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SKIMPOLE'S LITTLE SCHEME

A GRAND TALE OF
TOM MERRY'S
SCHOOL DAYS.

By
MARTIN CLIFFORD



SKIMPOLE'S
ATTACK
ON
D'ARCY.

NO. 41.

VOL. 2.

"Ha!" exclaimed Gore. "Here comes the bloated aristocrat. Here comes the oppressor—the roller-in-wealth—the down-treader of the toiling millions." Poor D'Arcy looked astounded.

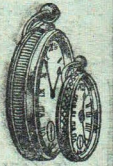
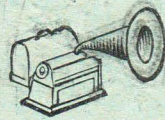
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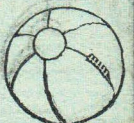
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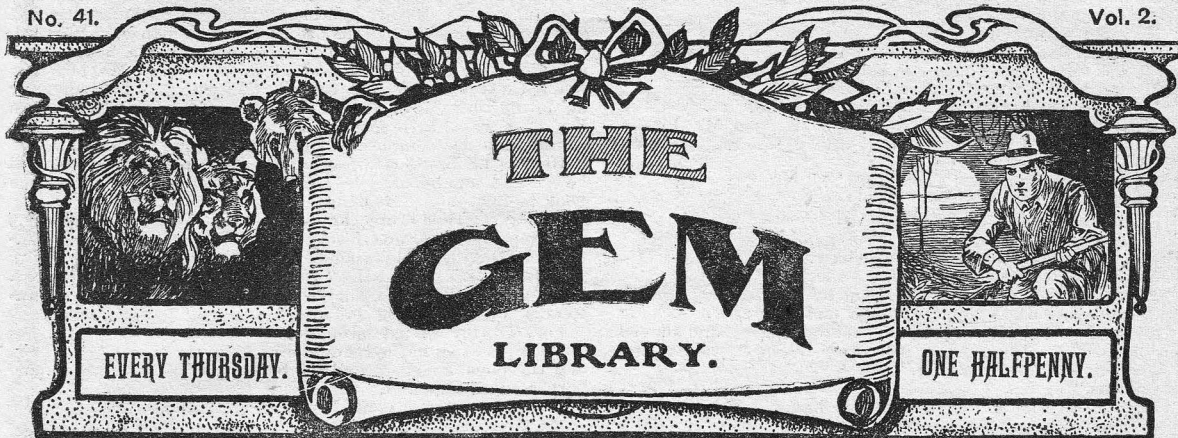
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SKIMPOLE'S LITTLE SCHEME.

A Splendid Long,
Complete Tale of

TOM MERRY'S SCHOOLDAYS.

By

MARTIN CLIFFORD.



CHAPTER I.

Skimpole's Little Scheme.

THERE was a blur of frost on the window of Tom Merry's study, in the School House at St. Jim's. The quadrangle without was a sheet of frozen snow, and a wintry wind was moaning round the roof and chimneys of the ancient building.

But within the study a bright fire blazed in the grate, the gas was lighted, and the Terrible Three—Tom Merry, Manners and Lowther—were cheerful and busy.

Manners and Lowther were scratching away with their pens at a great rate, while Tom Merry, having finished a page, paused to rest, and chewed the handle of his pen, and stared into the leaping blaze of the fire with a thoughtful expression.

Neither preparation nor impositions kept the chums of the Shell so deeply occupied. They were producing the Christmas Number of "Tom Merry's Weekly," a far more important matter, at least in their eyes.

Manners glanced up at Tom, as the editor of the famous weekly sat staring into the fire.

"Taking a rest?" he asked. "If you're hungry, Tom, there's something nicer in the cupboard than the handle of that pen."

Tom Merry laughed his merry, pleasant laugh, that was always good to hear.

"I've been thinking, kids. It's all right; I've done my little bit, and I'm waiting for you fellows. I say—"

"Go on," said Lowther, laying down his pen. "A few minutes' rest won't hurt us, if you must talk. What's worrying your little brain?"

"Nothing; but, I say, do you know what's the matter with Skimpole?"

"Skimpole? Is anything the matter with him?"

"You haven't noticed, then?"

"No. I know he's always mooning over something," Monty Lowther remarked. "Is there anything new? I hope there's nothing wrong with him, though. He's an awfully decent

chap, and his heart is in the right place, though he has wonderful ideas sometimes."

"He's got a new one, I think," said Tom Merry, "I saw him this morning with an enormous book in German under his arm, it was called Das—das—das Kapital, I think."

"My hat! What was he doing with it?"

"He was going to read it. And you remember in class there was a newspaper sticking out of his pocket, and Mr. Linton made him chuck it away. I saw it afterwards, and what do you think it was?"

"Blessed if I know? 'The Times'?"

"Ha, ha, no."

"The Daily Mail"?

"Wrong again! It was the 'Trumpeter.'"

Manners scratched his nose thoughtfully.

"Never heard of it. Sounds like a musical paper."

"Well, I don't know anything about it," Tom Merry agreed. "But from its title I suppose it is a musical paper. I only got just a glance at it, as Skimpole collared it again and shoved it in his pocket. I asked him if he were taking up music, and he laughed and said nothing."

"Curious."

"Then Gore told me that Skimpole had a consignment of books come down from London. You know he's in Gore's study, and they don't agree very well. Gore says he's off his rocker, but I don't think it's as bad as that. But really I think there's a screw loose somewhere, and as I rather like Skimpole

"So do I," said Manners. "He's an awfully obliging chap, and will do anything for anybody. I hope—hallo, Gore."

The door of the study opened, and Gore of the Shell put his head in: Gore was the cad of the Shell, and on very ill terms with the Terrible Three. But he evidently had news to impart now which he considered too good to keep.

"Hallo," said Lowther, "do they all come into a room without knocking in the slum you were brought up in, Gore?"

"Rats!" said Gore. "There's something on. It's—it's simply screaming, and I thought I'd come and tell you, especially as you all love Skimpole so much, and take his part when he rows with me."

Tom Merry rose quickly.

"Is anything up?"

"Ha, ha, rather! Come to the common-room and see. Skimpole's got a new idea in his head—"

Gore broke off, to yell with laughter. "Ha, ha, ha! What do you think he has become now?"

"Give it up. A musician?"

"Musician be hanged! He's turned a Socialist!"

"A-a-a-a what?"

"A Socialist, a real, giddy, red-hot Socialist. I wondered what he meant by wearing a red necktie the last week or two. It makes his greeny-yellow complexion look horrid. But a red necktie is the badge of the revolution, according to Skimpole."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"He's a Socialist. Do come; he's standing on the table in the common-room, addressing a meeting. He calls it propaganda. I don't know what that means, but he seems awfully proud of knowing the word. Walsh is looking it out in the dictionary. Are you coming? It's too good to miss."

And Gore cut off, chucking with enjoyment. The Terrible Three looked at one another with broad smiles.

"Anybody here know what Socialism is?" asked Manners.

"It's a new thing, I think," said Lowther, rather hazily. "Something to do with feeding all the kids who haven't any grub to eat, and—"

"That would be a jolly good thing, if that's all," exclaimed Tom Merry. "But I fancy there's something more in it than that, Monty."

"Yes, very likely; I haven't studied the subject at all," confessed Lowther, "I suppose as a matter of fact there's a lot to be said for and against it, like everything else. We may get some enlightenment from Skimpole. Let's go and hear his speech."

"Righto; come on." And the Terrible Three hastened from the study, leaving the Christmas Number of Tom Merry's Weekly in its unfinished state.

"Hallo, Merry!" exclaimed Blake, of Study No. 6, meeting the chums of the Shell in the passage.

"Have you heard?"

"About Skimpole becoming a Socialist?"

"Yes, that's it; I see you have. He's making a speech in the common-room, and we're going to hear him."

"Yaas, wathah!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, who was with Blake, as was also Herries.

"Yaas, wathah, deah boys. I weally think that I shall have to point out to Skimpole the ewwah of his ways, you know."

"Come on, or we shall miss the fun," exclaimed Herries.

And the six juniors tore off together to the common-room. They found it crowded. Juniors were crammed round the big table, and even a number of the Fifth and Sixth had come in to look on.

Standing upon the table was a rather slim, and not very graceful youth. Nature had been sparing in his limbs, but had made up the deficiency in the size of his head, which was abnormal. He had a large mouth and a small nose, and a broad brow wrinkled over a pair of somewhat watery eyes. His face was sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought, and his hair grew in unruly tufts over the extensive expanse of his cranium. His dress was a little neglected, and he wore a flaming red tie, which made his complexion look more sickly than ever.

He was holding forth in a loud and not particularly musical voice, and emphasising his remarks by thumps upon a huge book he held in his left hand.

As the Terrible Three and Study No. 6 came in together, the orator paused, and his eyes travelled to them, and wandered to D'Arcy, and remained fixed there.

"Ha!" he exclaimed. "Here comes the bloated aristocrat. Here comes the oppressor—the roller in wealth—the down-treader of the toiling millions."

Poor D'Arcy looked astounded.

The eyes of all in the room turned upon the swell of St. Jim's, and the boys looked to and fro between D'Arcy and Skimpole with amused chuckles.

A greater contrast could hardly be imagined.

We have described Skimpole; and our readers know Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. Needs it to describe the beautiful crease of his trousers, the gorgeous pattern of his fancy waistcoat, the height and spotlessness of his collar, the lovely set of his necktie? Needs it to dwell upon the shimmer of his elegant boots, the fashionable cut of his jackets, the charming parting of his well-brushed hair, or the eye-glass that was gracefully screwed into his eye?

The contrast was striking, and it made the School House boys giggle. The right hand of the orator rose, and a bony forefinger pointed at D'Arcy.

"Look at him! Look at the bloated—"

D'Arcy screwed the monocle tighter into his eye, and took an extremely disdainful survey of the orator on the table.

"Are you weferin' to me?" he asked, languidly.

"Yes, I am referring to you. Look at the bloated—"

"I pwotest against such a term bein' applied to me," said Arthur Augustus, showing some warmth, "I appeal to all the gentlemen pwesent if it can be regarded as at all cowwect. I have usually been considahed slim. But can I weally and twuly be described as bloated. I ask you—"

A howl of laughter interrupted the swell of the School House. "Look at the bloated aristocrat," shrilled Skimpole. "Look at him—the enslaver—the down-treader of the millions."

"I weally think you must be off your wockah, Skimpole," said D'Arcy, with a puzzled look. "I haven't the slightest recollection of down-tweading anybody."

"But wait," said Skimpole darkly, and without heeding D'Arcy. "Wait! Ha, ha, ha! Wait! Ere many years have passed he will be swept away."

"I shall uttably wefuse to be swept away."

"He will be swept away, with all the titled tyrants."

"Oh, draw it mild, old chap."

"And Freedom and Liberty will raise their glorious heads."

"Both of them?" inquired Tom Merry.

"Certainly; both."

"But what's the difference between freedom and liberty?"

Skimpole went on hastily, without replying to the question.

"They will raise their glorious heads, and the toiling millions will look up as to a new dawn, and greet the sun-burst of Socialism."

"My hat! ain't he eloquent!"

"Go on, Skimpole! Keep it up, old fellow."

"Rats!"

"Let him go on, Play the game. You needn't listen if you don't want to."

"Rot!"

"Play up, Skimpole."

"On the bawl!"

Skimpole waited for the hubbub to subside, and then continued.

"They will greet the new dawn."

"You've said that before."

"Tyranny and oppression will pass away like evil dreams.

There will be no more rich and no more poor. For what will be the use of wealth—of money piled up in banks—when the fruits of the earth are free to all? When national granaries supply plenty to everyone who needs—when national workshops find work for all—when national dwellings shelter the happy, working-man, what will be the use of filthy lucre? What, I say," roared Skimpole, growing more and more excited. "What will be the use of filthy lucre! Away with it—away—away."

He brought down his fist with a terrific thump upon his book, and it flew out of his left hand with the concussion. "Away—oh, I'm sorry!"

There was a fearful yell from Gore, who was standing near the table. The bulky volume had cracked upon his head with considerable force, and Gore was hurt. He stamped on the book as it fell to the floor, and rubbed his head savagely.

"You howling lunatic!" he yelled. "What do you mean by bunging your rotten book on my beastly head?"

"Sorry," said Skimpole sincerely. "I hope I haven't hurt you. I really hope——"

"That chap's awfully sanguine," murmured Blake. "He gives a fellow a bang on the head that would brain a nigger, and hopes he hasn't hurt him."

"I'm really sorry, Gore. But as I was saying——"

"You've said enough, you ass!" howled Gore, seizing the orator by the ankle, and jerking him off the table. "You've said quite enough, and you've banged that book enough. This is where you shut up."

"Let him alone!"

"Let D'Arcy answer him."

"Let me alone!" gasped Skimpole, struggling. "I must speak. It is my duty to speak and spread the good news of Socialism! I must speak. As a Socialist I am opposed to violence, but if you don't let me go, Gore, I shall certainly punch your nose!"

"I'll Socialist you! I'll——"

Gore and Skimpole began to fight. The juniors crowded round arguing, cheering, stamping, and laughing. The uproar was terrific, and it was not surprising that Mr. Railton, the master of the School House, came along and looked into the room.

"What is this noise about?"

The noise ceased as if by magic at the sound of the house-master's voice. The two combatants separated, both considerably ruffled. Gore's collar was torn out, and his nose was swelling, and Skimpole's red necktie was flaunting in the air by one end.

"It's all right, sir," said Tom Merry. "Skimpole's turned Socialist, and Gore is standing up for the British Constitution and the Rights of Property."

Mr. Railton stared. Then a smile dawned over his face.

"H'm! The argument must, I am afraid, be conducted a little more quietly, and with less damage to personal attire," he remarked. "No more of this, or you will hear from me."

The house-master retired, and the Socialist meeting broke up.

CHAPTER 2.

Tom Merry Declines the Article.

