on now, so far as Grimes knew; though, as the papers came late to Rylcombe, there never was any telling what the Government might have been up to without Grimes' knowledge. Grimes thought he had better pull up, anyhow.

The man who loomed up behind the electric lamp had a military look, though he was in "civvies." He had a weather-beaten face and a rather grim jaw.

"Hallo! What's this game?" asked Grimes cheerfully.

"Not 'ighway robbery, I 'ope?"

"Don't be a young ass!" grunted the big man.

"Don't you be a hold hass, then!" retorted Grimes undauntedly. "What do you mean by stopping a bloke on the King's 'ighway? Who are you, anyway?"

Another man came into the circle of light. He, too, had an upright, military look, though he wore a "reach-me-down" coat and a bowler hat.

"Only a village kid, sergeant," he said. "It ain't one of the young rips."

"You speak when you're spoken to, Private Brown!"

advice to you is to 'urry to the nearest canteen. That's your mark. I expect you was blooming conscripts, anyhow!"

And Grimes drove on victoriously, leaving Sergeant Stuckey and Private Brown fairly quivering with rage at his Partisan shot. So satisfied was Grimes at having scored over the two military gentlemen that he forgot all about Blake and Herries and Digby. But he remembered them as his cart rumbled past the gates of St. Jim's.

"My eye!" murmured Grimes. "Well, I couldn't 'ave turned into the field—they'd have guessed what I was up to then. I wonder if they'll foller on and dodge them old codgers?"

Grimes proceeded at a snail's pace, peering right and left in the gloom, in the hope of seeing something more of his employers. He had passed the school, and reached a spot where the road was bordered by a fir plantation, when a shadow loomed up in the dark.

"That you, Master Blake?" breathed Grimes.

"Little me, old top," answered Blake's voice. "You got through all right, Grimey?"

Grimes chuckled.

"Right as rain, sir."

"Good!" said Herries, coming out of the shadows. "We dodged them in the fields—I'm smothered with dashed mud!"

"Same here!" muttered Digby. "I stepped into a ditch! Groogh!"

"Never mind—the grub's safe," said Blake. "But what the thunder does it mean—jolly old soldiers guarding the road? Railton was with them. I heard his voice."

"Blessed if I know what it means!" grunted Digby. "I know I'm muddy and jolly cold!"

"What about this 'ere cartload?" asked Grimes.

Blake stared back along the dark road. Near the school gates was a glimmer of light; elsewhere all was dark.

"Better land it here," he said. "It will be safe enough. We can sneak out afterwards and get it in."

"Right-ho!"

And Grimes descended from the cart and tethered the horse.

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"Oh, chuck it!" answered Private Brown truculently. "We ain't in Flanders now, Sergeant Stuckey. And don't you forget it!"

"Look here, Private Brown—"

"What I say is, chuck it!" said Private Brown. "Orfen and orfen, when we was out there, I promised myself that I'd give you a one—a real one—right on that knob you call a boko, when the war was over. I never done it yet. But you mind your eye, Sergeant Stuckey. You're just Bill Stuckey now, same as I'm Jack Brown. So mind your eye!"

"Keeping me 'ere all night, you two hold ornaments of the canteen?" inquired Grimes.

Another voice broke in—the voice of Mr. Railton, House-master of St. Jim's.

"What is it?"

The sergeant saluted.

"Taking a look at this cart, sir. Thought it might mean supplies for the enemy."

Mr. Railton smiled.

"Ah, it is Grimes," he said. "You were not going to the school, Grimes?"

"No fear, sir," said Grimes truthfully.

Certainly he had not been going to the school. The supplies would have had little chance of reaching the rebels if Grimes had delivered them at the school.

"Pass on, Grimes!" said Mr. Railton.

"Thanky, sir," said Grimes. "These blokes ain't going to harvest me, then, or confiscate my cart and 'orse?"

"No, no!"

"They ain't going to take me up, and shoot me for a German spy, sir?" continued Grimes, in a humorous, sarcastic vein.

"Come, come!" said Mr. Railton. "Go on at once!"

"Certainly, sir! Good-night, sir!"

"Good-night, Grimes!"

"And good-night to you, Sergeant Stuckey and Private Brown!" said Grimes, as he shook out his reins. "My

CHAPTER 6 Just Like Grundy!

SPLASH!

"Oooooooh!"

Thus George Alfred Grundy.

Grundy of the Shell had lingered in Wayland till darkness fell. Grundy was not a fellow to admit defeat; but even Grundy had to recognise the fact that his sortie from St. Jim's had not been a brilliant success. He dimly realised, indeed, that he had fairly walked into the hands of the enemy. Experience, it is said, makes fools wise; and possibly the proverb proved its truth in this case, for Grundy determined to wait for nightfall before attempting to re-enter the school.

He improved the shining hour in Wayland by purchasing a large ruck-sack, which he stacked with foodstuffs, determined not to return empty-handed. Every little would help when the siege of the School House was pressed in earnest; and this was really wise of Grundy. The awkward circumstance was that when he started for St. Jim's he found himself weary and heavy laden. But that could not be helped. He comforted himself with mental promises of what he would do to Wilkins and Gunn when he saw them again.

By woodland paths and shadowy fields, Grundy pressed on towards the school. He was rather snowy and extremely muddy when he struck, at last, the road that ran by the school gates.

Grundy cautiously avoided the neighbourhood of the gates. He crept along behind a hedge at a little distance, looking for a gap to squeeze through into the road.

He found a gap—a narrow one. He squeezed through. He was aware that there was a ditch on the other side—but he knew all about that ditch, and how wide it was, and that he could leap it easily. His idea was to get through the hedge, get a firm footing on the outer side, and jump.

Unfortunately, Grundy's proceedings did not work out quite

According to programme—which often was the case with the proceedings of George Alfred Grundy.

He jumped; but a jutting branch had caught in the heavily-packed rucksack, and Grundy's jump was cut short. What happened next was too quick for Grundy to help it. There was a terrific splash, and Grundy of the Shell landed in the ditch, sending water and mud flying on all sides. The ditch was full of mud, water, and half-melted snow—and Grundy. He went down to his neck, and let out a terrific yell.

Then he scrambled for his life.

His life was not really in danger, but Grundy felt as if it was. He scrambled and clutched and splashed and gasped and spluttered. He got a hold on the frosty grass by the ditch and dragged—but the heavy rucksack dragged him back. With the exertion of all his strength, Grundy only just contrived to crawl out of the ditch, and he sank in the grass spluttering breathlessly.

"Oh! Ooooh! Gug-gug-gug! Groogh!"

A light flashed on the dark road.

"Only some blessed cow, sir, I think."

"It sounded to me like a human being. I am afraid someone has fallen into the ditch in the dark. Bring the light here."

Grundy fairly palpitated.

The first voice was strange to him; but the second voice was very well-known, as it belonged to Mr. Railton. Grundy struggled to his feet. Through thick and thin he had stuck to the loaded rucksack; but now he hastily dragged at the straps to jerk it off. He knew that he would have to run for it now; and he could never have escaped with his loaded pack. Better for the provisions to be captured than Grundy. The St. Jim's rebels might get on somehow without the provisions; but Grundy they could not by any possibility get on. So George Alfred struggled with the rucksack.

The light flashed in his face, and he blinked.

"A blooming schoolboy—"

It was the voice of Sergeant Stuckey, though Grundy did not know it.

"Grundy!" exclaimed Mr. Railton.

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Grundy.

He had the rucksack off at last. As the Housemaster started forward to seize him by the shoulder, Grundy, acting upon an inspiration, swung the loaded sack right at him. It smote the Housemaster on his knees, and he pitched forward with an exclamation. As he sprawled over the rucksack, Grundy had his chance, and he took it. Squelching out mud and water as he ran, he bolted up the road.

Mr. Railton staggered up.

