

'SKIMPOLE THE THIRD.'

The

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Tale.

A Tale of the Terrible Three.

by
MARTIN
CLIFFORD.



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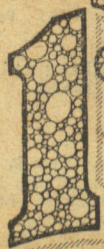
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SKIMPOLE THE THIRD

A Grand, Extra Long, Complete
Tale of Tom Merry & Co.,

By **MARTIN CLIFFORD.**

CHAPTER I.

Skimpole I.

"GLYN!"
"Bernard Glyn!"
"Hullo, in there!"
"Glyn, you ass!"
"Glyn, you duffer!"
"Glyn, you sweep!"
Knock, knock!
"Glyn! GLYN!"

And still there came no reply from within the end study.

The end study in the Shell passage in the School House at St. Jim's was usually occupied by three fellows—Bernard Glyn, the Liverpool lad; Clifton Dane, of Canada; and Harry Noble, otherwise known as Kangaroo—a nickname which sufficiently indicates the country of his birth.

Bernard Glyn, as the fellows of the School House knew only too well, was of an inventive turn of mind, equalling even Skimpole in that line, and, in fact, excelling him, for some of his inventions actually worked.

When Glyn was deep in some of his experiments, it was his custom to lock himself up in his study, and bury himself in his work. And at such times Clifton Dane and Kangaroo might knock and kick and stamp, but the door would not open.

At such times unholy smells of chemicals would emanate from the study—or perhaps the whirring of some machine or other—and sometimes the voice of Bernard Glyn, telling them to buzz off and not worry.

On the present occasion Kangaroo had come up to the study with Tom Merry, of the Shell, and Jack Blake of the Fourth Form. He was going to show them a pair of boomerangs which he had received as a present from Australia, and Tom Merry and Blake were naturally anxious to see them, and to examine the strange weapon of the Australian aborigine. And their excitement may be imagined when they found the study door locked, and could obtain no answer from within.

"The utter ass is making some of his beastly experiments," growled Kangaroo. "He locked us out yesterday, and when we got in the room was simply reeking with some beastly chemical."

"It's not smelly now," said Tom Merry, "I think I can hear some blessed machinery going."

There was a whirr within the study, and that was all.

Kangaroo kicked at the door, and the chorus recommenced.

"Glyn, you sweep!"

"Glynn, you ass!"

"Glyn, you frabjous duffer!"

Whirr, whirr, whirr!

That was the only sound from within the end study. The three juniors looked at one another in great exasperation.

"Dear me!" said a voice, as a junior with a large head, a weedy figure, and thin, short legs, came along the passage, blinking through a pair of huge glasses. "Dear me! Cannot you get into the study?"

"No; door's locked."

"Ah, I want to speak to Glyn particularly," said Skimpole.

"I require a small dynamo for an invention I am making, and I have no doubt that Glyn possesses exactly the thing I want. He will lend it to me."

"I don't think," remarked the Kangaroo. "I remember what happened to the battery he lent you last week."

"Well, you see, that was a wet battery, and when it fell off the table something was bound to go," said Skimpole. "You cannot expect glass jars to remain intact after an impact of considerable force with a hard floor. If it had been a dry battery it would not have been injured. Now, I had asked Glyn for a dry battery, and he could not lend me one. I regard the accident as being quite due to Glyn."

Kangaroo stamped at the door.

"Glyn! Glyn!"

"However, if he will not lend me the dynamo, I shall borrow it when he is absent from the study," said Skimpole thoughtfully. "Of course, I have as much right to use the dynamo as he has."

"It belongs to him, doesn't it."

Skimpole smiled in a condescending way.

"Oh, yes, but under Socialism all dynamos will be nationalised, you know. Now Socialism will probably be established shortly. The book I am now writing will do a great deal towards

A DOUBLE-LENGTH TALE OF TOM MERRY NEXT THURSDAY.

establishing it when it is once published. I have written nearly three hundred chapters already. Dear me, I wish Glyn would open the door. Glyn! Glyn! Pray open the door. I require a dynamo."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"If Glyn can resist an appeal like that he must be a stony-hearted bouncer," grinned Jack Blake. "Of course, he will open the door now."

"Of course," agreed Tom Merry.

But the door did not open.

"Dear me," said Skimpole, "my time is far too valuable to waste here. When you go into the study, Noble, will you tell Glyn I want his dynamo, and ask him to bring it along to my room."

"Ha, ha! Oh, certainly!"

"Thank you very much."

And Skimpole trotted along the passage, and disappeared into his study.

Kangaroo delivered a formidable kick at the door.

"Glyn! Glyn! Look here, I want my boomerangs. Chuck them out of window into the quad, if you don't want to open the blessed door."

There was a click of a key in the lock. The sound of the whirring within the study had ceased.

"Hallo! He's opening the door!"

Tom Merry tried the handle, and the door swung open.

"Good," muttered the Kangaroo. "We'll slay him for this. Collar him all at once, and we'll give him a jolly good bumping."

"What-ho!"

The door swung open wide, and the three juniors rushed into the study.

Then they halted with a simultaneous gasp of astonishment. A figure stood facing them as they entered.

But it was not that of Bernard Glyn, the youthful inventor. He was not to be seen in the study. It was Skimpole!

Skimpole, whom they had just been talking to in the passage—Skimpole, whom they had seen go into his own room half a dozen doors down—Herbert Skimpole, the amateur Socialist, the genius of the Shell, and the deadliest bore at St. Jim's!

He was standing in the study facing them, his eyes blinking away behind his glasses. No wonder the three juniors staggered back.

"M-m-m-my only hat!" gasped Blake.

"Great Scott!"

"Phew!"

"It's a giddy trick!" roared Kangaroo. "It isn't Skimmy, it's that blessed mechanical man! It's a joke of that Liver-pool bouncer! I'll bash it over!"

Kangaroo seized a chair, and whirled it in the air over Skimpole's double.

"Hold on!" yelled a voice.

And Bernard Glyn sprang out from behind a screen, and rushed to interpose between the wrathful Cornstalk and the wonderful invention.

CHAPTER 2.

Skimpole II.

"HOLD ON, you ass!" shouted Glyn.

Kangaroo grinned, and lowered the chair to the floor.

"It's all right, kid," he said, "I wasn't going to hurt it—that was only to fetch you out. What do you mean by looking a chap out of his own study?"

"Well, you see, I was busy," said Bernard Glyn, "I've just given the finishing touches to the figure, do you see? I've made the eyelids work so that he blinks his eyes, and I've made the mouth move, too. It makes it awfully lifelike."

"By Jove, it does!" said Tom Merry.

The juniors gazed at the figure in great admiration, forgetting all about the boomerangs they had come in search of for the moment.

It was really a wonderful contrivance. The figure was built up of paddings, such as are used to render plump the limbs of stage performers in tights, who do not happen to be blessed by Nature with plump limbs. The paddings were built up on a framework of steel. The face had been formed of wax, and it had been coloured into an exact imitation of life. The features were Skimpole, the form was Skimpole. The blink of the mechanical eyelids was Skimpole to the life, and the big glasses added of course to the effect. The tufts of hair on the large head, the frayed collar round the long neck, the shabby clothes which looked as if they had been thrown on instead of put on, the thin legs encased in baggy trousers—all seemed simply to breathe of Skimpole.

Skimpole the Second was an exact reproduction of Skimpole the First.

Once before Bernard Glyn had sprung his invention upon the startled School House, but that had been an accident—the figure had tumbled downstairs—and since then Glyn had kept it in the background. He had been working away, im-

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proving it, and there was no doubt that it was a masterpiece now.

"My hat!" said Blake, in almost an awed tone. "I don't believe Skimpole's own mother would know the difference."

"Well, yes, this one doesn't talk, and the other one does nothing else," grinned Bernard Glyn. "But I really think that's about the only difference."

"Only when Skimmy is thinking out new social systems or making up poetry, he goes off into a moony state, and doesn't talk," said Tom Merry. "This Skimmy might be the other Skimmy thinking out some subject like Determinism, or some such piffle."

"By George!" exclaimed Blake. "I heard Skimmy say that his father is coming to the school to see him this week. It would be a ripping wheeze to let him see the wrong Skimmy."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I really think it's rather good," remarked Glyn. "You can get up to no end of larks with a thing like this. I——"

Ting-ting!

"Hallo, there's the bell!" said Kangaroo. "That's for afternoon school. I shall have to show you the boomerangs afterwards, kids."

"Oh, blow school!" said Glyn. "I was going to give this chap one more touch."

"You'll have to leave it now."

"Yes, I suppose so."

"Better come," said Tom Merry, turning back to the doorway. "You know how ratty Linton was yesterday because you were late. He said that if you were late again you would hear of it."

"I heard of it yesterday," grunted Glyn. "He jawed me for about ten minutes, I think. It's all right, you chaps, cut off. I'll be down in two ticks."

"The bell's left off ringing."

"All right—buzz off!"

Kangaroo and Blake and Tom Merry ran off down the passage, and Glyn delayed a moment to give the final touch to the face of Skimpole the Second with his brush. When Glyn was at work on one of his inventions, even the bell for classes sometimes passed unheard, much to the wrath of the Shell Form-master. Glyn was a good pupil and a hard worker, and Mr. Linton approved of him on that account; but the master of the Shell was extremely particular on the subject of punctuality, and there had been trouble about it.

Glyn dabbed with his brush, and dabbed again. The bell had long ceased ringing, and the Forms of St. Jim's were in the classrooms. Tom Merry and Kangaroo parted with Blake in the passage. Blake dashed into the Fourth Form-room, and Tom and Noble into the Shell class-room, getting in just as Mr. Linton walked up to his desk. The master of the Shell glanced round, and frowned slightly. He was a somewhat formal gentleman, and disliked seeing anybody in a hurry. However he made no remark, and Noble and Tom Merry took their places.

"Narrow escape," murmured Monty Lowther, as Tom Merry sat down beside him. "Linton's not in his best Sunday temper this afternoon. There was beefsteak-pie for dinner, and you know what he's like after that."

Tom Merry nodded. He knew only too well.

"Skimmy and Glyn aren't here," muttered Manners. "There will be a row as soon as Linton notices. Hallo! he's looking round. Cave!"

Mr. Linton adjusted his glasses and glanced over the Shell.

He noticed at once that two places were empty, and a heavy frown gathered on his face.

"Skimpole! Glyn!"

The names, of course, were not answered to. The boys sat very silent. Skimpole, like Glyn, was doubtless very busy with his invention.

"Ah!" said Mr. Linton. "It seems that Skimpole and Glyn do not regard lessons as being of sufficient importance to draw them from childish amusements. Merry, you may go and tell them—stay! I will go myself. Merry, I leave you in charge of the Form while I am gone."

"Yes, sir."

Mr. Linton left the class-room.

"My only hat!" said Clifton Dane. "There will be trouble now. Linton was seeing red."

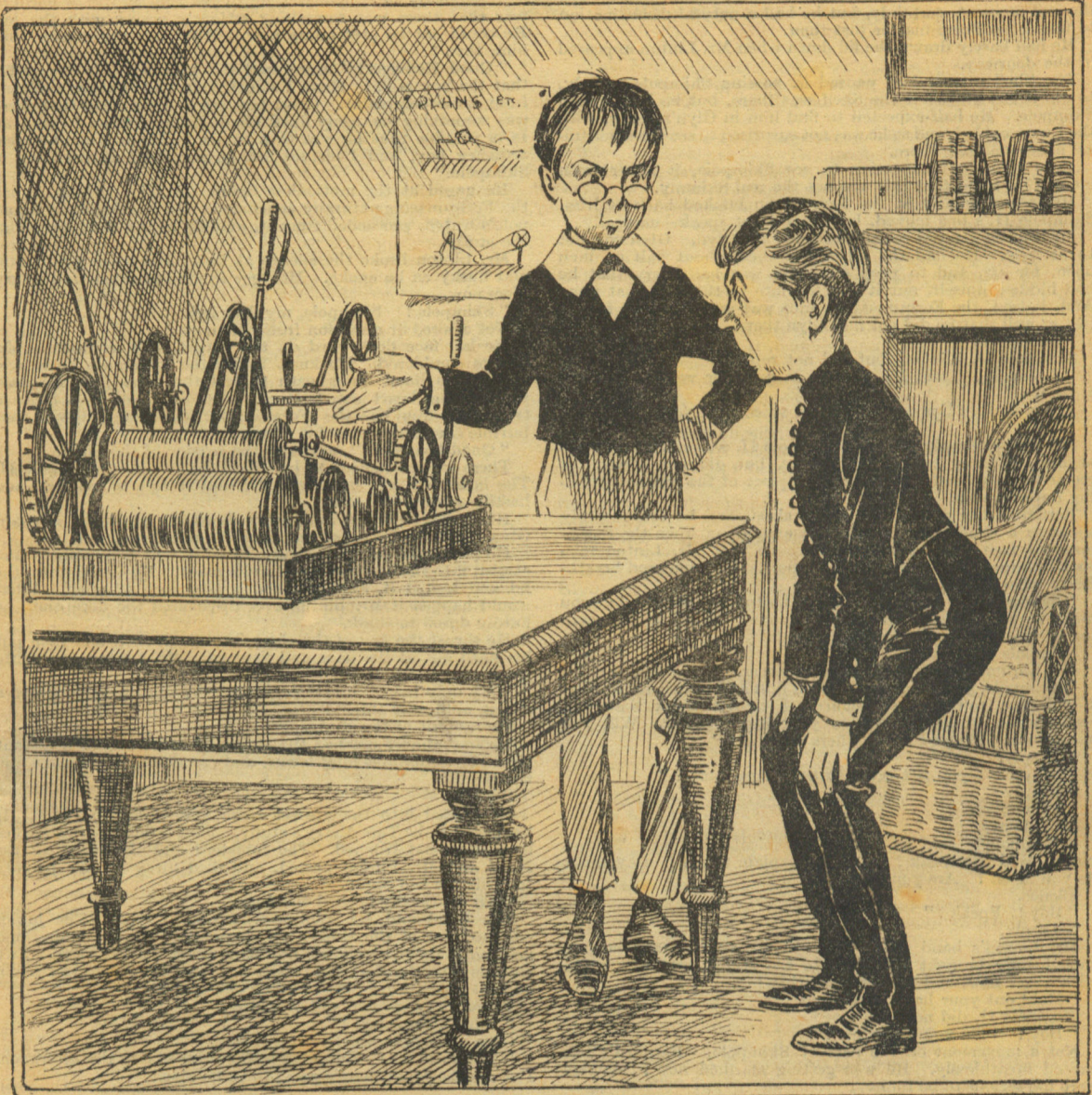
"Well, the duffers ought to come," said Manners. "Hang it! a chap ought to draw a line somewhere. We shall all be ragged this afternoon through them. When Linton once starts; he jolly well never leaves off."

"That's so!"

The class-room door opened, and Skimpole blinked in.

"Hallo! here's one of the duffers!"

"Really, Lowther, I regard that observation as almost rude." Skimpole blinked towards the master's desk. "I am sorry I am late, sir. I was very much interested in a scientific book, in which the author proves that, according to the theory of evolution, man and his progenitors have existed upon this planet for millions of years, and that the ancestry of the human



"This is my invention," said Skimpole, with a beaming smile. "If it's a success, Binks, you and several more superfluous servants will be discharged next week!"

race, therefore, stretches back far into the glacial period, when organic life on this planet was impossible. It is a most interesting subject, and proves what a wonderful thing science is, when it can contain two theories that directly contradict one another, and yet which are both scientifically demonstrated to be quite true.

If Mr. Linton had been seated at his desk, Skimpole would certainly never have been allowed time to get all that off.

By the time he had finished, the scientific genius of the Shell had discovered that Mr. Linton was not there.

The Shell were chuckling joyously. Skimpole was generally regarded as a funny merchant, but to see him making a long speech to an empty desk was too funny for anything.

"Dear me!" said the short-sighted junior, blinking round.

"Mr. Linton does not appear to be present."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"How on earth did you escape him?" demanded Tom Merry. "He's gone to look for you and Glyn."

As a matter of fact I had taken my book into the common-room to read, and I was studying it there when Binks kindly informed me that the bell had gone some time. However, it is all right. I am here before Mr. Linton is ready to take the class, so as a reasonable man he cannot complain.

And Skimpole sat down.

CHAPTER 3.

Mr. Linton Loses His Temper!

BERNARD GLYN stepped back and viewed the finished figure, with a great admiration in his face. Like most young inventors, he admired his own handiwork immensely. And really the contrivance was a wonderful one.

The eyelids and the mouth were both working, and except that there was no voice, the figure seemed to live.

"My hat! I shall be late for class!" exclaimed Glyn, suddenly remembering. "I'll buzz off, I think. It means a hundred lines; never mind. I shall have to put the thing away first, though, in case anybody looks in while I'm away."

There was a large chest at one side of the study, in which Glyn was accustomed to keep his mechanical figure.

He opened the lid, and as he did so, the sound of hurried footsteps in the passage came to his ears.

Glyn knew those sharp, quick footsteps. His face lengthened. It was the master of the Shell coming to fetch him; and the fact that Mr. Linton was coming in person showed how annoyed he was. Glyn looked serious.

The footsteps were approaching rapidly.

Obedying a sudden impulse, Glyn popped into the long chest, and drew the lid down upon himself. It was only putting off

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the evil moment, certainly, but he had a natural disinclination to facing his Form-master just then.

He had barely drawn the lid down when Mr. Linton appeared in the doorway.

The Shell master had paused in passing Skimpole's study, to see if the genius of the Shell was there, but he had missed Skimpole. He half-expected to find him in Glyn's study, with the Liverpool lad, and so he was not surprised to see the mechanical figure standing there.

More than half expecting to see Skimpole, it never even crossed his mind that this was not the real Skimpy.

He looked angrily at the figure, who blinked back at him. Skimpole II.'s lips moved, but he did not speak—naturally.

Mr. Linton glanced round the study for Glyn. Glyn was not to be seen. He had the lid of the chest about half an inch open, for air, and to peep out. He was half sorry that he had hidden himself, but it was too late to think of that now. And, indeed, the Form-master's face was so angry that it was just as well that he did not find Glyn there.

"Skimpole!"

Skimpole II. blinked, but did not reply.

"Skimpole!" said Mr. Linton, in a louder voice. "Where is Glyn?"

Skimpole II.'s lips moved, but no voice came forth.

"Boy!"

Mr. Linton simply glared. Skimpole II. was staring straight at him, blinking behind his glasses, but did not speak. It seemed to the master of the Shell a piece of the most astounding impertinence.

Bernard Glyn peeped out of the chest, and he could hardly suppress a chuckle as he saw the expression upon the Form-master's face. He understood at once that Mr. Linton mistook Skimpole II. for the real Skimpole. He wondered breathlessly what would happen.

"Skimpole!" thundered Mr. Linton. "What do you mean? Why do you not answer me, sir? What is the meaning of this outrageous impertinence?"

Skimpole II. blinked.

Mr. Linton simply trembled with anger.

"Skimpole, you are a boy of such dull and obtuse sense, that I will give you another chance. I cannot think that you really mean to be insolent to your Form-master. Will you answer me. Do you know where Glyn is?"

No reply.

"Why have you not come to the Form-room?"

No reply.

"Skimpole!"

Still silence.

"Skimpole!" said Mr. Linton, his voice quivering. "Skimpole! Will you speak? Will you explain to me? Boy, what do you mean? Are you mad?"

Silence.

"Boy! Speak!"

No reply.

Mr. Linton's hand closed convulsively on the cane he had thoughtfully brought with him to the study. He was white with anger now, and his eyes were blazing.

"Hold out your hand, Skimpole."

Skimpole II. did not stir.

"Boy! Will you obey me?"

Not a movement on the part of Skimpole. Bernard Glyn waited breathlessly. He was getting alarmed now; matters were too serious to be funny.

"Skimpole, if you do not immediately obey me, I shall thrash you with this cane, in the most severe manner."

Skimpole II. seemed quite unaffected by the threat. His lips moved, but he did not speak. He blinked directly at the Form-master, in the most exasperating way.

Mr. Linton grasped the cane hard, took a step towards Skimpole, and brought it down across his shoulders with a resounding thwack!

Thwack!

The echo of it rang along the Shell passage. Skimpole II. did not utter a cry. He simply staggered, and fell with a crash to the floor.

Bernard Glyn gave an inward groan. He was full of fears for his invention. The figure lay prone on the floor, without a sound, without a movement. Mr. Linton gazed at it in amazement, soon mingled with alarm.

"Skimpole! Get up immediately!"

Skimpole II. did not move.

"Skimpole!"

Dead silence! Mr. Linton began to be alarmed. He remembered that Skimpole, though a most absent-minded and exasperating pupil, was not insolent, as a rule, and he began to

fear that there was something seriously wrong with the lad. He could not be pretending now. What was the matter with him, then?

"Good Heavens!" murmured Mr. Linton. "Is it possible that the boy is ill! Have I struck him while he was suffering from some complaint. Good heavens! I—I recall that there was something strangely fixed about his face when I came in. Is it possible that he was in a trance? He is a most extraordinary boy, and I should not be surprised at anything in Skimpole."

He gazed at the motionless figure. A faint ticking, which the Form-master naturally concluded to be the ticking of Skimpole's watch, proceeded from it, audible in the dead silence of the study.

Mr. Linton broke the silence at last. His voice was hoarse and husky as he spoke. He very much regretted that angry blow now.

"Skimpole! Skimpole, my dear lad!"

Not a word or a motion from Skimpole!

He lay face downward on the carpet, still as death. Mr. Linton shuddered. He knelt beside the inanimate form, and slipped his hand underneath to feel the breast, to ascertain whether the heart was beating. Was Skimpole in a fit or a trance, or was he—the Form-master dared not shape that terrible thought even in his mind.

"Good heavens!" muttered the master of the Shell.