TOM MERRY and his chums re-entered their study, and Blake, Herries, and D'Arcy followed them in. There was very frequently war between the Terrible Three and Study No. 6, but just now they were allied for the purpose of producing the Christmas Number of "Tom Merry's Weekly." For the same reason the warfare between School House and New House had been suspended pro tem., and Figgins & Co. were expected to come over from the rival house to lend a hand.

"We shall get this out all right on Saturday," Tom Merry remarked. "It will be the best number so far, I think. The chief difficulty is keeping off the contributors who want to flood the paper with their awful piffle. There's Gore——"

"And Mellish——"

"And French——"

"But it's no good being an editor if you don't possess a blue pencil and use it," said Tom Merry resolutely. "That giddy Socialist has interrupted the editorial labours, and made us waste time. Get to work, kids."

There was a knock at the door of the study.

"Go away!" shouted Tom Merry. "We're busy."

But the door opened all the same. Tom Merry's hand slid towards the inkpot, but he withdrew it as he saw that the newcomer was Skimpole.

Skimpole had put himself to rights after the row in the common-room, and his red necktie was tied again. He came in and closed the door.

"What do you want?" asked Tom Merry. "We're pressed for time, you know."

"Yes, I'm sorry; but this is important," said Skimpole.

"Oh, buck up, and clear!" said Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I know you fellows are awfully decent," said Skimpole, looking round. "You wouldn't willingly take a hand in any injustice or oppression——"

"Of course we wouldn't," said Tom Merry. "Is there anything going on that wants our heavy hoof put down on it? Any bullying?"

"Yes, there is——tyranny and oppression——"

"Where?" exclaimed Tom Merry, rising hastily and pushing back his cuffs.

"All over the world," replied Skimpole calmly. "Tyranny and oppression are flourishing everywhere, and will continue to flourish till Socialism——"

"Oh, rats!" said Tom Merry. "If you've come here to spout when we're busy you'll find yourself and your Socialism chucked out of the window."

"But, my dear Merry, you naturally want to help to set things right; to help the injured and suffering, and——"

"What the dickens can I do?"

"That's what I am coming to," said Skimpole, producing a roll of manuscript from inside his jacket. "You can insert this article on Socialism——"

"Into the waste-paper basket?"

"No. Into the current number of the 'Weekly.' It will then reach all the boys at St. Jim's, and open their eyes to the terrible effects of the present social system——"

"Ha, ha! And when they're converted, do you want a lot of schoolboys to start throwing up barricades, say in Rylcombe High Street?" exclaimed Monty Lowther. "Don't be an ass, Skimmy! Take that foolscap away and burn it."

"My dear fellow, I have carefully written out an article containing only about eight or ten thousand words——"

"Why, the whole 'Weekly' wouldn't hold it!" said the editor, aghast.

"I know, but you're doing a Christmas Double Number, and so——"

"My hat! The nerve!" ejaculated Blake. "Devote a Christmas Double Number to an article on Socialism! What about my poem of Sir Fatted and his Fair Ladye?"

"And my photographic column!" exclaimed Manners.

"And my Yuletide sonnets!" cried Lowther.

"And my epic poem!" said Herries.

"And my editorial chat!" observed Tom Merry.

"Yaas, wathah! And my fashion column, deah boys!"

"Oh, all that piffle could be left out, you see," explained Skimpole. "I've arranged it all in my own mind——"

The staff of "Tom Merry's Weekly" made a simultaneous forward movement. The amateur Socialist had never been in greater danger of being used as a duster. But the editor waved back his indignant staff.

"Hands off, kids!" he exclaimed. "He's dotty in the crumplet, that's all. Skimmy, you can take that article away; it's declined with thanks."

"Look here, you'd better have it——"

"Rats! No, I tell you."

"Nix!" exclaimed Monty Lowther. "Non! Nein! Nein, mein Herr! It's necessary to speak in German on an occasion like this."

"What on earth for?" asked Blake, staring.

"Why, you cannot decline the article in English, you know," said Lowther, who was an inveterate punster.

A general groan greeted the pun. Skimpole laid his article on the editorial table.

"Now, don't be an ass, Tom Merry! I'm really offering you a prize. The 'Trumpeter' or the 'Red Flag' would offer me guineas for a really rousing article like this."

"Then send it to them."

"My propagandist work lies nearer home," replied Skimpole, shaking his head. "I'm going to convert St. Jim's to Socialism."

"Ha, ha! You'll have all your work cut out."

"Yaas, wathah! It's all vewy well for a chap like Skimpole, who never has anythin' of any value, and is always stony broke, but——"

"You bloated aristocrat——"

"I object to that remark. I admit that I am extremely awistocwatic, but I object to the term bloated. It is a weally idiotic phwase, because I am slim. I——"

"I did not mean it in a physical sense," explained Skimpole. "I mean that you and all your class are bloated with the plunder of the toiling millions——"

"He means it in a Pickwickian sense, Gussy," grinned Lowther. "Don't mind him. Are you going to take that article away, Skimmy, or shall I shove it into the fire?"

Skimpole snatched up his valuable article.

"I think you are a set of asses!"

"Thanks. Carry that thing away and bury it. Good-bye."

"Look here! I'll write you just a short, pithy article, covering only a page!"

Tom Merry scratched his curly head. He rather liked Skimpole, and didn't want to hurt his feelings. But he felt that Skimpole's new ideas would be rather out of place in the Christmas number of a school magazine.

"My dear chap," he said pacifically, "if you like to write a poem or anything of that sort, we'll give you room in the mag. But politics are barred."

The tears and misery of the toiling millions——

"Oh, blow the toiling millions!"

"Your words are heartless. Think—think of the wretched slave born in a slum, reared in the foul atmosphere of the slum, spending his days and nights in the reeking air of the——"

"Gin-shop," suggested Monty Lowther.

There was a general cackle.

"Don't interrupt me!" exclaimed Skimpole anxiously.

"I am always put out when I am interrupted. Where was I? Spending his days and nights——"

"You'll be both interrupted and put out very quickly if you

don't travel!" exclaimed Manners. "We're fed up with the toiling millions."

"Oh, you horrid cannibal!" said Lowther.

"Oh, don't rot! How are we to get on with the work if that chap stands there gassing all the time? Go and convert Gore, Skimpole."

"The beast has locked me out of the study," said Skimpole. "I was reading an article in my paper to him, and he suddenly shoved me out and locked the door."

"That was vevy wude and wuff."

"As a Socialist I am opposed to taking reprisals, or else I should certainly break in the lock and go for him," said Skimpole. "Now, about that article? There are such a lot of mistaken ideas relative to Socialism current, that it's your duty to print an article explaining the true facts—"

"The editor's decision is final," said Tom Merry. "As a matter of fact, we've finished making up the number, and it's ready to be taken down to the printer's to-morrow. We're having this number printed at the office of the local paper. Now do get along like a good fellow, and let us have some peace."

"You're missing a really good thing."

"We don't mind. Do travel."

"Hallo! What's the argument?"

Three youths looked into Tom Merry's study—Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn, the chums of the New House, known as Figgins & Co. They belonged to the editorial staff of "Tom Merry's Weekly."

"I was just explaining to Tom Merry that an article on Socialism ought to be introduced into the Christmas Number."

Figgins & Co. giggled.

"My dear chap, it would be quite out of place. Take the article away and bury it. We'll put it in a later number—the one that comes out on the 32nd of December," said Figgins.

"March! We're going to work."

And the amateur Socialist reluctantly marched. But there was a gleam of determination in his eyes.

"It's going in all the same," he murmured. "Where there's a will there's a way. I can't possibly let them neglect their duty in this style. The article's going in, by hook or by crook!"

CHAPTER 3.

Put to the Test.

"SAY, Skimpole!"

The amateur Socialist looked round. Two or three fellows were standing in the passage, among them Mellish and Gore. They were smiling as if they had a good joke among themselves, and a more suspicious fellow than Skimpole might have given them a wide berth. But the amateur Socialist came up to them good-temperedly.

"Hullo! Did you chaps call me?"

"Yes," said Gore. "We want you to go—"

Mellish made him a hasty sign.

"We want to know something about Socialism," he said quickly. "We should like you to explain to us—"

Skimpole drew the declined article from his pocket.

"My dear fellow, I'm your man. I'll read you my article—"

"No, no, no, that isn't exactly what we want!" exclaimed Mellish. "Put it away again. We want you to answer a few questions, that's all. You were offering to do so in the common-room, you know, when you were doing your—your—what's the word—something to do with a goose?"

"Wrong," said Gore. "You mean a gander."

"Well, I knew it was something of the sort," said Mellish.

"What's the word, Skimpole?"

"I suppose you mean propaganda," said Skimpole, with a superior smile. "That means carrying on the work of converting others to your views, and spreading the good tidings—"

"Yes, yes, I know. Now about the questions."

"Ask 'em!" exclaimed Skimpole readily. "I'm ready to answer. I know all that's known about Socialism, and I can answer you in the words of Hank, or Frontley, or Middleton."

"Never heard of any of those johnnies," said Mellish. "But I say, what is Socialism?"

"Socialism," said Skimpole, "is the application of the golden rule to the affairs of everyday life—Do unto others as you wish them to do unto you. It also means something in the line of practical politics, such as nationalising the railways and the coal-mines—"

"Don't use such beastly long words," said Gore. "That's the worst of you chaps who start spouting. Nobody ever knows what you're driving at."

"I'll explain—"

"Never mind the railways or the coal-mines," interrupted Mellish. "You can nationalise them, whatever that is, as soon as you like. I haven't any railways of my own, and I don't suppose any of the fellows here have coal-mines in their studies."

The fellows all smilingly agreed.

"But I say, Socialism means more than that," said Mellish.

"It means doing things for people, and making 'em happy—feeding the hungry, and taking trouble for others."

"Yes, it does; and more than that. I tell you—"

"That's enough to go on with. I suppose you're willing to practise what you preach?"

"Of course. If I had my way, I'd confiscate all the mines and railways and banks to-morrow, nationalise the land, and abolish poverty."

"Yes; but in smaller matters. Don't be so sweeping. For instance, as a Socialist you would be bound to do anything for anybody if he asked you, so long as it wasn't wrong?"

"Of course I should," said Skimpole unsuspectingly. "And I—"

"Well, will you go down to Rylcombe for me?"

Skimpole started, and did not speak.

Dusk was thickening in the quadrangle at St. Jim's, and with the night was coming a fresh fall of snow. The wind was howling dismally round the chimneys of the ancient buildings. Rylcombe Lane, as Skimpole knew, was thick with snowdrifts, and going would be very hard and very slow.

It was less trouble to go down to Rylcombe for a fellow than to nationalise the land and the railways, yet the amateur Socialist hesitated.

Mellish and Gore and the rest burst into a mocking laugh.

"Oh, he won't go!" said Gore. "He's only gassing when he talks about being a Socialist. When it comes home to him he can be a giddy Tory."

Skimpole turned red. He felt that he had been caught, and that the test was not a fair one. But he was too deeply in earnest in his new opinions to draw back. Like every pioneer, he had to make sacrifices for his opinions or else abandon them.

"I will go!" he exclaimed.

"Bravo!" said Mellish. "I shall begin to think you're in earnest. I've got to go to the post-office and send a wire for Knox. Here's the message and the tanner."

Skimpole took them rather unwillingly.

"I want a dozen mincepies from Mrs. Murphy's tuck-shop," said Gore. "I haven't any money, but, as you say yourself, filthy lucre is too base a consideration to be thought of. You can pay for them; and I'll settle with you when Socialism comes in and poverty is abolished. At present I am stony."

Skimpole made a grimace.

"And I say, you don't mind my using your fretwork tools while you're gone, do you?" said Walsh insinuatingly.

"Of course he doesn't!" said Gore. "Under Socialism tools and all the instruments of production will be public property. I know that, because I read it in one of Skimpole's Socialist books."

Skimpole's face lengthened.

"And now cut off, Skimpole!" said Mellish encouragingly.

"If you hurry, you'll get back before locking-up, and then you won't get caned. I do admire a fellow who has the courage of his opinions, and no mistake."

"All right," said Skimpole, with an effort, "I'm off."

He walked away rather slowly, and came back soon in overcoat and cap. The juniors saw him off from the School House steps; and the amateur Socialist disappeared into the dark and snowy evening.

Mellish chuckled gleefully.

"I say, I happen to know that Skimpole expects a liberal tip from his uncle to-morrow," he remarked. "He's generally hard up, because he lends his money to everybody, and they never pay it back; but I know his uncle comes down handsome. He expects to get a sovereign to-morrow; and I think as he despises filthy lucre so much he had better get rid of it as soon as possible in standing a feed in the tuck-shop."

And the young rascals grinned and agreed.

Skimpole did not feel like grinning, however, as he left St. Jim's and faced the wind and the snow. The lane was a ribbon of white under the gaunt leafless trees. Snow was drifting on the wind and piling up against the hedges. It was bitterly cold, and in spite of his warm overcoat, Skimpole felt the keenness of the winter wind.

"Please, young gentleman—"

Skimpole stopped. A miserable-looking specimen of humanity had loomed up out of the gloom before him. It was an old man, wizened and bent, and shivering with the bitter cold. His rag of a coat was flying in tatters in the fierce wind.

"Please, sir, can you spare a copper or two?"

"Certainly," said Skimpole. "That is to say, I can't spare it, but as a Socialist I am bound to help anybody in distress, even at a great loss to myself."

The old tramp stared. He had probably never heard of Socialism, but he understood that he was to receive current coins of the realm, and he was content.

"Thank you kindly, young gentleman! I'm shivering—"

"I can see you are," said Skimpole, his kind heart touched. "I should say that your present state was due to drink, judging by what I can see of your face and the nasty smell of spirits you have about you; but as a Socialist, I am bound not to condemn anybody. Perhaps if I had had your bringing-up I might have been a beast myself. One never knows. It can't

be right for a boy to have a warm coat and an old man to go about in rags, so I suppose I'd better let you have my coat."

The tramp had been glaring; now he stared. As Skimpole whipped off his coat and held it for the old beggar to get into, he undoubtedly concluded that he had to do with a mild lunatic. However, he thrust his arms into the coat, which was quite big enough for his skinny frame, and mumbled, with satisfaction, at the warmth it imparted.