"That is one of the schoolboys!" he gasped. "He must be taken—a very insolent boy whom I have already sent home once to-day. He has returned—"

"I'll 'ave him, sir!" the sergeant shouted. "This way,

some of you! Brown, Pilkins, Green, Scuppers—this way! Arter him!"

There was a rush of footsteps on the frozen road. A loud hallo sounded through the air. Mr. Railton's former comrades in the war, who had rallied round to help him in this emergency at the school, probably took the whole affair as more or less of a "lark." Certainly they seemed in very merry spirits as they chased up.

"Who is it?"

"Where is he?"

"We're arter him!"

"Over the top, boys!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Now then, sergeant, put a shade over your nose!" bawled Private Brown. "You don't want to show 'im a light."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And in a roaring crowd, the heroes of Flanders went racing up the road after Grundy of the Shell.

Grundy heard them coming; a deaf man might almost have heard them. Grundy put on speed. Evidently it was impossible to enter the school now; Grundy could only hope to escape, and lie "doggo" till a chance came later of getting into St. Jim's.

But Grundy's luck was out, as well as Blake & Co.'s. There was a terrific collision in the darkness, and Grundy spun round, clutching the fellow he had run into.

"Look out!" gasped Blake.

"Groogh! Ow! What—who—which— My hat!"

"What the merry thump—" gasped Herries.

"They're coming this way!" panted Dig.

Blake fairly groaned.

The chums of Study No. 6 had just started unpacking the cart when the uproar broke out on the road. Then somebody crashed into Blake—Grundy, of course. Blake sat in the road and gasped, while Grundy reeled against the cart and spluttered. On the hard road sounded the trampling feet of the pursuers. Two or three lights flashed in the frosty darkness.

"You!" howled Herries. "Grundy! That born idiot—"

"I—I've come back—" gasped Grundy.

"Why couldn't you stay away?" yelled Herries. "Why couldn't you go and drown yourself? Wasn't there a home for idiots you could get into? The game's up now!"

"Ow, ow, wow!" mumbled Blake. "The silly idiot has fairly winded me—biffing into a chap! Ow, wow!"

"I—I didn't see you!" gasped Grundy. "Lucky I ran into you, Blake—"

"What?"

"Might have run into the horse, or the cart," said Grundy.

"Lucky, wasn't it?"

Blake breathed fire and slaughter as he staggered to his feet.

"Wait till I get at you!" he gasped. "I'll give you lucky!"

"Ere they are!" roared Sergeant Stuckey, flashing his light on the group. "A 'ole crowd of 'em—"

"Collar 'em!" shouted Private Brown.

"Oh, lor!" said Grimes. "This looks like the finish."

Undoubtedly it was the finish. Mr. Railton came hurrying up. The cart, with the tailboard down, and some of its cargo already in the road, told its own tale.

"Grimes! Blake—then—" Mr. Railton stuttered. "Upon my word! Herries! Digby! Grimes, you young rascal, you were helping these boys take supplies into the school! Bless my soul! Sergeant, secure those boys—"

But those boys were not so easy to secure. The consignment of provisions was lost—hopelessly lost; Blake & Co. knew that. They owed it to Grundy; but there was no time to kick Grundy.

The three Fourth-Formers dodged round the cart, eluding the grinning enemy. Grundy, who was not so rapid in his movements, felt the grip of the old sergeant on his collar. But Blake and Herries and Digby got round the cart in time, and clambered desperately over the low fence of the fir-wood.

"Yarrah! Rescue!" bawled Grundy.

"Take it quietly, you young rascal!" said the sergeant. "I've got you. Oh! Ah! Ow! Oooooooooop! Crumbs!"

Sergeant Stuckey gave a fearful howl as Grundy, in his desperation, hacked the military shin. Mr. Stuckey staggered back in anguish, dancing on one leg, and clasping the other with both hands. Private Brown made a jump at Grundy, but the Shell fellow succeeded in dodging this time, and jumped for the fir-wood. He was half over the palings when Private Pilkins—in an unlucky moment for himself—grasped him by one leg.

"No, you don't!" said Mr. Pilkins.

Crash! Grundy's free foot came into collision with Mr. Pilkins' jaw, and the yell that Mr. Pilkins gave next, might almost have been heard in Flanders. Grundy went head first over the palings, and landed on hands and knees. He gave a howl, and jumped up again, and ran. Mr. Pilkins clasped his jaw, and in a loud and emphatic voice, gave utterance

A GREAT SCOOP!

"MY SCHOOLDAYS!"

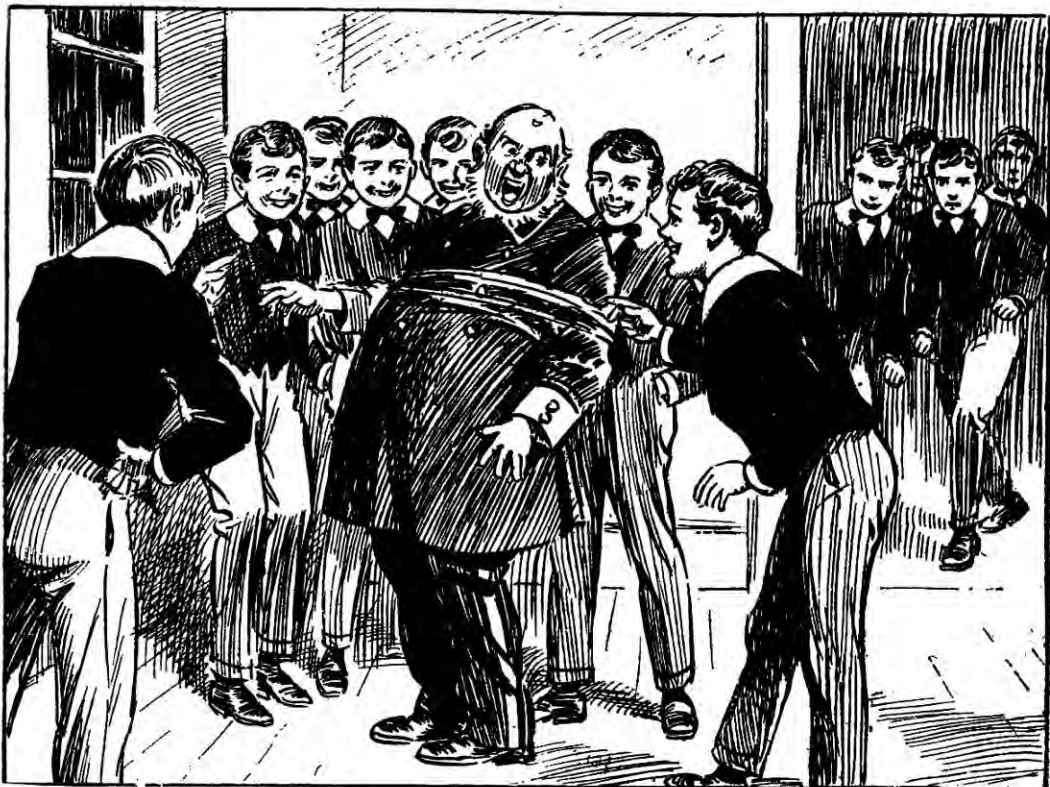
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"Now, then, Taggles," said Reggie Manners, "hop, or I'll stick a pin in you!" "You young raskit!" "Go it, Taggles!" yelled the delighted fags. There was a sudden rush as Tom Merry & Co. came to Taggles' rescue.—
(See page 16.)

to a continuous stream of expressions, that almost made his comrades believe themselves in Flanders trenches again. "Hush! Hush!" exclaimed Mr. Railton. "Are you hurt, Pilkins?"

Mr. Pilkins switched off his military language, and gazed at Mr. Railton speechlessly for a moment.