There was no motion to be felt in the breast of Skimpole II. The heart was not beating. Mr. Linton rose to his feet, and hastily quitted the study.

His quick footsteps rang away down the passage. Bernard Glyn threw up the lid of the big chest and sprang out.

He ran to the prostrate figure, lifted it, and in a moment had carried it to the box and laid it in its place. He closed down the lid and locked it, and breathed a deep sigh of relief. What would happen if Mr. Linton ever discovered the deception he hardly dared to think.

He thrust the key of the chest into his pocket, and then put his head out of the door and listened. Mr. Linton was quite gone.

"My only hat!" muttered Glyn. "I shall have to prove a strong alibi-over this."

He ran out of the study.

He had almost reached the stairs, when he caught a distant sight of two approaching forms, and recognised Mr. Linton and the Head.

"Phew!"

He darted into the nearest room and closed the door. It happened to be Tom Merry's study. Just inside the closed door he waited and listened. The footsteps and the voices of the Head and Mr. Linton passed, and died away up the passage towards the end study.

Glyn cautiously opened the door.

The Head and Mr. Linton were not in sight. The junior whipped out of the study, ran desperately for the stairs, and descended them by sliding headlong down the banisters. Two seconds later he dashed breathlessly into the Shell class-room, and sat down in his place, puffing and gasping.

There was a general yell of inquiry.

"What's happened?"

Glyn panted.

"Don't ask me! But—but look out for Linton this afternoon, I've a feeling that there's going to be trouble!"

CHAPTER 4.

Skimpole Proves an Alibi.

"EXTRAORDINARY!" said the Head.

He made that remark as he moved along the Shell passage with Mr. Linton. The master of the Shell was in a state of perturbation natural under the circumstances, brimming with excitement and alarm; but the Head was not to be hurried. He could not help thinking that Mr. Linton had made some mistake somehow.

"Yes. The boy must have been in a trance, you see."

"I did not know that Skimpole was subject to trances."

"No, I was not aware of it myself, or I should have been more careful. But, you see, he stared directly at me, and refused to speak a word; it did not occur to me until too late that he was in a trance."

"It is very strange."

"But—but that is not the worst. I felt his heart, and—and it had ceased to beat."

"It really seems impossible."

"It was true, sir."

"I hope not. But we shall see. I do not understand the matter at all. If it had been Lowther, for instance, I might suspect that it was some practical joke. But Skimpole would hardly have the intelligence to carry out such a scheme."

"Oh, I am certain not."

"You say you left him in the study?"

ANSWERS

"Yes, just where he fell. I thought I had better call you at once, sir. I—I was very much upset."

"Naturally."

"Here he is, sir—I—why—what!"

Mr. Linton and the Head entered the study while the Shell-master was speaking. The Form-master pointed out the spot where the body of Skimpole II. had lain—and then he saw that the body was no longer there.

The place was vacant.

Mr. Linton staggered back. He glared round the study. 'T was empty. Skimpole was not to be seen.

The doctor contracted his brows a little.

"You see, Mr. Linton, he is gone."

"Gone!" repeated the master of the Shell faintly. "Gone!"

"Yes, gone!"

"Yes, certainly he appears to be gone," said Mr. Linton dazedly. "I—I do not understand it. I assure you, sir, that he lay without sense or motion, and that I could detect no pulsation of the heart."

The Head smiled drily.

"Well, I thought it must be some deception, Mr. Linton, and I see I was right. Skimpole is not here."

"It is very extraordinary."

"Most extraordinary."

The Head's tone was very dry. Mr. Linton flushed slightly.

"I do not understand it," he said. "Perhaps we had better proceed to the class-room, and see if Skimpole is there."

"Oh, certainly."

The whole of the Shell were in their places when the Head and the Form-master entered the class-room, Skimpole blinked round towards the door as they came in, little dreaming of the experience Mr. Linton had gone through with his double.

The Shell-master gasped at the sight of the amateur Socialist sitting in his place in the Form as calmly as though nothing had happened.

"Skimpole!" he ejaculated.

"Yes, sir," said Skimpole.

"S-s-stand up!" gasped Mr. Linton.

"Certainly, sir."

Skimpole stood up. Mr. Linton stared at him as he might have stared at a ghost. The Head gazed at him narrowly. He was searching Skimpole's face—a face in which it was generally easy to read all Skimpole's thoughts. Certainly the junior did not look as if he had just been playing an astounding practical joke upon his Form-master.

"S-s-so, Skimpole!" gasped Mr. Linton. "So, it was all a joke?"

"Eh! What, sir?"

"You had the unheard-of, unparalleled insolence to play a joke upon me—upon your Form-master!" thundered Mr. Linton.

"I do not understand you, sir. I was late for class, I admit, but I do not regard that as serious, as you were not present when I arrived. Besides, under Socialism—"

"Silence, boy! Now, answer me!"

Skimpole looked perplexed.

"How can I be silent and answer you at the same time, sir?"

"Skimpole, this insolence—"

"Perhaps you had better leave him to me," said the Head. "Skimpole, answer me."

"Yes, sir. I am sorry I was late for class, but I was deeply interested in a scientific book, sir, in which the author proves that the Darwinian theory, while undoubtedly quite true and correct, is hopelessly at variance with other scientific theories, equally true and correct. You see, sir—"

"I am not speaking about your being late for class, Skimpole. You were in the end study in the Shell corridor a few minutes ago—"

"I, sir?"

"Do you deny it?"

"Yes, sir."

"What!" thundered Mr. Linton, "you—you deny that you went to the study?"

"Oh, no, sir. I went there to borrow a dynamo of Bernard Glyn. But the door was locked, and I couldn't get in, and so instead of proceeding with my invention—a splendid invention, sir, for saving labour which will enable Dr. Holmes to discharge half the servants in this school. Instead of that, sir, I proceeded to the common-room with my book, to study the very interesting question of evolution, which—"

"Were you inside the end study, or were you not?"

"No, sir."

"The boy is speaking absolutely falsely," said Mr. Linton. "He was certainly in the end study, and I saw him there, a few minutes ago."

"Quite a mistake, sir," said Skimpole blinking. "I assure you, sir, that I have been here for some time. All the fellows will bear witness that I have been in this room for the past ten minutes at least."

The Head looked at Tom Merry.

"Is that the case, Merry?"

Tom Merry glanced at the clock over the bookcase.

"Yes, sir—ten or twelve minutes."

"At what time did you leave Skimpole in the end study, Mr. Linton?"

"Certainly not more than five or six minutes ago," said Mr. Linton, beginning to look bewildered.

He knew perfectly well that Tom Merry would not tell a lie, to save himself or anybody else; and he simply could not grasp the matter at all now.

"Do you boys bear out Merry's statement?" asked the Head.

"Yes, sir," said nearly the whole of the Shell.

The Head glanced at Mr. Linton. The master of the Shell passed a hand across his brow. His face was very white. He could no longer doubt that he had been the victim of some strange hallucination, and the knowledge of it alarmed him. Bernard Glyn's face changed as he looked at him. The junior had hitherto thought only of keeping his share of the matter a secret. Now another thought came into his mind. It was not fair to leave Mr. Linton under such a misapprehension.

"I—I cannot understand it," muttered the master of the Shell. "It—it is incomprehensible. Unless I was under a hallucination, Skimpole was in the study."

"I was here, sir," said Skimpole.

"Perhaps you had better let Mr. Latham take the class this afternoon, and retire to your room, Mr. Linton," said the Head in a low voice. "You are not in a fit state to take the class, evidently."

Mr. Linton nodded dazedly.

"Very well, sir."

He moved towards the door like a man in a dream. Bernard Glyn could stand it no longer. He sprang to his feet.

"Doctor! Mr. Linton."

"What is it, Glyn?"

"If you please, sir, I can explain. It—it was really my fault."

"What do you mean?"

"I dived out of sight when Mr. Linton came into my study, sir. I—I thought I was going to have a licking for being late for class. I—I have a figure in my study, sir, dressed up like Skimpole, and—and it was that that Mr. Linton mistook for Skimpole, sir."

"Oh!"

"Impossible!" exclaimed Mr. Linton.

"It's true, sir."

"Ah!" said Dr. Holmes. "I remember hearing something about this figure before. That explains your strange mistake, Mr. Linton. I think I may return to the Sixth Form-room now."

And the Head departed with a rustle of his gown. Mr. Linton stared at Glyn. The Liverpool lad instinctively wetted the palms of his hands. He felt that he was in for it now.

"Glyn!" said Mr. Linton, at last. "You have acted very—very wrongly. But what was your motive in telling me all about it, when I had not the faintest suspicion that you were concerned in the matter?"

"I—I thought you might think you were a screw loose, sir—going off your rocker, I mean," stammered Glyn. "It—it was so queer, sir, and—and—"

"So you made your confession to relieve my mind, Glyn?"

"Y-e-es, sir."

"That was very honest and manly of you," said Mr. Linton, his face softening a little. "You deserve to be punished, Glyn, but your confession was very manly and straightforward, and I shall excuse you. We will now commence; too much time has been wasted already."

Glyn sat down, scarcely believing his ears. But he had escaped; there was no doubt about it. And—much as he had been worried by Glyn's troublesome invention—it was noticeable that Mr. Linton's manner to the Liverpool lad was very kind for the rest of the afternoon.

CHAPTER 5

Skimpole is Detained!

"STOP him!"

"Glyn!"

"Stop!"

Bernard Glyn was hurrying off as soon as the Shell were dismissed that afternoon, when a dozen voices shouted after him in the passage. The Liverpool lad turned his head.

"What's the row?"

"We want to hear the story," said Tom Merry indignantly. "What happened in the end study when Linton came to look for you?"

"Give us the yarn," said Kangaroo.

The inventor of St. Jim's grinned.

"Oh, I see. It was funny!"

He related the story of Mr. Linton's visit to the end study, and what he had seen from the interior of the chest. A group of Shell fellows gathered round, and a number of Fourth-Formers came crowding up with Blake. Glyn was the centre of a crowd as he related the startling adventure of Mr. Linton. One

junior of the Fourth Form in particular kept an eyeglass fixed upon Glyn all the time, with an expression of the most intense interest.

"Bai Jove!" remarked this youth, "I wegard this as awf'ly funny, you know. Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, a funny merchant like yourself ought to be a good judge," agreed Monty Lowther.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy turned his eyeglass upon Lowther,

"Weally, Lowthmah—"

"It was funny," said Blacké. "It must have given Linton quite a turn when he found Skimmie sitting in the class-room."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove, it must. It was awf'ly decent of him to take it as he did. He might have caned Glyn and confiscated Skimpole the Second, you know."

"What-ho!" said Figgins of the New House. "Linton's not a bad sort. I should like to see that blessed figure. I've heard about it before."

"It is takin' wathah a liberty with a chap, to make up a figure to imitate him," Arthur Augustus D'Arcy remarked thoughtfully. "I should wathah wesen't it, I think, if I had been taken as the model."

Bernard Glyn chuckled.

"It was a toss-up whether I made it you or Skimmie," he said. "Skimmie won, that's all. He is a bit easier to make up."

"Weally, Glyn—"

"I may make you up some day."

"I should uttally weseuse my permish for anythin' of the sort. I wegard the suggestion as insultin'."

And Arthur Augustus D'Arcy walked away with his head in the air. Bernard Glyn chuckled again. He left off chuckling, and gasped, as a bony finger dug him in the ribs.

"Ow! Yaroo! What's that?"

"I want to speak to you, Glyn," said Skimpole, blinking at him. "I require a dynamo for an invention I am making. I—"

"You idiot! You've nearly punctured me!" growled Glyn, rubbing his ribs.

"I'm sorry; it does not, however, matter. Can I have the dynamo?"

"I'm not giving any dynamos away to dangerous lunatics," grunted the Liverpool lad. "My dynamos cost money. I'll let you have it at five per cent. on cost price, cash down."

"Unfortunately, I have no money. I very seldom have any. I have, of course, an equal right to the dynamo. Under Socialism all dynamos will be nationalised."

"Oh, go and eat coke!"

"I require the dynamo—"

"Ach! Is tat Skimpole, ain't it?"

Skimpole turned round.

"Yes, Herr Schneider."

The German master of St. Jim's looked at him over his glasses. There was a portentous frown upon the brow of Herr Schneider. "Skimpole, have you done dose lines after?"

"I am sorry, sir, but I have not had time to do them yet," said Skimpole, politely. "I shall be very pleased to do them when I get time. At present I am busy with an invention, and also with studying the question of evolution."

"Ach! I tink, Skimpole, tat you do dose lines to-day. I tink you go into to Form-room now and write dem out before tea," said Herr Schneider, grimly.

"I am really very busy at present—"

"Go into der class-room at once, Skimpole!"

Herr Schneider had raised his voice. Skimpole blinked at him, and went into the room. The gas was turned up again, and Skimpole got out his foolscap. Herr Schneider wagged a warning finger at him.

"Skimpole, dose lines were given you for inattention in der Sherman class. Dey was doubled because you had not done dem. I tinks tat you are a pad poy."

"Oh, no, sir. I have really not had time to do the lines. I have been studying the subject of evolution, which is a very deep and engrossing subject," said Skimpole. "Think, sir, of the unbounded satisfaction it would give to know for certain that we really are descended from an ape-like creature which existed in prehistoric ages! The matter is so very important; has such a direct bearing on our present lives, and is really worth devoting a great deal of time to."

"I tink you are a ferry stupid poy, Skimpole."

"Ah, sir, perhaps you are one of the old-fashioned persons who believe that the theory of evolution has never been proved," said Skimpole, pityingly. "There are such people, I believe. My dear sir, the proofs are overwhelming. It is true that such evolution would have taken a great deal of time. But what of that? What are a few odd millions of years to a truly scientific mind? My dear sir, in a case of doubt, a man of science is always ready to throw in another million years or so."

"I tink," said Herr Schneider, "tat if you talk tat nonsense I giffs you to cane. It is vat you English call piffle. You will write out dem lines, and you will stay in te class-room till half-past six, as a punishment for talking nonsense to a master."

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"But 't isn't nonsense, sir. It is utterly old-fashioned to regard the Darwinian theory as nonsense!"

"Silence, Skimpole. Mind, I looks into dis room efferly now and efferly den to see tat you are still here. You understand?"

"Yes, sir, but—"

"Den you stays here, or you gets to cane, ain't it!"

And Herr Schneider stalked out of the Shell Form-room, leaving the amateur evolutionist alone in his glory. Tom Merry looked in at the door a few minutes later.

"Hullo, Skimmie! In the wars, as usual?"

Skimpole blinked up at him. He had not begun writing yet.

"Yes, Merry. Herr Schneider is a most unreasonable man. I never suspected, however, that he was so wanting in mere common sense. Do you know, he regards the Darwinian theory as piffle. Fancy a man being left in the world at this time of day who regards the great discoveries of Darwin as piffle!"

Tom Merry laughed.

"I think there are a few millions left who do, Skimmie. And I don't think you know what you are talking about, anyway. Have you got lines to do?"

"Oh, yes, certainly. I had forgotten the fact, but I certainly have a hundred lines to do," said Skimpole.

"Well, why don't you do them?"

"I was thinking of a far more important subject. I ar doubt whether to devote all my spare time to finishing my book on Socialism, or to leave that over for the present, and write out a book I have in my mind on the subject of evolution. I could write a book on that subject which would be a crowning work, as it were, to the writings of Darwin, Spencer, and Huxley. It would make a fellow so much easier in his mind to know for certain whether his remote ancestors began life, millions of years ago, in the present human shape, or in some modification of that shape."

"What does it matter?"

"Eh! Matter? My dear Merry, by asking that question, you show a grovelling mind utterly incapable of receiving the great and glorious truths of science."

"My dear ass—"

"Come, Merry, which would you advise me to write?"

"I should advise you to write your lines."

"I did not mean that—"

"But I mean it."

"It is very cold in this Form-room," said Skimpole. "I would much rather be in my study. I wonder whether I could venture to depart?"

"Look here," said Tom Merry, "we've got some lines in hand in our study. You can have them if you like. Schneider never looks at them, and he won't know the difference."

"Thank you very much, Merry. This is really kind of you."

"Not at all; I'll get them."

"Yes; but—"

Tom Merry dashed away. Bore and duffer as Skimpole was, everybody rather liked him, and Tom was sorry to see him sitting alone in the chilly Form-room. Tom Merry returned in a few minutes with sheets of foolscap closely scribbled on in his own hand.

"Here you are, Skimmie."

"Thank you very much, Merry. I—"

"Cave!"

Tom Merry darted behind the bookcase, just in time. Herr Schneider blinked into the room.

CHAPTER 6.

The Other Fellow.

HERR SCHNEIDER looked round the Form-room rather suspiciously. He had thought that he heard voices as he came along the passage. However, Skimpole appeared to be alone, and after a suspicious glance round, the German master was quite satisfied.

"Ach! You are still here, Skimpole?"

"Yes, sir."

"How vas you getting on?"

"Pretty well, sir."

"You stays till six o'clock, ain't it," said Herr Schneider, shaking a fat forefinger at the junior. "I look in efferly now and efferly den, and if you leaves te class-room, I tinks I giffs you to cane, after."

And Herr Schneider rolled away again.

Tom Merry came out from behind the bookcase.

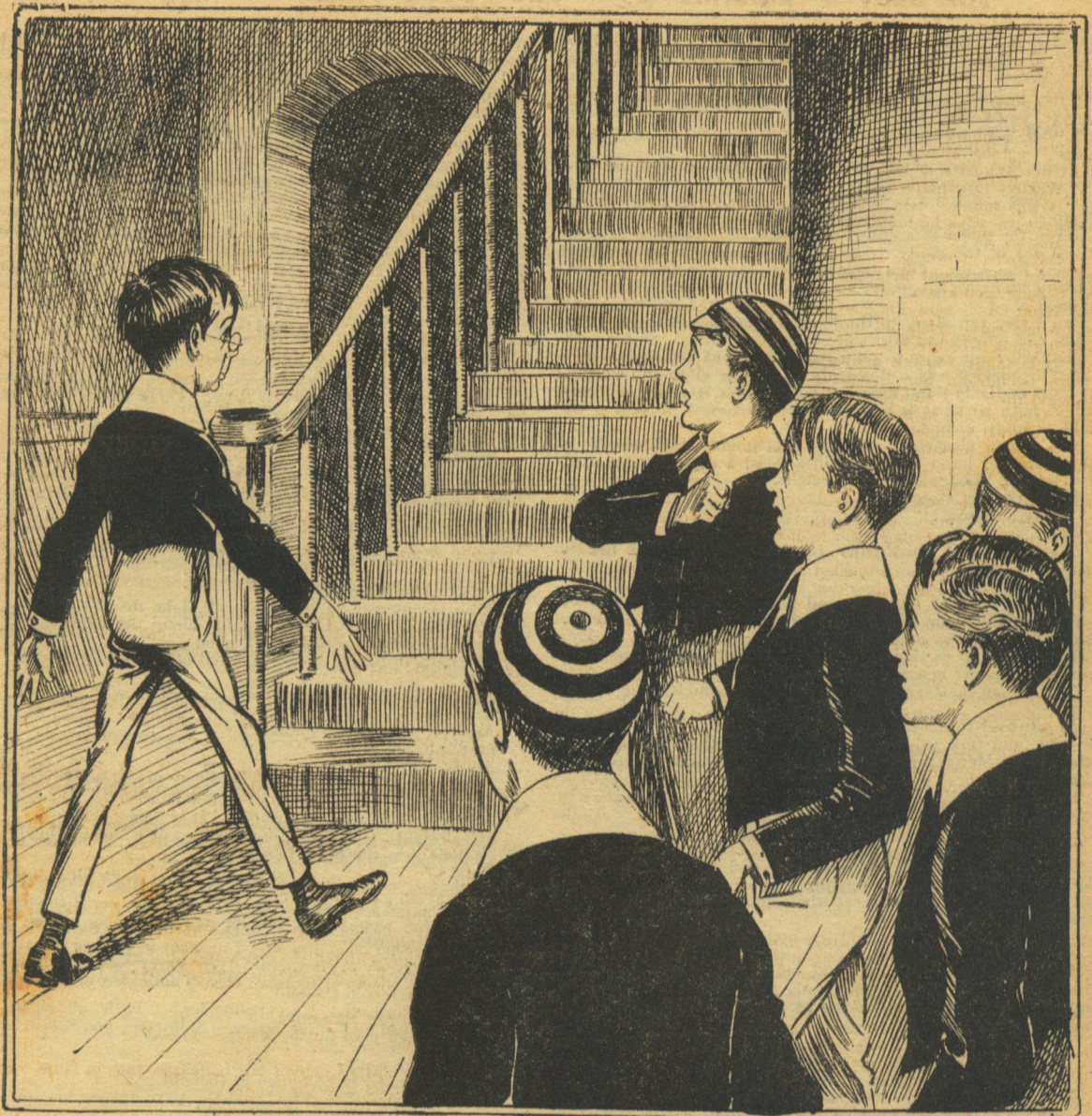
"So you're detained until six, whether you get the lines done or not?" he asked.

"Yes, Merry. I had forgotten that circumstance. However, the lines will be very useful, as, now, instead of working, I can make notes on my forthcoming book on the subject of evolution. I wish, however, that it would be safe to go to my study, as it is much more comfortable there."

A gleam of fun darted into Tom Merry's eyes.

"Schneider is going to look in every now and then," he remarked. "If you're missing, he'll spot it at once."

"Yes, unfortunately."



"Bless my boots if it is not going upstairs!" gasped Blake.

"I think it can be worked, though. If Schneider only wants to look at you, Skimpole the Second will do as well as Skimpole the First."

"I do not understand you, Merry."

"I don't expect you to understand anything, Skimmy. You're too jolly scientific. But I'll see to it."