"Here's a shilling for you," said Skimpole. "I sha'n't be able to take Gore any of the mince-pies after all, but it is surely more necessary for a hungry creature to have food. Good-night, my friend!"

The tramp was too astounded to reply.

Skimpole tramped on through the snow, feeling the warm glow of satisfaction which follows the doing of a good deed and the carrying out of one's principles. But as the wintry wind smote him and chilled him to the very bone, that glow died away. He did not regret what he had done, but he felt that Socialism was growing rather a painful creed, and he sincerely hoped that he would meet nobody who could make a claim upon his jacket or his boots.

He broke into a run to warm himself, and arrived in sight of the lights of Rylcombe clad in powdery snow, and puffing and blowing. There was a sudden biff in the growing gloom, and Skimpole reeled back as a dark form rose before him.

A hoarse, angry voice rasped out of the dusk:

"Who yer running into?"

"I beg your pardon most sincerely!" exclaimed Skimpole, "I did not see you, I really hope I have not hurt you?"

An ill-conditioned-looking ruffian was glaring at him. Skimpole felt rather alarmed, especially as he saw that the man had a knobby stick in his hand. He saw the fellow glance towards the lights of the village street, and it flashed through his mind that he was considering whether he was too near them for a robbery with violence to be quite safe. Apparently he decided that it would not be safe, for he changed his look and his tone at once, and began to whine:

"Can you spare a copper for a poor man, sir, as 'as bin out o' work since last summer?"

A strong flavour of whisky accompanied the words.

Skimpole moved back a pace, with a cough of disgust. But for his principles, he would certainly have returned a curt answer. This was not a feeble old man, but a strong and hearty fellow, evidently quite able to work if he wanted to. But Skimpole reflected that work was not always to be found when it was wanted, and his heart softened.

"I—I am afraid I have no money to spare, my good friend," he said. "I gave my last shilling to a beggar in the lane. But I hope I may be able to help you. It is too cold to talk here. Pray walk into the village with me."

"Yes, sir," whined the tramp. "Sixpence would git me a night's lodging, sir. It's an awful night to be out in, sir. I'd be frozen to death under a 'edge. I'm an honest workin' man, sir, name of Bill Bunter, and I've been looking for work for weeks."

"Terrible!" exclaimed Skimpole. "It is, of course, the fault of the present social system. Under Socialistic conditions, work would be found for all who can work, and there would be no such thing as an unemployed man."

The tramp stared at him.

It was extremely probable that under the idealistic system that Skimpole sketched out honest Bill Bunter would have found life a very uncomfortable affair altogether. Skimpole was quite right in believing that there were many who wanted work and could not find it, doubtless; but Bill Bunter was not of the number. He was a gentleman of the "born tired" species, and would have considered himself a deeply-injured member of society if anybody had forced him to work.

"We are going to abolish unemployment," went on Skimpole. "Under Socialism, you will work every day at some useful occupation—"

"Shall I?" murmured Bill Bunter, sotto voce.

"And you will not have to rush off first thing in the morning, but will have time to take a proper bath and shave, and so on."

Bill Bunter shuddered. Whether it was with the cold, or the prospect of having to take a bath under Socialism, we cannot say.

"You will live in a bright, clean house, and will not be driven to drink to deaden your misery," went on Skimpole with enthusiasm. "You will probably never taste spirits again—"

"What?" yelled Bill Bunter.

"My dear friend, you will not need the artificial gaiety imparted by spirits, when life is bright and happy, and work is a pleasure," explained Skimpole. "When we have abolished the House of Lords and the National Debt, I expect we shall abolish the drink traffic."

Bill Bunter muttered something.

"But, come," went on Skimpole. "Unfortunately, Socialism is not yet here. I will assist you as much as I can, as a brother in distress. It is evidently of more consequence for a fellow-being to have a night's lodging in this weather than for Knox's telegram to be sent. Here is sixpence, my poor fellow. It

was given to me to send a telegram, but I shall explain to the prefect. I am sorry I cannot do more, but I am expecting some money to-morrow, and if you come up to the school I may be able to help you further."

The tramp stared.

"Thank you kindly, sir; I'll come."

"I cannot now get Gore's mince-pies, or send Knox's telegram," murmured Skimpole. "I suppose I had better return to St. Jim's. Fortunately, I have not had my journey for nothing, as I have been able to assist fellow-creatures in distress, and to spread the knowledge of Socialism. Good-night, my good friend. Would you care for a copy of the 'Trumpeter'?"

He thrust the paper into the grimy hands of the astonished tramp, and turned away. Bill Bunter stared after him till he vanished. Then he tapped his dirty forehead in an extremely significant way.

He looked at the Socialist newspaper and at the sixpence. The "Trumpeter" he tossed away contemptuously, and it fluttered off on the wind. The sixpence he slipped into an inside pocket, where it clinked against a dozen other coins, most of them of greater value. Then he made his way to the Golden Pig—but not in search of a night's lodging. Poor Skimpole's sixpence passed over the bar, and it was followed by a good many more, and when honest Bill Bunter left the Golden Pig, his walk was decidedly unsteady, as he staggered away to sleep in a barn.

CHAPTER 4.

The Woes of a Socialist.

"TAGGLES! I say, Taggles!"

Taggles, the school porter at St. Jim's, smiled grimly. He had just locked up the school gates, and was going away with the keys, when a breathless figure came bolting out of the gloom of Rylcombe Lane, and paused panting at the gate.

"Taggles! Old Taggles!"

Taggles knew perfectly well that it was a junior who had been down to the village, and who had arrived only a few seconds too late for locking-up. But Taggles didn't intend to give him the benefit of those few seconds. The gates were locked, and the orders were that once locked they were not to be opened again. And Taggles had a very strong sense of duty—sometimes.

Skimpole—for it was the amateur Socialist—seized the frosty bars of the gate and shook them in his excitement.

"Taggles! Taggles! Let me in!"

Taggles turned his head.

"Hallo! Who's there?"

"It is I, Skimpole. I fear I am a few seconds late, Taggles, but—"

"If I lets you in, I have to make report to the 'Ead, same as usual," said Taggles, with a sour grin. "You can come in if you like."

"My dear fellow, surely you won't act like a cad, just for a few seconds. I know that you have frequently let in boys who have been half an hour late, for the consideration of a tip—"

"Oh, do you?" growled Taggles, shoving the keys back into his pocket.

"Certainly. It is common knowledge that you are amenable to tipping if not to persuasion," said Skimpole. "I do not blame you, mind. It is undoubtedly owing to your bringing-up in unrefined and debasing circumstances that you show such a decided want of honesty on this matter. As a Socialist I cannot blame but only commiserate you. I—"

"You young rascal!" roared Taggles. "If you was on this side of the gate I'd give you something! Debased circumstances, you young rip."

"I repeat that I do not blame you," said Skimpole, between the bars of the gate. "As a Socialist, knowing that all evils at present existing are brought about by the rank rottenness of the social system, I do not blame anybody for anything. But I could not possibly give you a tip. If you consider it your duty to keep me shut out, or to report me to the Head, I would rather you did so. To bribe an employee to neglect what he believes to be his duty is impossible to a sincere Socialist. I could not tip you, Taggles, without being guilty of an attempt to undermine the honesty of the lower classes—"

"Lower classes! I'll lower classes you!" spluttered Taggles, half inclined to open the gate for the sake of taking summary vengeance upon the youthful Socialist who indulged in such painfully plain speaking.

"I make an appeal, however, to your better nature," said Skimpole eloquently. "It is highly admirable to have a strict sense of duty. But when others suffer by that extreme dutifulness, and not oneself, it is time to examine one's own conscience, and ascertain whether one is really actuated by a sense of duty after all, or by a kind of ill-nature passing under the name of it. I entreat you, Taggles—"

"E's mad," said Taggles. "Stark, staring, raving mad!"

Even the 'Ead doesn't use so many long words in one sentence! I don't believe he could!"

"Indeed, Taggles, I should be very glad to explain my meaning in shorter and simpler words, suitable to the obtuse state of your intellect——"

This obliging offer was not accepted. Taggles turned and stamped away in an extremely bad temper. If the amateur Socialist wanted to come in, he would have to ring, and make his unpunctuality known to the whole of the school.

"Taggy! Taggy! What's the matter?"

It was the voice of Tom Merry. The hero of the Shell came out of the gloom of the quadrangle, and stopped the school porter. Taggles glared at him. He had had many a rub with Tom Merry.

"What's the matter, Taggles? Is that Skimpole at the gate? I came down in case he was late, to persuade you to let him in."

"Yes, it's Master Skimpole," said Taggles, "and he's staring mad. And I'm not going to let him in till he rings me up, and then I takes him straight to the 'Ead. So there!"

A shilling glimmered in Tom Merry's hand.

"I say, Taggles, don't be hard, you know. Let your naturally soft heart have its own way."

"None of your blarney, Master Merry," said Taggles, considerably softened, however, by the glimmer of the shilling.

"Come on, Taggles, he's only a few seconds late, and you know the Head wouldn't be very hard on a chap for a few seconds."

"Well, I don't like to refuse you, Master Merry," said Taggles, as he slipped the shilling into his waistcoat pocket. "You're a young gentleman, you are, and none of that Socialist rot about you. I'll let the young fool in."

The key turned in the lock again, much to the relief of the shivering Skimpole. The amateur Socialist came in. He had seen nothing of the incident of the shilling, and imagined that his eloquence had softened the stony heart of Taggles. Tom Merry had delicately disappeared for the moment.

"Thank you, Taggles," said Skimpole. "Would you mind shaking hands with me?" He shook the horny hand of the astonished porter. "As a Socialist, you see, I am bound to let all my fellow-beings on terms of equality, and must be ready to shake hands with everyone. It is rather unpleasant to shake a hard and dirty hand like yours, but I do not shrink from it in the cause of Socialism."

Taggles breathed hard.

"I am glad you decided to let me in," went on Skimpole. "It shows that even a usually hard-hearted and caddish fellow may have his good points. I should be glad to explain to you some of the glorious truths of Socialism, Taggles. I will send some of my books to you to-morrow, and will come in to explain them to you. I will couch my explanations in short and simple words which a child could understand, and so you——
Ow!"

Taggles' patience had given out.

He suddenly swung the amateur Socialist round and planted his foot behind him, and Skimpole went at a sudden run forward, slipped in the snow, and fell on his face.

He sat up somewhat dazedly. Taggles had locked the gates again and disappeared. Skimpole rose painfully to his feet.

"That was simply brutal of Taggles," he exclaimed. "As a Socialist, I am bound to forgive all those who injure me, or else I should certainly report him to the Head for his brutal conduct. Dear me, I can feel a most unpleasant pain where his great boot struck me. How very brutal! Still, it was kind of him to let me in, and I hardly expected it from such a person."

And Skimpole went off rather limpingly to the School House. Tom Merry joined him at the door.

"You've got in then, Skimmy?" asked the hero of the Shell cheerily.

"Yes," said the amateur Socialist. "I was late, but I appealed to Taggles' kind heart, and he admitted me. Another proof, if one were wanted, that even the most case-hardened rotters can be improved by an appeal to their better nature, as Socialists always maintain."

Tom Merry grinned.

"But where's your coat?" he asked. "Why, you're wet and shivering. You had a coat on when you went out, surely."

"I gave it to a beggar in the lane. He was old and weak, and as a Socialist I was bound to consider an old and feeble man before myself. I really hope he will not pawn it for drink. It is certainly very cold. I think I shall go and change my clothes before I see Knox. I have rather an unpleasant explanation to make to him. Ah, here are Mellish and Gore."

"Got my mince-pies?" asked Gore immediately.

"I am sorry, Gore. I intended to get them, but I had only a shilling, and I gave that to a beggar. His need was greater than yours, so of course you don't mind."

"Don't I?" roared Gore. "You—you ass! You duffer! You silly lunatic!"

"I hope you sent Knox's telegram all right, at all events," said Mellish rather anxiously. "It was an important one"

"I am sorry about that, too, Mellish. I shall explain to Knox, and when he knows that the sixpence went to procure a night's lodging for an unhappy victim of the present social system, he won't mind, I daresay."

"Won't he?" gasped Mellish. "Go and make the explanation, that's all. And mind, don't you put the blame on me, or——"

"I should certainly not put the blame upon you, Mellish. It is impossible for a sincere Socialist to prevaricate. Besides, there is no blame in the matter. The action was a good one, and therefore cannot be deserving of blame, and Knox the prefect will see it in that light, unless he is very unreasonable."

Tom Merry gave a roar.

"My hat! I fancy you'll find him unreasonable, Skimmy."

And Tom Merry cut off to his study to fetch out Lowther and Manners. He had an idea that there would be a row when Skimpole explained to the prefect, and he didn't mean to let the amateur Socialist be too much hurt.

Skimpole changed his clothes, and then made his way to Knox's study. It was immediately below that of the Terrible Three, on the lower floor. Skimpole tapped at the door, and the prefect's far from amiable voice bade him enter.

Skimpole entered. Knox was not alone. He was entertaining a couple of friends to tea, the friends being fellows of the same kidney as himself—Sefton, of the New House, and Pinner of the School House; both of the Sixth.

"Hallo! what do you want?" asked Knox, looking up. "Hallo, it's the amateur Socialist, is it? I hear there's going to be a red revolution at St. Jim's, and barricades thrown up in the quadrangles."

"Nothing of the kind!" exclaimed Skimpole. "Nothing could be farther from the truth than the popular belief that Socialism implies violence of any kind. We shall establish our system by convincing the minds and hearts of the people, not by shooting or stabbing their bodies—an old-fashioned and extremely ineffective and unpleasant method."

"Good heavens!" said Sefton. "Where does he get those words from? If he had a fellow like that in our house we'd boil him."

"Oh, he's mad!" said Knox. "He wants to abolish fagging, and——"

"Certainly. Fagging is a relic of the slavery of old times." And he suggested that every boy at the school should clean his own boots."