"No!" he gasped at last. "I ain't 'urt! A kick on the jor don't 'urt! It's nice! Werry nice and pleasant! I only ope the young villain will come back and gimme another kick on the jor! That's all! Don't you run away with the idea that I'm 'urt, sir! Jest chatting pleasant-like, that's all!"

"Come, come!" said Mr. Railton. "Have the boys gone? Bless my soul! Well, it cannot be helped. Grimes—
"Yessir!" said Grimes cheerily. "May I ask you, Mr. Railton, whether the langwidge of your friends is suitable for a feller of my hage to 'ear?"

Mr. Railton gasped.

"Grimes! You are a young rascal, sir! All these things will be confiscated. Drive the cart to the gates, and it will be unloaded there. Then you may go."

"Master Blake's paid for all this stuff, sir," said Grimes.

"Do as I tell you!"

"Werry good, sir," said Grimes. "I ain't responsible, if a 'Ousemaster of a public school takes to 'ighway robbery in his hold hage. All these 'ere blokes are witnesses, sir, if you're run in for it."

Mr. Railton controlled his feelings with difficulty. Private Brown took Grimes' ear between a hefty finger and thumb, and then Grimes considered it judicious to obey orders without making further remarks.

CHAPTER 7. The Rebels' Raid!

"I GUESS the coast is clear!"

Wildrake of the Fourth dropped in at the landing window, and shook snow from his clothes. It was dark; no lights were showing at the back of the School House. Every window but one was barred and barricaded—

all but the one little window from which Wildrake had descended on a knotted rope to scout. The Canadian junior came in very useful as a scout; even Grundy had admitted that Wildrake was the fellow for that particular job.

"No sign of the giddy expedition yet?" asked Tom Merry.

Wildrake shook his head.
"Nope. But I saw Railton go out, and I scouted round the New House and spotted Ratty in his study. Taggles is in his lodge; I heard a bottle clink against a glass—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The coast's clear, so far as the tuckshop's concerned," said Wildrake. "Of course, it's locked up and shuttered. But I reckon we can work the raffle if we like."

"And we're going to," said Tom.

"Yaas, waihah! I have thought it out, deah boys," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I wegard it as quite justifiable to waid the tuckshop, in the cires. Of course, we shall keep a stwict account of the goods we take, and pay for them all afahwards."

"Of course," said Tom.

"There's plenty of stuff there!" said Fatty Wynn, with a sparkle in his eyes. "I know that! I believe Dame Taggles would rather have kept the shop open, as we're here through the vac; but, of course, the Head ordered it to be closed. Mrs. Taggles will be jolly glad to sell off her stock. Some of it is perishable."

"It will really be doing Mrs. Taggles a good turn," said Talbot of the Shell, laughing.

"The pastry will be a bit stale," remarked Fatty Wynn thoughtfully. "But dash it all, stale pastry is better than none. We can't afford to grumble at trifles. And anyhow, there's dozens of jars of jam!" And Fatty Wynn beamed.

Tom Merry looked out into the shadows. It was a dark evening, with hardly a star in the sky. Only the snow glimmered faintly through the gloom, and dim frosty outlines showed of leafless branches.

It was long since Blake & Co. had gone, and so far there was
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was no sign of their return. Tom hoped fervently for their success; but, like a good general, he was taking measures against possible failure.

In the school shop, kept by Mrs. Taggles, there was a good store of foodstuffs of various kinds, and Tom's idea was to raid the school tuckshop and transfer the stores to the besieged School House.

The school shop was a "lock-up" one, and now it was shuttered and locked, and probably it had not even crossed the minds of the "beaks" that the rebels might attempt to raid it. It was not an easy task, and had Mr. Railton been at hand it was not likely that the raid would have been successful. But the Canadian scout had seen the Housemaster leave at the gates, and during his absence Tom decided to make the attempt. There was no time to be lost, since the Housemaster's warning that strong forces were shortly to arrive on the scene to deal with the rebellion. Once the heroes of Flanders were there, a raid outside the School House would be an impossibility.

"Good man, Wildrake!" said Tom Merry. "We'll get on to it at once. You'll take the lead, and take as many fellows as you like. We'll get a door open downstairs to get the stuff in."

"Right-ho!" assented Wildrake. "Pewwaps it would be bettah—" suggested Arthur Augustus.

But the swell of St. Jim's was not listened to. The juniors crowded down the stairs, and a back door was carefully unbarred and opened. Tom Merry had most of his forces on the spot, ready to repel an attack if it should come; but there was no sign of an attack.

Kit Wildrake slipped out quietly, followed by the helpers he had selected—Talbot, and Kangaroo, Figgins, Kerr, Wynn, Levison, Clive, Redfern, and half a dozen other fellows. They trod away softly and silently in the carpet of snow, and Tom Merry & Co. waited anxiously for their return.

Wrapped in the winter darkness, Wildrake and his comrades soon reached the school shop in the corner of the quad behind the elms.

The old quadrangle lay silent and dark, lights gleaming from the great front of the School House and from a few windows in the New House. The school shop was buried in shadow.

"How are we getting in?" murmured Clive.

"I guess I'll soon have it open."

Wildrake had come provided with tools. The window shutters were fastened with a padlock, which cracked open in a couple of minutes. Wildrake pulled back the shutters, and a minute later he had the window open.

The Canadian junior scrambled in.

The door was locked and the key taken away; it could not have been forced open without noise. But the window served the purpose of the raiders.

Levison and Clive followed Wildrake in.

It was dark enough inside, but the gleam of electric torches showed them their way about.

They did not lose a moment.

Baskets and bags were sorted out, and crammed with stuff from the shop stores, and handed out at the window.

The fellows waiting outside received them, and started for the School House with them at once, keeping to shadowy paths by the walls, out of sight, till they reached the back of the House, where Tom Merry & Co. waited.

"Here's the first lot, you fellows!" chuckled Figgins, as he landed a large basket in the doorway.

"Ow! Wow!"

"Great Scott! What's the row?"

"You have jammed that howwid basket on my toe!" wailed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, in tones of anguish.

"For goodness' sake, Gussy, put your toes somewhere else!" urged Figgins. "This isn't a time for you to be showing your toes everywhere!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You utah ass!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "You have failly ewashed my big toe! I have a great mind to give you a feahful thwashin', Figgins!"

"Order!" said Tom Merry. "Lend a hand, Gussy, and don't grouse!"

"I am not gwousin', Tom Mewwy. But I considah—" THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 779.

"Take this lot of jam, old chap, and dry up!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Get a move on!"

Arthur Augustus suppressed his indignation, and got a move on. He retired with jam-jars under either arm. The juniors piled in with energy to unload the basket. In a few minutes it was cleared, and Figgins & Co. disappeared into the darkness with it for a second load.

Then Talbot and Kangaroo arrived, almost staggering under their load of good things, which were rapidly handed in and carried away.

With much whispering and suppressed chuckling the work went on, load after load arriving at the School House, and being disposed of by Tom Merry & Co., the juniors returning to the tuckshop for more and more and more.

Wildrake and his companions, in the school shop, were kept very busy packing and handing out the baskets.

The shop was cleared of all its contents that were eatable, and then Kit Wildrake looked further, and the store-room at the back was cleared out. So far there had been no sign of alarm. The darkness covered the movements of the raiders, and they were silent and cautious. But suddenly, from the gloom, there came the glimmer of a lantern, and a husky, crusty voice startled the raiders.

"What's this 'ere?"

"Taggles!" murmured Levison.

Talbot of the Shell, with Kangaroo and Kerr, had just returned with empty baskets for a new load. Talbot spun round at the sound of Taggles' voice. He was quick to act.

"Collar him!" he whispered.

He made a spring at the old porter, and Kangaroo and Kerr were almost as quick. Taggles was grasped by both arms, and the lantern dropped from his hand into the snow and went out. Taggles gave a startled gasp, and then his mouth opened for a yell. Whether there was help for Taggles at hand the juniors did not know; but they had not forgotten Mr. Railton's warning, and they knew that stalwart foes might be within sound of a call. They were not running any risks. Talbot clapped his hand over Taggles' mouth hard.