And Tom Merry departed. He ran along to the end study in the Shell passage. He found it crowded. A good many fellows had come along to see Skimpole II. Bernard Glyn, yielding to the general persuasion, had taken the figure out of the chest, and was showing it to the assembled juniors.

He had set the mechanism in motion, and the figure was solemnly stalking round and round the study table. Tom Merry gave a gasp. If he had not just left Skimpole in the Shell Form-room he would certainly have been sure that this was the amateur scientist of St. Jim's.

"My hat!" said Jack Blake. "It's ripping!"

"Splendid!" said Digby.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I'll tell you what!" exclaimed Herries. "I'll set my bulldog Towser on to it, and see if he takes it for a live chap! It would be worth seeing, in any case."

Bernard Glyn gave the cheerful owner of Towser a withering look.

"You ass!" he said. "If you bring your measly bulldog anywhere near my study, I'll—I'll electrocute him!"

"Look here, Glyn—"

"Weally, Hewwies, I must say that I uphold Glyn in this mattah," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Towsah is quite out of place here. He has no respect whatevah for a fellows' twousahs!"

"It's a ripping thing," said Figgis, of the New House—who was there with the Co.—Kerr and Wynn—curious to see the strange invention of Bernard Glyn. "It's wonderful how you make it work!"

"Marvellous!" said Kerr.

"By George," said Fatty Wynn, with great admiration; "you only want to make it able to eat, and it would be exactly like life."

"I say, Glyn, I want you to lend me that thing," exclaimed Tom Merry, pushing his way into the study.

The Liverpool lad looked round.

"You can want," he remarked. "I'm jolly well not lending Skimpole II. to anybody. Why, it's taken me weeks and weeks to make it."

"It's for a jape."

"What's the jape?" said Glyn. "Let's hear it."

"Skimmy's detained in the Form-room till six. Schneider

a peeping in at the door about every ten minutes to see that he is still there. Now, suppose you shove Skimpole II. into the class-room for a bit. He's quite good enough for Herr Schneider to look at, and Skimmy can get off."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Blake. "A jolly good wheeze."

Bernard Glyn grinned.

"Good; I'll do it."

"Make him walk along the passage," grinned Tom Merry.

"I'll keep watch outside Herr Schneider's study, and give you notice when the coast is clear."

"Good."

And in the midst of a crowd of juniors, Skimpole the Second walked out of the study. The juniors shrieked with laughter at seeing him walk. Glyn took his arm, and the figure walked on beside him with the jerky, hasty stride that was so peculiarly Skimpole's.

Tom Merry ran along to the German master's study to keep watch, and almost ran into Herr Schneider himself, on his way to the Shell Form-room to take another look at Skimpole.

Herr Schneider was a decidedly suspicious man, and he did not trust anybody—and indeed it would have required a great deal of faith to trust a boy to remain detained indoors if he could possibly escape.

Tom Merry slackened pace as he caught sight of Herr Schneider, and burst into a shrill whistle, a signal to Bernard Glyn to keep Skimpole II. out of sight.

Herr Schneider stopped.

"Merry! Merry!"

"Yes, sir."

"You must not whistle like tat in te passages. I like it not."

"Very well, sir."

Tom Merry smiled demurely and passed on. Herr Schneider arrived at the door of the Shell Form-room and looked in. Skimpole was sitting at his desk, writing.

He glanced up as the Herr looked in, and then dropped his eyes on his paper again.

The German master gave a satisfied grunt and left the Form-room.

He returned to his own study, sat in his arm-chair, resumed his pipe, and took up his German paper. When his door was closed, Tom Merry ran back and joined the juniors round the corner.

"It's all right."

"Coast clear?" asked Blake.

"Quite clear."

"Good! Come on."

They walked on with Skimpole II., and took him into the Form-room. Skimpole started up, and his eyes almost started out through his spectacles at the sight of his double. He started to his feet.

"What—who—?"

"It's your twin, Skimmy."

"Indeed, I'm not a twin. I—I—oh! I suppose this is your absurd invention, Glyn. You surely do not mean to say that anybody could mistake that decidedly plain and ill-favoured creature for me."

"Ha, ha, ha."

"Really—"

"My dear chap, it's your double—your twin! Ha, ha, ha!"

"And it's going to take your place," said Tom Merry.

"Catch on? This chap is going to sit there, and you can buzz off."

Skimpole blinked at him thoughtfully, and then nodded his head.

"You really think it might be taken for me, Tom Merry?"

"Ha, ha! Certain."

"In that case I shall be glad to lend my assistance to the scheme," said Skimpole. "I shall be very glad indeed to have time to commence my great book on evolution. The subject quite takes hold of me, and I shall be able to set many anxious minds at rest as to what took place about fifteen million years ago."

"Good!" said Jack Blake. "I can really imagine a lot of people hanging about in a state of suspense to know what really did happen about that time. But I say, Skimmy, is there really anybody outside a professor's lecture-room or a lunatic asylum who really cares twopence about it?"

"Really, Blake—"

"Don't start Skimmy talking, or we shall be kept here all night," interrupted Tom Merry. "Buzz off, Skimmy."

"Yaas, wathah, Skimmy, deah boy. Buzz off."

"If any of you fellows would like to come to my study, I will explain the whole subject of evolution," said Skimpole. "I will begin at the very beginning, and take you through the matter right to the finish. I could get through by bedtime."

"My only hat!" gasped Tom Merry. "We should be fit for a lunatic asylum or a graveyard by that time. Do buzz off."

"Really, Merry—"

"Scat!"

And Skimpole "scatted." The dummy was placed on his THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 103.

form, at his desk, with one elbow on the desk and a pen in the fingers of his right hand. The juniors drew back and looked at it. They could hardly believe that it was not the real Skimpole.

"Splendid!" said Figgins.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Now get out, in case Schneider comes," grinned Tom Merry.

"We can watch from the door of the Fourth-form room."

"Good egg!"

And the juniors crowded away, and from half a dozen doors farther along they watched for Herr Schneider. He was certain to come along soon to see whether Skimpole was still in the class-room, and the question was, whether he would recognise the other fellow.

CHAPTER 7.

Bowled Out!

"H E'S coming!"

Jack Blake stepped back quickly from the half-open door, where he was keeping watch—and stepped upon the toes of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. There was a wail from the swell of the School House.

"Ow! You clumsy ass!"

"Quiet!"

"You have twodden on my toe."

"Well, shut up."

"I wufuse to shut up. You have twodden on my toe, and hurt me considewable, to say nothin' of spoilin' the shape of my boot."

"Ring off, you ass," whispered Tom Merry. "Schneider will hear you."

"I decline to wing off. I—"

"Bash his napper against the wall if he doesn't shut up," growled Blake. "Schneider's coming along the passage."

"I wufuse to have my nappah bashed—"

Three pairs of hands seized the swell of the School House.

Biff!

He gave a howl as his head came in contact with the wall.

"You uttah wottahs!"

"Are you going to be quiet?"

"Certainly not."

"Another bash!"

"Pway don't be hasty. On second thoughts, I will be quiet. I weward you as a set of wuffianly wottahs, howevah."

"Schneider's coming, you duffer. If he hears us—"

"It's all right," said Tom Merry, looking over Blake's shoulder. "He's gone into the Shell Form-room."

"Good!"

The juniors waited in tense anxiety for the result. They could not see the German master after he had entered the Shell-room, but they would soon hear, of course, whether he had discovered the imposture.

Herr Schneider entered the room and blinked at the supposed Skimpole. The boy was sitting very quietly at the desk, and appeared to be lost in thought.

"Ach!" murmured Herr Schneider. "It is all right—I tinks tat I need not come again. Skimpole, you stays hero till six, and den you goes."

There was no reply.

Skimpole seemed to be buried in thought.

"You hears me, Skimpole," said the Herr, raising his voice a little. "I tells you tat you goes at six o'clock."

Skimpole II. did not speak.

"Skimpole!"

Silence!

Herr Schneider grew pink with annoyance. He did not like being treated in this disrespectful way.

"Skimpole, you answers me at once, ain't it."

Skimpole did not move or speak. Herr Schneider gazed at

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him, and noted a strange stillness about the form at the desk. He would not have thought of it but for the adventure of Mr. Linton that afternoon, which the German master had heard of. It occurred to him that the same trick that had been played upon Mr. Linton might now be played upon him.

He came along the row of desks, and stood close to the figure. He adjusted his glasses carefully, and looked down at it with keen examination.

The juniors in the next Form-room waited in tense anxiety. They had heard the German master's voice, though they could not distinguish his words. Bernard Glyn and Tom Merry exchanged a look of dismay.

"I—I didn't expect the duffer to begin to talk to Skimmy!" muttered Tom Merry. "This looks like giving the show away."

"I'm afraid it does."

"Bai Jove! There'll be a wow!"

"I'm going to see what he's up to," muttered Tom Merry. "You fellows keep quiet, and keep the door open, in case I have to pop back."

"Yes, rather!"

Tom Merry ran lightly along the passage. He peeped into the Shell Form-room through the wide-open doorway.

Herr Schneider was standing beside Skimpole II., carefully examining the figure through his glasses. His voice was audible now.

"Ach! Den tat is it, is it? It is not Skimpole at all, and it is tat a shoke is being played on me, ain't it. I tinks I makes sure by sticking in te pin."

Herr Schneider fumbled in his coat and produced a pin, which he proceeded to thrust into the arm of the figure.

Skimpole II. did not utter a sound.

The German master grunted.

"Ach! I vas sure now! I tinks tat I goes and fetches te Head, ain't it, and shows him vat is te shoke tat dey play on deir master, pefore."

And the German came towards the door.

Tom Merry scuttled back into the Fourth-form room.

He was barely inside when the German master appeared in the passage and went away with his heavy tread towards the Head's study.

"What's happened?" whispered Blake, breathlessly.

"He's found it out."

"Phew!"

"And he's gone to fetch the Head."

"Great pip!"

"Cut off and fetch Skimmy, Blake. He'll have to be in his place when the Head comes or there will be a row," muttered Tom Merry. "Two of you go, and make Skimmy come instantly. We'll get Skimmy II. out of sight."

"Ha, ha! Good!"

Jack Blake and Monty Lowther rushed away for Skimpole. Tom Merry and Bernard Glyn ran into the class-room to get Skimpole II. out of sight. The rest of the juniors lay low in the Fourth-form room.

"Quick!" exclaimed Glyn, catching up the figure from the desk.

"Hold on! We shall never be able to get away in time. We may meet Herr Schneider and the Head in the passage!"

"Phew! Then what—"

"Into this cupboard!"

"Good! But ourselves—"

"Into the cupboard along with it."

"Good egg!"

The big wall cupboard in the corner of the Form-room, used for cases and blackboards and roller maps, and so forth, was amply large enough to accommodate the three. In a few seconds Skimpole II. was whirled into it, and the two juniors ensconced themselves inside, and pulled the door nearly shut.

"There'll be plenty of room," whispered Tom Merry. "I wish they'd get Skimmy here."

"I can hear them coming, I think."

"Lie low, it may be the Head!"

But a voice at the door of the Form-room told them that it was Skimpole. It was a complaining voice: Skimpole was annoyed. He was being marched into the Form-room with Blake on one side and Lowther on the other, gripping his arms, so he had very little choice about coming.

"It is really too bad," he exclaimed. "I was just beginning my work on evolution, and I have had to leave all my papers and notes on the study table. Suppose Gore comes in, and throws them into the fire? It would be just like him!"

"Never mind that. Look here, you'll get a licking if you're not here when Herr Schneider brings the Head," exclaimed Blake.

"Yes, rather," said Tom Merry, opening the door of the cupboard. "Sit there, Skimmy, and pretend to be thinking—you can pretend, though you can't do the real thing—"

"Ha, ha, ha."

"Really, Merry—"

"And don't answer at once when you're spoken to. Be buried in deep thought. Do sit down, and don't jaw. We

shall all get a licking if we're bowled out, and all through trying to help you off detection," said Tom Merry.

"Well, really, Merry—"

"Sit down and shut up."

Skimpole sat down in his place. There was already a sound of footsteps in the passage.

"Lowther! Blake! In here, quick!" muttered Tom Merry.

"Right-ho!"

The juniors crammed themselves into the cupboard. It was a close fit with four of them, as well as Skimpole II. But they managed it, and Tom Merry pulled the door shut, leaving about half an inch, which allowed them to take a view of the class-room.

Two forms appeared in the doorway. Herr Schneider, with many gestures and ejaculations, was guiding the Head to the spot. The doctor did not seem too well pleased. It was the second time he had been interrupted over Skimpole II.

"Quiet!" breathed Tom Merry.

And the juniors were still as mice, hardly daring to breathe, as Herr Schneider and the Head strode into the room.

CHAPTER 8.

A Surprise for Herr Schneider.

DR. HOLMES glanced at the junior sitting at the desk. Skimpole was not a good actor, and he had already forgotten what Tom Merry had told him, of the part he was to play. But he was unintentionally and unconsciously playing it very well. As a matter of fact, the important subject of the evolution of the human race was occupying his whole thoughts now, and he had gone off into a deep reverie. His chin was leaning on his hand, and his whole attitude was one of quiet and intense reflection. Even his eyes had ceased to blink behind his glasses. When Skimpole was in a state of thoughtfulness like this, settling the most important subjects in his mind, a cannon might have been fired without awaking him to the outside world. Dr. Holmes gazed at him attentively.

"Really, Herr Schneider," he said, "I find it impossible to credit that any person could make a figure so closely resembling the original."

"I assure you, Herr Doctor—"

"I have seen very clever waxworks," said the Head; "but certainly nothing so lifelike as that. You must have made a mistake. That is really Skimpole!"

"But I speak mit him, and he not answer."

"He is a very absent-minded boy. He is generally thinking about matters he is not old enough to understand."

"But I stick te pin in him!"

"Ah!"

"If it is really Skimpole, he make a yell when I stick in te pin," argued Herr Schneider. "Besides, you see tat he is not lifelike, because he not move at all. Shust now when I see him he vas blink his eyes; but I suppose tat te machine have run down, because he not blink his eyes now. Don't you tink tat he look too still for a poy, Herr Doctor?"

"He appears to be lost in thought!"

"Speak mit him and see, den."

"Certainly. Skimpole!"

Skimpole did not hear or heed.

"Skimpole!"

"You see, mein herr, he not speak."

"It is very curious," said the Head, regarding the genius of the Shell attentively. "If that is a waxwork figure, Glyn must be a genius!"

"I will show you, mein herr."

Herr Schneider took the pin from his coat, and stepped round behind the forms. Tom Merry suppressed a gasp.

"What is it?" breathed Blake.

"He's going to stick a pin in Skimmy, to show the Head that it's not alive."

Jack Blake nearly exploded. Fortunately, he restrained any audible demonstration; but he shook and shook till the cases and blackboards stowed in the cupboard shook too. Tom Merry looked out of the slit of the door ajar, breathlessly. What was about to happen?

Herr Schneider stepped behind Skimpole, and dug the pin into his arm. He fully expected, of course, that the figure would remain silent and motionless, and thus demonstrate to the Head that his statement was correct. But there was a surprise in store for Herr Schneider.

Even the genius of the Shell, even when thinking about such an intensely important matter as the happenings of six million years ago, could not remain unmoved with half an inch of sharp pin suddenly jabbed into his arm. Skimpole came out of his reverie with a jump.

"Ow!" he yelled.

He jumped up so suddenly that the back of his head came in violent contact with Herr Schneider's chin, as the German leaned over him from behind. Herr Schneider's jaws clicked

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shut with a sound like castanets, and he staggered back and sprawled on the desk behind.

"Ach!" he gasped. "Ach! Himmel!"

Skimpole clapped his hand to his arm, and whirled round, blinking away wildly.

"What—what does this mean?" he exclaimed. "I—I have been stabbed. I am hurt." He blinked in amazement at the German master. "Herr Schneider, is it possible that you, a master in this school, are capable of playing such silly tricks?"

"Mein gootness!"

Herr Schneider rubbed his injured chin, and stared helplessly at Skimpole.

"Mein gootness! It is alive!"

"Dear me!" said the Head.

"I am surprised—astounded!" said Skimpole. "It is most unpleasant to be suddenly startled by an absurd practical joke. I am surprised at you, Herr Schneider!"

"Mein gootness!"

"In Lowther or Blake," said Skimpole, assuming a magisterial manner, "I should not be so surprised. But in a gentleman of your age, Herr Schneider—"

"Mein gootness!"

"Skimpole!"

Skimpole turned round, and blinked at the Head, seeing him for the first time.

"Yes, sir!"

"Herr Schneider was under a mistake. He imagined that you had left the Form-room, and that a dummy figure had been put in your place."

"It is ferry strange! I stick te pin into him, and he not move before. Now I stick in te pin, and he shoomp oop and pang against mein chin, ain't it?"

"I have hurt the back of my head," said Skimpole. "I trust I shall not have a headache. It would be most unfortunate at the present moment, because I am thinking out the whole subject of the descent of man, for a book I purpose writing, which will, I think, cause something of a sensation in the scientific world!"

"Skimpole!"

"Yes, sir. It is quite a mistake to suppose that Darwin and Spencer and Huxley have said the last word on these subjects. I think I shall be able to let in a flood of light which will dazzle the scientific world!"

"Skimpole—"

"You see, sir, a great and original brain is certain to find out something new. It is a mistake to suppose that the question of the evolution of the human race is unimportant and a terrible bore. It is nothing of the sort. Think of the intense satisfaction it will cause to every truly scientific mind to know that at a certain period, between six and sixty million years ago, the human race—"

"Skimpole, you must not talk nonsense!"

"This is not nonsense, sir," said Skimpole, in astonishment.

"This is science. It is quite a mistake to suppose that science is at all nonsensical—a common mistake, I know, but quite a mistake, all the same. I will explain to you—"

"You will do nothing of the sort, Skimpole. You will leave this room at once!"

"I should like to explain—"

"You may go!"

"Oh, very well, sir. But my theory is really a most important one. By tracing a resemblance to the monkey tribe in human features, I can prove—"

"Don't be stupid, boy!"

"Not at all, sir. Take your features, for example—"

"Skimpole!"

"The strong resemblance to the features of a monkey I saw at the Zoo is very striking. Now, that proves—"

Dr. Holmes made a step to the desk, and seized a pointer. Skimpole gave him one blink, and bolted. The Head breathed hard for a moment.

"A most extraordinary boy!" he exclaimed. "Extraordinary, indeed! I should certainly punish him for his impertinence, if you had not already hurt him, Herr Schneider, by pricking him with that pin."

"Mein gootness!"

"You see now that you have made a mistake.

"Mein gootness!" Herr Schneider seemed to be able only to repeat those words. Dr. Holmes quitted the Form-room, and Herr Schneider remained there, blinking dazedly. "Mein gootness! First I sticks te pin in him, and he not move or squeak. Den I sticks te pin in him, and he shoomps op and knocks mein chin ferry hard. It is strange!"

"I shall burst a rib if he doesn't go," murmured Jack Blake.

"Ach! Here are te lines, too! Ach! he has written dem! Tat is ferry strange! It is certain tat de dummy could not write te lines. It must have been Skimpole! But for why did he not squeak ven tat I sticks te pin into him before? It is ferry strange! Mein gootness, I am at not understand it after."

And the German master, shaking his head slowly and solemnly, walked out of the Form-room. The hidden juniors hardly waited for him to be gone before they burst out of the cupboard, shrieking with laughter.

"Oh, my hat!" sobbed Blake. "Mein gootness! Vy for did he not squeak ven tat I sticks te pin in him before?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Fancy Herr Schneider playing a trick like that on an innocent kid, and Skimmy lecturing him on the subject!" grinned Tom Merry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I thought I should have died in that cupboard," said Monty Lowther pathetically. "I would have given a week's pocket-money to be able to yell."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It looks to me as if we shall be able to get some fun out of this dummy," said Tom Merry. "Better get it out of sight now, though; it will be safer."

And Skimpole II. was rushed back at once to his hiding-place in the end study.

CHAPTER 9. Figgins's Mistake.

"HIST!"

Figgins, of the New House, uttered that monosyllable in a whisper.

It was very dusky in the Shell passage in the School House, where the gas-burners were turned only half on; and in the dusk of the passage three dark figures might have been seen—as a novelist would put it—stealing towards the end study. Figgins & Co. were on the warpath.

Skimpole II. had caused so much fun in the School House, that it had occurred to Figgins that he might be used to "dig up" some fun over the way. To attempt to borrow the mechanical figure from Bernard Glyn was useless. Glyn would as soon have parted with a leg or an arm as with that triumph of his inventive genius. There was only one thing for it—a raid.

As the New House was always at war with the School House, and the mutual raids were never ceasing, that was the thought that naturally occurred to Figgins.

It was rather a risky business to venture into the School House and carry off so bulky an object from a Shell study; but there was no other resource. Figgins & Co. had chosen a favourable moment, too. Figgins was a great general. He had seen Tom Merry & Co. in the gym, and had noticed that Kangaroo, Dane, and Glyn, the chums of the end study, were with them. The end study would be unoccupied, except by Skimpole II.; and it was Skimpole II. that the three raiders were looking for.

The passage was dusky and deserted. The New House trio reached the end study without seeing a soul, and found the study door open. The light was turned down low in the study, but there was just sufficient illumination for the New House chums to make out the interior.

Figgins suddenly clutched his comrades, and dragged them back.

"Look out!"

"What is it?"

"Skimmy's there!"

"Phew!"

The three juniors were silent as mice now. Skimpole was not very dangerous himself, but a single yell would be enough to bring the Shell fellows swarming out of their studies, and a host more juniors from the common-room. And if the New House raiders were caught there their punishment was certain to be a painful one. The frog's march, or a ducking in a bath-room, would be the least they could expect.