"Decidedly," said Skimpole. "It would prevent them from entertaining the absurd notion that they are in any way superior to the boot-boy."

"Ha, ha! Kick him out!"

"I have something to tell you, Knox."

"Buck up, then, and clear," said the prefect.

"You gave Mellish a telegram to send, and sixpence to pay for it——"

"Well, hasn't he sent it?" demanded Knox; his heavy brows contracting angrily at once. "If he hasn't, I'll——"

"Pray do not be angry with Mellish, Knox. He asked me to go down to the village and send it, and handed me the sixpence."

"Well, if you've sent it, that's all right, and there's no need to be long-winded about it. Cut!"

"But I haven't sent it."

"What!" roared Knox.

"I fully intended to send it, Knox, but I was unfortunately unable to do so. I met a sad case of destitution in Rylecombe, an unfortunate victim of the present social system who had nowhere to lay his head; and as I had already parted with my last shilling, I was compelled to give him your sixpence to pry for a night's lodging."

Sefton and Pinner burst into a roar of laughter. Knox's face was a study.

"I am sorry, if this puts you to any inconvenience, Knox, and of course I shall repay you the sixpence," said Skimpole. "The lesser necessity must always yield to the greater, that is one of the great principles of Socialism; so of course you don't object——"

"Of course not. Ha, ha, ha!" giggled Sefton and Pinner.

"Under better social conditions," continued Skimpole, now fairly mounted upon his hobby-horse, "this could not have happened. The telegraph-office ought of course to be free to all who had any need to use it. And every house would be open to a homeless wanderer on a stormy night. In fact, there would be no homeless wanderers under Socialism, as we are going to abolish poverty and laziness and the drink traffic. We are——"

Knox rose quickly and crossed to the door, and closed it. Skimpole stopped short, looking a little alarmed. Knox was in such a rage that his face was quite white.

"Did you know, you young scoundrel, that that telegram was an important one?" he asked. "Did you know that you would get the hiding of your life for not sending it?"

"I did not know, Knox, but I am afraid it would have made no difference. I acted according to my conscience, and you must allow me to point out that had you taken the

telegram yourself to the post-office, instead of imposing a laborious and unpleasant journey upon a fag, you would not—Pray do not be violent."

The appeal was wasted. Knox grasped the amateur Socialist, and flung him face downwards upon the rug. He held him easily there in spite of his wriggles.

"Get that cane out of the corner, will you, Sefton?"

"Rather," said Sefton, grinning. That was just in his line. Any kind of cruelty or bullying did not come amiss to Sefton. He brought the cane."

"Now lay it on while I hold him," said Knox. "I'll tell you when to stop. Let him have it hard. I'm going to cure him of Socialism."

"Ha, ha! I'll knock it out of him if I can," grinned Sefton, and he swung the cane up into the air.

The cane came down with a terrific slash, and the dust rose from Skimpole's garments. The amateur Socialist gave a whoop.

"Ow! Don't! You're hurting me! Oh! Oh!"

"Ha, ha! how remarkable!" exclaimed Sefton. "He says it hurts him, Knox. Does that hurt you too, Skimpole?"

And the bully gave another fearful slash.

"Oh! Oh! Don't!" shrieked Skimpole. "I—oh!—don't—"

Slash! slash!
Skimpole struggled desperately, and Pinner had to come and lend a hand to hold him down. Sefton continued to slash in the most brutal way with the cane. Knox thrust Skimpole's face into the rug to deaden his cries.

"Give him some more—give him open—"

The study-door suddenly burst open.

"You cads!" shouted Tom Merry. "I thought so! Go for 'em!"

CHAPTER 5.

More Trouble for Skimpole.

TOM MERRY dashed into the study, followed by Manners and Lowther. Blake, Herries, and D'Arcy were at their heels. The juniors had been busy in the editorial office, and Tom Merry had brought them all along to the rescue of Skimpole. He knew that Knox had company, and it was not a light matter for juniors to interfere with two or three Sixth-Formers.

Knox sprang up in a fury.

"Get out of my study!" he roared.

"You cad!" cried Tom Merry. "Let Skimpole up! Do you hear?"

Tom's eyes were blazing with indignation. He didn't care whether it was a Sixth-Former or not that stood before him. He bolted right up at Knox, and sent him flying with a sudden uppercut under the chin. Knox floundered over, astonished almost out of his wits by this attack from a junior. And Sefton and Pinner released the amateur Socialist, who staggered to his feet, his face white and drawn, wriggling with pain.

"Thank you, Merry!" he gasped.

Knox was on his feet in a moment.

"Smash them!" he hissed furiously.

The three seniors rushed at the youngsters. They had not the slightest doubt that the latter would fly at once, with kicks and cuffs to help them on. But they were mistaken. The juniors received them pluckily, and gave blow for blow.

Numbers were on Tom Merry's side, and pluck, too; and the three bullies, big fellows as they were, soon had enough of it.

Knox was soon on the floor, with Herries and Blake sitting on him; and Sefton went reeling to and fro with Manners and Lowther and D'Arcy clinging to him like limpets to a rock. Tom Merry and Skimpole had Pinner down very quickly, with his head in the grate among the cinders, and Tom sat on his chest.

"Let me get up!" roared Knox. "I'll be the death of you! I'll report you to the Head for attacking a prefect."

"And we'll report you at the same time," exclaimed Tom Merry. "You'd be expelled if the Head knew how you were treating Skimpole, and you know it."

"Let me get up, hang you!"

"Wait a bit! Hold him tight, Blake. He's going to have some of his own medicine before he gets up. Skinny, I can manage this cad alone. Get up and take the cane, and give Knox a hiding."

Skimpole jumped up, and then he hesitated.

"Do as I tell you!" exclaimed Tom. "It's all right. Knox wouldn't dare to say a word, in case the whole matter came out."

"You young hound!" snarled Knox. "I—"

"Give him a licking, Skinny. I tell you there's nothing to be afraid of."

"It isn't that," said Skimpole. "It's a matter of principle, you see, Merry. I—"

"He's licked you. Now you lick him. That will make it

square, and he wants a lesson, ass," said Tom Merry. "And buck up about it. You ought to be glad of the chance."

"Pray excuse me, Merry, but I really cannot. As a sincere Socialist I am compelled to pardon those who injure me, and to lay the blame of their wicked actions upon their bad training or debasing environment."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Blake. "Which did you suffer from, Knox, a bad training or a debasing environment?"

"I'll wring your beastly necks—"

"Consequently I cannot punish Knox," said Skimpole. "I am sorry to displease you, Tom Merry, especially as you have rescued me from that person's brutality; but as a Socialist I do not believe in the efficacy of corporal punishment."

"Oh, go and eat coke!" said Tom Merry. "We'll let him off if you like, though he ought to have a hiding."

"Yaas, watah! I weally considah that a feahful thwashin' would do the bwute a weal lot of good, deah boys, and teach him to keep off the gwass in the futuah."

"Pray pardon him," said Skimpole. "I admit that he is a beast and a cad, but some defect in his nature or in his training is to blame. Let him get up."

The juniors released their prisoners. Sefton and Pinner had had enough, and they stood scowling and dusting themselves viciously. But Knox was not only hurt, but his dignity as a prefect had been outraged. As soon as he was loose he flew at Tom Merry.

"Now, you young cad!" he roared. "I'll—"

"Collar him!" shouted Blake.

They fastened upon the prefect like dogs upon a stag. He went over with a terrific crash against the tea-table. The table naturally went over, too, and there was a crash of smashing china. In the midst of the ruins Knox sprawled under the victorious juniors, yelling to his friends for help. But his friends had had enough.

"I hear you want more," remarked Blake, slapping a pat of butter into Knox's mouth as he opened it to yell. "Pass the marmalade, Merry. Thanks! That's for your left eye, Knox. Now the jam. Dab it on his hair; he's bound to like that."

"Ow—ow—oooh! gerrrrrrroh!"

"Are you satisfied now?"

"No—yes—lemme go—lemme gerrup!"

"Come on, kids," said Tom Merry; "I think he'll be quiet now."

And the juniors crowded out of the study. Tom Merry was right, Knox had had enough this time. The feed was ruined, and his two guests departed in towering bad tempers, after giving Knox some plain opinions. The prefect was left to clean himself, a task that was not easy, for Blake had been liberal with the butter and jam and marmalade.

The juniors marched Skimpole down the passage in their midst. The amateur Socialist was wriggling and writhing as he walked. He had been very much hurt by the caning, and his breath was still coming in gasps.

"It was really very good of you fellows to come to my rescue," he exclaimed. "I should like to make you some recompense—"

"Rats!"

"But I am in earnest. You have acted so generously that I feel it to be my duty to enlighten you, as you are just the fellows to turn Socialists if you only understood the—"

"Rats!"

"But really, even against your will, I think I must—"

"Look here, old kid! I don't know anything about Socialism, but I know I'm not going to be talked to death," said Tom Merry. "You had no right to undertake to send Knox's wire and then not send it."

"But a famished and freezing victim of the oppression of the rich—"

"Bosh! You ought to have sent the wire, and Knox was quite right in licking you."

"Corporal punishment is a mistake—a foolish and antiquated example of brutality—"

"More rats! You deserved a licking, but Knox had no right to be a beast, and that's why we interfered. We're not going to allow bullying."

"My dear Merry, that's just Socialism. What is the oppression of the toiling millions but a species of bullying on a grander scale—"

"I believe you'd talk a dead donkey deaf. Come in, kids; here's the editorial office. You can travel along, Skimpole; and do buy a gag—and use it—the next time you are flush with money."

"I can freely overlook your rudeness, Merry, as I do not attribute it to any fault in your nature, but to base and sordid surroundings in your early childhood."

"Eh?" roared Tom Merry, seizing Skimpole by the throat and pinning him against the door of the editorial office. "What's that?"

"Leave go!" gasped Skimpole. "I did not mean to offend you, really. But Middleton and many other Socialist writers have clearly proved that everything is the fault of nobody—I mean that nothing is the fault of anybody; and they attribute

all wrong to heredity and environment—that is to say, to defects received from one's parents by descent, or to bad and degrading surroundings during childhood. I should not like to declare that your parents were brutal or bad—"

"You'd better not!" yelled Tom Merry.

"Therefore I attribute your roughness to your early environment, and trace it to the base and unlovely surroundings amid which you were brought up—ow!"

The "ow" was caused by Tom Merry knocking the amateur Socialist's head against the door of the editorial office.

"You image!" exclaimed Tom Merry wrathfully. "If I didn't think that you got those terms off by heart, and repeated them like a parrot, I should wipe up the corridor with you, and scatter you in little pieces along the passage. But you had better draw it mild."

"I should be the last fellow to hurt anybody's feelings," gasped Skimpole. "But—"

"My hat!" said Lowther, "if you're trying to please people, you're going to work in a really remarkable manner."

"Yaas, wathah! My opinion is that the boundah is wight off his beastly wockah, deah boys."

"You bloated aristocrat—"

"I wefuse to be chawactahwised as bloated. I have made that remark before. If Knox had not already tweated you in a bwutal way, I should thwash you for that expression, Skimpole. Kick the boundah down the passage, Mewwy, and let us go in and get to work."

"Righto!" said Tom Merry. He did not administer the kick, but he gave Skimpole a twist that started him off at a run. "Scat, you ass! Disappear!"

"I say, Merry, I wish you'd think again about inserting that article—"

"Be off!" roared Tom Merry, exasperated.

And the amateur Socialist departed at last.

"That chap's enough to turn a fellow's whiskers grey!" exclaimed Blake, as they entered the editorial office. "We've lost a lot of time, and we shall lose a lot more if we're going to yank him out of all the scrapes his Socialism gets him into."

"Yaas, wathah! Here come Figgins & Co. Come in, deah boys; there's plenty to do."

The staff of "Tom Merry's Weekly" set to work again. Before they concluded their labours, the number was quite prepared for the press, and it only remained to take it over to the local printer's on the morrow.

CHAPTER 6.

An Unsolicited Contribution.

NIGHT—a dark winter's night! Snow was falling heavily in the quadrangle, and drifting on the bitter wind. It covered roofs and walls and window-sills with spotless white. Within the two houses of St. Jim's silence and slumber reigned.

But as twelve boomed out from the school clock, a figure cautiously raised itself in a bed in the Shell dormitory in the School House.

It was Skimpole's bed, and it was Skimpole's face that glimmered in the gloom, Skimpole's eyes that looked cautiously round the dormitory.

"I say, you fellows!" It was Skimpole's voice that uttered the cautious whisper.

There was no reply; nothing but steady breathing, mingled with a few unmusical snores. The Shell were fast asleep.

Skimpole grinned in the gloom. He got slowly and quietly out of bed. The night was cold, but the amateur Socialist, though he shivered, did not mind. A brain governed by a fixed idea does not take account of trifles. Cold was a very small and trifling matter to the enthusiastic Socialist.

Skimpole hurriedly dragged on his clothes and a pair of felt slippers, and then quitted the dormitory, closing the door carefully behind him. He paused to listen in the passage, but there was no sound, no movement, no gleam of light. It was evident that the School House was wrapped in slumber.

Skimpole gave a silent chuckle. He made his way to the stairs and descended on tiptoe. If he had been going to commit a burglary he could not have been more cautious.

He stopped at the door of Tom Merry's study, and opened it. A faint glimmer came in at the window from the snow-clad branches of the trees without. Skimpole closed the door and lighted the gas.

"Now for the 'Weekly'!" he murmured. "If Merry will not insert my article from a sense of duty, there is no alternative to inserting it against his will. I only hope he will observe nothing before taking it to the printer's to-morrow. But he is not likely to do that, as the paper is already wrapped up to go."

A bundle lay upon the table, tied with string. Skimpole knew that it contained the number of the "Weekly," written out and ready for the press. He carefully untied the string, opened out the paper, and the Christmas Number of "Tom

Merry's Weekly" lay before him. There was a great deal of it, as it was written on one side of the foolscap only in more than one variety of large sprawling handwriting.