"Grooooh!" came from Taggles.

"Gug-gug-goooh!"

"Shut up, old man!" whispered Talbot. "We're not going to hurt you, but you've got to keep mum."

"Grooooh! Ho-o-o-ooh!"

Taggles struggled. But three or four more fellows closed round him, and he was well held.

Wildrake peered anxiously from the window.

"Got the scallywag?" he asked.

"You bet!"

"Keep his rat-trap shut!"

"He's quiet!" said Talbot, with a chuckle. "I've stuffed his hanky into his mouth now."

"Good! Get him away!" said Wildrake.

"Gggggggrrrrrr!"

The hapless Taggles was led away. He refused to walk at first, but a pin in the hand of Kangaroo bucked him up wonderfully. After that he walked quite quickly. Tom Merry stared as the group of juniors appeared with Taggles wriggling in their midst at the back of the School House.

"What on earth—"

"A giddy prisoner!" explained Talbot. "Taggles had to butt in. I dare say he wishes by this time that he hadn't—but he did."

"Chuck him inside!" said Tom Merry, laughing.

Taggles was bundled in. Wally of the Third took charge of him, and he sat on Taggles' head as the hapless old gentleman sprawled on the floor, keeping him quite secure.

Meanwhile, the remaining consignments from the tuckshop arrived, and were handed in. Kit Wildrake, having seen his comrades back to the house, was the last to come. He grinned as he entered, slammed the door, and the light was turned on.

"There's something going on outside the school," he said. "Some sort of a row on the road, I guess. I think I heard Railton's voice."

"Bai Jove! I twust nothin' has happened to Blake!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus anxiously. "I was afraid somethin' would happen if I did not go with them. You fellows will wemembah that I said so."

"We've got the grub, anyhow," said Fatty Wynn.

SPECIAL!

FOR NEXT WEEK:

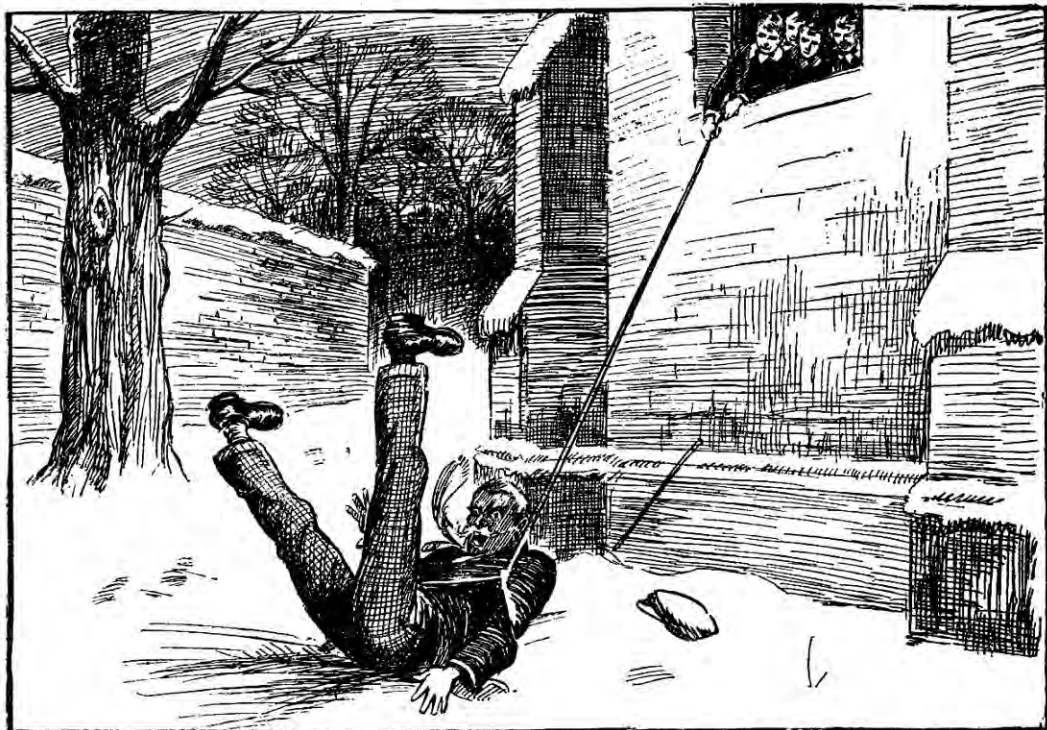
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Before Sergeant Stuckey knew what was happening, a loop dropped over his shoulders. The next moment Willdrake and Tom Merry were dragging on it, then two or three other fellows rushed to catch hold and pull. Mr. Stuckey was fairly swept off his feet, and head over heels he whirled through the snow towards the House. (See page 17.)

The door was bolted and barricaded again. Then, while the provisions were being stacked away, Tom Merry ascended to the landing window to look out. He was very anxious about Blake & Co. now. Grundy he had almost forgotten, a circumstance that would have roused the deepest wrath of George Alfred had he known it.

There was a sound of running feet in the darkness. A breathless figure stopped under the high window.

"Blake!" Tom called cautiously.

"Yes—the rope—quick!"

The rope rattled down from the window.

CHAPTER 8.

The Enemy at Hand!

JACK BLAKE hardly knew how he had arrived. He had plunged and scrambled through the fir wood in the dark—he had tripped and stumbled, bumped into trees, scratched through thickets, tumbled over fences and walls. But somehow or other he had reached home, with barely an ounce of breath left in his body. As the rope rattled down from the window he seized it and hung on it, but he could not climb; he was too spent to make the effort. He just hung on it and gasped.

"Bai Jove! Why don't you come up, old man?" inquired Arthur Augustus' voice from above.

Blake did not answer. He gasped and spluttered. Had the enemy been at hand just then Blake certainly would have been captured unresistingly. There was a foolstep in the darkness; but it was only Herries, who came through the gloom, spattered with mud and tired out. Robert Arthur Digby followed him, limping. The chums of Study No. 6 had been through a strenuous time—in fact, they had had the time of their lives.

Tom Merry slid down the rope, and landed beside the three panting juniors.

"Bad luck?" he said.

Blake gasped and groaned.

"Rotten! That idiot Grundy——"

"Grundy!" ejaculated Tom.

"He had to butt in. He brought the giddy enemy down on us!"

"They nearly got us!" gasped Herries.

"And they got the cartload of grub!" groaned Digby.

"Not a tin of sardines saved!"

"And where's Grundy now?"

"Blessed if I know! At the bottom of the deepest ditch in Sussex, I hope!" said Blake ferociously.

Arthur Augustus' voice was heard above.

"Why don't you fellows come up? Is it weally safe to hang on there talkin'? Better get a move on!"

"Fathead!" gasped Blake.

"Weally, Blake——"

"I couldn't climb a foot if there was a fire!" gasped Dig. "I'm fairly fagged out. Oh, my hat! What a night! That idiot, Grundy——"

"That dummy, Grundy!" groaned Herries.

"Never mind Grundy now," said Tom consolingly. "I'll tie the rope round you, and the fellows will pull you up. Stand ready, there!"

"Right-ho!" called back Talbot's voice.

A dozen pairs of hands drew the rope up, with Blake. Herries and Digby followed him, and landed in at the window. Then the rope rattled down for Tom Merry, and he caught it to climb. He gave a last look round for Grundy, but the great man of the Shell was not to be seen. Tom climbed hand over hand, and clambered in at the window.

Blake and Herries and Dig were surrounded by eager questioners. They gave a breathless account of their exciting adventures.

"Grundy's a stickler!" grinned Monty Lowther. "Of course, he would butt in at the wrong moment, in the wrong place! That's Grundy all over. And all the grub's confiscated."