Figgins looked cautiously into the study again. There was Skimpole, standing by the table. He had one hand on the table and the other clasped his chin, his attitude being one of the deepest thought.

"You ass!" muttered Fatty Wynn.

"Eh!" said Figgins.

"That's not Skimmy."

"Who is it, then?"

"Skimpole II."

Figgins started. Then he smiled at his own mistake.

Instead of packing the mechanical figure away in the box, Bernard Glyn had evidently left it standing there by the table, and Figgins at a glance had taken it for the genius of the Shell. The junior burst into a laugh.

"Of course; what an ass I am!" he exclaimed. "It's the dummy, of course. Come on, let's collar it and buzz off."

"Hold on a minute," said Kerr, the cautious and canny Scot, "I can hardly think that Glyn would leave—"

"Oh, rats! Come on." And Figgins strode into the study. He caught hold of the figure by the shoulders, and swung it down on the floor. "You take the other end, Fatty. Oh, help!"

The figure began to struggle violently.

"Ow! Oh, it's alive!"



"It's going to fall and get smashed!" exclaimed Glyn. But the figure was already descending the stairs, planting its feet firmly, and with a curious mechanical regularity.

"It's Skimmy!"

"It isn't," said Fatty Wynn. "I know Glyn was going to put some dodge into it to make it squeak."

"Really, you chaps, you startled me!" gasped the figure.

"Bring it along!" exclaimed Fatty Wynn excitedly.

"Ow!" yelled Skimpole. "Help! Ow! Rescue! Help!"

"My hat!" exclaimed a voice in the passage. "What's that row in our study?"

"Look here," muttered Figgins fiercely, "are you Skimpole I. or Skimpole II.?"

"Really, Figgins—"

"Let's clear!" muttered Kerr. "It's a blessed mistake, and the whole School House will be on the track in a tick."

It was evidently hopeless to pursue their raid any further just then. Three figures had arrived in the doorway—the chums of the end study.

Figgins & Co. made a desperate rush.

"Look out!" shouted Kangaroo. "New House cads!"

"Collar them!"

"This way!"

With a desperate rush, Figgins & Co. broke through, and ran down the passage. But the passage was alive now with fellows pouring out of their studies at the alarm.

Figgins was dragged down by Lowther and Gore, and Kerr and Fatty Wynn gallantly turned to help him, instead of escaping themselves.

They charged Lowther and Gore off Figgins, but a dozen hands grasped them and dragged them down, and in a minute or less the three New House juniors were prisoners. They struggled wildly in the grasp of many hands.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Tom Merry, who had just returned from the gym with his friends, at an unlucky moment for Figgins & Co. "What's the row?"

"Yaas, wathah, what's the wow, deah boys?"

"New House raiders."

"Figgins & Co.!"

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, putting up his eyeglass and surveying the three struggling and dishevelled figures. "You look wathah untidy, deah boys."

"Yah!"

"I wegard that wemark as wude, Figgins. I twust you fellows will give those wottahs the fwog's march, as a hint not to intwude their obnoxious pwesence into a wespectable House."

"What ho!" chuckled Jack Blake. "Frog's march, kids!"

"Good!"

"Hurray!"

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And Figgins & Co., in the grasp of many hands, amid yells of laughter, went down the passage in the joyful frog's march. Down the passage, and down the broad staircase, struggling desperately but vainly, went the three New House juniors, amid a crowd of laughing and cheering School House fellows. Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's, came along to see what the row was about, and he grinned at the sight of the New House juniors, and discreetly turned his attention in another direction.

Out of the School House went the laughing crowd, and Figgins & Co. were borne across the quad towards the New House. They struggled more furiously than ever now. To be carried back to their own House in this fashion was too humiliating; but there was no help for it.

Right across the quad they went, right to the porch of the New House, and there they were dumped down like sacks of potatoes.

The noise had brought a good many of the New House juniors out, and they gazed with open mouths at Figgins & Co. as they were dumped on the steps.

"Great Scott!" ejaculated Pratt; "it's Figgins!"

"Phew!"

Laughing loudly, the School House crowd retreated long before the New House fellows could decide whether to assail them or not. Figgins & Co., dusty and dishevelled, were left to struggle to their feet amid the grim looks of the New House fellows.

It was such an open defeat that there was no disguising it. Figgins & Co. had been utterly "done," and all the New House had seen it. The three juniors crept away to their study amid sniffs from the other fellows.

The School House crowd returned to their own house laughing and chuckling. Tom Merry & Co. looked into the end study. Bernard Glyn had turned up the gas, and Skimpole was still there, apparently in a dazed state still from the sudden attack of Figgins & Co. He sat on the carpet rubbing his bumpy forehead, with an expression of great amazement upon his face.

Bernard Glyn gently stirred him in the ribs with his boot, and Skimpole gave a gasp.

"Ow!"

"Now, what does all this mean, Skimmy?"

"I—I really do not understand!" gasped Skimpole. "I came here to look for your dynamo, and I——"

"To look for what!" roared Glyn.

"Your dynamo," said Skimpole. "As I have previously explained, I require it for an invention I am making. As I could not find it, I was standing here trying to think out where it might be, when I was suddenly seized by Figgins. He seemed to intend to carry me away bodily, though for what reason I cannot imagine."

"But I can!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "He was after Skimpole II."

"My hat," exclaimed Bernard Glyn, "of course he was! He's welcome to this Skimmy, if he wants him, but he's not going to have my Skimmy."

"Really, Glyn——"

"Time you travelled along, Skimmy. If I find you looking for my dynamo again, you will get a shock. Clear out!"

Skimpole staggered to his feet.

"But I really must have the dynamo, Glyn."

"Get out!"

"It is absolutely necessary to me, and I cannot afford to purchase one. I trust you will not be actuated in the matter by a spirit of vulgar commercialism, and stand upon such a trifling detail as the fact that the dynamo belongs to you."

"Travel along!"

"Under Socialism all dynamos, of course, will be nationalised."

"Will you get out?" roared Glyn.

"Besides, my invention will enable the Head to dispense with the labour of half the domestics in the house; and when I place it at his disposal, he will of course hand me a decent reward. Out of this I will pay for the dynamo."

Bernard Glyn made a stride to the grate, and picked up the poker. Skimpole gave one glance at Glyn, and another at the poker, and then ran out of the doorway, and was gone.

CHAPTER 10.

Binks Helps!

"MERRY!"

Tom Merry looked up from his work as Skimpole blinked into the study about an hour later. Skimpole came cautiously in, and closed the door.

"I want someone to help me, Merry. I shall have to do without Glyn's dynamo, owing to his commercial spirit in the matter. Will you help me?"

"What do you want me to do?" asked Tom Merry, with a sigh.

He was the soul of good nature, and hated refusing anybody; but Skimpole made the most extravagant demands upon anybody's good nature.

"You see, I require the aid of a second person in perfecting my invention," explained Skimpole. "It would not take you more than two hours."

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Tom Merry laughed.

"But I've got my prep to do, Skimmy."

"I suppose you would not allow a paltry consideration like that to stand in the way of helping with a great invention?"

"I don't want an argument with Linton in the morning," grinned Tom Merry. "He mightn't think the invention so important as the prep."

"That is nonsense, of course."

"Go and ask D'Arcy, old chap. He's an awfully obliging fellow, and may have finished his prep, you know."

Skimpole blinked at Tom Merry. Tom's idea of placing school work before an invention of such importance evidently seemed to Skimpole an unfailing sign of a low order of intelligence. He withdrew without another word, and drifted down the passage to Study No. 6 in the Fourth.

"D'Arcy! Is D'Arcy here?"

Four juniors were seated round the table in Study No. 6, at work. They did not look up. They were too busy to talk to Skimpole. Skimpole, as a matter of fact, ought to have been at work, too, but his invention was filling his thoughts now to the exclusion of everything else, even of the almost equally important subject of evolution and the origin of species.

Skimpole blinked at the four, and discovered that one of them was Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, and he came into the study.

"I say, D'Arcy! D'Arcy!"

"Yaas, deah boy?" said D'Arcy, in a tone of resignation.

"I want you to help me."

"Wats! I'm workin'."

"You can put that aside. I am now perfecting an invention which will prove one of the greatest of labour-saving appliances, when used in the ordinary household. It will enable the Head to discharge half the servants in the School House, as a start."

"I wegard you as an ass, Skimmay."

"Really, D'Arcy——"

"What are they to do if they are discharged in the wintah?" demanded D'Arcy. "I wegard you as a beast, as well as an ass!"

Skimpole rubbed his nose.

"I had not thought of that aspect of the case, D'Arcy. However, under Socialism there will, of course, be State maintenance for the unemployed."

"Yaas, but Socialism isn't here yet, and the unemployment will be, if they get the sack," said Arthur Augustus.

"Oh, that is all right. The intelligence of the nation is awakening wonderfully of late, and the establishment of Socialism cannot now be more than a few weeks distant, or a few months at the most."

"Bai Jove! I wondah if there evah was such a fwabjous ass as Skimmay! Not that I believe anybody will be discharged on account of your wotten invention, Skimmay! I think there is about as much in it as there is in your theowies of evolution. Will you kindly shut the door when you wotire?"

"But I want you——"

"I could not possibly help with an invention which had such a wascally object in view, and I have to do my pwep, anyway."

"Really, D'Arcy——"

"Pway wing off, deah boy!"

"Blake, if you will help me——"

"Rats!"

"I am willing to let you have a share of the credit——"

"I am opposed to credit on principle," said Blake solemnly.

"I always prefer cash."

"You misunderstand me. When I say credit, I do not mean credit. I mean——"

"Never mind what you mean, Skimmy. Shut the door."

Skimpole closed the door.

"Ass!" roared Blake. "I meant, get on the other side of it first."

"Really, Blake! Will you help me, Herries?"

"Certainly," said Herries, getting up.

"Thank you very much! You—oh—ow! What are you doing?"

Herries had grasped the astonished Skimpole by the shoulders, Digby grinned, and opened the door, and the burly Herries whirled the genius of the Shell through the doorway.

"I'm helping you!" explained Herries.

"I—I meant with my invention!"

"Oh! I meant I'd help you to get on the other side of the door!"

"Really, Herries——"

"Good-bye!"

Skimpole whirled into the passage, and the door slammed on him. He staggered against the opposite wall, and gasped for breath. He adjusted his glasses, and blinked at the door of Study No. 6, but did not venture to open it again.

"Really, this is what I must consider almost rude!" he murmured. "I must have someone to aid me, too. Ah, Binks!"

Binks, the page of the School House, was coming along the passage. Skimpole extended a bony hand, and seized one of his many buttons.

WAR!

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NOW ON SALE.

PRICE 1D.

Binks stopped, and looked at him.

"I want you to help me, Binks."

"Ho!" said Binks.

"I am making an invention," explained Skimpole. "It will be a great and useful labour-saving invention, and will enable the Head to dispense with the services of more than half his domestic staff."

"Ho!" said Binks again.

"Yes," said Skimpole, with a beaming smile. "If my invention is a success, you and several more superfluous persons will be discharged next week."

"Ho!"

"You need have no fear of unemployment, as Socialism will shortly be established, and there will be State maintenance for unemployed."

"Ho!"

"Will you help me, Binks? I would offer you some slight remuneration, but I am unfortunately short of ready cash. This, however, will soon be remedied, as the Head will hand me a substantial reward. The saving on your wages alone will be very large, and on your keep, too. I believe you have an enormous appetite, and that will be a clear saving when you are discharged."

"Ho!"

"Pray come into my study."

Binks looked at Skimpole. If he had not been in employment in the school, and dependent upon his employment for his bread, he would certainly have wiped up the passage with the cheerful scientific youth. As it was, he contained his boiling wrath, and followed Skimpole into the study, to help with the invention which was to have the desirable effect of depriving him of his situation.

A curious looking object lay on the table. It was composed chiefly of wheels, levers, and springs, and what it was intended for and how it was intended to work, and what it would do if it did work, were great mysteries to Binks, and probably to Skimpole also.

"This is the invention," said Skimpole, beaming over it at the interested Binks. "You see, it is a combination of several sorts of a machine. It will clean knives and silver better than they can be done by hand, and at the same time, by means of a wire, it will open doors when the bell rings, and, by means of a gramophonic attachment, it will announce visitors to the Head."

"Ho!"

"Set in motion in a certain way, it will light fires before anyone is down in the morning, wash up plates, and clean windows. I am not certain whether it can be perfected to the extent of cooking meals, but if so, you will understand what a saving will be effected. Unfortunately, there seems to be some slight defect, and the machine will not work at all so far. Glyn has selfishly refused to lend me his dynamo, though I assured him that in all probability it would not be damaged. Now I want you to help me with this."

"Ho!"

"I have to examine the interior of the machine to see what is wrong. I dare say it is simply some cog slightly out of place. You will hold it like this—"

"Ho!"

"I am glad to see you so willing to assist me, Binks. It shows that even the stupidest and dullest brains may have some slight turn for scientific investigation."

"Ho, indeed!"

"Certainly. I should not despair of even a mental organisation like yours," said Skimpole, beaming. "Now hold it like this—why, what—"

Binks had grasped the wonderful invention. Whether by accident or design, he had tipped it over the edge of the table. Skimpole gave a gasp of dismay.

Crash! The machine smashed on the floor, and cogs and wheels and springs and levers flew in all directions.

"Oh!" gasped Skimpole. "My invention!"

"Ho, indeed!"

Skimpole blinked in utter dismay at his broken machine. It was in a more parlous state than Humpty Dumpty when he fell off the wall. All the king's horses and all the king's men certainly could not have put Skimpole's machine together again.

Binks grinned fiendishly.

"Oh, lemme pick it up, sir!" he exclaimed.

And he rushed to the rescue, treading on the parts of the wonderful machine in the most reckless manner with both his heavy boots.

"Stop!" shrieked Skimpole. "You are crushing the things! You are ruining my apparatus! Stop! Oh, dear me, what incredible stupidity!"

"Ho, indeed, I'm sorry!" grinned Binks. "I was goin' to pick them up, Master Skimpole. Can I 'elp you hany further?"

"Oh, dear!"

"I should werry much like to 'elp you, Master Skimpole."

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NEXT
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"TOM MERRY'S TRIAL."

"Oh, dear, this is terrible!"

"Can't I 'elp you?"

"I am much obliged to you, Binks," said Skimpole faintly, "but I think you had better go."

"Yessir."

And Binks went out of the study and closed the door. Outside he fairly doubled up with irrepressible mirth.

"Ho, ho, ho!" he chuckled. "He, he, he!"

Binks really seemed to be in danger of an apoplexy. A sudden grasp on his shoulder restored him to gravity, and he started, and looked up into the face of Kildare, the captain of the school. The big Sixth-Former looked at him curiously.

"Ho!" gasped Binks.

"What's the joke?" demanded Kildare. "What trick have you been up to?"

"Ho, Master Kildare," said Binks reproachfully, "as if I'd be hup to any trick! I've just been 'elping Master Skimpole's with his invention."

"Oh!" said Kildare, eyeing him.

"Yes, sir. It was an invention for saving labour downstairs, so that the 'Ead could give me the sack, sir," said Binks. "He asked me to 'elp him."

"Ha, ha! A very trusting nature, Skimpole's!"

"Yessir. There was a small haccident——"

Kildare laughed again.

"Yes, I can guess there was—quite accidental, of course. You can cut off, you young rascal!"

And Binks, still chucking, cut off. Kildare opened the study door and looked in. Skimpole was regarding the fragments of his wonderful machine through his spectacles, with a frown of deep reflection upon his bumpy brow.

"Accident?" asked Kildare.

"Yes," said Skimpole, blinking at him, "Binks was kied enough to help me, but he is very clumsy, and he has completely ruined my machine. It is very unfortunate, for but for Binks' clumsiness, I should have been able to effect a great saving in the wages of the School House staff. Now I am in doubt whether to reconstruct my machine, which will take a considerable time, or to devote my whole attention to my book on evolution. Which would you advise me to do, Kildare?"

"I should advise you not to be a stupid young ass," he said; and walked away.

Skimpole shook his head solemnly. Kildare's advice made him entertain very grave doubts of the St. Jim's skipper's intelligence.

CHAPTER 11.

Kerr's Great Wheeze.

FIGGINS & CO. sat in their study in the New House.

There had been silence in the study for some minutes, and that silence still continued. Figgins & Co. were not cheerful.

They had raided the School House, and they had been defeated. That was nothing new; in the alarms and excursions between the two houses at St. Jim's, the honours were about equally divided. Each house claimed to be cock-house, but the question never was settled, and probably never would be settled.

But the defeat had been such a public and humiliating one. Almost the whole of the New House had been witnesses of the return of Figgins & Co.

They had been frog-marched across the quad, under the eyes of a grinning crowd, and dumped down on the steps of the New House under the eyes of their own house-fellows. It was too bitter!

The New House juniors were openly sniffing at the great Figgins. His leadership of the juniors of his house was in danger. If there had been any other junior in the house with abilities to take the lead, it is probable that Figgins would then and there have fallen from his high estate. But the only fellow who could possibly have supplanted Figgins was Kerr, and Kerr would sooner have cut off his right hand.

So the New House juniors grumbled and jeered, and asked Figgins whether it was time to go out of business, and whether he particularly enjoyed frog-marches, and so on, till the chums of the New House had retired to their study in a state of boiling wrath and exasperation.

There was no one belonging to the lower Forms in the New House to take Figgins's place if he fell; but it was quite possible that unless he did something to re-establish his prestige, his leadership would be disregarded, and the New House juniors would be in the same state as the chosen people of old, when there was no king in Israel, and every man did that which was right in his own eyes.

Figgins & Co. had been chipped and sniffed at unmercifully. As they sat in the study, it was evident that they had not taken the chipping patiently. Kerr had a cut-lip, and Figgins a discoloured eye. Fatty Wynn was still mopping his nose with a handkerchief which showed plentiful stains of gore.

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"Well, this is what I call not nice," said Figgins at last.

Kerr started. They had been silent so long that Figgins's voice in the quiet study was quite startling.

"Yes," he said.

"It's rotten," said Fatty Wynn. "Pratt said you were an ass, Figgy!"

Figgins snorted.

"You needn't repeat to me all the piffle Pratt said," he replied crossly.

"Yes, but he said you were an ass——"

"Oh, rats!"

"He said——"

"Oh, do ring off, Fatty. You make me tired."

"But it's so rotten, you know," said Fatty Wynn. "He said you were an ass, and I punched his nose, and he punched mine."

"Well, mop it, then. It will mend in time, I expect, and if it doesn't, it doesn't matter."

"Doesn't it?" said Fatty Wynn indignantly. "But I'm not thinking about my nose. I was thinking of something else. I remembered afterwards that Pratt was standing a feed in his study this evening. Of course, he won't ask me now that I've slogged him on the boko. It's not to be expected."

"And, of course, you're hungry?" jeered Figgins.

"Well, I get so awfully peckish in this weather, you know. It's the cold weather that does it. I'm awfully hungry, always, at this time of the year. And Pratt was standing a decent feed, too. He's had a tip from an uncle, or an aunt, or a grandfather, or something of that sort."

"Blow Pratt!"

"Oh, blow Pratt as much as you like, but the feed——"

"Blow the feed!"

"It's no good being an ass, Figgy. I was wondering whether I could explain to Pratt. After all, it isn't exactly unfriendly to punch a chap's nose, is it?" said Fatty Wynn argumentatively.

"I mean, you can explain away a thing like that, can't you?"

"I say, you chaps," began Kerr.

"Well, what do you think?" asked Wynn eagerly.

"I think I've got a good idea."

"You think I could explain to Pratt, and——"

"Pratt! Pratt! What's Pratt got to do with it?"

"I was just saying that Pratt's standing a feed, and I——"

"Oh, I haven't been listening to you."

Fatty Wynn simply glared.

"Oh, you haven't! But you said you had a good idea? What do you mean, you ass?"

"I wasn't thinking of your blessed feeds," said Kerr disdainfully. "I've got a good idea for getting level with the School House, I think."

"Oh," said Fatty Wynn, in a disappointed tone.

But Figgins gave an eager start.

"Good!" he exclaimed. "What is it, Kerr, old man? We've got to think of something, or we shall have those duffers barking at us all the time, now."

"That's what I was thinking."

"Well, go ahead."

Figgins was eager. He knew how keen and canny his Scottish chum was. Although Figgins was the acknowledged leader of the New House juniors, it was well known that Kerr was responsible for most of the good ideas that proceeded from the study—a fact that Figgins fully and heartily admitted.

"I was thinking about that blessed mechanical figure," said Kerr.

"We've tried to raid it," said Figgins gloomily. "We were done! It was awfully unlucky. We might have managed it if the real Skimmy hadn't been there. But our luck was out."

"One swallow doesn't make a summer," said Kerr sagely.

"You're thinking of trying again?" said Figgins, in a doubtful sort of way.

Kerr shook his head.

"No. Glyn will take jolly good care now to keep the thing safe. But my idea is, to jape the School House wasters off their own hat, so to speak. They've made a Skimpole the Second. Why shouldn't we make a Skimpole the Third?"

"My hat!"

"Phew!"

"Well, what do you think of the idea?"

"I don't know," said Figgins slowly. "I suppose we could do anything a School House chap could do——"

"Of course," said Fatty Wynn.

"But at the same time, it's no good denying that that chap Glyn is a genius at mechanics. He can make any sort of giddy machine, and—and we can't, you know. Then there's the tin. His father is a millionaire. Mine isn't, yours isn't, and Fatty's isn't. You see, Glyn has no end of money for materials, and we have to hustle to scrape up a pound or two. That mechanical figure must have cost heaps of tin. I'm afraid, Kerr, that anything of that sort is a bit too rich for this study."

And Fatty Wynn nodded acquiescence.



Skimpole's eyes almost started out through his spectacles at the sight of his double. "You surely do not mean to say that anybody could mistake that decidedly plain and ill-favored person for me!" he gasped.