Skimpole looked through it and scanned the contents carefully.

"I shall have to leave something out to make room for the article on Socialism," he murmured. "Ah, what is this? It looks like poetry. Yes, it is poetry, written by Blake. I should be sorry to leave out anything of any value, though, of course, in comparison with my article, nothing here is of much value. Still, I will read it carefully before I take it out, so as to do the least possible hurt to the feelings of the contributor."

Blake's poetic effort covered a whole page, being sprawled in very big writing. It would go into a column or less when the magazine was printed. Skimpole read it over with an air of careful consideration. It ran as follows:

"SIR FATTED AND HIS FAYRE LADYE.
A Romantic Poem by J. Blake.
Continued from Last Week.

Note for New Readers.—In previous instalments was described how Sir Fatted de Fitzbooters serenaded the daughter of the noble baron, and how the noble baron woke up early one morning and found him a-doing of it.

It was certainly a pity that this sweet, love-laden ditty,

So poetic and so pretty, his hard heart should fail to melt,

But he really seemed to hate it; we are sorry to relate it,

But truth forces us to state it, 'twas annoyance that he felt. And the baron proud and haughty, said some words all very naughty,

Which I really can't report—he was a man of language strong; What the words were doesn't matter, but as mad as any hatter, Forth the baron bold did clatter, when he heard the swain's 'sweet song!

(To be continued in our next.)"

Skimpole calmly tore out the page containing Blake's effusion.

"I think that can very well be spared," he murmured. "My article on Socialism will fill the place nicely."

His article was written in close writing on a foolscap page, which he produced from his pocket. He gummied it in the place of Blake's poem, which he crumpled up and put in his pocket. When it came to be set up, the article would naturally take up more room than the poem. But, to save time, Tom Merry had arranged a certain number of comic advertisements, to be put in or left out at the printer's discretion, according to the exigencies of space. Skimpole's article would therefore find room.

Satisfied with the result of his raid, Skimpole folded up the paper round the magazine again, and tied the string. The parcel now looked exactly as he had found it, and it was extremely unlikely that Tom Merry would guess that it had been tampered with before taking it to the printer's.

Skimpole smiled the smile of one quite happy and serene as he quitted the study, and returned to the still slumbering dormitory. He got into bed again without awaking anyone, and fell asleep, to dream of all St. Jim's being converted by his cunning propaganda work, and all enlisted in the great cause of Socialism.

Skimpole kept a curious eye upon Tom Merry the next day. After morning school he saw the hero of the Shell come out of his study with the package under his arm, and walk away from St. Jim's towards Rylcombe.

Plainly enough he suspected nothing! Skimpole chuckled silently, gleefully anticipating Saturday, the promised day of publication:

He watched Tom Merry disappear down the lane, and was about to turn in at the gates again, when a dingy figure came into view. Skimpole recognised honest Bill Bunter, and honest Bill Bunter recognised him at the same moment.

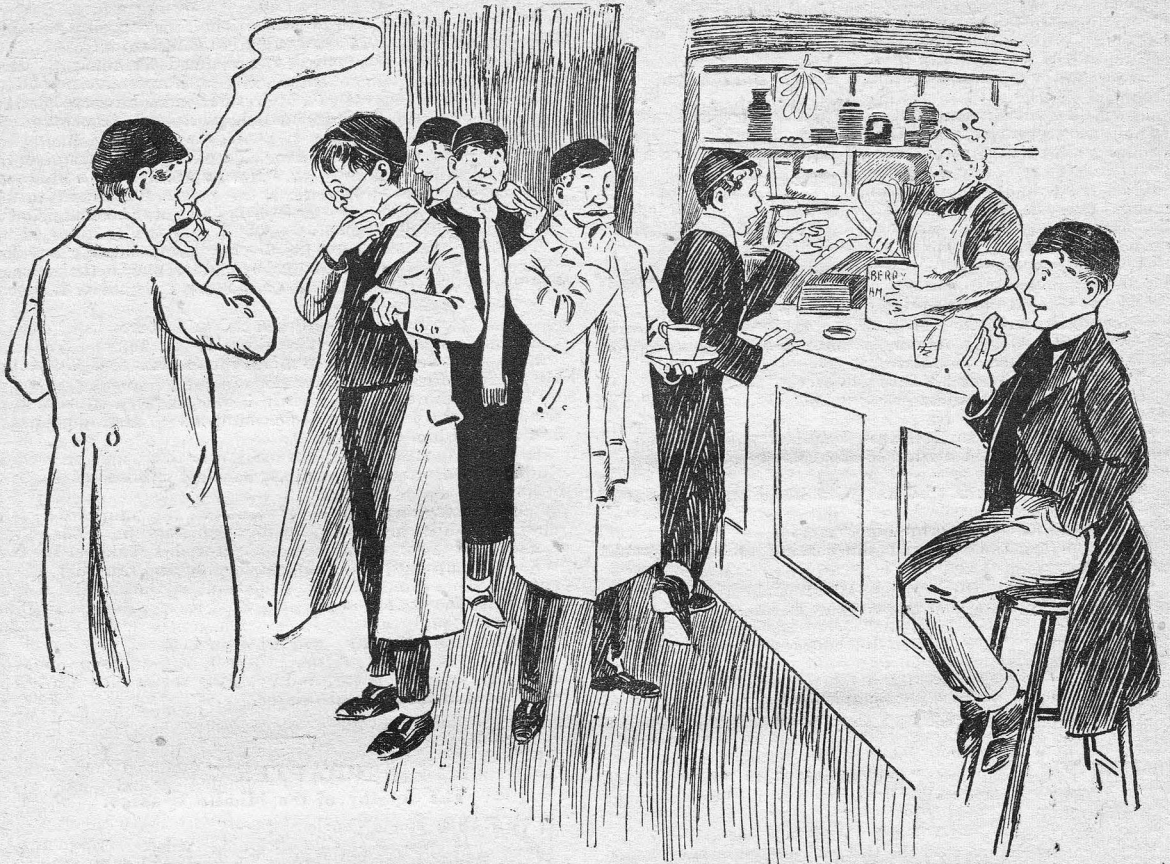
He touched his cap, with a glimmer of mockery in his bleared eyes which Skimpole did not observe. His bleary, bloodshot eyes, his loose lips and foul breath, all told the tale of last night's indulgence in strong liquor; but Skimpole was not sufficiently experienced to see it at a glance.

"Which it's the kind young gentleman 'oo 'elped me last night," said honest Bill Bunter, stopping. "You said as 'ow I might come up to the school, sir, thanking you kindly. I ain't slept under a roof for weeks—"

"Why, I gave you sixpence to pay for a night's lodging last night!" exclaimed Skimpole, in surprise.

"Ye-e-e-es! So you did, sir," said the tramp, rather awkwardly. He had brought out his usual rigmarole without remembering that important circumstance. "But, you see, sir,

ANSWERS



The St. Jim's boys had seldom enjoyed such a feed. The unhappy Skimpole stood mute, wondering where it was going to end.

I—I gave it to an old feller who was starving to death, and stayed out myself in the cold."

The tears almost came into Skimpole's eyes at this example of generosity in such an apparently degraded victim of the social system.

"That was noble and generous of you!" he exclaimed. "Ah, who that heard this would maintain any longer that the submerged tenth possesses less true nobility of character than any other class of the community?"

The tramp winked with the eye that was turned away from the amateur Socialist.

"Just so, sir. If you could 'elp me on my way——"

"Certainly, if I could. I am expecting some money to-day, but it has not yet come," said Skimpole, in perplexity. "The post will be in after afternoon school. Then I shall be able to help you, my poor fellow. Unfortunately I have no money now, as I have spent some of my last allowance, and lent the remainder, and those who have borrowed it are unable to pay me. Of course, as a sincere Socialist I cannot press them for payment; but when I get my remittance—but in the meantime, you must have shelter from this horrible weather. My heart aches when I think of poor people exposed to the inclemency of the weather. While dukes and millionaires are rolling in wealth on the marble staircases and tessellated floors of their palaces. If you care to come into the school, my poor fellow-citizen, I will give you such shelter as I can."

The tramp gave a start.

He glanced through the ancient gateway, across the snowy quadrangle, at the great pile of noble buildings. Some thought seemed to flash into his mind that made his eyes glitter with greed.

"You're werry kind, young gent. I'm dying with cold and 'unger."

"Come in, then," said Skimpole eagerly. "I will show you to a shelter at once. It cannot be wrong to shelter a fellow-creature in distress, though I have a feeling that the masters would not approve of my admitting you to the school. Probably in the base and brutal surroundings of your early youth you have learned to steal as well as to drink and lie, and go about in a filthy personal condition." The tramp's eyes glittered savagely, but the enthusiastic Socialist did not observe it. "I am far from blaming you, my poor fellow, if such is the case,

but Dr. Holmes might feel a natural nervousness about his silver if you were admitted to the house."

"I swear I wouldn't touch——"

"Ah, yes; but I think you are probably a liar, my poor friend," said Skimpole. "A man brought up as you have evidently been could hardly fail to be a liar as well as a dirty ruffian. But I will risk admitting you to an outhouse. I can give you shelter in the wood-shed, and will there bring you food and drink."

"Thank you kindly, young gentleman!"

"But take care not to be seen as you come in, or the brutal porter may eject you with violence."

Skimpole hastily led the way. The tramp showed a great aptitude in dodging into cover, and they reached the wood-shed unobserved. Skimpole opened the door and admitted the tramp into the dimly-lighted shed. It was cold and chilly, but a great improvement on the open air for a man wretchedly clad in such bitter weather.

"There are some sacks you can use to keep yourself warm," said Skimpole. "I am sorry that I can offer you no better covering, but really the sacks will suffer considerably by contact with your person. My poor fellow, you are a terrible example of the oppression of the lower classes. I have seldom seen a man so absolutely degraded and filthy. I must do everything I can for you."

"Thank you kindly, sir!" said the tramp, through his gritting teeth.

"You are looking angry, and no wonder. I suppose my words have brought home to you for the first time the terrible wrongs you groan under. But take hope, my friend—take hope! Socialism is coming—like a burst of sunshine to lighten the darkness of the wretched millions now enslaved—and when it comes you will be a clean, sober, hardworking man. Think of that, my poor fellow!"

Honest Bill Bunter muttered something below his breath that would have made the amateur Socialist jump if he had heard it.

"I will leave you now," continued Skimpole. "Take care that no one discovers your presence here, or you will be ejected violently. I will return to you as soon as I can with food."

And Skimpole quitted the hut. The door closed, and then the

tramp crossed to the little window of the wood-shed, and gazed through it towards the school buildings.

"My heye! wot a crib to crack!"

That was the grateful reflection of Honest Bill Bunter.

Skimpole came hurriedly out of the class-room when lessons for the afternoon were over, and the Shell were dismissed. He was thinking about his protege, and he hurried off at once to discover if there were any letters for him.

"There's one for you, Skimmy," said Gore, as Skimpole glanced over the rack. "See if it's got any tin in it, old fellow."

"Yes, it's my uncle's handwriting," said Skimpole, with a smile of satisfaction, as he took the letter down. "I am sure it contains a postal-order."

"Good!" said Mellish, winking at his friends. "Good! Now's the chance for a Socialist!"

Skimpole opened the letter. It contained a postal-order for a pound. Mellish linked his arm in Skimpole's. Gore affectionately seized his other arm.

"Come on, Skimmy!" said Mellish. "Mrs. Taggles will change it for you. You are going to stand a feed all round, of course."

"No, I cannot do so, Mellish. I am sorry, but I need the money for the relief of a wretched and down-trodden member of society."

"Yah!" said Walsh. "What price Socialism? Share out, that's what I say!"

"My dear Walsh, do you labour under the common and absurd error that Socialism implies sharing out? There was never a greater mistake."

"Look here, Socialism is the Golden Rule applied to the affairs of everyday life, you said so yourself," exclaimed Gore.

"Yes, I did, and I maintain it."

"Very well! You've got to do to others as you would like them to do to you."

"Exactly."

"Good! Now, if you particularly wanted to be treated to a jolly good blow-out at the tuck-shop, wouldn't you like somebody to treat you?"

"Certainly I should."

"Then there you are!" exclaimed Gore triumphantly. "We particularly want to be treated to a good blow-out at the tuck-shop, don't we, kids?"

"Rather!" came half-a-dozen approving voices.

"Now's your chance with the Golden Rule, Skimpole! You can't get out of it without confessing that you're a beastly humbug!"

Skimpole looked worried. Gore certainly had him, as far as argument went.

"Come on!" said Mellish. "Don't waste time!"

"I—I will treat you, certainly," said Skimpole. "I am not at all mean; but I must reserve the greater part of my sovereign for more useful purposes. I must also repay Knox his sixpence. Come, then!"

They carried him off triumphantly to Dame Taggles's little shop. The dame willingly changed the postal-order, and the juniors began giving their orders right and left. Poor Skimpole, not knowing exactly what to do, remained mute and worried.

Gore had never distinguished himself by the amount of consideration he showed to others. He had a victim in Skimpole, and he made the most of it.

The young rascals had seldom enjoyed such a feed. The unhappy Socialist stood mute, wondering where it was going to end.

"Let me see, you want sixpence left for Knox," said Gore, making a calculation. "Good! The amount comes to nineteen and fourpence so far."

"What!" gasped Skimpole.

"I'll have another tart—a twopenny one, please, Mrs. Taggles. And there'll be just sixpence left for Knox," said Gore. "Thank you very much, Skimpole, for the feed. If you get some more tips like this, you'll find Socialism go down very well at St. Jim's."

And Gore and Mellish and their friends marched off, chuckling, leaving Skimpole to settle Dame Taggles's little bill, which he did almost with tears in his eyes.

"It was really most inconsiderate for Gore to plunder me like that," he murmured, as he left the tuck-shop disconsolately. "I shall not now be able to assist poor Bunter. I must explain to him."

He hurried off towards the wood-shed. He heard a noise proceeding from that direction, and a fear entered his breast that the refugee had been discovered.