"Every blessed biscuit!" mumbled Blake. "We'd have got it in safely—safe in a place where it could be fetched—but——"

"It was vewy unfortunate," said Arthur Augustus D'Arey

(Continued on page 16.)

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OUR SPECIAL SHORT COMPLETE DETECTIVE STORY!



THE AFFAIR OF THE YELLOW CLOUD!

Another of the Amazing Exploits
of
ANTHONY SHARPE—Investigator.

By Whose Hand?—Timothy Dennis Michael O'Carroll—The Clue of the Visiting-Card!

"HALLO, youngster! What's the matter?" Anthony Sharpe had been investigating a little matter, which brought him into the neighbourhood of the docks—but which, through certain new and complicated circumstances that would take too long to describe, he found it would not be advisable to pursue for a few days—and was on his way back, when a youth of about fifteen suddenly cannoned into him.

Sharpe was just then about half-way down a narrow thoroughfare—a short cut to the Commercial Road and the buses—and a thick mist from the river made even the immediate surroundings indistinct, so that he was quite unaware of the lad's coming until the latter, panting, emerged, like a wraith, from the fog, and struck him somewhat forcibly.

The youngster pulled up with a gasp. "Sorry," he said. "I didn't see ye; but there's been bad work yonder, and I'm lookin' for a copper!"

"Oh!" Sharpe exclaimed. "If that's so, perhaps I'll do. I'm a—a kind of private copper," as it happens.

The boy stared at him out of a pair of bright brown eyes, set in a rather thin, but very astute face. The investigator studied his new acquaintance as well as he could by the mist-dimmed light streaming from a neighbouring eating-house, noticing how ill-clad the young fellow was, from his tattered cap to his broken canvas shoes; a typical waif of the streets; just one of many to be found in that rabbit-warren of a district.

Sharpe was naturally a man of quick decision—of likes and dislikes. He either took a fancy to an individual at their first moment of meeting, or did not care for him, or her, at all. And in the present case he felt himself strangely drawn to this ragged gamin, whose face, despite his agitation, betrayed unusual traces of a latent cleverness—the face of one who, under better circumstances, might be well worth interesting oneself in.

"You're—you're a slop, sir?" the boy cooed doubtfully. "But where's yer tunic?"

"Don't wear one, as a rule," Sharpe smiled. "Still, it's all right, you can trust me. Now, what's the trouble exactly?"

For answer, the youngster turned and led the way back along the narrow street, presently turning into a branch passage at the rear of some big warehouses. The place, though a busy enough one during the day-time, was now almost as silent as the grave, only the distant hum of traffic from the Commercial and East India Dock Roads breaking the stillness.

"I saw the whole thing, sir!" the boy explained. "I—I live hereabouts—anywhere I can—an' was comin' through here, when it happened. I suddenly spotted a tall gascon strugglin' with three others—tryin' to get away, I thought. Then I twigged the flash of a knife, an' the big feller went down in a heap with the rest stop of him. They didn't see me, I fancy, so I slipped past in the shadders, and bunked to get help."

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"Where did it take place exactly?" asked Sharpe. "Is it far away?"

"No, sir," the youngster replied. "It was just about here— Ah! Look yonder—under the lamp!"

They pulled up short. Sprawling on his face by the side of the alley was the body of a man about six feet tall. He was quite dead, as Sharpe soon proved, having been stabbed in two places, for a couple of nasty patches showed on the back of his coat beneath the left shoulder.

"You did not see the attackers clearly, of course? I mean, you would not recognise any of them again?"

The boy shook his head.

"No; 'fraid I couldn't," he answered. "Twas misty, an' I daren't go any closer, for they might have objected to a witness—meanin'ly—so the only thing I could do was to sprint for assistance."

Sharpe drew a police-whistle from his pocket, and sent a couple of shrill blasts trilling into the fog.

"Well, this is certainly a case for the regular force," he said; "so we'll wait till one or two of 'em hop along. You see, I'm only a private detective, and— By the way, what's your name, my lad?"

"Timothy Dennis Michael O'Carroll, sir," replied the gamin. "That's me name; but—but don't ask me address, for I haven't one—sorra a one!"

Sharpe smiled slightly, despite the solemnity of the occasion.

"No need to inquire your nationality, anyway," he observed.

"No, sir; I s'pose not. I'm Irish enough, though I was born here." The youngster's voice suddenly dropped to almost a whisper. "I ain't got no parents, not now; they was killed in a bus-smash three year ago. And— Well, sir, I've got to shift for meself as best I can, bedad!"

"What d'you do for a living?"

"Oh, any odd thing! Run errands, get an odd job down by the river now an' then, an' all the rest of it. It ain't as payin' as a Cab'nit Minister's crib, sir!"

"No, it certainly isn't!" Sharpe agreed, then broke off short to blow another blast on his whistle, at which a big blue-coated figure, followed by a stoutly-built man in plain clothes, approached at a run up the passage. "Ah, here's someone now!"

"What's the trouble?" demanded the plain-clothes man tersely. "We heard the— By James, it's Mr. Sharpe, of all people!"

The investigator started, also surprised, for the other man was an old friend of his—Detective-Inspector Winton, of the Yard.

"Didn't expect to see you here," Sharpe said; "but all the better, for this is plainly a murder case. Look at that!"

He indicated the body, and Winton bent down, making his examination by the brilliant beam of the constable's electric torch. He went through the victim's



Up the staircase sprang the evil-looking Chinks, their knives glinting in the half-light; but they were no match for the burly policemen who charged upon them.

pockets systematically, producing a gold watch and chain, a pocket-book containing several Treasury Notes, and then some loose silver; but no papers of any description which would tell the deceased's identity. Presently he stood erect again.

"Clearly not a case of robbery, anyhow," he observed, "so perhaps the motive was revenge for something. Queer things happen



Imprinted plainly upon the palms was the sign of the Yellow Cloud.

down here. I've just been finishing up an affair at one of the local depots myself. Formed any personal theory, Mr. Sharpe, may I ask?"

The investigator smiled. "Hardly," he answered, "considering that I've only just arrived, brought here by our young friend yonder, and left the matter for the regulars. You see, I don't like interfering with other people's work unless requested to do so."

Sharpe, though he had been of considerable assistance to the authorities on many a well-remembered occasion, was quite aware of the etiquette—mistaken etiquette, perhaps—prevailing in the criminal investigation profession, and never on his own initiative poked his nose into a case which he considered should be left to the regular police.

"Bunkum and fudge!" Detective-Inspector Winton growled, after a keen glance at O'Carroll. "You know we're glad of your advice at any time—unofficially, perhaps—but I'd be only too pleased if you'd give me your opinion about this affair. It's a serious business, but there doesn't seem to be much to go on, except that it's pretty fresh. But that's little use in an over-populated maze of a place like Limehouse."

"All right!" Sharpe agreed, stooping down to the body, which the Yard man had turned over during his search.

He again went carefully through the pockets, but drew blank, and was about to pursue a fresh line of investigation when he fancied he heard something crackle as he passed his hand over the victim's clothing.

"Hallo! What's this?" he muttered, renewing his energy, and presently finding that the lining of the inside breast-pocket was torn.

He worked his fingers through the rent, soon feeling the touch of a small stiff but crumpled card, which must have slipped from the mau's wallet into the coat between the lining and the outer cloth.

Winton stepped forward as he saw that his friend had unearthed something that he had missed.

"What's that?"

"A visiting-card, bearing—Sharpe held it close to the ray of the constable's torch—"bearing the name of 'Mr. Thomas W. Saxon.' And at the bottom left-hand corner, is an address in Shepherd's Bush."

"Ah! That's something, anyway!" commented the Yard man. "Well, our next move is clear. Jenkins!" he turned to the policeman—"see that the body is removed to the mortuary, and then—"

"Wait!" Sharpe quickly interrupted, as he bent down again. "Wait a moment! Here's something else, I fancy!"