Kerr laughed.

"I wasn't thinking of making a figure," he said. "I don't believe we could do it, for one thing, and we haven't the money for another. And if we had the money, I shouldn't want to spend it that way, either."

"Then what on earth do you mean?"

"I think we can do it without spending a penny—without needing any materials except those we have in our make-up box."

"Eh?"

"You know I'm pretty good at impersonations," said Kerr modestly. "When I was made up as Lathom once, I took in Mr. Railton. I took in Study No. 6 by making up as a detective. I impersonated Skimpole himself once, and was only discovered by accident."

"That's so!"

"Well, then—there you are!"

Figgins stared at his chum for some moments, and then he jumped to his feet with a war-whoop of delight.

"My only hat! Ripping."

"But I don't quite catch on," said Fatty Wynn. "Where's Skimpole III. to come from?"

Kerr tapped his chest.

"Here he is!"

"You?"

"Exactly."

"Phev!"

"What larks!" chuckled Figgins. "Mind, keep it dark. It will be a jape that will make the New House see that this study isn't played out yet. My hat! I foresee the highest of high old times."

Kerr grinned gleefully.

"You catch on? I'm going to personate, not Skimpole, but Skimpole II. Personate the mechanical figure. And if that mechanical figure's double doesn't work some havoc in the School House, you can call me a duffer."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"My hat!" exclaimed Fatty Wynn, his eyes glistening. "What a ripping wheeze. Why, you'll be able to raid the School House and carry off their grub—"

"Ha, ha, ha! Trust Fatty to think of that!"

"Well, it's worth thinking of, I suppose—that's a way to get a double victory—you give them a hard knock and get a feed for yourself."

"Blow the feed!" said Figgins. "Come on, let's get the things ready, and we'll make Kerr up. We'll begin the wheeze tomorrow, and if we don't make Tom Merry & Co. sit up, it will be funny!"

CHAPTER 12.

The Inventor's Success.

"FIGGY seems to be in pretty low water just now," Jack Blake remarked, as the Fourth Form came out after lessons the next morning.

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "It must be on account of the defeat I gave him last evenin'."

"You gave him!"

"Well, you fellows helped."

Figgins certainly did seem to be in low water. He came out of the Form-room with Kerr and Wynn, but he was not followed and surrounded as usual by admiring fellows. The New House juniors appeared to have lost their high opinion of Figgins.

Figgins, it is true, did not seem to mind much. Perhaps he had too steady a mind to care much for the giddy eminence of popularity. At school, as in the great world outside the school gates, popularity is an extremely uncertain thing—it is here to-day, and gone to-morrow—and a fellow who cares much for it, and cannot be indifferent to the world's opinion, is likely to have a worrying time. Figgins appeared quite unconcerned. He had two chums who would never have deserted him if he had been proved to be the biggest ass in Christendom, and that contented him.

"Anything wrong in the New House, Figgy?" asked Blake affably.

Figgins shook his head.

"No, nothing."

"Your chaps seem to have a grievance."

"Oh, those asses!"

"Figgy, deah boy, I wegard that remark with appwoval," said D'Arcy, putting up his eyeglass. "As a wule, I disappwove of the use of any strong expvressions, and I wegard the word ass as a diswospectful term to apply to anyone. But in the pwesent case, I approve of your attitude."

"Thanks," said Figgins.

"I mean it, deah boy! It shows a high mind to be able to dispense with the admiration of the mob," said D'Arcy. "Populawity can come and go, but it ought to leave a sensible chap feelin' just the same. I wegard you with wewspect."

Figgins put his hand on his watch-chain and bowed low.

"Pway, don't be an ass, Figgy," said D'Arcy. "I'm speakin' sewiously. Upon the whole, I am sowwy I wagged you so much last night."

Figgins stared.

"I don't remember your ragging me."

"Yaas; the fwog's march, you know."

"But you didn't do that."

"These fellows helped, of course."

"I like that!" said Digby. "Gussy was looking on all the time through his blessed eyeglass, and he wouldn't lend a hand in case his clothes should be made dusty."

"The diwectin' mind does not need to share the manual labah," said D'Arcy loftily. "You might as well gwumble at Napoleon for not usin' a musket."

"Napoleon!" gasped Blake. "Gussy! Napoleon!"

"I have often been stwuck by a simlarity between that gentleman and myself. I weally considah—"

Figgins & Co. did not appear to be greatly interested in D'Arcy's considerations. They strolled out into the quadrangle. Arthur Augustus looked after them through his monocle.

"How extwemely wude of those boundahs to walk away while I am talkin'," he remarked. "I withdwaw my expvressions of appwoval with wegard to Figgins."

"But they had to go away some time," urged Blake, in excuse of Figgins. "And as you never leave off talking—"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Hallo!" said Tom Merry, coming by as the Shell poured out of their Form-room, and giving D'Arcy a hearty slap on the shoulder. "How do you feel this morning, Gussy?"

D'Arcy staggered, and his eyeglass fluttered to the end of its cord.

"Tom Mewwy! You uttah ass—"

"Hallo! What's the matter now? What a curious thing it is that Gussy is always grumblin' at something," said Tom Merry.

"I wegard you as a wuff ass. You have caused me considewable pain in my shoulder, and have wuffed my jacket."

"Go hon!"

"My shouldah will pwobably ache for some seconds now—"

"Never mind! Have a little pain in the other shoulder to make it even," said Monty Lowther, and he gave the swell of the School House a hearty slap on the shoulder that Tom Merry had neglected.

Arthur Augustus gave a howl.

"Oh! You howwid wuffian!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blake, pway hold my gloves while I thwash Lowthah. Lowthah, pway put up your hands. I am goin' to give you a feahful thwashin'."

Monty Lowther gave a gasp of affright, and dashed along the

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passage, and fled at full speed into the quadrangle. D'Arcy gazed after him in astonishment.

"Bai Jove! Come back, you wottah! Lowthah, I insist upon your weturnin' immediately and havin' a feahful thwashin'."

"Not good enough," chuckled Tom Merry. "Come on, Manners, let's go and look for Monty. He may be falling down in a fit from fright, or something of that sort."

"What-ho!" grinned Manners.

And they hurried after their chum. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy roadjusted his eyeglass with great care, and glanced round at the grinning Fourth-formers with considerable dignity.

"I don't believe Lowthah was fwightened at all," he said.

"I believe the uttah watah was only wottin'."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I fail to see any cause whatevah for laughtah!"

And D'Arcy walked away with his nose very high in the air.

"I rather think those kids will have to admit that School House is cook-house," Jack Blake remarked. "Even the New House are getting fed up with Figgins. It's rough on Figgy, but he must expect to go under when he has to deal with fellows like us."

"What-ho!" said Herries.

"Yes, rather!" agreed Digby. "Though those Shell-fish take most of the credit to themselves for having put Figgy in his place."

"Oh, that's all rot, of course!"

"Awful rot!"

"Hallo, Glyn, where are you bolting off to?" asked Blake, as the inventor of the Shell passed him with rapid steps.

"I'm off to my study."

"More giddy inventions?"

"I'm going to give Skimmy II. a finishing touch. I've been thinking that with a new contrivance in his head, he might be able to talk, you know," said Bernard Glyn, his eyes beaming with his new ideas. "I could have a sort of gramophonic attachment in his head, you know—it's hollow, like that of the other Skimmy—and he could be made to talk when I turn the record on."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What a jolly good wheeze!" exclaimed Digby. "I don't believe it will work, though."

"Well, you'll see," said Glyn.

And he hurried off to the end study.

"Blessed genius, I call him," said Kangaroo. "Are you going to help Glyn, Dane, or help me knock a footer about till dinner?"

"I'll help you with the footer," said Clifton Dane, promptly.

Bernard Glyn was alone in his study, and very busy, until dinner time. When he came to dinner, his fingers were stained, and his face smudgy, but his eyes beamed with the light of triumph. Mr. Linton glanced at him at the table.

"Glyn!"

"Ye-es, sir."

Glyn came out of dreamland with a start.

"Did you come to dinner in a great hurry, Glyn?" asked the master of the Shell, in a sarcastic tone.

"Ye-es, sir. I was in rather a hurry."

"I presume so, as you have forgotten to wash your hands."

The Liverpool lad turned red.

"I'm sorry, sir. I was hard at work," he said, half-rising.

"Never mind now, Glyn," said the Shell-master, mollified by the junior's contrition. "But you will be more careful another time?"

"Yes, sir."

Bernard Glyn was evidently keenly anxious for dinner to be over, so that he could get back to his study. He hardly noticed what he was eating, and he astounded Tom Merry by absently taking a slice of pudding off his plate, and leaving his own untouched. Tom promptly helped himself to Glyn's pudding, and the Liverpool lad never noticed it. As Glyn generally had his wits quite about him, this was a sufficient proof that he had a most important matter on his mind.

After dinner, he rushed back to the study and locked himself in. He did not emerge till the bell was ringing for afternoon lessons. He was not late this time, but he came into the classroom with soiled fingers and a smudgy face, which had certainly not been cleaned since Mr. Linton remarked upon them at dinner.

The master of the Shell glanced at him.

"You may go and wash yourself, Glyn," he said severely.

Glyn started.

"Certainly, sir!"

He left the Form-room. He came back with a face shining from fresh scrubbing. He sat down in his place, and being questioned in geography, imparted the astounding information that Rome was the capital of New Zealand.

"You are not yourself this afternoon, Glyn," said Mr. Linton, and Glyn stammered out an apology; and Mr. Linton, looking at him very curiously, passed the matter over, and let Glyn alone for the rest of the afternoon.

"What on earth is the matter with you?" Kangaroo whispered to the Liverpool lad, as soon as the Form-master's eye was off them.

"Eh?"

"What's the matter?"

"Matter?" said Glyn vaguely.

"Yes. What are you mooning about?"

"Mooning!"

"Blessed if he isn't understudying a blessed parrot!" exclaimed Kangaroo, exasperated. "Of all the silly asses——"

"Noble!" rapped out Mr. Linton's sharp voice.

"Ye-e-es, sir!"

"You are talking."

"Ye-e-e-e-es, sir."

"Take twenty lines."

"Certainly, sir."

And Kangaroo subsided into silence, feeling very much inclined to kick his chum's legs under the form. Glyn did not even seem to be aware that Kangaroo had received lines. On his other side, Clifton Dane dug his ribs, a few minutes later, and he gaped.

"What's the trouble?" demanded Dane.

"Eh! What?"

"What are you thinking of?"

"Thinking?"

"Yes, idiot!"

"Oh! The invention, you know—Skimpole II. I've done it!"

"Done what?"

"Made him talk!"

"My hat!"

"Dane!"

"Yes, sir!"

"Take fifty lines for talking in class."

"Yes, sir!"

And no more was said on the subject of Skimpole II. until the Shell were dismissed at half-past four.

CHAPTER 13.

Skimpole II. Speaks.

BERNARD GLYN was surrounded by eager inquirers as soon as the Shell was out of the Form-room. Kangaroo and Dane were particularly keen about the matter. They had had to pay for their curiosity with lines, but they did not care. Lines were not new to them. The Cornstalk grabbed Glyn by the back of the collar as he was hurrying off to the study.

"You've made it talk?" he demanded.

"Eh? Yes!"

"How?"

"Oh, it was simple enough," said Glyn, coming to himself, and discussing his triumph eagerly. "You see, I've made lots of phonograph records, and it's simple as A B C. All I had to do was to imitate Skimpole's voice into a receiver, making up a silly-ass speech such as he makes, and then I had my record. Well, I've arranged it on a disc, with a fixed needle, with a sapphire point like a Pathé. I've fixed it inside the head of the figure, and there's a spring to wind up the disc, and when you touch a button, it starts. See? Then it winds off the Skimpole speech."

"Then he only makes one speech?"

"Did you think he could recite Shakespeare or preach a sermon?" asked Bernard Glyn, indignantly. "You want a lot, I must say."

"Oh, don't get ratty! Let's go and hear him speechify."

"I'd rather you waited till——"

"Rats! We're going to hear it now."

"Oh, all right, come on!" said the inventor resignedly.

The chums hurried to the end study. There, Bernard Glyn locked the door to keep out curious intruders, of whom several followed them into the Shell passage. The curious ones, after kicking at the door a little, took their departure.

Glyn lifted the figure out of the box, and Skimpole II. stood upon his feet before them. The inventor touched a spring, and the eyes behind the big glasses began to blink, and the lips to move.

"Make him talk!" said Kangaroo.

"All right; he's just going to begin."

Glyn touched a button under the tufty hair at the back of Skimpole II.'s head. Then from the mouth came a speech in cracked, squeaky tones, strongly resembling Skimpole's.

"The first principles of Determinism may be stated in this way: Everything being as it is, is evidently as it is, and must be considered as a result resulting from a cause or a series of causes. Each of these causes must be considered as being in part the producer of the result. It is therefore clear that, as nothing exists except heredity and environment, heredity and environment are responsible for man as we find him. Man, as we find him, being the creature of heredity and environment, and therefore being just what he is, is demonstrably the product of the causes that have worked together to produce him, and

hence the first principles of Determinism are incontrovertibly established."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The squeaky voice, the utter inconsequence of the speech, were so exactly Skimpole I., that the chums could hardly believe that it was really Skimpole II. who was talking.

"My only hat!" ejaculated Kangaroo. "He talks Determinism as well as the original. He is just about as convincing too. Determinism is a science just about suited to the brain of Skimpole II."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Let's take him out for a walk, and make him talk," suggested Dane.

"Ha, ha! Good!"

"Hold on!" said Glyn. "Where's the real Skimmy?"

"I saw him go into his study. I'll lock him in, and then he won't be able to show up and spoil the joke."

"Good!"

Kangaroo ran along the passage to Skimpole's study. The genius of the Shell was sitting at the table, poring over a huge volume in which Professor Loosetop proved, in words of not less than five or six syllables, that Determinism was a great science, that the obvious was perfectly true, and that simple matters known to every schoolboy could be put into tremendous sentences full of sound and fury and signifying nothing.

Skimpole did not even look up as the Australian junior opened the door. Kangaroo changed the key to the outside of the door and turned it, Skimpole being too deeply buried in the lucubrations of Professor Loosetop to see or hear.

The Cornstalk hurried back to the end study.

"Coast's clear," he announced, "as far as Skimmy's concerned. There are some of the Shell fellows coming up the passage—Tom Merry, and Manners and Lowther."

Glyn grinned.

"We'll try Skimmy on them first of all."

"Good egg!"

Glyn hastily sat Skimpole II. down at the table, and threw a cloth over it. Kangaroo dragged out bread and butter and tea cups, and Clifton Dane put the kettle on the fire. A bun was put into Skimpole II.'s hand, and a plate before him. Tom Merry looked into the study.

"Hallo, you kids! I've looked in to see Skimpole II. I hear you've made a big improvement in him."

"Well, here he is," said the Liverpool lad.

Tom Merry and his chums looked critically at the figure at the table. Then they burst into a laugh.

"You can't take us in, Glyn. Skimpole II. doesn't eat buns."

"Well, he was not eating buns. He's only got one in his hand."

"Look here," exclaimed Tom Merry, "are you Skimpole I. or Skimpole II.?"

"Blessed if I could tell one from the other!" said Monty Lowther. "They've got as much sense as one another, too."

"Give them some Determinism, Skimmy," said Glyn, giving Skimpole II. a playful tap on the back of the head.

Skimpole II. turned his head towards Tom Merry, and began:

"The first principles of Determinism may be stated in this way. Everything being as it is, is evidently as it is, and must be considered as a result resulting from a cause or a series of causes."

"Hold on!" gasped Tom Merry. "That's enough. I know you're Skimpole the real now. No respectable mechanical figure could be such an idiot."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

But Skimpole II. was going on, unheeding:

"Each of these causes must be considered as being in part the producer of the result. It is therefore clear that, as nothing exists except heredity and environment, heredity and environment are responsible for man as we find him."

"Stop!"

"Mercy!"

"Man as we find him being the creature of heredity and environment, and therefore being just what he is, is demonstrably the product of the causes that have worked together to produce him, and hence the first principles of Determinism are incontrovertibly established."

"Stop!"

Skimpole II. stopped, a faint whirring sound following his speech.

"My only hat!" said Tom Merry. "I believe he grows a bigger idiot and a bigger bore every day. I don't envy you your guest at tea. But we came along to see Skimpole II., not Skimpole I."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What are you sniggering at?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look here, what's the joke? I can't see anything funny in Skimmy spouting rot. He's been doing it for dog's ages."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You cackling asses! Where is Skimpole II.?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Glyn. "This is Skimpole II."

"What!"

"Skimpole I.'s in his study."

"Impossible."

"Fact."

"But—but—but," stammered the Terrible Three together, completely bewildered, "he—he talks! It's impossible."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry rushed forward, and seized the figure by the shoulder.

"Look—here," he shouted, "which Skimmy are you, you ass?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Answer me, you duffer!"

"He can't talk now," exclaimed Manners. "It's Skimpole II. right enough."

"I'll stick a pin in him!" said Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I suppose it's Skimpole II.," exclaimed Tom Merry, as a pin jabbed into his arm failed to draw any sign of pain from Skimmy II. "It's wonderful! But he can't talk now."

"Oh, yes, he can!" said Glyn, touching the button. And Skimpole II. started again.

"The first principles of Determinism may be stated in this way: Everything being as it is——"

"Oh, stop him!"

"Is evidently as it is, and must be considered as a result resulting from a cause or a series of causes——"

"Kill it!"

"This is worse than Skimmy I."

"Each of these causes must therefore be considered as being in part the producer of the result. It is therefore clear——"

But the Terrible Three had fled.

CHAPTER 14. D'Arcy Sees It All.

"GIVE me your arm, Skimmy, my son," said Kangaroo, with a grin. And he linked arms with Skimpole II. Clifton Dane, grinning, took the other arm.

Bernard Glyn gave the figure a touch, and it started walking. They walked with it out of the study, and along the passage, and several fellows glanced at them; without suspecting for a moment that it was not the real Skimpole.

The real Skimpole was safely locked in his study, and could not interfere with the little jape of the chums at the end study.

Mr. Linton, the master of the Shell, met them in the lower hall, and he glanced curiously at them.

"Ah, Glyn!" he said. "I wish you to let me see that figure of yours some time, as I am very much interested. Not now, as you are going out."

"I should be glad to show it to you now, sir, if you like," said Glyn.

"Oh, no! Another time will do."

"I have succeeded in making it talk, sir."

"Indeed."

"Yes, it can talk Determinism now, just like the real Skimpole, sir. I suppose you have heard Skimpole talk Determinism, sir?"

"I really——"

Glyn gave the figure a touch on the back of the head. Skimpole II. started at once.

"The first principles of Determinism may be stated in this way: Everything being as it is, is evidently as it is——"

Mr. Linton frowned.

"Nonsense, Skimpole!"

"And must be considered as a result resulting from a cause or series of causes——"

"Skimpole!"

"Each of these causes must be considered as being in part the producer of the result. It is therefore clear——"

"Skimpole!"

"That as nothing exists except heredity and environment, heredity and environment are responsible for man as we find him——"

"Skimpole, will you cease talking this utter nonsense?" exclaimed the master of the Shell sharply.

"Man as we find him being the creature of heredity and environment——"

"Skimpole!"

"And therefore being just what he is——"

"Silence!"

"Is demonstrably——"

"One word more, Skimpole, and I will cane you!"

The chums of the end study could contain themselves no longer. They burst into a loud and simultaneous chuckle.

The master of the Shell stared at them angrily.

"This is very unseemly, Glyn."

Glyn tapped the back of Skimpole II.'s head, and stopped him. There was a slight whirr, and silence on the part of Skimpole II.

"I'm sorry, sir, but——"

"I shall cane Skimpole for his impertinence. Follow me to

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my study at once, Skimpole!" Skimpole did not move. "Do you hear me, Skimpole?" thundered Mr. Linton.

"If you please, sir——"

"Not a word, Glyn."

"But——"

"Not a word! Follow me at once, Skimpole!"

Skimpole II. did not obey, and Mr. Linton started forward and grasped him by the shoulder. When he felt the lifeless substance under the cloth of the jacket, he gave a great start.

"What! What!"

"It's—it's Skimpole II., sir!"

"Is—is it possible?"

"Yes, sir. I was going to tell you, sir."

"But he—he talked!" gasped the master of the Shell, gazing at the figure in blank astonishment.

"It's a phonographic arrangement inside his napper, sir. I—I mean his head, sir."

"Bless my soul!" ejaculated Mr. Linton. "Wonderful!"

"Would you like to hear him run on, sir?"

"Yes, certainly. This is most amazing."

Bernard Glyn restarted the phonograph, and Skimpole II. resumed the thread of his discourse where he had dropped it and ran on to the end.

"Is the product of the causes that have worked together to produce him, and hence the first principles of Determinism are incontrovertibly established."

"Dear me!"

Mr. Linton gazed almost in awe at Skimpole II.

"That's all he can say at present, sir," said Bernard Glyn.

"I hope to make him talk more presently, sir."

"It is wonderful."

Mr. Linton walked on, very much amazed. The chums of the end study walked Skimpole out into the quadrangle. Tom Merry & Co. were on the steps, and Tom Merry was relating to the chums of Study No. 6 his experience in the end study.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy shook his head.

"Yaas, I daresay you were taken in, Tom Mewwy," he remarked. "I regard it as extremely impwob, howevah, that I could be taken in by a lay figah."

"Rats!"

"I stwongly object to that expression, Tom Mewwy. I should be sorry to infewwupt the harmony of the present discush by givin' you a feahful thwashin'——"

"Yes, you'd be jolly sorry, I think," grunted Tom Merry. "You'd have been taken in just as I was."

"Wats!"