It was even so. As Skimpole hurried up the angry voice of Taggles could be heard.

"Hout of it, you dirty thief—a-sitting on my faggots and a-gorging of bread-and-cheese! Hout of it, and thank your lucky stars I don't and you hover to the police for frequentin' with felonious intention."

"Let me alone! I'll——"

"Hout of it!"

Taggles appeared in sight, and before him, propelled along by a succession of severe kicks, was Honest Bill Bunter!

"Taggles, how dare you?" exclaimed Skimpole. "How dare you treat a fellow-creature with such excessive brutality! Leave him alone instantly! My poor friend, I have not now the opportunity of helping you, but I hope to be in funds again on Saturday, and——"

There was no time for more. Taggles, without paying the slightest heed to Skimpole, gave Honest Bill Bunter a final kick that sent him sprawling towards the gates. The tramp picked himself up and vanished into Rylcombe Lane, and Taggles shut the gates and locked them.

The amateur Socialist turned away disconsolately towards the school house, and went in. He met Knox in the passage, and felt in his pockets for the sixpence. The prefect favoured him with a black scowl.

"I have your sixpence here, Knox," said Skimpole. "I hope you understood that I intended to repay it. Please take it."

Knox glared at the sixpence, and then took it and placed it in his pocket without a word.

"I hope you were not greatly inconvenienced by that telegram not being sent?" went on Skimpole. "Had not the case been so pressing——"

He was interrupted by a box on the ear that sent him reeling. Knox walked on. The amateur Socialist rubbed his ear ruefully.

"That was very brutal of Knox!" he murmured. "I must send him my pamphlet by Gentleless on 'The Utter Inefficacy of Corporal Punishment.' I wish I could get the fags to back me up in a revolt against fagging and brutality on the part of the seniors. Once Socialism is thoroughly spread through the lower forms at this school there will be a surprise in-store for the tyrants! I think my article in the Christmas Number of the 'Weekly' will have that effect."

And, in his delight at the prospect, the amateur Socialist forgot the pain in his ear, and even the casting forth into the cruel world of Honest Bill Bunter.

CHAPTER 7.

The Apathy of the Middle Classes.

"PLEASE, young gentlemen——"

It was a feeble, whining voice. Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther were standing at the gates of St. Jim's, engaged in a warm argument with Skimpole, when a ragged and dirty figure came up the lane—the figure of a wretched-looking old man. He stopped with the usual beggar's whine as he saw the boys at the gate.

"Please, young gentlemen, can you 'elp a pore old man who's starving and freezing?"

Tom Merry gave him a glance of pity.

The man was old and feeble, and though his copper-tinted face bore plain signs of an evil life, it was certain that his coat was ragged and thin, and let in the bitter blasts of the wintry wind. Flakes of snow were lightly falling, unregarded by the chums of St. Jim's, but the ill-clad beggar shivered and shook as they fell upon him.

Tom Merry's hand went into his pocket at once, and so did Skimpole's. Skimpole's came out empty, as he was in a state of "stoniness" as usual. He looked compassionately at the old tramp, and then gave a sudden start.

"Why, I've seen you before," he exclaimed. "What do you mean by tramping around in that old rag of a coat, when I gave you mine?"

The old tramp gave a jump.

He had not recognised Skimpole, but now he knew him, and for a moment the usually-ready lie did not come to his lips.

"I gave you a nice warm coat," exclaimed Skimpole indignantly. "I've got into a row with my pater for giving it away, and he says he's going to stop my pocket-money till the new one is paid for. And here you are rotting about in the same old rag I saw you in. Where is that coat I gave you?"

"I—I—I——"

Monty Lowther burst into a roar.

"Look at his chivvy!" he said. "Besides the ancient and deeply-engraved signs of reckless indulgence in the glass that cheers, methinks I can trace symptoms of recent, very recent, indulgence in the flowing bowl. Skimpole, old son, he's drunk your coat!"

"Drunk my coat!" said Skimpole, in astonishment.

"I mean, he's pawned it, and consumed the proceeds in the shape of liquid refreshment," said Lowther. "And it's just what you might have expected, you silly ass."

"I swear I 'aven't touched a drop——"

"Rats! You're not more than half-sober now——"

Skimpole looked at the old tramp angrily for a moment, but his theories were not to be so easily upset. He was quickly good-tempered again.

"I suppose that what you say is true, Lowther," he observed. "The man has undoubtedly pawned the coat for drink. But is he to be blamed—?"

"Well, I should certainly say so, and I think a thorough hiding would do him good; and I think I'd give him one if he wasn't an old man."

"You are mistaken, Lowther. This man has acted in a way that we consider beastly and absolutely dishonest and caddish. But has he had our advantages of training? Has he been brought up at a good school, properly educated, and aided by the kindness, the love, the good advice, of affectionate parents in a decent home? No, he has not. He has probably been reared in a foul slum, his parents were undoubtedly members of the vicious and, perhaps, criminal classes, as dirty, as beastly, as depraved as himself, and his training was of a kind which naturally turned him out the hideous, filthy wreck you now behold him—"

Skimpole was suddenly interrupted, which was a pity, for he was growing quite eloquent. The old tramp, perhaps, did not like being alluded to in such flattering terms. At all events, he suddenly let out with a bony fist which caught Skimpole on his nose, and made him sit down with startling suddenness in the snow.

Doubtless, the tramp had given up the expectation of getting anything out of the boys, and so he could afford to let himself go. He followed up the sudden blow with a torrent of swearing, which made the chums of the Shell pelt him with snowballs till he took to his heels and disappeared down the road.

Manners helped up Skimpole, from whose nose a stream of red was trickling.

"Dear me," said Skimpole, "the man is absolutely brutal. But I do not bear him any malice; his brutality is the result of the shocking neglect of the lower classes displayed by our effete Government. Has he had any chance of being better? Has he—?"

"Oh, if you're going to ask conundrums," said Lowther, "I'm off!"

And the Terrible Three walked away, leaving Skimpole to waste his eloquence on the desert air. But the amateur Socialist only smiled.

"There is a surprise in store for them to-morrow," he murmured, "and a surprise for the seniors, too, if I can organise the fags to revolt. It will be a surprise all round if the red flag is hoisted in the quadrangle at St. Jim's one of these fine days."

"That chap's getting more cranky every day," Lowther remarked, as the Terrible Three went up to their study. "There's a lot in what he says, I know, but a chap ought to draw a line somewhere. I don't blame that old boulder for dotting him on the boko. Hallo, here's Gore! What do you want in our study, Gore?"

"I came to speak to you fellows," said Gore. "It's a serious matter."

"Oh, get on with it!" said Tom Merry, who knew Gore too well to attach much importance to anything he said. "What's the trouble now?"

"It's the apathy of the middle classes," said Gore, with the air of one working off a really telling sentence.

The chums of the Shell stared at him.

"It's the what?" asked Tom Merry politely.

"The apathy of—" began Lowther.

"The middle classes," said Manners.

"Exactly!" assented Gore, with a nod. "That Socialist maniac is spreading his rot among the lower Forms. I suppose you know that he advocates the abolition of fagging. Now, if he were in the Fourth Form, there would be some sense in the position he has taken up, as the Fourth have to fag for the seniors."

"Of course!" assented Tom Merry. "But as the Shell is exempt from fagging, except when some beastly bully assumes the right of fagging us, why it's no concern of his. As long as he's comfy himself, it doesn't matter about others, eh? My dear Gore, that's exactly the view I should have expected you to take."

"It's a jolly sensible view!" said Gore. "What does it matter to him if the upper Forms fag the youngsters? It's no business of his if Mellish and Blake and the rest are fagged, or of ours. But that isn't all. He's not only trying to encourage the fags to revolt, but he's undermining the authority of the Shell."

"Shocking!" said Monty Lowther.

"Now, you know the talk that's been in the papers lately about Socialism, and the apathy of the middle classes," said Gore. "They're forming a Middle-Class Defence League, you know, and I've got an idea of the same kind. The Shell represents the middle classes at St. Jim's. We're not upper Form fellows, and we're not fags—we're the Shell, placed midway between the Fourth and the Fifth, and, therefore, we are the middle classes, so to speak."

"Well put," said Tom Merry encouragingly.

"Although," continued Gore, "we haven't the admitted right to fag the juniors, we often do fag them, as a matter

of fact—most of the bigger fellows in the Shell get fagging done for them by little chaps in the Remove or the Third."

"That's uncommonly like bullying, though!" remarked Manners.

"Oh, rot! That crank wants to put a stop to that first. There's little Gibson of the Third used to fag for me. That crank Skimpole, as he shares my study, has put his foot down on it, and threatened Gibson with scragging if he comes to the study to fag again."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's all very well for you to laugh, Tom Merry, but it's a serious matter. There'll be an end of all authority and discipline in the school if the kids are allowed to get their backs up. If you looked round you a bit, instead of swotting all the time over that rotten weekly of yours, you'd see that Socialism is spreading in the Third Form at an alarming rate."

"My hat! Have they hoisted the red flag yet?"

"Oh, don't rot! Some of the Third were walking in the quadrangle this morning in high hats, which they're not allowed to do except on special occasions, as you know. They say they're going to wear toppers if they like, as the Shell is allowed to."

"Let 'em!"

"Oh, if you're not going to stand up for the dignity of the Form, I'm done," said Gore huffily. "The papers are quite right in what they say. Socialism is eating away the British Constitution at the root, and the middle classes show an apathy that is simply appalling. It's the same at St. Jim's, I suppose, as everywhere else. When the hydra-headed monster—"

"The what?"

"The hydra-headed monster," said Gore obstinately. "That's what Socialism is; I know, because the 'Daily Telegraph' says so. It's a hydra-headed monster, and when it raises its head—"

"Its heads, you mean. Hydra-headed monsters have more than one head."

"When it raises its head," repeated Gore angrily, "and its glare of destruction encompasses the world with fiery doom, then the middle classes will be sorry that they did not catch it on the wing, and, seizing it by its scaly throat, nip it in the bud."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the Terrible Three.

Gore's metaphors were certainly getting a little mixed.

"I am trying to get up a Middle-Class Defence League," snarled Gore. "We shall stand forth as the defenders of privileges and rights and—and property. We are going to put down Socialism with an iron hand. I think you fellows ought to join. You belong to the Shell, and you have a lot of influence in the Form, though I am blessed if I can see why. You ought to stand by your class, against the oncoming tide of red revolution which raises its ferocious head and threatens destruction to all that is sacred to the hearts of the free-born citizens of this great and glorious empire—"

"Doesn't he talk like a giddy gramophone!" exclaimed Lowther admiringly. "I've never seen a tide raise its head, I know, but it sounds quite imposing. How does a tide raise its head, Gore?"

"Look here, are you going to join?" demanded Gore angrily. "You know you ought to do so. I am trying to rouse up the middle classes from their apathy, and you ought to join me."

"Well," said Tom Merry, running his fingers thoughtfully through his curly hair, "a Middle Class Defence League sounds all right, and I know that those youngsters ought to be taught to respect the Shell. That goes without saying. But a league in defence of fagging and bullying is not quite in my line."

"Nor in mine," said Manners. "We don't mind the apathy. We'll go on being apathetic, if you don't mind, Gore."

"That's it!" agreed Lowther. "You can go on getting up the defence league, Gore, and we'll go on apathetizing—if that's the correct term."

"Oh, it's no good talking to you rotters!" said Gore sulkily. "Just you wait till the hydra-headed monster—"

"Oh, blow the hydra-headed monster!" said Lowther. "We've had enough of him. Blessed if your hydra-headed monster isn't as bad as Skimpole's toiling millions! You've both got 'em on the brain, I think."

Gore scowled and took himself off. The projected league of the middle classes at St. Jim's was not destined to receive the support of the Terrible Three.

CHAPTER 8.

Skimpole Takes the Stranger In.

SATURDAY morning dawned, cold and snowy. There could be no football that afternoon, but as a compensation, Tom Merry had received an assurance from the Rylcombe printer that fifty copies of the "Weekly" would be delivered without fail after morning school. And the editorial staff were looking forward to the first really printed number of "Tom Merry's Weekly" with delighted anticipation.

The first number of the "Weekly" had been written by hand upon foolscap. The second and third numbers had been duplicated by taking off copies on gelatine, which was a great improvement, as the circulation rose to twenty copies. But to have a really printed and properly stitched number was a great deal more satisfactory.

The expense was a consideration which had made the staff hesitate. But most of them had liberal pocket-money, and the editor had thought of a good idea for raising the wind. It was not desirable to charge for the magazine, but Tom Merry decided to levy a share of the costs upon every contributor. Every fellow who had the satisfaction of seeing his effusions in print might naturally be expected to stand a share of the cost of production. Some of the contributors were unreasonable. They wanted to be paid instead of paying. But most of them came round. And the necessary amount having been raised, and arrangements made with the printer of the local paper, the clouds cleared from the editorial brow, and, as Lowther expressed it, everything in the editorial office was lovely.

Great as was the anticipation of the staff and their friends, it did not equal Skimpole's. The amateur Socialist was eager to see his own effusion in print, and still more eager to watch its effect in stimulating the revolt of the lower Forms at St. Jim's. Of the consequences that might come when Blake discovered that his beautiful poem had been replaced by a Socialist article, he cared and thought nothing. He was too enthusiastic to take heed of consequences.

Morning school on Saturday dragged slowly by. Skimpole was greatly relieved when it was over, and after dinner he went down to the gate to watch for the consignment of the "Weekly" from Rylcombe. He did not know exactly at what time Tom Merry expected it. The weather had been growing worse during the morning, and a bitter wind was whirling thick snowflakes in the air as the amateur Socialist went down to the gate. Most of the boys of St. Jim's remained indoors, only a few going out to the slides in the quadrangle.

Skimpole, like Sister Anne, looked down the road and watched eagerly. He did not see the carrier's cart, but later on he saw a familiar figure. He started, and a worried look came over his face. In the intense interest of the propaganda work of the past few days, he had forgotten the existence of Honest Bill Bunter.