The victim, now lying on his back, had the palms of his hands turned upmost, and it was these which had suddenly attracted Sharpe's attention. He again took the torch from the police-officer and shone it on each palm in turn, Winton looking over his shoulder during the process and uttering a surprised gasp. For, impressed on the skin of both hands evidently by means of a rubber stamp, were three strange characters,

"Chinese or Japanese—or what?" the Yard man muttered.

"Chinese," Sharpe confirmed. He had been in the East some years before, and possessed something more than a smattering of the language. "And they mean, in each case,

"The Yellow Cloud"! What on earth's that? A secret society of some kind, I suppose?"

Sharpe rubbed his chin.

"Very likely," he agreed, "though we can't tell for certain. But it's probably the sign mark of some gang with branches or agents here in London. But where? The Limehouse Chinks are innocent-looking beggars, and usually harmless, and there's a pretty big colony of 'em about here, so it's no use casting round at random. Indeed, as you were about to suggest just now, Winton, the next move seems clear. We'd best follow up this visiting-card without delay, and see what comes of it."

As Sharpe paused he glanced again at Tim O'Carroll, who had not spoken once during the investigation, and loaded his pipe, presently setting a match to it. The police-constable and his superior were busy moving the body of Saxon into the shelter of a neighbouring doorway.

There was something about the youngster that, as has already been implied, impressed the investigator strangely, and in any case, Tim would be required as a witness at the forthcoming inquest, in the usual course of events.

Then Sharpe, suddenly producing his notebook, scribbled a few words on a leaf, tore it out, and handed it to the lad, together with some silver.

"Look here, kid," he said, "take a bus and find your way to that address, where you might wait for me. Give this note to the porter, who'll get you a meal in my rooms, but don't leave till I come. I want to talk to you. And now, Winton—he turned again to the inspector—"if you've finished here, we'd better get along."

The other, however, hesitated for a moment, regarding O'Carroll doubtfully.

"You seem to be taking a lot on trust, Mr. Sharpe," he remarked, a trifle suspiciously. "Is it wise to let the youngster out of our sight? He may know more about this affair than you believe."

"My dear fellow," Anthony Sharpe interrupted, "if the lad was mixed up in the dirty business, as you appear to be suggesting, don't you think it's likely that he would rush away to find the police? I'm afraid you're a wee bit tired, Winton—been working too hard lately, perhaps. Now, come along, there's a good chap!"

CHAPTER 2.

The Message—Tim Proves His Usefulness!

IT is a far cry from Limehouse to Shepherd's Bush, but eventually Sharpe and his companion arrived there. Winton obtaining a search-warrant at a local police-station, in case of necessity.

They found the address on the visiting-card easily enough, but learned little from the deceased's landlady, who answered their ring. Mr. Saxon, she said, had occupied a couple of rooms on the top floor for some six months past, and had proved an ideal lodger, paying his rent regularly, and seeming in fairly comfortable circumstances. He had no occupation that she knew of, seldom went out, and, beyond the fact he had once told her he had travelled extensively, she knew nothing at all about his past life.

The good woman, who was visibly upset at the news of her tenant's untimely death, willingly conducted the pair up to the apartments in question, and, at Winton's request, left them alone.

But no exhaustive search was necessary, after all, for about the first thing they noticed was an envelope propped up in a prominent position against a vase on the mantelpiece, so that it might readily be seen by anyone who came in. Evidently the landlady, unlike some others, was not in the habit of prowling about her lodgers' rooms during their absence, or she would doubtless have delivered the missive to its destination without delay, considering that it was addressed to—"The Police."

Winton gazed at it, his eyes narrowing; then he turned to Sharpe, but the latter's hand was already stretched towards the mantelpiece. He silently picked up the envelope, tore it open, and drew out a message written in a neat, round hand.

They read it together, each experiencing a feeling of amazement, mingled with satisfaction, if the term can be understood;

for the communication made a most startling document, in all conscience, as well as providing an invaluable clue. It ran as follows:

"To the Police.—Some years ago, in Shanghai, I joined the Society of the Yellow Cloud. I did so in the spirit of adventure, but soon regretted my folly. I discovered things which sickened me, and tried to break away. It was impossible for a time—I was too well watched—until I thought I saw my opportunity."

"I managed to elude them, and came back to England, believing myself safe from discovery. I lived in a fool's paradise. They have found me."

"This morning I received word from their emissaries in London to report myself without fail, and without delay. I dare not refuse—and, in any case, it would make no difference. They would come for me, if I did not go to them."

"I leave this note for the authorities, since I can scarcely hope to return here. I shall, unless a miracle happens, pass out; but it is better that the world should know the manner of my passing—that England should learn how this pestilential society has spread its tendrils even into the heart of her capital, where they may take root and spread farther, unless killed. I implore that instant action will be taken—not on my behalf, but on behalf of humanity."

"The place to which I am summoned is known as Sam Loo's joint, in Limehouse."

"THOMAS W. SAXON."



Timothy O'Carroll.

Sharpe read the epistle through a second time, and pursed his lips. Then he turned to Winton.

"Ever heard of Sam Loo's?" he asked, but the other shook his head.

"No; but doubtless they'll know all about it locally," he answered. "They're well acquainted with most of these places at the district stations, and—"

"One moment!" Sharpe interrupted, a sudden idea striking him. "Let's call at my digs on the way. That young O'Carroll is as

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thoughtfully. "But in war, deah boys, you have to learn from your disastahs. I trust you will dwaw instnuction from this misfortune, Blake."

"What do you mean, fathead?"

"On anothah occasion," said Arthur Augustus, with dignity, "you had bettah not attempt anythin' wisky without me. I am sowwy now, vewy sowwy, that I allowed you to go out without me, Blake!"

"What difference would it have made, dummy, if you had been there, idiot, playing the giddy ox as usual, jabber-work?" inquired Blake, in concentrated tones.

"Weally, Blake, if you are goin' to use oppwobwious expressions—"

"I'm going to punch your silly nose, you burbling hander-snatch!" hissed Blake.

"Gwont Scott!"

Arthur Augustus jumped away just in time. He could not see that there was anything in his judicious remarks to irritate his chums. But, undoubtedly, they seemed irritated. Arthur Augustus sagely decided to leave them to themselves till they were in a calmer and more reasonable mood.

"It's not so bad as it might have been, old scouts," said Tom Merry consolingly. "While you've been out we've raided the tuck-shop, and bagged all the provender. It's a bit mixed, but there's enough to see us through for some time."

"Good!" said Blake heartily.

There was a sudden howl from below.

"Elp!"

"Hallo, that's Taggles!" exclaimed Manners.

"Elp! 'Elp!"

"The fags were looking after him," said Tom. "I hope they're not putting the prisoner to the torture!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry hurried downstairs. Taggles, no longer gagged, was howling for help in tones of great excitement. Wally and Co. of the Third were in charge of the prisoner, and they were deriving some harmless and necessary entertainment from him.

"Elp! Master Merry!" roared Taggles. "Stoppem! 'Elp!"

"You young sweeps, what are you up to?" exclaimed Tom Merry, as he hurried to the scene.

"You old sweep, don't you butt in!" retorted D'Arcy minor. "We're only teaching Taggles to hop!"

"He can't hop for toffee!" said Reggie Manners. "He won't even try unless I stick a pin in him!"

"Stoppem, Master Merry!" groaned the hapless Taggles. "Blooming young Red Injuns, that's wot they are! 'Ow's a man at my time of life to 'op'?"

"Rot!" said Wally. "You look no end funny hopping, Taggles. You ought to do it for the films!"

"You young raskil—"

"Now, hop!"

"Go it, Taggles!" chorused the delighted fags.

"I won't! I tell yer—"

"Got that pin, Reggie?"

"Here you are," said Manners minor. "Now, old bones—"

"Elp!"