"It might be Skimpole's twin."

"Yaas, but——"

"And it talks!"

"Yaas, but I——"

"It's got Skimpole's voice, and Skimpole's bosh, exactly."

"Yaas, wathah! But I weally think I should not have been taken in, you know. Hallo, here they come, with Skimmay himself."

Tom Merry laughed.

"Oh, that's Skimpole II."

"Pway don't be funnay, Tom Mewwy. I know the weal thing from the sham, if you don't. I wegard you as an ass."

"I tell you that's Skimpole II.," shouted Tom Merry.

"Wats!"

"Which Skimpole is that, Glyn?" demanded Monty Lowther.

"Second—mine."

"Oh, pway don't be funnay, Glyn," said D'Arcy, turning his eyeglass scrutinizingly on the figure, "I know too much for that. Skimmay, deah boy, it's no use your playin' the giddy goat—we know you."

"Blessed if I don't believe it's the real Skimmy," said Jack Blake. "Let's hear him talk."

"Certainly."

Skimpole II. started.

"The first principles of Determinism may be stated in this way: Everything being as it is, is evidently as it is——"

"Bai Jove! That's the weal Skimmay!"

"And must be considered as a result resulting from a cause or a series of causes."

"Bai Jove!"

"Each of these causes must be considered as being in part the producer of the result——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It is, therefore, clear that, as nothing exists except heredity and environment——"

"Oh, stop him!" gasped Tom Merry.

Glyn stopped him.

"Well, it's wonderful," said Blake.

"Amazing," said Digby.

"Wats!"

"Look here, Gussy——"

"My dear boys, I can see it all. Skimmay is joinin' with these asses in a little joke on us," explained D'Arcy, with a smile of superior wisdom. "That's what it is. I saw it all from the beginnin'."

"March!" said Glyn.

The chums of the end study walked on, and Skimpole II. walked on with them. He walked right into Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Skimmy! You clumsy ass!"

The mechanical figure marched straight on, and D'Arcy skipped out of the way. He seized the figure by the shoulder.

"Look here, you ass—by Jove!"

Skimpole II. might look like Skimmy, but he did not feel like Skimmy. D'Arcy released him with an expression of wonder.

"Gwreat Scott!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Blake.

"Bai Jove! It is weally the mechanical figah, you know."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I fail to see any cause for wibald laughtah. I——"

"You saw it all along, didn't you?" shouted Tom Merry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yes, he saw it all along. Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Blake——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"If you intend to continue this wibald mewwiment, there is nothin' for me to do but to wewire," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, with a great deal of dignity.

And he retired, leaving the juniors yelling with laughter. Meanwhile, the chums of the end study and Skimpole II. were promenading in a stately manner in the quadrangle.

CHAPTER 15.

Figgins is taken in!

FIGGINS & CO. had come out of the New House, and they were chatting together under the elms, when Figgins caught sight of the chums of the end study.

"Hallo, here's the giddy inventor," he remarked. "I wish that were the second Skimpole they had with them, and we'd have a try to collar it."

"Perhaps it is," said Kerr.

"Oh, no. It's the real thing this time. Glyn wouldn't have the cheek to bring it out for a walk in the quad; besides, it couldn't walk as well as that."

"Oh, I don't know——"

"I was thinking——" began Fatty Wynn.

"Well, what were you thinking about it, Fatty? Is it Skimpole First or Second?"

"Eh! Oh, I wasn't thinking about that," said Fatty Wynn. "I was thinking that we haven't had tea yet, and it's a bit late, and——"

"Rats! Let's go and speak to Glyn."

"You see, I'm hungry——"

"That's no news; you're never anything else."

"Well, you see I do get peckish in this weather," said Fatty Wynn. "At this time of the year I seem to have a keener appetite than at other times."

"I've heard you say that in every blessed month of the year, I believe," said Figgins. "Never mind your unearthly appetite now. Let's get on."

"But really——"

"Rats! Come with me."

And Fatty Wynn sighed and followed his leader. Figgins looked keenly at the figure that was strolling along with its arms linked in those of Clifton Dane and Kangaroo. This circumstance made Fatty suspicious. The chums of the end study never went about arm in arm with the real Skimpole.

"I suppose that's the blessed dummy you've got there," said Figgins.

"What-ho!" said Bernard Glyn.

"Then we're jolly well going to have it," said Kerr. "Here, New House—New House, this way! School House cads on our side of the quad! Rescue!"

"Rally, New House!" roared Figgins.

There was a rush of feet at once.

The chums of the end study looked a little alarmed. They had brought the figure out there to guy Figgins & Co., but they didn't want to have it raided by the New House juniors under their very noses.

"Hurry up, New House!"

"This way!"

"Hold on," said Bernard Glyn, "Jaw to them, Skinny, and let them see whether you're real or not."

The Liverpool lad's keen wits were equal to the occasion. He gave Skimpole II. a friendly tap on the head as he spoke.

Skimpole II. blinked and began at once.

"The first principles of Determinism may be stated in this way. Everything being as it is, is evidently as it is——"

"Oh, rats!" grunted Figgins. "It's all right, you fellows. It's the real Skimmy."

Pratt smirked.

"Of course, it's the real Skimmy," he said. "Nice ass you are, Figgins."

"Are you looking for another thick ear, to match that one you've got, Pratt?" demanded Figgins.

"Oh, rats!" said Pratt, walking away.

Meanwhile Skimpole II. was rattling on.

"... and must be considered as a result resulting from a cause or series of causes."

"Oh, shut up!" growled Figgins.

"Each of these causes must be considered as being in part the producer of the result."

"Stop it, you silly ass."

"It is, therefore, clear that, as nothing exists except heredity and environment, heredity and environment are responsible for man as we find him."

"Br-r-r!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tom Merry, coming up breathlessly. He had dashed across the quad to the rescue, with his chums, as soon as he saw the hostile demonstration of the New House fellows; but the rescue was not needed.

"Blessed idiot!" grunted Figgins. "If that had been Skimpole II. we'd have had him this time, and no mistake."

"What-ho!" said Kerr.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What are you cackling at?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look here!" exclaimed the exasperated Figgins. "What's the joke? I don't see anything to get the sniggers about."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You frabjous ass——"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tom Merry. "That is Skimpole II., that's all."

Figgins jumped.

"What!"

"Start him again, Glyn."

Bernard Glyn grinned cheerfully.

"Certainly."

"It's impossible!" gasped Figgins. "Impossible! It was Skimpole's voice, Skimpole's blink, Skimpole's silly rot."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Glyn started the mechanical figure again, and the voice ran on through the set speech from start to finish.

"The first principles of Determinism may be stated in this way: Everything being as it is, is evidently as it is, and must be considered as a result resulting from a cause or a series of causes. Each of these causes must be considered as being in part the producer of the result. It is, therefore, clear that, as nothing exists except heredity and environment, heredity and environment are responsible for man as we find him. Man as we find him being the creature of heredity and environment, and therefore being just what he is, is demonstrably the result of the causes that have worked together to produce him, and hence the first principles of Determinism are incontrovertibly established."

"My only hat!" gasped Figgins.

A faint whirring sound showed that Skimpole II. had come to the end of his record. Kerr was busily taking down the words as the figure uttered them, in shorthand. Kerr, who could do nearly everything, wrote shorthand as easily as Latin, and Latin as easily as English. He was taking the speech down like a reporter—for his own reasons.

"Well, it's wonderful," said Figgins. "Blessed if I should have guessed that it wasn't the real silly ass all the time."

"Yes, rather," said Fatty Wynn, "I was taken in."

Bernard Glyn chuckled, and he walked on with his chums and the mechanical figure, seeking fresh victims for his little jokes.

Kerr chuckled softly as they went away. Figgins looked at him.

"What are you gurgling about?" he demanded. "It seems to me that the joke is up against us this time."

The Scottish junior chuckled again.

"Not wholly, old chap. I've taken down the speech in shorthand."

"What's the good of that? I saw you doing it, and I'm blessed if I can see what good it's going to do," said Figgins, looking puzzled.

"Let's go and talk it over in the tuckshop," suggested Fatty Wynn, with the air of a fellow who had hit a really brilliant idea.

Figgins grunted.

"Shut up, Fatty! Now, what do you want with Skimpole II.'s speech, Kerr?"

"To learn it by heart."

"Eh?"

"Don't you see," grinned Kerr, "Skimpole III. will have to spout the same piffle, if he's to be taken for Skimpole II.?"

"Why, of course. What a chap you are for thinking of things!" exclaimed Figgins, in great admiration. "I should have thought of it afterwards, you know."

Kerr smiled.

"Well, I thought of it at the time, that's all."

"And you've got it all down?"

"Every word."
 "Jolly good!"
 "You can say it over in the tuckshop," said Fatty Wynn, encouragingly. "We'll hear you, and see if you've got it right. I say, I heard from young Jameson that they're going to have a feed in Tom Merry's study to-night."
 "Blow Tom Merry's feeds!"
 "Yes, but—"
 "Why don't you join the School House, and have done with it?" demanded Figgins scornfully.
 "Look here, Figgins—"
 "I'm going to practise this a bit," said Kerr. "It won't take me more than ten minutes to get it off, and I can do Skimpole's voice already."
 "Come to the tuckshop, and—"
 "I'm going to the study."
 "But—"

But Kerr was gone. Fatty Wynn grunted discontentedly.
 "I say, Figgy, are you coming to the tuckshop? Hallo, he's gone, too. Blessed if I'm going, anyway."
 And Fatty Wynn ambled along to the school shop, and did not leave it again till his last penny had passed across the counter. Then, with a feeling of more fulness than comfort, he ambled back to the New House.

He ascended to the study, and as he approached it he heard a voice he could have sworn was the squeaky voice of Herbert Skimpole. And the voice was saying, in the peculiar jerky manner of Skimpole:

"The first principles of Determinism may be stated in this way. Everything being as it is, is evidently as it is, and must be considered as a result resulting from a cause or a series of causes. Each of these causes must be considered as being in part a producer of the result. It is therefore clear that, as nothing exists except heredity and environment, heredity and environment are responsible for man as we find him. Man as we find him being the creature of heredity and environment, and therefore being just what he is, is demonstrably the product of the causes that have worked together to produce him, and the first principles of Determinism are therefore incontrovertibly established."

Fatty Wynn looked into the study. He had expected to see Skimpole there, but the genius of the Shell was not present, neither was his mechanical double.

It was Kerr who was holding forth, in Skimpole's words and Skimpole's voice, to the grinning and delighted Figgins. "Splendid!" ejaculated Figgins, enthusiastically. "Ripping!"

"What-ho!" said Fatty Wynn. "Blessed if I didn't think it was the other silly ass when I heard you—"
 "What!"

"The other silly ass—ow! What are you chucking cushions at me for, Kerr, you howling duffer!"

And Fatty Wynn sat on the floor and gasped. And Kerr, without condescending to explain why he had hurled the cushion, squeaked through the speech again and again, till he was, as Figgins said, letter-perfect and squeak-perfect in the part, and was quite certain that he would make no mistake when he came to repeat the words in his character of Skimpole III.

CHAPTER 16.

Many Invitations.

BERNARD GLYN and his chums walked into the School House with Skimpole II. They were very well satisfied with their success. Skimpole II. was panning out well. There seemed to be endless possibilities of fun—more possibilities, in fact, than the chums of the end study guessed—for they had no suspicion of the plans that were working in the minds of Figgins & Co.

As they walked the mechanical junior along the Shell passage, there came a sound of hammering and complaining from within Skimpole's study.

Glyn gave quite a jump.
 "Phew! I forgot Skimmy. He's still in there."
 "Ha, ha, ha!" roared Kangaroo. "He's been shut up there for about an hour, then."
 "My hat! Poor old Skimmy!"
 Hammer, hammer, hammer!
 "I say, let me out—I want to get out! Hallo there! I say!"
 "Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ah, there is someone there! Pray open the door. It appears to be locked on the outside. Pray open it."

Bernard Glyn unlocked the door, and opened it. Skimpole blinked out at the chums of the study, and started at the sight of his double.

"Dear me. I have been locked in my study, Glyn."
 "Dear me," said Glyn.

"Yes, I have been a prisoner for some time. I was hard at work on my book dealing with the important question of evolution and the origin of species, and did not notice that someone was fastening my door."

"Dear me."
 "It was very inconsiderate, because I wished to obtain a book of reference from the library. I am not quite certain whether man originated in a tiny atom of jelly floating in the sea or in a fragment of rotten fruit that turned to life in the sun. It is a most important point."

"Yes, and a jolly savoury one, too," said Glyn cordially. "It seems to me that I've heard a different story of the origin of the human race, but I suppose you've gone one better."
 "Oh, yes," said Skimpole confidently, "there isn't much doubt now that the theory of evolution is correct. Of course, there isn't any proof, but you can't expect everything. A chap is bound to have some faith, you know."

"Well, if it's a question of faith I'd rather stick to faith in what I was brought up to believe," said Glyn. "Skimpole, old chap, why don't you let that rot alone? Why don't you go in for gymnastics or something, instead?"

"Really, Glyn—"
 "Or marbles," said Kangaroo. "Marbles would just about suit your intellect, and would be a big advance intellectually on Determinism."

"Really, Noble—"
 "You see, it will be rotten when you have to be locked up for good in a padded cell," said Clifton Dane. "I shall often think of you."

"Really, Dane—"
 The chums of the end study chuckled and walked on, and Skimpole blinked after them with a shake of the head, and hurried away to discover his book of reference. Skimpole II. was laid away in his box, and locked up safe from New House raids. Then Tom Merry looked into the end study.

"You fellows coming along?" he asked.
 "Whither, my son?"
 "Feed in my study?"
 "Jolly good!" said Kangaroo heartily. "I'm jolly hungry, and I really think you've sprung a good idea on us this time, Tom Merry."

"Come on then, duffers."
 And Tom Merry vanished.
 He called in at No. 6, where he found the chums of Study No. 6 sitting round the fire, and listening to Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, while chestnuts roasted on the bars. D'Arcy's voice was raised, and there was a tone of deep indignation in it.

"I should regard it as an unfriendly act, dear boys, if you asked Glyn to do anythin' of the sort."
 "Hallo!" said Tom Merry, putting his head into the study.
 "What's the trouble?"

Arthur Augustus turned his eyeglass upon the hero of the Shell.

"Blake has made a most insultin' proposition, Mewwy. He suggests that Bernard Glyn should be requested to make a D'Arcy II., on the same lines as Skimpole II."

"Jolly good wheeze!" said Tom Merry heartily.
 "Weally, Tom Mewwy—"
 "Well, it would be funny," said Jack Blake. "Gussy is a funny merchant, and a Gussy II. would make the school shriek."

"I should wefuse to give my permish for anythin' of the sort. I—"

"I looked in—"
 "You are intewwuptin' me, Tom Mewwy—"
 "Exactly. I looked in—"
 "If you persist in intewwuptin' me, Tom Mewwy, I shall have no wesource but to hurl you from the study."

"Rats!"
 D'Arcy jumped.
 "Did you say wats to me?"
 "Yes."

"Pway hold my jacket for a minute, Blake, while I give Tom Mewwy a feahful thwashin'."
 "I looked in—"
 "Put up your fists, dear boy."

"I looked in to tell you it was time to come to tea in my study."
 "Oh!"

"Come on. Lowther's making the toast and Manners is cutting the cake."

"Undah the cires, Tom Mewwy, I will let you off that thwashin'. Come on, dear boys, or we shall be late for tea."
 "What-ho!" said Blake.

And the Fourth-Formers followed Tom Merry down the passage. Skimpole looked out of his study.

"Ah, I hear that you are standing a feed in your study, Merry."
 "Go hon."

"I will come, if you like. I have missed tea in Hall, owing to my being deeply engrossed in my book on evolution. I have

reached the tenth chapter already, and have so far clearly proved the date of the origin of the human species, within a margin of fifteen million years. Of course, it is impossible to be absolutely exact."

"Ha, ha!"

"There is nothing comic in it, Tom Merry. I will come to tea, as I have run out of money, and cannot get anything at the tuckshop. Mrs. Taggles is most unreasonable. She refuses to let me have anything unless I pay cash for it, and it is useless to explain to her that the tarts are as much mine as hers, and that under Socialism all jam puffs will be nationalised."

Tom Merry linked his arm in Skimpole's.

"Come on, Skimmy—we shall be delighted."

"Very good, Merry. Wait a moment, and I will get the chapters I have written, and will read them aloud to you while you have tea."

"That you jolly well won't," said Tom Merry promptly.

"Come on."

"But I want to improve your minds——"

"Ring off, please, and come on."

"Yes, but——"

"Help him, Blake."

"Certainly."

"Ow! Blake, I strongly object to the brutal impact of a boot upon my person. I regard it as a custom surviving from barbaric times."

"My dear chap, it's either my heredity or my environment that's to blame," grinned Blake. "It's no good talking to me—you must go back fifteen million years and talk to that lump of jelly floating in the sea, if you want to get at the chap who's really to blame."

"Ow!"

"There's another—that's due to my heredity—and another—that's because of my environment. There's another—that's a little of each."

"Ow, ow, ow!"

Skimpole broke into a run, and Blake's foot swept the empty air next time. The genius of the Shell bolted into Tom Merry's study, and the juniors followed him in laughing. There was a pleasant smell of buttered toast and freshly-made tea in the study.

CHAPTER 17.

Tea in Tom Merry's Study.

THE juniors gazed round them with looks of appreciation. There were piles of toast, and heaps of cakes and buns and tarts, and other things calculated to make youthful mouths water.

"My hat!" said Blake. "This is ripping! Have you come into a fortune, or dug up a rich uncle, or what, Tom Merry?"

"Yaas, wathah, it is certainly wippin', deah boy."

Tom Merry laughed.

"I've had a tip from my old governess," he said. "Miss Fawcett has come down handsome. Of course I was bound to share my good luck with such nice fellows as you are. What would a feed be without Gussy's aristocratic chivvy at the table?"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy——"

"The presence of the one and only Gus—otherwise the one and only Adolphus—the single and solitary Aubrey—we did make any feed a success."

"Yes, rather," said Bernard Glyn solemnly. "May I sit beside Gussy? I should regard it as an honour."

"Weally, Glyn——"

"Then I shall sit on the other side of him," said Kangaroo, with equal seriousness. "I am entitled to the honour, as a member from a distant part of the Empire."

"Weally, Noble——"

"That leaves Dane out in the cold. Now the best thing Dane can do is to sit on Gussy's knees. That's as near as he can expect to get to the House of Lords. Now that the Upper House is going to be abolished, we must make the most of Gussy."

"I uttably wefuse to allow Dane to sit on my knees."

"Now then, Gussy——"

"I wogard you as a set of asses. Yaas, Lowthah, I will begin with toast."

"Toast for the Honourable Gussy."

"Hear, hear."

"And he that will this toast deny," sang Digby, "Down among the dead men let him lie."

"Pway don't be an ass, Dig."

"Buttered toast for Gussy. Make the most of our share of the House of Lords while it lasts," said Manners solemnly.

"I wefuse——"

"There's the toast, Gussy."

"Vewy good."

"It would be a good idea to ask all the fags in the lower Forms in to tea," said Skimpole, blinking through his spectacles at the juniors. "It would show them that there is something in the tenets of Socialism——"

"Rats!"

"Bosh!"

"Really, Merry, I think it is a good idea. I should be perfectly willing to share this feed with the fags."

"Perhaps that's because it doesn't belong to you," suggested Monty Lowther.

"Oh, no, not at all. I am as willing to give away my own property as anybody else's," said Skimpole simply.

"Go hon!"

"I'll tell you what," said Glyn, "if Skimpole is anxious for more company, we might have his twin in to tea—Skimpole II."

"Ha, ha, ha."

Skimpole blinked at Glyn. He reached out his hand absently for his teacup. Jack Blake had calmly poured his tea away, and filled the cup with hot water instead, but that trifling matter passed quite unnoticed by Skimpole, whose mind was working upon such tremendously important things as the origin of the human race in a floating speck of jelly in a pre-historic sea.

Skimpole raised the cup to his lips, and took a gulp.

Then he gave a wild yell and leaped to his feet.

"Ow! Yow! Gerrooh!"

"What on earth's the matter?" exclaimed Tom Merry, jumping up.

Skimpole clasped his hands to his mouth.

"Ow—yow—wow!"

"What on earth——"

Blake quietly took away Skimpole's cup, and substituted another cup half full of almost cold tea in its place. This passed quite unnoticed by the short-sighted scientific youth, who was clapping his mouth.

"I—I—I— I've scalded myself," said Skimpole. "My tea was awfully hot, and I drank it without noticing."

"Oh! Sorry."

"Yes, I am sorry I disturbed you," said Skimpole, sitting down again. "I was really not much hurt, but somewhat startled. The tea was remarkably hot."

"Blessed if I can see it," said Tom Merry. "It doesn't look hot."

Skimpole blinked into the cup before him. He dipped the tip of a bony finger into it in a gingerly way, and started. The tea was almost cold.

"Dear me!" said Skimpole. "This is most remarkable."

"What is?" grinned Blake.

"The tea, which was fearfully hot only a moment ago, is now quite lukewarm."

"Amazing."

"Yaas, wathah, I wogard it as amazin'," said D'Arcy. "Pewwaps you only imagined you were scalded, Skimmay, deah boy."

"Really, D'Arcy——"

"Well, you know what a feahful ass you are, you know."

"It was extremely hot," said Skimpole thoughtfully. "It is now cold. This is a most remarkable scientific fact."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I do not see why a curious scientific discovery should excite your mirth, Blake. It is evident that the heat from the tea passed, by some mysterious process, into myself, and left the tea cold. This is very singular. In all the annals of scientific discovery, I do not think you will find an incident so singular, and so well proved as this."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It is remarkable—remarkable. I must make a note of this, to send a statement to the 'Scientific Review' or the 'Polysyllabic Times.' I shall be glad if all you fellows will sign your names as witnesses to this remarkable incident."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There was a tap at the door.