He remembered now that he had promised the tramp further help on Saturday, when his regular weekly allowance arrived, and it was evident that Bill Bunter had not forgotten. The tramp touched his ragged fur cap respectfully to Skimpole, without allowing the lad to see the mocking gleam in his eyes.

"I 'opes as 'ow you 'aven't forgotten me, young gent," he said, in a whining voice.

"I am extremely sorry, my good friend," said Skimpole. "As a matter of fact, I had completely forgotten your existence. I have been very busy lately spreading the glorious truths of Socialism, and I am in hopes of causing a revolt to take place here against the tyranny of the upper Forms. My allowance has not come to-day, so I am unhappily unable to assist you in a pecuniary way. I gave my coat to a beggar the other day, and when I wrote to my father for a new one, he was hard-hearted enough to say that my allowance should be stopped until it was paid for. I am therefore unable to give you any money."

Honest Bill Bunter murmured something the amateur Socialist did not hear.

"But if you care to risk a mishap similar to the one that happened the other day, I will give you shelter and food," said Skimpole.

"Thank you kindly, sir."
"It was really very remiss of me not to foresee that Taggles might go to the woodshed," Skimpole remarked; "but one cannot think of everything. I hope he did not hurt you very much in kicking you off the school premises."
"Yes, he did; and if I get a chance—"

"Hush, hush! You must not entertain thoughts of revenge, which is entirely opposed to the principles of Socialism. If you should meet Taggles, I hope you will take him by the hand in a friendly and cordial way. He is not really a bad-hearted man, though his manner is against him. He allowed me to enter the other night, when I was late, without reporting me to the Head; which was very kind of him, as I had refused to bribe him. But come, my dear fellow, you must not stand here in the cold."

"You are very kind, sir," whined Honest Bill Bunter.

"Not at all. I am simply doing my duty as a Socialist. If my principles were adopted by all here, I should take you into the dining-hall, and get you a square meal. But, unfortunately, selfishness still reigns here, and though I have made some converts among the fags, I have not yet ventured to address the masters on the subject. You will have to take care not to be observed."

"I think I can manage that, sir," said the tramp, with a peculiar glitter in his eyes. "If you'd only let me stay the night in the school, sir—"

"I will do my best. As a fellow-citizen of this country, you

certainly have a right to food and shelter. Of course, you ought to work for them. But if your training has not fitted you for work, that is evidently the fault of the ruling classes. Come with me, my poor comrade. It is so misty that no one can possibly see you."

Skimpole led his poor comrade across the quadrangle. He did not choose the woodshed again. It was very probable that Taggles might unearth the refugee as he had done before. Skimpole turned the matter over in his mind, and decided upon the bicycle-shed, which was an outbuilding with a separate door. It was not likely that anybody would go there for a bicycle in such weather as now prevailed.

The tramp looked round him as Skimpole led him in. "Here is shelter, at all events," said Skimpole; "and you see there is a little loft at the top of those steps, where you can hide if anyone should enter. I will return as soon as possible with food and drink."

"And you'll let me stay here to-night, sir?"
"Certainly. There should be no difficulty about that. I will get some sacks for you to sleep on. I will leave you now. Take care to keep your presence here a secret."

The tramp chuckled as Skimpole left the place.

"My heye! No need to tell me that," he murmured. "They won't know I've been 'ere—till to-morrer mornin'. Then—"

Honest Bill Bunter finished the reflection with another chuckle. He evidently saw something humorous in the situation.

The duty of providing for the oppressed member of the submerged tenth banished all thought of the Christmas Number of the "Weekly" from Skimpole's mind. He went into the School-House in search of provender.

The early dinner of the juniors being over, and tea not yet due, Skimpole was in a difficulty. He had no money to purchase provisions at the tuck-shop, where the boys usually went for extra feeds between meal hours. Dame Taggles might or might not have trusted him, but he could not ask her. For, as he said to himself, as a sincere Socialist, it was impossible for him to run into debt unless he was absolutely certain of being able to pay. And he certainly wasn't certain, now that his allowance had been stopped by a stern anti-Socialistic parent.

"Of course, in cases of extreme necessity, confiscation is allowable," Skimpole reflected. "For instance, when we come into power, and have a majority in Parliament, we shall decidedly confiscate the land, and set all the landlords to working for their living. The majority of Socialists hold that course to be quite just, and I agree with them. I am really sorry that I am not a landowner, in order to show the disinterestedness of my views. But if it is just, as it undoubtedly is, to confiscate land and railways, it must be just to obtain supplies of food for the benefit of a starving victim of a bad social system. I will see if Tom Merry has anything in his cupboard."

He had noticed the Terrible Three going down to the gate, doubtless to watch for the coming of the Christmas Number, and so he knew that he would find their study untenanted. He made his way to it without delay.

The Terrible Three, as it happened, were in funds at this time, and their cupboard was well provided. A steak-pie and a whole jam-roll caught Skimpole's eye at once. He took them out, and wrapped them up, with a pat of butter, half a loaf, some pepper and salt, and knife and fork. With the parcel under his arm he quitted the study.

"Hallo! what have you got there?" asked Blake, meeting him as he went downstairs. "More contributions you've been taking to the editorial office?"

"Oh, no!" said Skimpole. "I have borrowed some provisions from Tom Merry to save a fellow being from the horrors of starvation."

"Did you ask him first?"

"No; I was afraid that he might be hard-hearted enough to refuse. I shall, of course, own up to what I have done, or my action might be considered in the light of a theft. If Tom Merry cuts up rough, I shall compensate him when I am in funds again; or I shall take any punishment he chooses to inflict without resistance."

"My hat! You're booked for a thick ear, I fancy."

"Yaas, wathah!" remarked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I weally considah that it's like your beastly cheek to collah and wemove a fellow's pwivate pwperty without askin' his permish, Skimpole, and some people might call it stealin'."

"I do not expect sympathy from a bloated aristocrat," said Skimpole loftily. And he marched on with his capture.

Blake gave a chuckle.

"There's a lively time in store for that Socialism merchant, if he keeps on," he remarked. "Tom Merry is the kind of chap to give his last crust to anybody who needs it; but he'll make a row at his grub being given away to some drunken tramp, I expect."

Careless of the consequences, as usual, Skimpole went through the snow to the bicycle-shed, and Honest Bill Bunter received the provisions with surprise and satisfaction. He certainly regarded the amateur Socialist as cracked, but that made no difference to him.

"I am sorry I have not been able to procure you any drink," said Skimpole; "but you can quench your thirst, my poor fellow, by melting some flakes of snow in your mouth. I dare say you have often been driven to such an expedient. In fact, it would be a great deal better for your health and morals if you frequently did so, instead of indulging in the use of strong liquor, which has brought you to your present degraded state. Under Socialism, thank goodness, there will be no drunkenness, and a being like you, a mere wreck and caricature of the human form divine, it will be impossible to find. I shall see you again later, my poor fellow."

And Skimpole left his unfortunate fellow-creature to enjoy his meal.

"Mad!" murmured Honest Bill Bunter. "Mad as a March 'are! Mad as a blessed 'atter! I wish I had him out in the lane when he's a-calling me a wreck. I'd give him such a lick round the mouth that he wouldn't call anybody a wreck agin in a 'urry. Never mind, I reckon I'll make a good thing out of this 'ere. If I don't pick up a hundred quid to-night in this 'ere school, blow me tight, that's all."

As Skimpole entered the School House again he found the juniors in a buzz. The Christmas Number had arrived from Ryleombe, and Tom Merry was unfastening the parcel in the editorial office. Skimpole hurried upstairs, in the midst of a crowd of juniors, and saw Arthur Augustus D'Arcy proceeding, with stately dignity, to take a presentation copy of the magazine to Mr. Linton, the master of the Shell. Mr. Linton had taken it upon himself to exercise the authority of a censor over "Tom Merry's Weekly."

Tom Merry was handing out copies to eager readers. Skimpole received one, and hurried off to read and enjoy his article.

CHAPTER 9.

The Christmas Number—The Amateur Reformer in Hot Water—Exit Bill Bunter.

TOM MERRY looked over the Christmas Number of his "Weekly" with an eye of pride. It was really an imposing number. Twelve leaves, nicely stitched together, and printed in big, clear type, with an ornamental title-page, designed by Tom Merry himself, and skillfully reproduced on wood at the office of the "Rylcombe Times."

It was a magazine to be proud of, and the staff were proud of it.

Figgins & Co. and Blake and his friends were in the study while the copies were given out, and when one only remained, the nine members of the editorial staff gathered round it to allow themselves the pleasure of looking through the well-printed pages.

"Isn't it a gem!" exclaimed Blake. "Precious few school magazines are produced in this style, kids, when you think of the excellence of the printing, and the first-class quality of the contents."

"Every story a gem," remarked Monty Lowther, "and every poem a jewel."

"Yaas, wathah! Pway turn to the Fashion page, deah boys. I hope the beastly pwintah has weproduced my article just as I wote it. When Lowthah was copyin' out my article for the last numbah, he wote whiskahs instead of waist-coats, and such a sentence as 'The wopwah colours to be used in fancy whiskahs,' sounds simply widiculous. I hope the pwintah chap hasn't made any blundah like that, you know."

"Oh, blow the Fashion page!" said Blake. "Let's have a look at my poem. I've never had anything in print before, except some conundrums in the local paper. Look for 'Sir Fatted and his Fayre Ladye.' It's awfully touching this week. The next instalment is very tragic. It describes how—page 14 in the manuscript, Merry; but I don't know where it will be in this, as we hadn't any proofs sent in. It's just after Manners' article on photography, between that and the instalment of Figgy's 'Red Chief.'"

"Here's the photographic column," said Tom Merry, "and here's the 'Red Chief.' But as for the poem—My only pyjama hat!"

"What's the matter?" asked Blake anxiously. "Has the printer made a muck of it?"

"No. It isn't here!"

"Isn't there!" shouted Blake, making a dive for the paper. "Do you mean to say the villain has left it out! Isn't it there?"

"There's something else in the place of it!" gasped Tom Merry. "Blessed if I know how they got changed. I refused Skimpole's Socialistic article—you all heard me—but here it is, as large as life, in the place of your poem."

Blake stared at the page in amazement and dismay. It was too true! Sandwiched between the photographic column and the instalment of the "Red Chief" was the declined article on Socialism!

How had it come there? Where was Blake's poem? The staff of Tom Merry's "Weekly" looked at one another in wonder and wrath.

Instead of "Sir Fatted and his Fayre Ladye: a Romantic Poem by J. Blake," the following title stared at them in capital letters:

"SOCIALISM: What it is, and What it Wants," by Herbert Skimpole.

"What is Socialism? Socialism is the approaching sunrise after long darkness. What does Socialism want? It wants to make everyone happy, to abolish poverty and laziness, and tyranny and bullying and fagging, and institute free feeds for all who want them.

"Boys of St. Jim's, coming citizens of this great Empire! begin the great Fight To-day! Submit no more to Fagging and Bullying, but rise in your might and sweep away the Tyrants!"

"Shall the freeborn Briton bow down to a person who happens to be in a higher Form than himself? Perish the thought! Shall a fag wash his neck in cold water on a winter morning at the tyrannic behest of an unfeeling master? Never!"

"Masters and prefects are, properly considered, only the servants of the whole people, and can be called to account for their actions. Otherwise we are but slaves. When the light of Freedom has fully dawned, the school will probably be governed by a committee selected from all the Forms, equal representation being given to each, and all important matters will be submitted to a referendum.

"Meanwhile, it is our duty to Spread the Light, and make a stand against Tyranny. Let the Fourth Form refuse utterly to fag for the Sixth. Let the Third and the Remove insist upon the right to wear silk toppers at all times, as the Shell and the Fifth do. Let all boys announce in plain terms to the prefects that so long as they are appointed by the Head they will be treated with contempt, and that this will continue until they are elected by the free suffrages of the whole school. Let the masters be informed that they are regarded simply as the ministers to our wants, and are to be called over the coals at our will and pleasure.

"Boys of St. Jim's, hoist the Red Flag and rally round it! Fight for the Good Cause! All meetings with revolt for their object can be held in Herbert Skimpole's study. The boot-boy and page of the School House are invited to attend, as social inequalities are not recognised by the sincere Socialist."

There was some more in the same strain. The staff of the "Weekly" forgot their anger, and laughed till the tears ran down their cheeks as they read it. All excepting Blake; he could not forget that his poem had been cruelly taken out to make room for Skimpole's precious article.

"Ha, ha, ha!" shouted Tom Merry, wiping his eyes. "I think that's really about the funniest thing in the paper. I didn't know Skimpole was a humorist, or I wouldn't have declined his article."

"Yaas, wathah! But it is awfully widiculous, you know, Tom Mewwy. I am affraid that it will get the mag. into trouble with the mastahs, if they wead that."

"Quite possible," Monty Lowther agreed. "Linton will certainly get his hair off. How on earth could the article have got into the paper?"

"Oh, that's plain enough! Skimpole must have got at the manuscript before I took it, and put this in the place of Blak e's poem. It's rough on Blake."

"I should say it is!" shouted Blake wrathfully. "I'm going to look for Skimpole and skin him. I'll teach him to amputate my poems—"

"Oh, don't be hard on him, Blake!" said Manners. "He's a rank ass, I know, but he's sincere; and a chap who's sincere deserves some consideration in this humbug of a world."

"Oh, does he!" exclaimed Blake. "Look in your cupboard, then, and see how you like his beastly Socialism when it's brought home to yourself."

"What do you mean?" asked Manners, opening the cupboard. "Do you mean to say that he's— I say, where's our grub?"

"Ask Skimpole."

"Has he taken it? The horrid bounder, the beast—the—"

"Ha, ha, ha! He hasn't taken it for himself! It's for a suffering victim of the Social system," grinned Blake. "He's sincere, you know. Don't be hard on him."

"Hard on him! I'll wipe up the floor with him! I'll Socialism him! Here, you kids, come and have a look for the beast! He wants killing."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Figgins & Co. "You'll never see your grub again!"