Tom Merry and Co. rushed in and rescued Taggles from the fags. Taggles did not seem grateful. The sight of the whole of Mrs. Taggles' stock in the hands of the schoolboy rebels had an exasperating effect upon him. But Tom Merry proceeded to administer comfort.

"Now you're here, Taggles—"

"You let me hout, you young ruffian!" growled Taggles.

"Now you're here you can go over the stuff," said Tom. "We want a bill made out for it!"

Taggles brightened up.

"You're agoing to pay for it?" he inquired.

"You old ass, did you think we should take it without paying for it?" demanded Figgins.

Taggles coughed. Apparently he had thought so.

"Give him a pencil and paper," said Tom Merry, laughing, "and you, Kerr, as you've got the best head for business, you go over the prices, and see that Taggles doesn't spread himself too much!"

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"What-ho!" grinned Kerr.

Taggles, looking much brighter now, proceeded to make out a little bill. The little bill was rather big by the time Taggles had finished. But by the time Kerr had gone over it with Scottish keenness and care, it was much smaller. Taggles' arithmetic seemed to run chiefly to addition and multiplication. Kerr put in a due amount of division and subtraction. But the amount was settled at last, and the sum raised among the rebels and paid over, and Taggles looked quite cheerful as he was let out of the School House.

The rebels were enjoying a late tea when there was a sound of running feet outside, and then a bang at the School House door.

"Let me in—quick!"

It was the gasping voice of George Alfred Grundy.

"Grundy!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"Bai Jove! Gwunday's come back!"

There was a roar in the dusky quad.

"There he is! Collar him, Pilkins!"

"Arter him!"

"That's the giddy enemy!" exclaimed Blake. "Don't open the door; there'll be a rush!"

Bang, bang!

"Let me in!" roared Grundy.

But the door was not unbarred. The enemy were swarming without, and the opening of the door would certainly have been followed by a rush of the heroes of Flanders. The St. Jim's barring-out would probably have come to a very sudden termination if Grundy's request had been acceded to. Tom Merry shouted back to him.

"Hook it, Grundy! Can't open the door!"

"Let me in, you ass!"

"Isn't it just like Grundy to come to the front door with all the enemy at his giddy heels?" chuckled Lowther. "Born leader, you know! One of his Cromwell stunts, I suppose!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bang, bang!

"Got him!" shouted Private Brown. "Now, you young scallywag—"

"Hook it, you ass!" shouted Blake.

"Collar 'im! Oh crumbs!" came Sergeant Stuckey's voice, and there was a bump. The old sergeant had apparently slipped on the steps.

There was a sound of running again, and footsteps tramping in pursuit. Loud through the frosty air came the shouting and laughter of the old soldiers. Whether Grundy was captured or not the juniors could not tell—the sounds of the chase died away in the distance.

"They seem a very merry crowd!" grinned Cardew.

"Like a lot of schoolboys themselves!" said Tom Merry, laughing. "Well, it means business now; no more going outside the fortifications with that crowd around. We've got our provisions in only just in time. I'm sorry for poor old Grundy, but—"

Tom Merry looked from the window. In the light from the School House more than a dozen men could be seen, and evidently there were a good many more at hand. Mr. Railton, in gathering forces to crush the schoolboy rebellion, was not doing things by halves. It could scarcely be doubted that if the military gentlemen came hand-to-hand with the juniors the tussle could go only one way. But behind defences it was quite another matter, and the St. Jim's rebels were quite prepared for the struggle when it came.

CHAPTER 9.

Roped In!

WATCH was kept in the School House that night. All through the night schoolboy sentinels relieved one another in turn, keeping watch and ward.

But the enemy did not approach. They seemed to be waiting for daylight before commencing operations.

In the winter morning Tom Merry & Co. breakfasted on the alert, and ready to man the defences at a moment's notice.

Then from various windows the rebels watched the quadrangle, rather hoping that the enemy would attempt to come to close quarters.

Mr. Railton was seen several times in the quad; and once Tom Merry spotted him coming back from the direction of the raided school shop, with a frowning brow. Tom smiled. While Mr. Railton, the previous night, had been intercepting Blake's cargo, the other consignment had been safely landed. But Victor Railton could not be in two places at once, and his colleague, Mr. Ratcliff, was not active enough to take his place. The School House was provisioned for some time to come, and if the Head had hoped to see the rebels surrender when supplies ran out, that hope was deferred now.

The demobbed heroes were seen in twos and threes strolling in the precincts of the school, smoking cigarettes without number, and chatting and laughing when they glanced towards the rebels' stronghold. Sergeant Stuckey seemed to be the only member of the military party who took the affair with proper seriousness. The others were evidently greatly entertained by it, and in high good-humour.

Nevertheless, it was certain that they would carry out Mr. Railton's instructions without hesitation, and that, good-humoured as they were, they were a very tough proposition to deal with.

Tom wondered what had become of Grundy. As he had not approached the School House during the night, and was not to be seen about, Tom could only conclude that he had been captured by Mr. Railton's "army."

It was probable that he was locked up in the New House, waiting to be sent home by an early train.

Kit Wildrake joined Tom on a little balcony outside the window at the end of the Fourth Form passage. There was a coiled rope looped over the Canadian junior's arm, and Tom glanced at it.

The junior from the Boot Leg Ranch was skilled with the lasso, as Tom well knew. Wildrake smiled as he met the Shell fellow's glance.

"I guess I've got a wheeze," he said.

"Go it!" said Tom.

"They've got Grundy!" said Wildrake.

"Looks like it."

"He's all sorts of a jay," said Wildrake. "He jumps into every trap that he can find, and lands in every kind of trouble he can hunt for. But, after all, he's one of us, and I guess we want to see him through. Besides, Grundy's hefty when it comes to scrapping, and there's going to be some jolly tough scrapping soon, I guess!"

"But what—"

"What about an exchange of prisoners?" asked Wildrake, tapping the rope.

"We haven't any prisoners; we let Taggles go," said Tom, smiling.

"I guess the Head wouldn't have worried about Taggles," grinned Wildrake. "Taggles wasn't any use. But the jolly old sergeant—"

Tom looked round over the balcony iron rail. Sergeant Stuckey, tall and lean, with a little cane under his arm, and a cigarette sticking out of his mouth, was surveying the School House from a little distance. He was out of reach of a missile—a snowball, gathered on a windowsill by Dick Julian and hurled, had fallen short, and the sergeant took no heed of it. The military gentleman was apparently surveying the position before the attack, for he had walked all round the School House, scanning it with a keen, careful

eye, and now he was planted like a ramrod in front of the House, staring at the building.

Wildrake let the coiled rope slip into his hand.

"At that distance—" murmured Tom.

"I guess it's a good distance," admitted Wildrake. "But I reckon I can fix him. I've landed a steer at a distance greater than that, on horseback, at home on the ranch. There's room here to swing a rope, and I guess I can land our bird. There'll be only time for one shot; if it misses, he will use those long legs of his pretty fast, I think."

"Try it on!" said Tom, laughing.

From a window under the balcony a voice hailed the sergeant—the voice of Monty Lowther.

"Good-morning, sergeant!"

Mr. Stuckey did not heed or reply.

"I say, sergeant, I'm awfully sorry you were wounded in the face!" called out Monty.

The sergeant stirred at that. He stared at Lowther's face at the window.

"Eh—what's that?" he grunted. "I wasn't wounded in the face."

"Didn't a shell burst right in your face?" asked Lowther.

"No!"

"My mistake! You look as if it had!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Sergeant Stuckey's face became purple. He fixed a deadly glare on what he could see of Monty at a barricaded window. Doubtless he wished that he had that lively young gentleman in his old squad for drill. As he glared at Monty and formed those amiable wishes in his grim old mind there came a whiz in the frosty air, and a rope circled. Before Sergeant Stuckey knew what was happening—or that anything was happening—a loop dropped over his shoulders.