"Come in," sang out Tom Merry.

Gore of the Shell looked into the study. There was a surprised and somewhat alarmed look on Gore's face.

"Hallo," he exclaimed, "Skimpole's here!"

"Yes, I am here, Gore," said Skimpole, looking at him. "I trust nothing has happened to the papers I left on the table——"

"Blow the papers. Then it's Skimpole II."

Bernard Glyn looked up quickly from his teacup.

"Eh! What's Skimpole II.?"

"The chap who's ambling down the passage."

"What!"

"Come and see."

"I left him locked up!" exclaimed Glyn.

"Well, somebody's taken him out—or he's got out—or something. It's simply uncanny. Look at him! Here he is!"

Gore jumped away from the doorway. With a steady, monotonous tread, a figure came into view—a figure that was an exact reproduction of Herbert Skimpole. Glyn jumped up.

"It's my Skimmy—Skimmy II."

Or was it Skimpole III.?"

CHAPTER 18.

Most Surprising!

SKIMPOLE THE FIRST blinked at the figure—and Skimpole the Second or Third—whichever it was—blinked back at him.

"Dear me!" said Skimpole.
"Hang it," said Bernard Glyn, in an annoyed tone. "Somebody's been and let him out of his box, and started him going. I suppose this is Figgins's work. But it's curious—I have the key of the box in my pocket."

"The first principles of Determinism may be stated in this way," came in squeaky tones from the visitor. "Everything being as it is, is evidently as it is—"

"Why, he's talking!" gasped Tom Merry.
"Without being started!" ejaculated Glyn. "What on earth—"

"—and must be considered as a result resulting from a cause or series of causes—"

"Dear me!" said Skimpole.

"Each of these causes must be considered as being in part a producer of the result. It is therefore clear that, as nothing exists except heredity and environment, heredity and environment are responsible for man as we find him. Man as we find him being the creature of heredity and environment—"

"My hat!"

"Gweat Scott!"

"I—I can't understand it," muttered Glyn. "There's—there's something uncanny about it. I don't catch on."

"—and therefore being just what he is, is demonstrably the product of the causes that have worked together to produce him, and the first principles of Determinism are therefore incontrovertibly established."

Then there was a faint whirr.

"My only hat!" gasped Tom Merry.

"Hallo! Look out!"

The figure walked into the study, advanced to the table, and stood there tramping, as if trying to get further.

The arms were raised in the air, and they came down upon the table, and then swept from side to side, sending tea-pot and tea-cups, saucers and plates, toast and buns and tarts, flying on all sides.

"Hold on!" yelled Tom Merry. "Stop him!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Help!"

"It's alive!"

"Ow!"

"Gweat Scott! My twousahs are wuined! The howwid thing has knocked the tea-pot on my twousahs, and they are uttably wuined!"

Bernard Glyn sprang forward to seize the figure.

One of the arms swept round and caught the youthful inventor on the side of the head, and sent him sprawling on the floor.

"Oh!" roared Glyn.

"Bai Jove! This is vewy remarkable!"

"Help!"

"What on earth—"

"It's alive! I tell you it's alive!"

The juniors crowded back from the figure.

Whether it was wound up, or whether Skimpole II. had suddenly come to life, certainly it was acting in the most outrageous way.

It swept the table clear of things, and then marched with a mechanical tramp round the study, sweeping its arms round and knocking things down.

Then it tramped out of the room.

The juniors simply gasped.

Bernard Glyn staggered to his feet. He was a little hurt, and very much astonished. He seemed dazed.

"I—I don't understand it!" he gasped.

"The blessed thing's alive!" said Manners, in an awed tone.

"I'll swear I saw it grinning when it was knocking the books off the shelf!"

"Oh, draw it mild!"

"I tell you it was! It's like that giddy statue in the Greek lesson—the chap made it so like life, and it came to life, you know."

"Rot!"

"Look here, Blake—"

"Let's get after it!" exclaimed Kangaroo. "Goodness only knows exactly how much damage it will do!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Good! Quick!"

Forgetting all about the feed, and the wrecked tea-table, the juniors ran along the passage after that most remarkable mechanical figure.

The figure had reached the stairs, and was tramping on the verge of the landing.

"It's going to fall and get smashed!" exclaimed Glyn, and he dashed towards the pseudo-Skimpole at top speed.

But the figure was already descending, planting its feet

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squarely, with a curious mechanical regularity; it descended the stairs methodically.

The juniors crowded down after it.

"Hullo, there's Linton!" exclaimed Bernard Glyn, in dismay. "That blessed figure seems fated to run into Linton."

The figure stopped dead as Mr. Linton met it in the hall. The mechanism seemed to have run down at that especial moment.

Mr. Linton glanced at it.

"Ah, Skimpole!" he exclaimed, "You were doubtless coming to my study with your lines? I hope you have finished them? Otherwise it will be my painful duty to double them!"

The figure did not speak.

"Skimpole! Answer me!"

"The first principle of Determinism may be stated—in this way—"

"Skimpole!"

"Everything being as it is, is evidently as it is, and must be considered as a result resulting from a cause or series of causes—"

"Bless my soul!" ejaculated Mr. Linton. "It is the mechanical figure again!"

"Each of these causes must be considered as being in part the producer of the result—"

"How very curious!" said Mr. Linton. "It is really comic."

"Ach! Vat is it tat is comic?" asked Herr Schneider, the German master, who was crossing the hall just then. He had heard Skimpole's words.

"This is the mechanical figure constructed by Glyn of the Shell," explained Mr. Linton. "It is a most remarkable thing."

"Mein Gott!"

"The figure talks, repeating a certain set of words by means of a phonographic arrangement placed inside the head," explained Mr. Linton.

"Ach! It is vunderful!"

"Yes, Glyn is certainly a clever boy."

The German master blinked through his glasses at the figure with great interest.

"Vunderful, vunderful!" he ejaculated. "I tinks tat I can almost see it breathing, ain't it. It is vunderful!"

"Yes, that is doubtless a mechanical contrivance to imitate respiration," said Mr. Linton. "Some button or lever has to be touched at the back of the head to make it talk. Give it a tap, Herr Schneider."

"Certainly."

Herr Schneider gave the mechanical figure, if such it was, a smart rap on the back of the head with his knuckles.

The next moment he almost fell upon the floor, and Mr. Linton staggered back in amazement. For, instead of the usual formula of words from the mechanical figure, what answered that sudden slap on the head was a loud and sonorous—

"Ow!"

CHAPTER 19.

Amazing!

"W!"

"Dear me!" ejaculated Mr. Linton.

"Ach! Himmel!"

"Ow—yow!"

The figure put up one hand, in the most natural way in the world, to rub the back of its head.

Herr Schneider staggered away as if he had seen a ghost, and Mr. Linton stared blankly, gasping for breath.

"Amazing!" he exclaimed. "Amazing!"

"Himmel!"

"I am astounded! It seems impossible—"

"Mein Gott!"

The figure lowered its hand from the back of its head. Perhaps it had suddenly remembered that it was giving itself away.

The squeaky voice started.

"The first principles of Determinism may be stated in this way."

"Most remarkable," said Mr. Linton. "Very remarkable indeed! Ah, is that you, Glyn? You have succeeded in improving this curious invention wonderfully!"

Bernard Glyn's face was the picture of amazement.

"I—I don't quite understand it!" he gasped.

"It is certainly very good."

"I—I never made it able to say that!" gasped Glyn. "I—I never put in any joints so that it could bend its arm!"

"What!"

"It must be a—a hallucination!"

"Glyn!"

"Ach! It is tat it is te real Skimpole, ain't it, after?"

"No, here's the real Skimmy, sir!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"Mein Gott!"

"It is very surprising," said Skimpole I.

"Ach! Dat is te real Skimpole, ain't it."

"Certainly, sir. I must make a note of these curious

WAR!

READ "PLUCK." 10.

WAR!

circumstances, for a report to be sent to the 'Modern Scientific Piffler.'

"I am amazed," said Mr. Linton. "Amazed!"

"My hat—he's going!"

The figure turned with the sharp mechanical motion they knew so well, and tramped on towards the open door of the quadrangle.

"Stop it, Glyn," exclaimed Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!"

The Liverpool lad ran after the figure. It turned round, and the right arm came squarely up, and shot out straight from the shoulder.

Bernard Glyn received that right-hander on the chin, and he fell with a bump on his back.

"Gweat Scott!"

The figure strode out into the quad.

There it disappeared into the gloom.

Mr. Linton, with an ejaculation of surprise, walked away. Herr Schneider seemed glued to the floor.

The juniors gazed after the vanished figure.

"It's a ghost!" gasped Lowther.

"It's come to life," said Manners. "It's like that blessed statue that that ancient Greek boulder made."

"Bai Jove!"

Kangaroo raised Glyn up.

The Liverpool lad seemed dazed. It was not the knock-down blow, but the fact that his mechanical figure had suddenly developed a will of its own, that dazed him.

"I—I can't understand it!" gasped Glyn.

"Amazin', deah boy!"

"I'm going to look for it."

And Glyn ran out into the dark quad.

"Blessed if he isn't like Frankenstein and his monster in the story," exclaimed Tom Merry. "There's something awfully uncanny about this."

"There is no end to the wonders of science," said Skimpole, blinking at them. "How do we know that the story of Pygmalion and the statue is impossible? One must have faith in the marvels of science, as you know. If evolution can produce a human race from a floating speck of jelly in a prehistoric sea, why should not the principle of life develop of its own volition in a mechanical figure? I pause for a reply?"

But no one replied. No one was listening to Skimpole, as a matter of fact.

"Let's go and help Glyn look for his blessed Frankenstein monster," said Herries.

"Yaas, wathah!"

And they went. It was very dark in the quad, and nothing was to be seen of either Glyn or the imitation Skimpole.

As a matter of fact, Glyn had fallen among foes.

As he ran across the shadowy quad in search of the vanished figure, he was suddenly seized by two pairs of hands, and plumped down on the ground.

"Got him!" said the voice of Figgins.

"Good!" said Fatty Wynn.

Glyn gasped and struggled.

"Let me go, you duffers!"

"Rats!"

"Pax, Figgins! It's serious. Let me go!"

"What's the matter?"

"Blessed if I know," gasped Glyn, struggling to his feet as the New House juniors released him. "There's something gone wrong with my mechanical figure, that's all. I can't understand it."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's nothing to cackle at."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, go and eat coke."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bernard Glyn scuttled off, leaving the New House chums still laughing. He disappeared into the shadows, and Figgins's laugh died away in a chuckle.

"Have you got it?" asked Fatty Wynn, with a chuckle too.

"What-ho!"

Figgins held up a little Yale key.

"I knew he had it on his watch-chain," he grinned. "I had it off him in a twinkling. We can open the box now that he keeps his blessed mechanical figure in, and while they're looking for Skimpole III., we'll let them find Skimpole II."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And Figgins and Wynn moved off quietly towards the School House. Tom Merry & Co. had gone out into the quadrangle to help Glyn in his search for that wonderful mechanical figure, and no one took any notice of Figgins and Wynn as they entered the School House. The two juniors hurried up to Bernard Glyn's study.

Figgins fitted the key into the lock of the long oaken box in which Glyn kept Skimpole II., and in a moment had it unlocked. He raised the lid, and between them they lifted Skimpole II. out of the box.

They had him out in the passage in a twinkling, and Figgins

who had seen Glyn work the figure, soon set the mechanism in motion.

"Cave!" whispered Wynn suddenly. "Cave! Somebody's coming."

"Get him along to the box-room."

The New House chums whisked the mechanical figure out of sight. Several juniors were coming along the passage towards the end study.

"I can't understand it," said Bernard Glyn. "I know I never put any mechanism in the thing that would let it bend its arm."

"But it did bend it."

"It's uncanny."

"It's some blessed jape, somehow," said Blake. "I don't catch on to it, but it's a jape of some sort, and I shouldn't wonder if Figgins & Co. were at the bottom of it."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"That's what occurred to me," said Glyn. "I don't believe Figgins could make another figure like mine, but it's possible. Anyway, I'm going to see whether the thing's still in its place in my study."

"That will settle it," said the Kangaroo.

"Yaas, wathah!"

They reached the end study. Bernard Glyn felt on his watch-chain for his key, and uttered an exclamation.

"What's the mattah, deah boy?"

"My key's gone."

"What key?"

"The key of the box where I keep the figure."

"Bai Jove! Somebody's found the key and taken the figure out. That's how it happened," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, with an air of great wisdom.

"I—I suppose so. We'll soon see, anyway."

The juniors entered the end study. Glyn turned up the gas, and the first thing that caught their eyes was the long box, with the lid standing wide open.

Skimpole II. was gone.

"My hat!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "That settles it, Glyn. Somebody found the key when you lost it, and took the figure out."

"Bai Jove! Then it must weally be Skimpole II. that we've seen!" exclaimed D'Arcy. "I wegard this as most we remarkable."

"Glyn must have put more machinery than he knew of into the blessed thing," said Lowther, "and it's worked out like this."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Glyn shook his head.

"I don't understand it," he said slowly.

"Oh, it's simple enough," said Blake. "Something's always going wrong with machinery, you know."

"Yes, but—"

"The thing's worked out a little differently, that's all."

"But it couldn't."

Tom Merry laughed.

"But it has, Glyn."

"Yes—and that's what I don't understand. It's uncanny."

"Well, when you find the figure again, you can examine it, and see what's gone wrong," Kangaroo remarked.

"Ye-es—but where has it gone?"

"Into the quad."

"Yes, but it ought to have run down by this time. It is wound up like a clock. I've hunted all over the quad for it. It ought to have run into a wall and stopped there. I'm hanged if I don't think the blessed thing's alive, somehow."

"It's a giddy Frankenstein monster."

"Well, we must find it, somehow," exclaimed Glyn.

"Hark! What's that?"

It was a sound of regular tramping in the passage.

"Hallo! That sounds like it."

"Let's look!"

The juniors hurried out of the study. Down the passage, from the direction of the box-room, came Skimpole II.

The lips were moving, the eyes blinking, and the slow and jerky motion, curiously reminiscent of the real Skimpole, showed that this was indeed the mechanical figure.

"Now, there it is," ejaculated Glyn. "How did it get in from the quad, and get up the stairs?"

"Bai Jove!"

"It's horribly uncanny."

Glyn put out his hand as the figure passed, and stopped it. He grasped it hard, and a look of bewilderment came over his face.

"It's simply amazing," he cried. "I had a faint idea that somebody might have dressed up as the figure, you know, to puzzle us, but here it is—it's the figure right enough."

"Bai Jove!"

"Feel it!"

The juniors felt the thing over. It was evidently the figure, and there was no possibility of doubt.

Blake gave it a tap on the back of the head, and the figure began to talk in squeaky tones:

"The first principles of Determinism may be stated in this way. Everything being as it is, is evidently as it is, and must be considered as a result resulting from a cause or series of causes—"

"Oh, stop him, for goodness' sake."

Glyn stopped the record. The figure relaxed into silence. The Liverpool lad released it, and stepped back, pressing his hand to his forehead as if to assist his thoughts. He was trying to think it out—to explain the mystery.

The figure, released from control, walked on.

CHAPTER 20.

An Amazing Discovery.

"**B**AI JOVE!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "This is most amazin'!"

"Simply astounding," said Tom Merry. "I don't understand a bit. That's the odd thing about these blessed clever inventions—they're always going wrong."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"It's a trick of some sort," grunted Bernard Glyn. "I don't understand it. Better go and stop that beastly thing, though."

The figure had reached the stairs.

After what they had seen Skimpole III. do, the juniors fully expected the figure to descend the stairs in perfect safety; but it did not.

It stepped blindly off the landing into vacancy, and rolled down the stairs. It alighted with a bump on the mat, and lay there. The bump apparently started the record in the head, for there was a whirring sound, and then the squeaky voice started:

"The first principles of Determinism may be stated in this way. Everything being as it is, is evidently as it is, and must be considered as a result resulting from a cause or series of w-whirr—whir-r-r-r-r-r!"

The shock had damaged the apparatus, apparently, and Skimpole II. could now get no further than that.

The juniors ran downstairs.

Bernard Glyn picked up the figure and set it on its feet, and it immediately started walking again, showing that the internal mechanism was not damaged by the fall.

It walked on to the doorway, and out upon the steps, and fell down them into the quad.

"Can't understand it," said Tom Merry, shaking his head. "Last time it walked down the steps as easily as anything."

"It's amazin'!"

"Pick it up, Glyn."

Glyn went out and picked the figure up. It walked on unconcernedly. The Liverpool lad did not follow it. He was so overcome with astonishment at these strange happenings that he felt as if his head was turning round.

The figure disappeared into the darkness.

The juniors did not know that a pair of eyes were watching it, and that Skimpole III. was ready to take the place of Skimpole II. Pratt, of the New House, who had been let into the secret, seized the walking figure, and walked it off towards the New House. As he did so, the disguised Kerr came towards the School House, with the curious mechanical walk of the figure.

Tom Merry uttered an exclamation as Skimpole III. loomed up in the gloom.

"It's coming back!"

"Gweat Scott!"

Bernard Glyn smote his forehead.

"Wh-wh-what can it mean?" he gasped. "I—I can't grasp it. I tell you there's nothing whatever in that blessed figure to enable it to turn round."

"But it has turned round, deah boy."

"Then it's jolly well alive."

"Imposs."

"It must be."

"Wats!"

"Oh, we'll soon see," grinned Tom Merry.

The figure came on steadily.

Tom Merry stepped quickly towards it as it passed, and grasped it by the shoulder.

"M-m-m-m-my hat!"

The hero of the Shell simply staggered—for under his grasp was not the hard substance of the mechanical figure but flesh and blood!

Tom Merry staggered back.

"It's alive!"

"Wats!"

"Try yourself, ass!"

"I wefuse to be called an ass!"

"My hat! I—I—"

"Howevah, I will twy."

And Arthur Augustus ran after the figure and grasped it. He staggered away in amazement.

"Bai Jove! I beg your pardon, Tom Mewwy! It is weally alive!"

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Tramp, tramp went the figure up the School House steps. The juniors followed it at a respectful distance now. No one felt inclined to touch it again.

What did it all mean? A horrible sense of uncanniness was creeping over the juniors. The figure was alive, or seemed so. What did it mean?

Blake at last reached out and tapped the figure on the back of the head. Without stopping, it began to talk.

"The first principles of Determinism may be stated in this way: Everything being as it is, is evidently as it is."

"My hat!"

"Gweat Scott!"

The figure ran through that set speech, whirred, and was silent. Bernard Glyn tore his hair.

"It's impossible!" he stuttered. "The record can't run twice without being wound up."

"But it has, deah boy."

"And, besides, it was busted when the thing fell downstairs."

"But it's still workin'."

"It's a dream—a horrible vision!" said Glyn wildly. "I—I'll never make a blessed mechanical figure again!"

"Let's follow it."

"Bless my boots if it isn't going upstairs!" muttered Blake.

Up the stairs went Skimpole III. It passed along the Fourth Form passage, into the Shell passage, and stopped at the door of Tom Merry's study. Then it entered the study, and the juniors cautiously followed it to the door and looked in.

They gasped at what they saw. Skimpole III. was filling a basket with the provisions placed for the feed in Tom Merry's study. A considerable quantity remained untouched, and Skimpole III. was raiding the whole.

"M-m-m-my hat!" gasped Tom Merry.

"Look here, we're going to stop the beastly thing, whether it's alive or not, human or ghost!" exclaimed Glyn. "Collar it as it comes out."

"Right-ho!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

The figure, with the full basket on its arm, came out of the study doorway. The juniors closed upon it, and grasped it desperately. The basket went with a crash to the floor, and cakes and apples and jam tarts rolled in all directions, and were squashed under the trampling feet.

Skimpole III. woke to sudden life. He struggled and fought desperately, and there was no longer any doubt that it was alive. But the conviction that there was some amazing trick in the matter was in every mind now, and the juniors did not let go.

Skimpole III. was dragged down, with the juniors sprawling over him in a heap. And then Skimpole III. uttered a yell that was certainly not part of the phonograph speech he had uttered so often.

"Yow! Yaroch! Help! Rescue, New House!"

He spoke in his natural tones at last. The juniors gasped.

"Kerr!"

CHAPTER 21.

Figgins & Co. Smile.

"**K**ERR!"

"Kerr, you bounder!"

"Kerr, you villain!"

"Kerr!"

"KERR!"

"It's a New House jape!"

"Collar him!"

"Squash him!"

"Don't let him get away!"

"Bai Jove!"

Kerr struggled desperately in the clutches of the amazed and wrathful School House juniors. His spectacles came off, and were crunched under foot, and his jacket was ripped up the back, his collar torn out.

"Rescue, New House!"

That cry was not likely to be answered in the School House; but answered it was, nevertheless. There was a rush of feet in the passage, and Figgins & Fatty Wynn came tearing along the passage, and they hurled themselves upon Tom Merry & Co.

"Hallo!"

"Look out!"

"Great Scott!"

"Sock it to them!" panted Figgins.

The School House juniors, taken quite by surprise, were knocked right and left. Kerr wrenched himself loose, and sprang up, and Figgins & Co. charged down the passage for freedom. But the noise had brought a score or more of School House fellows upon the scene. New hands laid hold of the three, and they were stopped, struggling furiously; and then Tom Merry & Co. fastened upon them again.

The odds were too great.

Figgins & Co., resisting desperately, were dragged bodily

into Tom Merry's study, and there they were pinned by a dozen hands. Gasping and breathless, they glared at the School House juniors.