The juniors felt that it was only too true. The Terrible Three rushed off in search of the amateur Socialist, and the chums of Study Six went with them. Figgins picked up the copy of the "Weekly," and the New House members of the staff left the office.

"I can foresee a high old time for that merchant," grinned Figgins, as they left the School House. "Hallo, Blake, haven't you found him yet?"

"No!" growled Blake. "I suppose he knows what to expect, and he's skulking somewhere. Wait till I find him! I'll red flag the bounder!"

Figgins & Co. went off chuckling. The School House juniors continued the search for Herbert Skimpole. Mr. Linton, the master of the Shell, came striding suddenly out of his study, with a copy of the Christmas Number crumpled up in his hand, and a heavy frown upon his thin, sour face. He stopped the boys with a gesture.

"So this is the advantage you take of the permission given you to carry on the school magazine, Merry? You publish an article subversive of all discipline and order in the college."

"If you please, sir——"

"Not a word! We will see what the Head thinks of it."

And the master of the Shell stalked away, with the evident intention of showing the offending article to Dr. Holmes.

Tom Merry gave a whistle of dismay.

"We shall get the magazine suspended again, by order," he exclaimed. "All the fault of that ass Skimpole! Let's find him and slay him."

Mr. Linton went straight to the headmaster's study. Dr. Holmes glanced curiously at the paper in his hand. He could read the title on it, "Christmas Number of Tom Merry's Weekly."

"Nothing wrong again with the boys' paper, I hope, Mr. Linton," he observed cheerily.

"Read that article, sir," said the master of the Shell, opening the paper, and pointing out Skimpole's unfortunate effusion to the Head.

Dr. Holmes took the paper, adjusted his pince-nez, and Mr. Linton watched him, expecting to see the thunderclouds of anger gather upon the Principal's brow. He was surprised and disappointed. Dr. Holmes looked puzzled at first, then amused, and finally he burst into a hearty laugh.

"You do not seem to attach much importance to the matter, sir?" the master of the Shell observed, somewhat huffily.

"My dear Linton, if I attached any importance to it I should give the nonsense a weight which it does not at present possess," said the doctor. "This is the outpouring of a heated brain, excited by reading all kinds of literature suitable only for grown-up persons. Skimpole is evidently earnest and sincere, which is a merit. He does not fully understand what he professes, which is to be expected at his age. He does not really mean to be disrespectful; for I have noticed the boy, and observed that he never fails in respect to a master."

"But the incitement to revolt——"

Dr. Holmes laughed.

"I don't think any boy at St. Jim's will take advantage of it, Mr. Linton. If the fags refuse the usual service to the Sixth, the seniors know how to take care of themselves. If the Third and the Remove imitate the Shell and the Fifth in the privilege of wearing tall hats upon every occasion, a few impositions will soon cure them of their impertinence. I cannot imagine any of the juniors venturing to treat the prefects with contempt, so long as the prefect wields the power of the cane. Nor can I picture to myself a little lad in the Third Form standing up in the Hall to call me to account."

Even Mr. Linton could not help smiling at that.

"We will let it pass without notice," said the Head, "and I imagine that the attention it excites will last only a few days. I shall speak to Skimpole myself, kindly but firmly. As for Socialism, there is a great deal, I believe, to be said upon both sides of the question; and it is an extremely interesting one, and proper for grown-up people to investigate. But Skimpole is hardly old enough yet to take an intelligent interest in the matter, and I shall point that out to him. I think he will regard what I say. The greatest of mistakes would be to be harsh with a lad who is sincerely touched with enthusiasm, even if he happens to be mistaken."

And Mr. Linton somewhat dubiously assented, and left the study. Meanwhile, six wrathful juniors were still seeking the amateur Socialist; but for some time they could not find him, as it happened that Skimpole had paid a visit to his protegé in the bicycle shed.

When at last he came in Blake spotted him. Skimpole had listened sympathetically to Honest Bill Bunter's complaints of the cold and draughtiness of the bicycle shed, and had consented to admit him to more cosy quarters in the School House later on. It was impossible to do so until after lights out, of course; so Skimpole had agreed to come down at eleven o'clock and admit Honest Bill by a back window. The amateur Socialist was thinking out a plan for making up a comfortable bed for the victim of the social system in his study, when the wrathful staff of the "Weekly" pounced upon him.

"Now, then," said Blake, seizing him by the shoulders, and pinning him against the wall of the passage. "What do you mean by taking my poem out of the paper, and sticking in a silly, rotten fat-headed article on Socialism instead?"

"You are mistaken, Blake," said Skimpole. "My article was a really good one. As I wrote it, I should know. I know that I owe you an apology for interfering with the paper without permission; but, as you declined my article, what was I to do? It was necessary to use the 'Weekly' as a medium for spreading the great and glorious truths of Socialism among the lower classes—I mean the lower Forms at St. Jim's."

"You—you silly cuckoo! You——"

"I did the best I could," went on Skimpole. "I did not recklessly take out the first thing that came to hand. I went carefully through the magazine, and selected the contribution which I regarded as being of the least value."

There was a howl of laughter from the rest of the staff, while Blake turned as red as a turkey-cock.

He knocked Skimpole's head gently against the wall.

"The least value, you silly ass! A lot you know about poetry! I——"

"Pray don't be violent, Blake! I am sorry you are displeased, but if you read the article I have inserted carefully you will benefit——"

"What price our grub?" demanded Lowther and Manners together. "What have you done with our steak-pie and jam roll, you burglar?"

"I will compensate you for the loss when I am in funds," said Skimpole. "True Socialists all believe in compensation for articles confiscated. I——"

"And when will you be in funds?"

"Unfortunately, I do not expect to have any more pocket-money this term."

"Cave! Here's Linton!"

The amateur Socialist was released, and the juniors scuttled off.

Tom Merry was in a thoughtful mood.

When the Shell went up to bed his chums noticed it, and Lowther asked him politely what was biting him.

"I'm thinking about that ass Skimpole," said Tom Merry, with a nod towards the amateur Socialist. "He's collared our grub to feed some blessed tramp. But where's the tramp? We know that Skimpole hasn't left St. Jim's, and the gates were locked just after we received the 'Weekly' from Rylcombe, as it came so late."

"Never thought of that," said Lowther. "What do you make of it?"

"Why, I know that the other night a ruffianly fellow was discovered in the wood-shed, and Taggles kicked him out. I wondered if Skimpole had anything to do with it. It looks to me as if Skimmy let him in, and he may have been doing the same thing over again, and Taggles hasn't discovered the boundary."

The chums of the Shell looked serious.

"You see," went on Tom Merry, "Skimpole is quite right in helping the unfortunate; but when it comes to admitting dangerous characters into the school it's going a bit too far. If there's some ruffianly tramp inside the gates the school may be robbed for aught we know, and there would be a fearful row. Skimpole would probably be sent home. All that time this evening when we couldn't find him, where was he? Not walking about in the snow, I suppose? And we know he wasn't in the house?"

"My hat! He was with some victim of the social system, I suppose, whom he has hidden away in some corner!" exclaimed Lowther.

"That's my belief. What do you say to remaining awake to-night, kids, in case of accidents? It's no good speaking to Skimpole, of course. As it's Sunday to-morrow we can get a rest if we lose our sleep. What do you think?"

"I'm willing," said Lowther, and Manners nodded assent.

Tom Merry glanced across at Skimpole. He noted that the amateur Socialist only partly undressed himself before getting into bed.

"He's going to get up in the night for something," muttered Tom Merry. "My word! He may be going to let his precious protegé into the house! We shall have to keep an eye on him!"

Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's, saw lights out in the Shell dormitory.

The boys, after the usual buzz of talk, settled down to sleep. The Terrible Three remained awake, but as ten chimed out Lowther and Manners slumbered.

Tom Merry remained on the watch.

Eleven!

St. Jim's was buried in silence and sleep.

Tom Merry gave a sudden start. Through the whine of the wind the strokes from the clock towers sounded clearly. A sound in the dormitory followed. He strained his eyes through the gloom. He caught sight of a half-dressed figure gliding to the door. He did not need telling that it was Skimpole's.

Tom Merry was out of bed in a twinkling, shaking Manners and Lowther. They started up in alarm.

"Skimpole's left the dormitory!"

The whisper was enough. Quickly the chums of the Shell dragged on their clothes, and followed on the track of the amateur Socialist.

Skimpole had disappeared, but as they went silently downstairs the sound of a hoarse voice came through the gloom to the ears of the Terrible Three.

"You ain't told no one about letting me in?"

"Certainly not, my poor fellow. They would be cruel enough to turn you out into the bitter cold. I have made up a bed for

you in my study. I have put all my own garments I can spare, as well as Gore's, and taken one of Tom Merry's coats. I am afraid they would complain if they knew; but, as a sincere Socialist, I—whatever are you doing? Release me at once! Are you mad?"

"No other word, and I'll serag yer!" came a deep whisper. "Old yer tongue, and show me the way to the headmaster's study! Mind, if I don't find where the money is, I'll cut you to pieces. I'll make a 'aul to-night, or I'll know the reason why. Don't struggle, you young fool. I could wring your neck with one hand. Show me the way, or—"

Tom Merry nudged his companions. Truly it was fortunate that they had kept awake.

Skimpole made no reply to the ruffian, for a savage grip was on his throat. He was a child in the hands of Honest Bill Bunter.

There was a faint sound of a struggle in the darkness, and it guided the Terrible Three. Tom Merry knew where to find the gas-jet. He reached up and turned it on, and a match flickered, and the gas flared out.

Honest Bill Bunter blinked in the sudden light. In his startled alarm he relaxed his grip upon the amateur Socialist.

Skimpole gave a gasping cry.

"Help! Help!"

In a twinkling the Terrible Three had thrown themselves upon the ruffian. Bunter went to the floor under their combined weight.

"Help! Help!"

Doors opened and lights flashed. Mr. Railton, the master of the School House, arrived on the scene at the same moment as Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's.

Bill Bunter was dragged to his feet, and held in their grip. His face was black with sullen fury.

"What does this mean?" asked Mr. Railton sternly. "How did this man come here?"

"I—I let him in, sir," stammered Skimpole, rubbing his bruised throat. "I intended to give him a night's shelter, sir, as I was bound to do as a sincere Socialist, and—and then he seized me, and attempted to make me show him where the Head kept his money, sir. It is a shocking instance of ingratitude, and would almost make a champion of the submerged tenth despair, if one did not reflect that—"

"You had better reflect that you will be expelled from the

school if you ever commit such a foolish action again," said the house-master sternly. "As for this scoundrel—"

"You had better let me go," snarled the ruffian. "That young feller let me in. Take me afore the beaks, and I'll swear as he let me in to share the loot. I'll show you up—"

"Dear me!" gasped Skimpole. "What baseness! If I did not reflect that it was due to the combined results of heredity and environment, I should be inclined to use violence towards that horrible wretch."

"You see the position your folly has placed you in," said Mr. Railton sternly. "I hope it will be a lesson to you. Tom Merry, I thank you and your friends from my heart. You have prevented a robbery, as well, probably, an injury to that foolish boy. As for this detestable scoundrel, as no robbery has been perpetrated, perhaps we can afford to let him go. Kildare, will you call a couple of prefects, and see him off the premises, and if he escapes without an ache in every bone in his body I shall be disappointed."

"Certainly, sir!"

And so Honest Bill Bunter was left in the hands of Kildare, Darrel, and Knox, who saw him out at the gate, and gave him before he went such a terrific thrashing that the rascal sincerely regretted that he had ever entered the precincts of St. Jim's.

The next morning Skimpole had a talking to from the Head, which, as he pathetically told Tom Merry, nearly made his flesh creep.

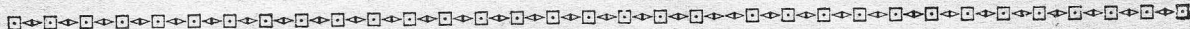
But Tom Merry did not sympathise with him. "I hope you won't be such a giddy ass in the future," he remarked. "You ought to have had a licking."

"I do not agree with you, Merry. Corporal punishment is antiquated and ineffective. I have not the slightest intention of abandoning Socialism because of the unfortunate failure of a single experiment, but I shall certainly be more careful in the future about admitting doubtful characters into the school. By the way, Merry, if you have a couple of hours to spare, I should like to read you a little article I have written on the—"


But Tom Merry was gone.

THE END.

(Another tale dealing with Tom Merry next Thursday. Order your copies in advance. Price One Halfpenny.)



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A fearful storm is raging outside, when Cyril Conway tells Herr Ludvig, who is taking the class for German, that he can see from the window a ship being driven ashore. Dr. Buchanan, the headmaster, Herr Ludvig, and the boys immediately make their way to the cliff, but on reaching there they find that the ship has sunk. However, the Head is instrumental in saving a little black boy. He is taken to the school, and money to the amount of £1,000, with a request that it may be used for his up-bringing, is found on him. A medical man examines the nigger, and he finds the boy has had such a shock to his system as to affect all memory of the past. He does not even remember his name, so the Head leaves it to the boys to re-christen him. After a lengthy discussion, Billy Barnes and Cyril decide on naming their new schoolmate Snowy White Adonis Venus. He is taken as a fag by Graft, a bully.

One morning Venus and Cyril give Graft a dousing of cold

water. They make a frightful mess in the bath-room, and Venus has to offer a bribe of five shillings to Mopps to clear it up.

(Now go on with the story.)

Afternoon Tea.

"Well," gasped Mopps, "you've made a tidy mess this time, and no error. You call this mighty swamp a few splashes. You ought to have your necks wrung, strike me silly if you oughtn't. Still, I'm always ready to get boys out of their troubles—when they pay me for doing it—so here goes!"

Mopps set about his work in a businesslike manner. He had often had to mop up that bath-room, so knew exactly how it ought to be done.

"There," he exclaimed at last. "I think that will be about right, till some silly brute wets it again. That will soon dry with this window open, and it will be as right as it was before you got fooling around by breakfast-time."

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