"Gum!" ejaculated Mr. Stuckey, in surprise.

In the Flanders trenches Mr. Stuckey had come across all sorts and conditions of weapons of offence. But the lasso was new to him. He was taken completely by surprise. The noose slid over his lean figure and tightened round his waist.

The next moment Wildrake and Tom Merry were dragging on it, and three or four other fellows rushed to catch hold and pull. Mr. Stuckey was fairly swept off his feet, and, heels over head, he whirled through the snow towards the House.

There was a shout in the distance. Privates Brown and Pilkins and Scuppers came racing up. But they were not in time.

"Pull away!" roared Wildrake.

"Yaas, wathah! Pull like anythin', deah boys!" shrieked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, dragging on the rope with an utter disregard of the effect on his carefully-kept hands.

"Hurrah! Go it!" roared Jack Blake.

"Yooooooop!" came in choking accents from the sergeant.

"Goog-googoo-goog!"

Many hands made light work. The sergeant was not a light-weight; but he fairly flew from the ground, and was dragged up to the rail of the balcony, his heels lashing wildly at the wall a good ten feet over the heads of Jack Brown & Co.

"My eye!" said Private Brown. "Sergeant, old man, you've 'ad a rise in the world!"

"Yurrrrrggggggg!"

Even yet the hapless sergeant hardly knew what had happened. He knew that he was pinned against the wall by something that felt like a band of iron round his chest. He kicked and struggled and clutched at the rope; but his own weight hanging on it made it quite impossible to loosen it. The balcony rail above was lined with grinning faces.

"Let him down, you young imps!" shouted Mr. Pilkins.

"Come up and fetch him!" roared Wally of the Third.

Mr. Railton came hurrying up. The Housemaster had been making his preparations for the attack on the rebels' fortress, but they were not completed yet. The capture of Sergeant Stuckey came as an interruption. He hurried up breathlessly.

"Wildrake! Merry! Blake! Release that man at once!"

"I guess not, sir," said Kit Wildrake coolly. "He's our giddy prisoner. Prisoner of war, sir."

"You young rascal—"

"Lemme go, you himps!" roared the sergeant frantically. "This blooming rope is a-grinding into my chest like thunder. Leggo! Let me drop, blow you!"

"Sorry, old man!" said Wildrake. "Fortune of war, you know!"

"Yaas, wathah! Take it smilin', sergeant."

"Groogh! Ow!" gasped the sergeant. "Don't I wish I 'ad you on the parade-ground! Wouldn't I break you in! Ow, wov!"

"Boys," shouted Mr. Railton, "I command you—"

"Cut it out, sir!" said Cardew cheerfully.

"Can it, old man!" said Wildrake.

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"Why, I—I—I—" the Housemaster gasped.
 "Where is Grundy, sir?" asked Tom Merry.
 "Grundy! Grundy is locked in a room in the New House! That does not matter now! Let that man down at once!"

"Exchange of prisoners, sir," explained Tom Merry.
 "We'll give you this bony old chap in exchange for Grundy."
 "Yaa, wathah!" chuckled Arthur Augustus.

"Merry, how dare you—"
 "You get the butt-end of the bargain, sir," said Cardew.
 "The sergeant isn't ornamental, but he may be useful; and Grundy's no earthly use to anybody."

"I will do, nothing of the kind!" shouted Mr. Railton wrathfully. "How dare you attempt to make terms with me! Men, fetch a ladder, and we—"

"We shall yank the sergeant indoors, sir," said Wildrake.
 "We'll have him safe long before you can get a ladder here. And I guess we're going to keep him tied up till you send Grundy back."

"Ow, ow, ow!" came from the hapless sergeant. "I say, sir, this 'ere rope is 'urting a bloke something 'ard. It is, really."

Mr. Railton paused, and signed to Private Pilkins, who was starting for the ladder, to stop. He wanted the sergeant in the attacking party, when the attack came off; and there was no doubt that Mr. Stuckey was safe in the hands of the rebels, if they chose to drag him inside the house.

"Better exchange the prisoners, sir!" suggested Tom Merry, with a grin.

"Get me out of this, some of you!" howled Mr. Stuckey.
 "Are you going to leave a man 'anging up here like a turkey?"

Mr. Railton muttered a word to Private Brown, who started for the New House. The rebels exchanged grins. They could guess that Grundy of the Shell had been sent for.

In a couple of minutes Grundy of the Shell appeared in the quad, with a very surprised expression on his face, and he came back with Private Brown.

"Now release Sergeant Stuckey!" said Mr. Railton sternly. "Grundy will be allowed to enter the School House in the—the circumstances."

"That's a promise, sir?" asked Tom Merry.

"Yes!" snapped the Housemaster.

"Right-ho!"

"Down you go, old bird," said Wildrake to the sergeant.
 "Cast off the rope when you're on the ground, will you?"

Sergeant Stuckey slid to the ground. Very glad was the veteran to feel his feet on solid earth again. He stood against the wall, and gasped spasmodically.

Mr. Railton, with a grim brow, jerked the lasso off the sergeant, and flung the rope to Grundy. Then he stalked away, with feelings too deep for expression in words.

Grundy, grinning, caught the rope, and was pulled over the balcony. Arthur Augustus clapped him on the shoulder.

"Jollay glad to see you again, Gwunday!" he said. "You will only be in the way, of course, but we were bound to see you through, you know."

"You silly ass!" answered Grundy.

"Bah Jove!"

"I've been locked in the New House," said Grundy. "Of course, I shouldn't have let them send me home. Were you fellows going to surrender if I hadn't got back?"

"Ha, ha! Not quite!"

"Well, I'm glad you had grit enough to hold on without your leader," said Grundy. "Lucky I've got back, though. They're going to attack, and they've got twenty or thirty men. We'll beat them! Mind there's no rot; just listen to what I tell you, and carry out my orders on the spot, without any arguing. That's the only way to save the situation."

The juniors looked at Grundy. After his disastrous exploits of the previous day, they had expected even Grundy to sing a little small, for a time, at least. But that was not George Alfred's way. He was as satisfied with himself as ever—more so, if possible. And evidently he had come back to take the command.

"You frabjous goat!" said Blake at last.

"Yaa, wathah! You burblin' jabbahwecck—"

Grundy held up his hand.

"That's enough! Silence!"

"Good old Cromwell!" said Monty Lowther. "I say, shall we drop him off the balcony? They're welcome to him, as far as I'm concerned."

"Grundy—" began Tom Merry.

"Shut up! Matters are getting serious now!" said Grundy. "No time for inefficient duffers to shove themselves forward. Leave it all to me—"

Jack Blake made a sign to his chums.

Three pairs of hands closed on George Alfred Grundy. He stared in surprise, and began to struggle.

"You silly asses! Let go! What—"

"Bump him!"

"Why, I—I—I'll—" roared Grundy.

Bump, bump, bump, bump!

Grundy roared, with a terrific roar. He seemed to be understudying the celebrated bull of Bashan at that moment. But the juniors did not spare him. Grundy's attempts at leadership were too disastrous to be encouraged. Grundy had to have a lesson—and he had it!

He was bumped on the balcony; bumped on the door-sill; bumped on the linoleum within. Then he was bumped along the passage, with a series of terrific bumps, and still more terrific howls. All the way to Grundy's study in the Shell passage he was bumped, amid wild yells from Grundy, and roars of laughter from the other fellows. At last—and emphatically—it was being impressed upon Grundy that he was not the leader of the St. Jim's rebellion, and very far from being monarch of all he surveyed.

Bump, bump, bump!

A final bump landed Grundy in his study. He rolled on the floor, breathless, unable to do anything but gasp and splutter. There the juniors left him.

And when the attack came it was Tom Merry who took the command—undisputed; Grundy being fully occupied just then in gasping and spluttering on his study carpet.

THE END.

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