Kerr looked a decidedly odd sight. He was flushed and breathless, the grease-paint was smeared over his face, his clothes were ripped and ragged, and he was covered with dust. He still bore a faint resemblance to Skimpole I. and II., but it was plainly to be seen that he was really Kerr of the New House. Tom Merry & Co. simply stared at him.

"Well, my only hat!" ejaculated Tom Merry at last. "Who'd have thought it!"

"Dear me!" said Skimpole. "It is very astonishing! Kerr must have been imitating the mechanical figure all the time."

"Not all the time," said Bernard Glyn. "It was Kerr sometimes, and Skimpole II. sometimes; and no wonder he was sometimes alive and sometimes he wasn't!"

"The first principles of Determinism may be stated in this way," gasped Kerr. "Everything being as it is, is evidently as it is."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ring off!"

"Well, it was a jolly good jape!" grinned Figgins. "You can't get out of that."

"It was a fair catch," admitted Blake. "You took us in."

"You've been diddled, dished, and done, and you'd never have found it out if I hadn't come into this blessed house a second time," chuckled Kerr. "It was going too far."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"But you looked such a precious set of asses that I couldn't resist it!"

"Oh, did we?"

"You did! Ha, ha, ha!"

"The New House knows it all by this time," grinned Fatty Wynn. "We've got our own back. Is it alive? Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Figgins and Kerr.

The School House chums looked at one another sheepishly. There was no doubt that Figgins & Co. had scored this time—and scored heavily.

"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "We've been fairly done this time, I wathah think, deah boys!"

"Looks like it."

"Never mind. We've got the perpetrators," said Tom Merry. "We'll give Figgins & Co. another frog's-march home to the New House."

"Yaas, wathah."

"Good egg!"

"No, you won't!" said a voice at the door. And Pratt, of

the New House, looked into the study. "You jolly well won't!" "Hallo!" said Tom Merry, looking round. "Here's another of them! We'll march all three home again on their necks!"

"Yes, rather!"

"No, you won't!" repeated Pratt.

"What do you mean? Why won't we?"

"Because we've got Skimpole II."

"What!" ejaculated Bernard Glyn.

"We've captured him," grinned Pratt. "We'll let you have him back for Figgins & Co—see? Otherwise we retain him."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Figgins.

"It's all right," grinned Kerr. "I told Pratt to take the dummy into the New House. I knew it would be useful if anything went wrong."

"Oh, blow the dummy!" exclaimed Blake. "We're jolly well going to frog's-march these bouders back to the rotten old show they call a House!"

"Then you won't see Skimpole II. again."

"Blessed if I want to!"

"Yaas, wathah! We're not particulahly anxious to see the wottah again, Pwatt."

"Hold on!" exclaimed Bernard Glyn. "You may not be anxious about Skimpole II., but I jolly well am! I want him back."

Tom Merry laughed.

"All right. We'll ransom Figgins & Co., then," he said.

"Let's have Skimmy II., and you can go free."

"It's a bargain."

"Oh, all right," said Blake. "It's pax, then."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"And, to show there's no ill-feeling, we'll come to tea if you like," said Fatty Wynn, with a beaming smile at Tom Merry & Co.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Some of the things have been spoiled, but there seems a lot left, and we're quite willing to have-tea with you, and smoke the giddy pipe of peace," said Fatty Wynn.

And so they did.

When the true story of the three Skimpoles got out, it made Mr. Linton frown a little, and the rest of St. Jim's roar; and the juniors of both houses indulged in many a chuckle over the remarkable adventures of Skimpole III.

THE END.

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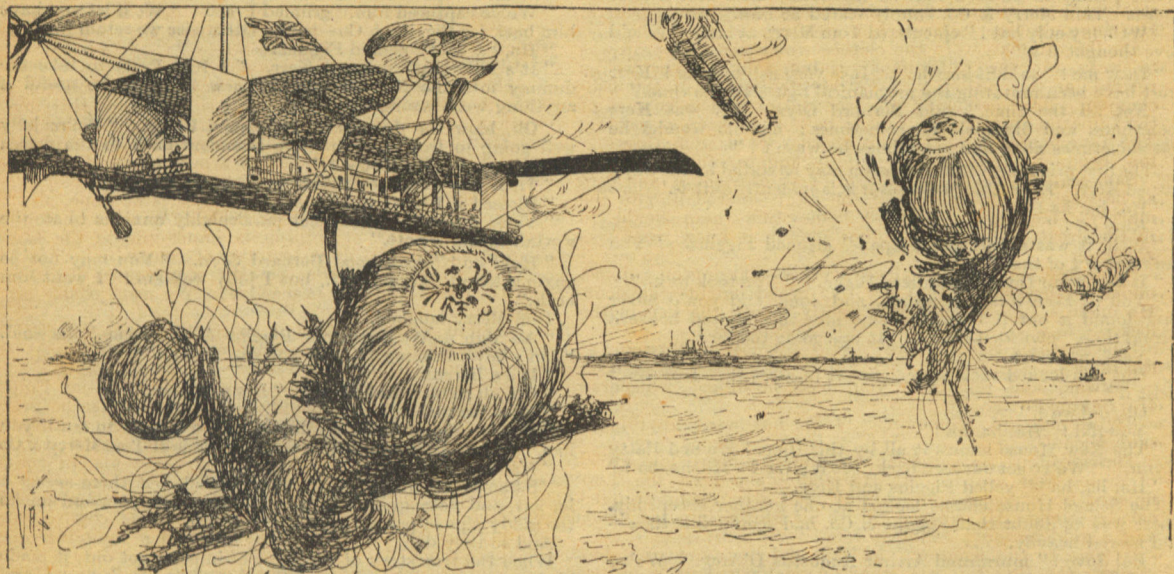
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BRITAIN'S REVENGE

THE PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS ARE:

AUBREY VILLIERS, nicknamed Sam Slick. A lad who has performed wondrous service for his country in her time of need, during the terrible invasion by the Germans.

STEPHEN VILLIERS, his brother. He is Sam's companion in all his exploits.

The two boys form part of the crew of the Condor, a wonderful airship invented by John Carfax. The airship has been brought quickly to Russia at the instigation of Harrington Carfax, the inventor's brother, who has a scheme for getting possession of the Tsar's person, in order to prevent Russia from joining Germany against England.

(Now go on with the story.)

The Condor Makes a Capture.

A thrill ran through Sam and Stephen as they realised that the moment was at hand for carrying out the most daring coup ever conceived. Harrington, the gold-master, remained as cool as if he were going to call upon a friend, rather than to capture the Emperor of all the Russias in his own fortress.

Down went the Condor, and before Sam knew what was happening she was poised over a dark, high building, silently as a hovering bat.

Harrington nimbly slid down the rope into space, signing to the young scout to follow; and the next moment Sam found himself clinging to some stout iron bars, his feet on the narrow sill of a wide casement window.

Up went the aeroplane once more, rope and all, leaving the two adventurers hanging to the bars like flies, seventy feet above the ground. The night, as well as being pitch-dark, was very still, and the measured beat of the tramping sentries far below came up to them.

Harrington drew from a pouch hanging from his breast a little instrument which Sam had not seen before. Shielding it with his body, he applied it to the upper bar. There was a momentary flash of violet electric flame, like the sparking

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of a shocking-coil, a slight buzz no louder than a blue-bottle's, and the bar was severed neatly through.

Harrington treated the others in the same way, and signed to Sam to bend the cut bars down. This Sam's powerful arm easily enabled him to do, stout as the iron was, for the leverage gave him plenty of power. It was done in a few seconds, and the way was clear.

Behind the bars, one side of the casement was open; for though the night was cold, the sleeper within evidently preferred fresh air. Harrington noiselessly stepped down into the apartment, and Sam followed with a beating heart.

They found themselves in a large, roomy chamber, sumptuously furnished, as far as could be seen, but the dim light from a single, heavily-shaded electric lamp that was evidently kept aglow all night did not allow them to see one inch. A great bed, with tall canopies and hangings, and surmounted by the globe-shaped Russian crown in gilded carving, stood in the centre.

Harrington, with silent steps, strode at once towards this. With his head on the lace-edged pillow, and one arm thrust out from the sheets, was a pale, bearded man, who seemed to mutter uneasily in his sleep.

The gold-master laid a hand lightly on his shoulder, and the sleeper awoke with a violent start and sat up, staring wonderingly at the intruder. The face was that of Nicholas, Tsar of all the Russias.

His lips parted as if to cry out, but the gold-master interposed with a quick, low-spoken command.

"Not a word! Keep your lips closed. No harm will come to you."

Harrington's glowing, steel-point eyes were fixed on those of the man in the bed with terrible intensity. The two regarded each other for some moments, and the Tsar's gaze seemed to grow vacant and glassy. He swayed as he sat.

It was a strange moment. Before Harrington sat the sovereign who was absolute lord of one-sixth of the globe, with powers of life and death over 140,000,000 subjects, and was looked upon by most of them almost as a god. But

WAR!

READ "PLUCK," 1^d.

WAR!

the weak chin and indecisive eyes had no more chance before the will-power of Harrington Carfax than a child would have. In a few seconds the Emperor Nicholas was no more than a puppet doing the gold-master's commands, not even knowing that he did them.

"Arise and dress yourself, if you please," said Harrington, in the same voice, but with perfect courtesy.

The Emperor descended from the bed, clad in a silk sleeping-suit, and, like a man walking in a dream, he went straight to an ottoman that stood before the glowing hearth. Harrington's eyes followed him steadily.

On the ottoman were the clothes which the Emperor was to wear for the following morning, laid out before he retired, as the custom was, by his gentleman of the bed-chamber. The garments were the uniform of a colonel of the Imperial Guard, and were to have been worn at parade. The Tsar paused, and, without another word from Harrington, began to dress himself quietly and carefully.

Sam seated himself on the arm of an easy-chair, and cool as he was, the strangeness of the affair stirred him to the marrow. He thought what a commotion there would be in the great palace if any other soul in it knew what was going on.

"Quicker, sir, if you please!" said Harrington, almost under his breath; and a step was heard outside the door. He made a sign to Sam, who gently turned the key in the lock.

"Is anything needed, sire?" said a voice, in Russian, at the door.

"Speak, and tell them you need nothing," whispered Harrington to the Emperor.

"You may go, Romovitch; I do not want anything," said Nicholas.

The footsteps retreated again, and the deep, low growl of a dog was heard. At Harrington's request the Tsar finished his dressing more rapidly, and drew on his spurred cavalry boots. Harrington thrust his gloves into his hand, and a gold-mounted riding-switch.

"Come to the window," he said quietly; and in a few minutes the Emperor was standing on the sill itself by the bent bars, utterly unconscious of where he was.

"Take him by the arm!" said Harrington to Sam; and the little electric torch flashed.

The Condor at once came right alongside the window. There was a louder knocking now, at the door of the room, but in a twinkling Harrington and Sam were aboard with their guest, and the aeroplane soared swiftly towards the stars, that were paling before the coming dawn.

"Well done, Harrington!" said Carfax; and Stephen stared with wide-open eyes at the uniformed figure as it was led into the deck-house, and the door quietly closed upon it. "Just in time, too; yonder comes the morning."

The day was slowly growing beyond the Ural Mountains, and the Condor, with her Imperial prisoner, sped swiftly towards the south.

The Imperial Captive.

"You've got him, then?" said Stephen, scarcely able to believe it.

"The Little Father is our guest for the present," said Harrington, with a nod. "All goes well. Were you seen, John?"

"It's pretty certain we weren't. There would have been an alarm raised. It was very dark just before the dawn. Have you left your—your guest in the state you put him in?"

"He will soon come to by himself," said Harrington; "we cannot keep him like that. It is dangerous to a man that is not strong. He will give us little trouble, or I'm mistaken. Sam, I thank you for your help. You are always a tower of strength at my elbow on these occasions."

"It gave me the cold shivers more than ever this time, sir," said Sam.

"Why so? He was a far easier subject than the German messenger. Still, he is the Emperor of the Russians, and the man we want. We have now to convince him that he must leave Britain alone," said the gold-master.

"By your powers of hypnotism, sir?"

"No, no! That is of no use for settling the future. By fair speech and tact, and power instead."

Sam looked puzzled.

"How's that to be done, sir?"

"There is just one person—one exalted person—in the world who can do it," replied Harrington—"one alone who has the skill and the power."

"Yourself, sir," said Stephen promptly.

"No, youngster. One whom I revere as my infinite superior, and the superior of us all."

At that moment the boys could hardly imagine anyone greater than Carfax.

"Who is he, sir?"

"It is not well to name any names, for this business must be done privately. We will say he is an English gentleman."

"Where does he live?" asked Stephen wonderingly.

"At Windsor."

A light broke in upon the boys.

"What, you mean the—"

"Hush!" said Harrington. "No names, please. That would be his wish."

"The greatest gentleman of all," said Sam, in a lower voice; "the one who has done more for Britain than a dozen Governments. You intend—"

"Yes; I mean the Peacemaker."

John Carfax nodded, and the boys were silent for some time, but they had never thought so highly of Harrington's wisdom as at that moment; they saw what he meant.

"Half an hour's talk with that gentleman," said Carfax quietly, "will do what guns and armies and endless speeches in Parliament could not bring about."

"I believe it," said Sam; "but can it be done, sir?"

"Yes. The Tsar has never been to Windsor, but he will be there to-night. Nothing is impossible to the Condor. The thing must be done secretly, of course."

"But will the—Peacemaker countenance it?"

"In the cause of peace, yes. We can count on his wisdom."

"And it will be settled if he convinces the Tsar?"

"Monarchs understand each other, my lad, and their pledges hold good. The Tsar—Here he comes!"

The door of the deck-house opened, and the Emperor Nicholas came out, his hand shaking slightly as he grasped the handle. His face was pale and strained, and he was not of commanding stature, but still he looked dignified, and with the subtle air of authority about him of one who is all-powerful among his people.

"What is the meaning of this?" he said, in a querulous voice, and in Russian. Then, seeing the company were plainly British, he repeated his question in their own tongue.

"Where am I?"

"You are on the aeroplane Condor, sire," said Harrington.

The Tsar looked round the vessel with bewildered eyes, and then at the empty space of skies all round.

"The Condor—Condor!" he muttered. "That British airship—the one that destroyed Potsdam?" He stared at the company as if doubting his senses, and then at Harrington.

"You, then, must be the man John Carfax."

"Harrington Carfax," replied the other, with a bow.

"This is my brother, the more celebrated of the two."

"You are the man who makes gold."

"Hardly that; but I have some dealings in matters of that sort. I am concerned with quite another affair at present."

"Am I dreaming?" cried the Emperor, with a sharp exclamation. "What is the meaning of it all? How did I come here?"

"I brought you from the Elsass Palace, sire. But no harm is intended you. You will be there again to-morrow night, I trust, if all goes well."

"If all goes well?" repeated the Tsar, with a gasp. "Does this mean that I am kidnapped?"

"You are our guest, sire."

"Do you know who I am?"

"Assuredly. You are the Emperor Nicholas."

"The Tsar of Russia, sir!" said the Emperor, in a passion.

"And I command you to release me instantly."

"I am sorry that is impossible."

"I am at a loss to know what you mean by this outrage, sir," cried Nicholas; "but I assure you, unless you release me at once, and make full reparation, it will mean war between my country and yours."

"Your pardon, sire, but I believe that is exactly what it will prevent," said Harrington coolly.

The Emperor turned a startled look on him.

"The Imperial messenger who is bringing Germany's terms will be somewhat late," added Harrington; "his train met with some delay."

"You knew, then?" muttered Nicholas.

"I hope, however, that before to-morrow you will be convinced that his terms are not big enough. I think, sire, it will be best for you and Russia if you are not."

"Where are you taking me?"

"To England."

The Emperor's face changed colour slightly.

"Do you expect to hold me a prisoner as you have the Kaiser? Is that the way, do you think, to avoid a war with Russia?"

"I hope it will not be necessary," said the gold-master quietly; "nor need you imagine that Britain has any fear of Russia. We wish to avoid a further outbreak of bloodshed and strife, however. There has been enough already."

The Emperor became silent.

"Will you be pleased to retire to your apartment?" said Harrington. "The deck-house will be set apart for your use while you are our guest. When the time comes to-night I will present you to one who will talk to you better than I can."

"The farther I can be from your company, sir, the better."

"As a matter of fact, sire, I shall be glad to have your parole."

"You are no better than pirates!" said the Tsar bitterly. "I will give no parole to such as you."

"As you please, sire. We shall see you are better guarded."

Harrington bowed coldly, and the Tsar, with a gloomy frown, retired into his quarters in the deck-house.

High up in the frosty heavens the Condor made her way southwards as straight as a swallow. All through the day she journeyed, her crew resting and taking their meals by turns, and the best fare they had was set before their illustrious but sullen guest.

A suppressed excitement reigned among the Condor's crew, and only her two oldest hands showed no trace of it. All felt that big events were moving; they were playing with higher cards than ever before. But darkness drew down upon the English Channel as the Condor passed over it, and the night was well advanced when Carfax, bringing the Condor down to earth on a long slant and slackening speed, pointed to the grey line of a sleeping river, and the black mass of a huge, majestic castle near its banks.

"Windsor!" he said.

"Very good!" returned Harrington. "Lieutenant Villiers, inform his Majesty the Tsar, and request him to make ready. We'll strike while the iron's hot. But remember, he has given no parole."

Harrington Carfax at Windsor.

Sam opened the deck-house door, and the Emperor, who was reclining gloomily on the left-side berth, looked up.

"Will you be pleased to make ready, sire?" said Sam. "We are nearing our journey's end."

The Tsar made no reply. Presently he rose and looked through the window over the bunk, and saw the great arched mass that loomed ahead over the level land, for the Condor had descended towards the land.

"What building is that?" he asked listlessly.

"Windsor Castle," replied Sam.

Nicholas started slightly, and gazed at the distant edifice, turning his eyes from it to Sam.

"You are taking me there?" he said.

"I believe so. But the arrangements are all in the hands of Harrington Carfax, and I can tell you nothing personally."

"Whom shall I see there?"

"A certain great gentleman whom we all serve, as I understand," said Sam.

A look of triumph passed over the Tsar's face; but it did not last long, and it gave way to a puzzled expression. He stared at Sam, and seemed about to ask a question, but thought better of it, and turned away with knitted brow. Sam shut the door, and left him to himself.

"Was he surprised?" asked Stephen.

"He dunno where he are," was Sam's reply. "Is there anything else I can do, sir?" he inquired of Harrington.

"You will be in charge of him, and must be ready to produce him at once when called for," was the answer. "You are prisoner's—I mean visitor's—guard."

"I suppose, Harrington, you've no doubts about the success of this affair?" said Carfax.

"Very few," replied the gold-master. "But I shall let nothing stand in the way of success, whatever happens," he added grimly. "However, I don't think there's any chance of a refusal. John, you know the large east window—I pointed it out to you on the plan of the Castle."

"I know it."

"It is there I hope to bring you. The signal, as before. No need to wait at any great distance."

"Very good!"

"You can set me down at the eyot in the next reach of the river. On the north bank, of course. It may take me half an hour to make the arrangements when I get to the castle—but I hope not so long."

"My word!" said Stephen. "Then you expect to see the—the Peacemaker himself."

"It's not the first time—eh, Harrington?" said John Carfax. "You have a voice in the councils of empires, these days."

"Although I'm only a simple Hampshire squire," returned Harrington, smiling. "Yes; I think I can get an audience. I've written the request," he said, placing a sealed envelope in his breast-pocket.

"There's nothing more to be settled, John. You will bring the Condor to the window when I signal. I hope that will be the room; but in case it's altered, you must watch the others. I am a servant here, not a master," concluded Harrington, with a glance at the Castle. "Sam will escort his Imperial charge into the room; the rest of you must remain aboard, and take the Condor out of sight till we need you again."

"We're wading deep," said Sam. "Do you think he—he will allow this, sir?"

"Yes; for he will know what is at stake. And I have faith in his wisdom. It is better he should deal with it than us. Put me down, John!"

The Condor circled silently towards the dark trees by the eyot some distance up the river, and as she glided to the ground, Harrington stepped down, alone. The aeroplane shot upwards again, and was lost to sight.

Harrington stepped out briskly, and after he had reached and passed through the outskirts of the town, came to the castle. He went like a man who thoroughly knows his way, and had no need to ask it. The magnificent pile of England's greatest and most ancient seat towered above him.

"Who goes there!" said the sentry, as Harrington approached the gate. The soldier saw only a little man in a dark, semi-military coat, and never guessed what events were afoot. Harrington answered him, and presently got word with the officer of the guard.

"Will you be good enough to see that this reaches Lord Rolles, the private secretary, without delay?" he said, presenting his sealed envelope. "It is of great importance."

"Who are you, sir?" asked the officer of the guard, glancing at him suspiciously. "I can hold no communications in this manner."

"It is not an occasion for the naming of any names, believe me," said Harrington; "but my business cannot wait."

And, lowering his voice, he pronounced a couple of words that only his questioner could hear.

The officer of the guard was not only surprised but impressed. His manner altered at once, and, asking Harrington to wait in the guard-house, the officer departed on his errand. He was gone some little time, and when he returned he escorted Harrington in by one of the lesser entrances, and passed him on to a well-dressed gentleman-in-waiting.

In a very short time the gold-master found himself in a large apartment, where a tall, soldierly-looking man, slightly bald, but with a handsome and commanding face, received him courteously. It was Lord Rolles.

"Good-evening!" he said. "You will be given an audience immediately, but quite privately, you understand."

"Of course!" said Harrington.

"You are a privileged man, my dear sir," replied Lord Rolles, with a smile. "Of course, I need not talk to you of caution. Return here as soon as the interview is over, and I will see that you are able to leave without any trouble or advertisement."

(Another instalment next week.)

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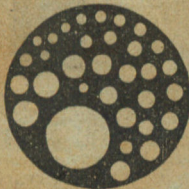
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